

2000 TURKEY AND GREECE

Tuesday, September 5, 2000. Met Mary in Delta's Business Elite Lounge and, after a long delay while they worked on a mechanical problem, flew off to Athens. We are part of a group of 10 women, mostly Atlantans (many bridge players) who go on a trip with Susan Feldman each year, but I have never been able to join them before.

Wednesday, September 6, 2000. Happy Birthday Mary! We arrive right on time (11:50 AM) despite the delay last night. After a long slow line at immigration we get through, collect our bags and find the representative from Yalla Tours, We are the first of the group to arrive. Most are coming on Air France with a connection in Paris.

I was first in Greece in 1955 with my grandmother and then came again in 1963 when my parents, my sister and brother-in-law, and my husband and I chartered a yacht called the Aostra and cruised the Aegean. That was a very special trip and I worry that I will be disappointed this time.

Driving from Piraeus to Athens I note one big difference, many more automobiles and people, but the City of Pericles is still dominated by the Acropolis. Our hotel, the Titania, is a commercial hotel, several blocks from Constitution Square. Mary and I both crashed when we got to the room.

That night I gave a birthday party for Mary in the Olive Garden, the spectacular rooftop restaurant of the hotel. The restaurant has great food and a view of the Acropolis. The group consists of Susan Feldman, our travel agent, Jackie Newfield, Carey Snider. Carol Matthews, Brenda Clarkson, who is traveling with her friend, Nancy Elyard, and Diana Cowan who is traveling with her sister-in-law, Marilyn Hampton. Air France got them here safely but without luggage!

Thursday, September 7, 2000. We have to be in the lobby by 7:15 AM for our tour to Delphi. Yalla Tours has not given us a bus of our own but put us with a company called CHAT, which is picking people up all over the city. We drove all over Athens for an hour and fifteen minutes, until the bus was full, then drove back past our hotel on the way out of town! It all made no sense.

We drove for two hours through somewhat uninteresting landscape, commercial areas and farms where they were about to harvest the cotton. Lillian, our guide, entertains us with stories about the Greek Gods and the impact they had on the world. Even today we use their democratic principles and many of their words. She recounted the story of Oedipus Rex, who, the Oracle predicted, would murder his father and marry his mother. His parents, the rulers of Thebes, decided to abandon the baby on a mountain so it would die and the prophecy would not come true. However, the baby was rescued and raised by the rulers of Corinth. One day Oedipus met an old man on the road to Thebes. They had a fight and Oedipus killed Laius, not knowing he was his father. He continued on to Thebes where they made him their king and he married the widowed Jocasta, not knowing she was his mother. Many ills befell them and finally the Oracle told him about the prophecy he had fulfilled. He was so distressed he blinded himself and spent the rest of his life as an outcast. Lillian points out the road where Oedipus murdered Laius.

After two hours we stopped at Livadia for refreshments and then drove into the mountains to Delphi, which is nestled in the side of Mount Parnassus. Legend says that Zeus sent out two eagles and where they met they built a temple to Apollo, who lived here. People would make pilgrimages to the sacred mountain on February 8th, Apollo's birthday.

The oldest extant ruins date from the eighth century BC but there were undoubtedly earlier ones of wood which has not known for its Oracle, a priestess, who stayed in a small cave under the temple in a sort of trance (caused by hemlock and gases) and gave predictions. Her success was due to the fact that her answers were always ambiguous. One king asked if he would win a war and the Oracle replied, "You will cross a river and a kingdom will be destroyed." The king lost the war and his own kingdom was destroyed. Delphi was worshiped until the Roman invasion in 191 BC. Apollo felt health had four elements, intelligence, emotion and material state as well as strength. Thus the Pythian Games were held here in a stadium high above the ruins.

We walked up the Sacred Way envisioning the statues and treasures that once lined it. By the time we reached the Temple, our guide dismissed us to explore on our own. She was obviously distressed from a personal problem. Nancy and I made the climb up to the small Greek Theater before we gave up. The rest went all the way to the stadium, which I had seen before. It is a beautiful site, with the cliffs of Mt Parnassus above and thousands of olive trees falling down the mountain to the Gulf of Corinth below.

