

Hi all,

Did you know that wombats are capable of crushing a predator's skull with their hard-plated rumps? I learned that last Saturday at the Taronga Zoo. It was Tricia's, a fellow Biolan, birthday celebration. I didn't get to witness a wombat's skull-crushing skills because wombats are nocturnal, but I did get to see a platypus.

These six weeks have flown by. I'm coming up on the end of the first term in the semester. Next week there are no classes so that people can finish and turn in mid-semester projects. On Saturday, I am traveling to the Gold Coast—a surfing city a little south of Brisbane—with four other girls. The first day of spring was a few days ago, so I hope it will be warm enough for the beach farther north.

Here's the update from my trip to Canberra two weeks ago. My entire study abroad group spent two packed days in the capital city during the election, which still hasn't been resolved, but more on that later. On Friday morning we drove four hours by bus, arriving at Parliament house to hike onto the roof and see the flag pole, which is the largest stainless steel structure in the southern hemisphere. Who knew? From there we went to the New Zealand High Commission and the Indonesian and American embassies to hear briefings about Australia's relationship with each country. I loved it. I learned so much and realized yet again how little I know about the world. I also had my first big project there—a group presentation on Australia's foreign policy with the US. We spent the night at a hostel and in the morning sprinted through nearly every museum in Canberra. The last place we saw was the Australian War Memorial, which was impressive considering Australia has participated in every war that either the US or the UK have fought since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Over all, the trip was a great bonding experience with the 32 other Americans in the program. It was also good to reflect on the US and American-ness from an outside perspective. Oh, and we saw kangaroos in the wild on the bus ride back.

Although the election took place two weeks ago, we don't know yet who the next Prime Minister will be. How the electoral system works is that citizens vote for local representatives who hold to a certain political party, and whichever party holds the majority of the seats in Parliament forms the ruling government. At the moment, Parliament is hung with both the currently ruling Labor party and the opposition party holding 73 seats. The remaining 4 seats are held by independents, so we're waiting to see with which party they will decide to align.

In other news, I've been learning Lindy hop, similar to swing dancing. Leah is teaching me and our friend David. Our goal is to enter a competition in November. We've got a long way to go, but it's great fun. My friend Betty and I have also been going to Korean class on Sunday afternoons and an English conversation class on Thursday evenings at my church in Burwood. Kelli, our new housemate from Korea has been coming with us. She moved in while Leah and I were in Canberra. She speaks very little English and I almost no Korean, so we have a lot of laughs working out ways to communicate. We really enjoy our church. The congregation has welcomed us so warmly and the pastor makes sure that people know who we are. All the attention is almost embarrassing.

On a more sober note, we've been learning about the history of Australia's Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples under colonization by Anglo-Europeans. The events are similar to the decimation and displacement of Native American nations. On Tuesday, we heard the story of Ivan, an Aboriginal man who was forcibly separated from his parents and placed in a children's home as a part of the Australian government's policy to assimilate Aboriginal people into Western society by removing children from the cultural influence of their families and communities. These children are known as the Stolen Generations. It's heartbreaking to hear and to learn about the terrible ramifications it has on Aboriginal communities today. I admit I got tired of hearing about racial reconciliation at Biola, but learning about the Stolen Generations has revealed so much more how

necessary and difficult reconciliation is. On top of the terrible crimes that have been committed in the past, how do you reconcile completely different cultures and worldviews? How do you reconcile huge disparities in access to education and healthcare without imposing your understanding of success on someone who sees the world differently?

So that's how life down under is going. Here's a glimpse of what's coming up next. On Wednesday evening I come back from the Gold Coast and enjoy the rest of the week without classes. Then on Monday I head to the outback with the other ASC students. We'll be spending a week in the bush of west New South Wales. I am heaps excited! So when I write next, I'll have two more Australian environments under my belt.

Thanks so much for your support! I