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At 1:15 we met the guide for a tour of the small museum. Some wonderful treasures like the "omphalos" a large rock decorated with knots which symbolizes that Delphi was considered the center of the world. Knots have symbolism such as tying the knot at a wedding. The most famous sight is the bronze charioteer with his handsome penetrating eyes.

We had an unmemorable buffet lunch at the Amalia Hotel before the three-hour drive back to Athens. There was no time to see the spring where the faithful bathed or even to shop in Arachova, the small village near the site. We talked them into letting us off the bus two blocks from the hotel rather than driving all over Athens again to be the last let off. We are all agreed that we should have had more time for Delphi.

That night we ate at the Olive Garden again, but the magic was gone. It was overcast and windy so we had to move indoors, and then there was a problem with the check since they would only give one check for the ten of us. Trying to figure out what each one owed was a real hassle. However, I had the same delicious lamb chops I had enjoyed the night before.

Friday, September 8. Another CHAT tour, and again they picked us up at 8:15 to drive all over the city picking up people.

We stopped at the Olympic Stadium where the first games were held. In 1896, the stadium was restored for the modern games. We had our picture taken with the marble monument that identified the Greek medal winners at Atlanta in 1996. Plaques commemorate where each of the modern games has been held.

Then it was on to the Acropolis, which we approached through the Propylaea or ancient gate. There were hundreds of tourists and I was afraid I would hold the group up as I climb very slowly in order to breathe, so while the guide described something I pushed on to the top and then I waited and waited for the rest to catch up. Finally I concluded I had missed them and went touring on my own. It was nice to spend as little or as much time as I wished each place. It was also easy to attach myself to some English-speaking group, when I wanted to know what was going on. The magnificent Parthenon dates from 447 BC and honors Athena. A huge gold statue of her used to dominate the city. In its history it has been converted into a church, a mosque and even an arsenal. The proportions of the building are perfect and it must have been even more magnificent in its day. However, Lord Elgin ripped off one of the friezes for the British Museum and time and weather have caused a lot of damage to the structure. In fact, all of the carvings have been removed to the museum on the site, so the building sits forlorn and unadorned. There is a project to reconstruct it. Nearby the Erechtheion stands with its famous porch of Caryatids. But the maidens are now in the museum, except for the one in London, and plaster copies hold up the roof of the porch. The museum has a number of sculptures, found when they started to dig a subway line. Particularly interesting are the sculptures of the original frieze that preceded the ones taken to London. Many of them still showed their original paint.

At last I caught up with the group. Mary had been very worried about me, in case I fell down and hurt myself. Then we returned to the hotel, being the last to be dropped off. Even the guide left before we got to our destination! I will never go on tour with CHAT again! We should have had our own bus and guide.

We had to check out of the room and brought our bags to the lobby and then I went in search of the Hughes family who just this morning got off the Crown Odyssey, which we are about to board. I had not seen my step-daughter, Margie Hughes, and her husband, Bob, in a couple of years, although I did see her daughter, Stephanie Matthews, but not her husband, Jim, when I went to Frankfurt last year. I couldn't get over how my great grandchild Rebecca had grown. She is now an adorable three-year old with impeccable manners. I took them for lunch at, where else, the Olive Garden, and we had a lovely leisurely time catching up.

Then Mary and I took a cab to Piraeus to catch the ship. I had been on the Crown Odyssey once before in 1994, a cruise of the British Isles, France and Lisbon, when she was the Royal Crown Odyssey. Now she is owned by Orient Cruise Lines. Mary and I have been assigned a lovely cabin on the Lido Deck. We barely had time to get unpacked and attend lifeboat drill. Then I took a nap before our 8:30 late sitting dinner. The ship sailing was delayed until 10:30 PM to accommodate some passengers on a late airplane. I went on deck to watch us sail from Piraeus, which was beautiful with lights on both sides. The rest of the group went to the entertainment but I was so tired I just went to bed.

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Saturday, September 9. Mary and I sprang out of bed (our alarm didn't go off) thinking our tour started in 15 minutes, but it turned out to be 7:30 instead of 8:30 when the tour was scheduled. We are at Delos; at one time the most sacred spot in Greece, for it was here that Apollo and his twin sister, Artemis, were born. Their father was Zeus, who was married to Hera, but their mother was Leto. Hera was jealous of Leto and searched for her with the idea of killing the babies, but Leto fled to Delos and gave birth here under a palm tree by a lake now vanished. Legend says the nearby islands danced around in joy forming the Cyclades.

Delos has been a sacred spot at least since 1500 BC. However the early buildings were built of wood and so the earliest ruins date from the seventh century BC. In the seventh century BC Delos was under the control of Naxos but in the sixth century BC came under the influence of Athens. The first "purification" decreed by Athens was that no one could die on the island. Even the graves were dug up and moved to another island. The second "purification" said that no one could be born on the island. The net effect was to weaken the islander's hold on Delos and probably contributed to the island's final abandonment. In the first century BC the island was sacked and the population declined until by the sixth century AD no one lived on the island. Although some of the barren land is still privately owned but there is no market to buy it.

We walked up through the residential section where the wealthy merchants lived. Mosaic tiled floors covered deep cisterns under their atriums where rainwater was collected. Some of the atriums had marble columns.

The town was very reminiscent of Pompeii since houses were the same all over the ancient world. Rarely did a window face the street and the houses all huddled together on the narrow streets, which gave some protection from the constant wind. Above the residential section was a theater in very bad condition for after the island was deserted, nearby islanders used the old buildings as quarries. Pieces of Delos went into houses on Mykonos and other places. Near the theater was a much larger cistern, the town's public water supply, and the water was used to keep the streets clean and to supplement the population's water in time of drought.

Back down in the commercial part of town, we walked through one of the many-arcaded agoras, or market squares, for Delos was an important trading port. We entered the sanctuary of the Temple of Apollo, actually a series of structures, built by various towns and islands to honor Apollo. One ruined building was built by the island of Naxos in the seventh century BC. A huge colossus stood in front of it but only the base remains. In fact there is little sign of statuary anywhere, for what has not been carried off, has been moved to the museum on the site. Some of the statuary is only recalled from sixteenth century drawings. When I was here in 1963 there were bits of statuary lying around. But now the Delian lions no longer roar toward the old port, being housed in a wing of the museum. I understand why this must be done, but am glad I saw it all in situ.

We took the tender back to the ship. Mary ate at the Cafe Italiano out on deck but I went to the buffet in the Yacht Club, having had enough sun for a while. We sailed for the nearby island of Mykonos and at 1:00 I went to the Lounge for the Greek dancing lessons. It was great fun, but I think I need a lot more than a half hour to master them!

We docked at Mykonos and caught the shuttle bus into town. Mykonos sparkles with its white stucco buildings all with blue shutters. It is one of the most picturesque places in Greece. We walked through the town, where shops line the road, to the end where the historic windmills are. Then we found a taverna right on the water and I introduced Mary to Ouzo, a native drink similar to Arak. It was all good fun but I was glad to get back on our comfortable ship. Brought this journal up to date, bathed and napped to kill time before dinner. Mary and I went up to the Crown, with its 360-degree view for a drink before dinner.

Sunday, September 10. Santorini. This island is an old volcano crater with one side blown away to form a harbor. The volcano is still active but hasn't erupted since 1956. Back between the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries BC, the volcano had a violent eruption that was felt all over the Mediterranean and ash was found as far away as Scandinavia. The northern shore of Crete was destroyed, which spelled the end of the Minoan civilization. Some people think it may also be the reason the waters of the Red Sea parted for Moses. Much of the island of Santorini sank and the population vanished. It wasn't resettled until the fifth to fourth centuries BC.

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Inside the caldera are two volcanic islands. The small Komeni was formed by an eruption in the second century BC while the big Komeni was formed between the second and ninth centuries AD.

We took a boat ride from the ship to the southern end of the caldera, where we were loaded into buses for our tour. To our delight our excellent guide from Delos, Marianna, is our guide, having commuted from Athens by plane. A long switchback road lifted us to the rim of the crater and then we drove through rich agricultural land to Akrotiri on a bay near the shore. Many small grape vines grow here and the branches are twisted around to form a sort of basket to protect the fruit from the wind. The island is also known for its capers and small tomatoes.

Plato first mentioned a lost continent of Atlantis in the fourth century BC. He positioned it outside of the Straits of Gibraltar, but many believe that Atlantis sank with the eruption of Santorini. Akrotiri was an ancient city dating from the eighteenth to seventeenth century BC. When the big eruption came it was covered with ash. An archeologist named Marcactus decided that a town must have existed near a natural bay. In 1967 he got some funding and within a week uncovered the first buildings. Marcactus died in 1994 but the excavation still continues under an archaeologist named Dumas. The full extent of the city has still not been determined, but it was obviously an important trading center. Smoked fish of a type found only in the Atlantic gave evidence of this. The excavation is covered to protect it from the elements and only a small portion is open to tourists who walk the wooden catwalks through a part of the dig. The first things you see are huge jars, which were used for storage. When the houses collapsed these jars in the basements were broken but have been carefully reassembled. There was even a pair of bathtubs. On the upper levels of the houses were found frescos, but these have been removed to the National Museum and also the small museum in Fira, the capitol of Santorini. The artwork is very reminiscent of Minoan art and the island was obviously influenced by the Minoans. Curiously the houses were constructed exactly like the ones we saw on Delos showing that not much changed over the centuries. They were built of stone, wood and plaster and some have cut stonewalls and are thought to be the public buildings of Akrotiri. The houses are built around atriums and few rooms have more than one door to add strength to the building in case of an earthquake. However a few triple-size doors and windows have been found and may have been shops.

Obviously the wood and organic material has not survived but as it decayed it left holes in the lava and when these were filled with plaster the archaeologists could determine what had been there. Again you are reminded of Pompeii even though the two cities were destroyed centuries apart. There is evidence that the people had advanced warning of the quake for no human or animal remains have been found. Also there is no jewelry, which they would have carried off. In one house the beds were piled on top of one another, a traditional process when the owner was going to be away for a while. However it is doubtful that any of the people reached safety for huge tidal waves accompanied the quake and would have capsized the boats. Even more significant is the fact that no people of the Mediterranean have a legend of people escaping an eruption, although there are legends reporting an eruption far away.

Back on the bus we drove to the northern end of the island to the picturesque village of Oia. This was once the capitol of the island but after a series of earthquakes the capitol was moved to Fira. We walked through the town taking pictures and I bought a ring, which is a copy of a Minoan ring in the National Museum.

Then we were bused back to Fira and walked through this touristy town, with its many jewelry and souvenir shops, to the cable car that took us down to the dock. When I was here before, the only way to climb to the rim of the caldera was to walk or ride a mule or donkey, which were said to be the souls of those in eternal purgatory. The trail was narrow and full of switchbacks. I had no trouble choosing the cable car for the 3-minute descent. We took a tender back to the ship and ordered a room service lunch since the dining rooms were closed. I don't understand why the hours aren't extended when most of the ship is ashore on a long morning tour. I got my hair done, took a nap and even had enough energy to go to the Crown for some music and dancing with the paid dance hosts on board. Of course, after dinner, it was all over. I am just not a night person!

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Monday, September 11, 2000. Woke to a breathtaking view of the medieval walls of the city of Rhodes. Maria, our guide, took us first to the supposed site where the Colossus stood, where two columns adorned with deer mark the narrow entrance to the harbor. However, the actual site was probably a bit inland near where the palace stands as the harbor has silted in through the years. The Colossus stood 130 feet tall and was made of metal in 305 BC to commemorate a Rhodian victory over the Macedonians. It was of the god Helios. In 227 BC an earthquake toppled it. A question was sent to the Oracle at Delphi about whether to repair it but the answer was no, so the crumpled metal was left where it had fallen. 700 years later pirates stole it, but this again gives credence to the theory that the Colossus stood further inland, for if the metal had fallen into the water it would have rusted away before the pirates could take it.

We drove through the countryside to Mt Filerimos, 720 feet high. This was a place of worship during the Phoenician period and later by the Byzantines and Catholics. St Filerimos went to the Holy Land and brought back an icon said to have been painted by St Luke. A monastery arose around the original sanctuary, to house the icon, but much of it has been lost. Two small chapels, which date from 1306, stand side by side, one Catholic, one Greek Orthodox. In the floor of the Orthodox chapel a fish is engraved, the symbol of Christ. There is also a small and poor copy of the icon, but the original was carried off to St Petersburg. Beyond was the cloister with the monk's cells opening off of it. Each monk had the name of an herb or a plant and tiles in the walls near the doors depicted which monk lived where. Outside we walked through a curious arbor of cedars called the Path of Contemplation to an outlook, which gave a view of the surrounding countryside. Next we visited the Chapel of St George, which is housed in an old cistern. Every surface is covered with frescos, all in very bad condition due to the dampness (or perhaps due to the unrestricted use of flashbulbs by the tourists). We then walked through another arbor where the Stations of the Cross are marked by bronze tablets. At the end was a huge cross, which had stairs inside to the top, and there was another view of the countryside.

Next we drove to the Acropolis, where once there was a temple to Athena and Zeus, but all that remains is a few columns. Below was a complex consisting of a stadium 205 feet long (the measure of a foot varied from place to place). Much of the original stonework has been stolen and when it was repaired they only did a few rows of the spectator seats giving it a very truncated appearance. Nearby was a perfectly restored Odeon where, if you spoke from a central point in the circle, everyone could hear you. Rhodes was known for its schools of Rhetoric and people came from all over the country to take speech lessons. They have not tried to reconstruct the gymnasium, where the athletes trained for the games in the nude. Women were barred from the competitions but one mother wished to see her son win his medal and disguised herself as a trainer so she could see her son's victory. However, her identity was revealed and after that even the trainers had to be nude!

We drove back to the old city of Rhodes and walked through the medieval walls into a labyrinth of narrow cobbled streets with supporting archways overhead. A city was first built here in 408 BC. In 1309, the Knights of St John, returning from the First Crusade built a citadel over the ancient city, the Palace of the Grand Masters, a fortress within a fortress. Built in the 14th century it was blown up by an accidental explosion in 1856. During the 1930s it was restored to be used by Mussolini and King Umberto, but this never happened due to the outbreak of World War II. Beautiful mosaics cover the floors, some dating from Roman times. We toured the staterooms on the second floor.

Then it was back to the ship. I was exhausted but Mary went back to the old city to shop while I took in a Julia Roberts movie, "Notting Hill", and took a nap before the Captains reception. It is always fun and very traditional to see the Captain introduce his staff.

It is Susan's birthday and we all chipped in for champagne and the ship provided a cake and singing salute. Dropped in on the entertainment but soon left to work on this journal. Mary has a wonderful new digital camera and needs the computer for long periods of time to download her pictures and edit them so it is hard for me to find time when the computer is available to me. However, I am ending up with a great slide show of pictures of the trip!

Tuesday, September 12. Kusadasi. This town on the Turkish coast is close to the ancient city of Ephesus. There were many levels and locations of the ancient city, but the one which the tourists sees dates from the first and second centuries AD. This Greco-Roman city heard the oratory of

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St Paul who was imprisoned here. Also here are the graves of St John and probably that of the Virgin Mary. It is an impressive site. We entered through the agora and walked a short distance down where an ancient stoa once stood, to the small theater. Greek theaters were carved out of the hillsides but Roman theaters were enclosed in man-made walls. I sat down to admire it and out of nowhere came a small white spotted cat that jumped into my lap and proceeded to purr. It must have known I was a cat person! We then moved on to a patrician house, whose owner ran the local brothel, which boasted its own Roman Bath. In one room the water was heated and then it was piped in clay pipes to another hot room where you could have a steam bath. The streets were marble and lined with fountains and shops. In some of the paving stones you could see the ruts from the chariot wheels and there were holes drilled so that portable torches could be set up at night to light the city. One interesting stop was the public men's latrine where marble benches with holes lined the walls and where the men could have a sociable time while conducting their business! At the end of the street was the recently reconstructed library, a multi-storied and columned building that was considered one of the largest libraries of the ancient world. Across the square was the brothel. On a side street an advertisement for both the library and the brothel was carved into the paving. This side street also led to the large Roman theater where modern concerts are held. However, there will be no more rock concerts since at the last one the noise was so loud some of the seats collapsed. A road led to the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, but only a single column of the temple remains. We followed the road down to where the harbor used to be before it was silted in and found our bus. Neila, the guide, tells us she will take us to a place to see native works of art and, if we didn't want to buy carpets and jewelry, she pointed out her own shop where she sold Turkish towels. The carpet show was well done with each type of carpet described and approximate prices given. There was one silk carpet I could have died for but I didn't have the \$22,000 they were asking. We went back to the ship and Mary bought some towels on the way. Then it was time for packing and our last dinner on board.

Wednesday, September 13. Woke to find we were cruising the Sea of Marmora waiting for the traffic to clear so that we could enter the Bosphorus and dock. Istanbul straddles the Bosphorus. The narrow strait between Europe and Asia connects the Black Sea, Sea of Marmora, and Dardanelles with the Aegean Sea. The old city is on the European Side beside an inlet known as the Golden Horn. This small harbor could be chained in ancient times to keep an enemy out. The newer city sprawls from there and across the Bosphorus. The Asian City of Istanbul is also huge. Two modern bridges connect the two parts of the city.

We are the first group let off the ship and find our guide Yaman waiting for us. Wonder of wonders, we have our own small bus! Yaman is both personable and knowledgeable. He studied English literature at the university and served a mandatory 16 months as an officer in the Turkish army.

He took us first to the Old Spice Market, a small arcade built in 1865. Although spices are still sold, there are many other shops in the small bazaar. Then we boarded the ferry for a cruise up the Bosphorus almost to the Black Sea. Yaman pointed out the government buildings and palaces. Later we saw the old wooden houses, which are being restored. We ate at the Gulstan Restaurant, a large fish restaurant built for the tourist trade. We had hot and cold mezzis (assorted appetizers) and sea bream. Best of all were the clean western-style restrooms!

Our bus took us down the Bosphorus and we crossed to the Asian side to visit the Beylerbeyi Palace built as a summer residence by Sultan Abdul Aziz between 1860 and 1865. We were asked to put on plastic bags over our shoes to protect the carpets, which were laid over straw matting designed to absorb the summer humidity. This baroque palace showed how the sultans lived in the less formal summer months. For instance, only two wives and his mother accompanied him. They had their own harem quarters with a reception and dining room. Beyond the harem was the sumptuous receiving hall with small waiting rooms for the ambassadors and diplomats coming to see the Sultan. Everything was symmetrical, there being a wing on the far side identical to the harem. Much of the furniture is original and it is upholstered in French fabrics. Some of the rooms had beautiful wood paneling and parquet floors. A large fountain circulated water to keep the palace cool in the summer. It was all quite charming. Afterward we were taken to a hilltop to admire the sweeping view of the city.

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At last we came to our hotel the Richmond. It is on a pedestrian shopping street and the bus can only park two blocks away.

For dinner that night we walked up the pedestrian mall to the Haci Baba Restaurant that Yaman had recommended. The walk took longer than we expected, for we made a lot of detour to shop. Dinner was pleasant on the second floor overlooking the street. We were tired and the walk back to the Richmond was much quicker!

Monday, September 11. We went to the mosque of Suleiman the Magnificent, where we had to take off our shoes and those wearing shorts had to wrap a sarong around their legs to show respect. The four minarets are resting in cisterns of water to cushion the shock of earthquakes. We admired the majestic beauty of the columns that support the main dome and the stain glass windows on the wall around the marble mirab, which is there to guide you to pray toward Mecca. Good Moslems pray five times a day. The floor is carpeted with a pattern that gives each supplicant his own area. Women don't come to the mosque as often as the men and they sit in balconies provided for them. Yaman clapped his hands to demonstrate the wonderful acoustics in the mosque.

Next stop was the hippodrome where chariot races used to be held. Little remains of the original stadium but there are two obelisks of interest here. One, from Egypt, dates from 1500 BC and sits on a marble base carved by Turkish artists. The other is in bad condition and is the Column of Constantine Porphrogenitus.

Across the street is the famous Blue Mosque, so called because of the thousands of blue tile that cover the interior. This is the second biggest mosque in Turkey and boasts six minarets. Because of this the Kabah in Mecca had to add two more minarets since no mosque should have more minarets than the Kabah! Sultan Akmet built the mosque between 1609 and 1616. Sixteen balconies adorn the minarets to show he was the 16th Sultan. Actually no one knows how many sultans there were since some served only a day before being killed or imprisoned by a jealous brother seeking the throne. It is a handsome mosque. The blue decorated tiles make a contrast with the more austere Suleiman Mosque. The stain glass windows are more beautiful, although they are not original. An earthquake destroyed the original ones a century ago. The marble mirab is larger than the one in Suleimon's Mosque. The building is very sturdy since they employed many domes and half domes to support the largest dome in the center. At one time people brought their own prayer rugs to the mosque, but this clutter has been removed and a handsome machine-made carpet covers the floor,

We walked on to Haggia Sophia, now a museum, but once a Byzantine Church. Two churches stood on this site before 537 when Justinian the Byzantine Emperor commissioned the building of this church. Because of the instability of the dome, the church was buttressed and work is still being done to strengthen and stabilize it. In the 15th century the Ottomans converted it into a mosque. They covered the gold mosaics with large plaques honoring the first Imams and Allah. No mosque can display the human or any other animal body, so the beautiful mosaics of the Virgin Mary and Jesus were obscured. One spot in the building was reserved for the coronation of the Byzantine emperors but the sultans were crowned at the Topkapi Palace. Two huge marble jars, taken from the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, acted at one time as ablution fountains. The Byzantines brought a lot of Ephesian marble to Istanbul to humiliate the pagans.

We were close to the Topkapi Palace where the sultans lived. We entered through a cool manicured and shaded park. On the wall was diagram showing the various parts of the palace. We were taken to the Palace Restaurant for a lunch and view of the Bosphorus. Then we were given time to explore the various rooms of the treasury. The collection included porcelain, silver, even costumes which the sultans used. Among the treasures was the second largest diamond in the world, the relic of John the Baptist's hand encased in a bronze glove, a golden throne, even a gold plated cradle! There wasn't time to see the harem since we wanted plenty of time in the Grand Bazaar.

Mehmet 11 built the Grand Bazaar shortly after the conquest of the city in 1453. It is a covered labyrinth of shops selling every conceivable item. The shopkeepers come outside to try and lure you into their shop. Nothing has a fixed price. We headed for Muhlis Ginbatti's shop, which our guidebook recommended. After an hour of negotiation and some apple tea, we bought two silk rugs for Mary that shimmer on the floor and change colors depending on which direction you view

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them. The owner's son admires Mary's digital camera and was shocked that it was as valuable as one of the rugs! Mary hopes to design a web page for him when she gets home. For our last dinner the group ate in the café at the Hotel Richmond. Most had pizza but I had a delicious nicoise salad and a kebab. We said our goodbyes for the group leaves at 6:30 AM to catch the Air France flight.

Friday, September 15. We left for the airport at 9:30 AM to catch the Delta flight to JFK New York. Ten hours later we landed and cleared customs in only a few minutes for Delta has a customs and immigration station right in their terminal. Mary took a little longer since she had to pay duty on her rugs. Then we parted company. Mary caught a flight to Orlando connection into Ft. Myers. I caught another Delta flight to Atlanta. The bad news is that the plane left an hour late. The good news is that the plane had business elite, so I slept all the way home.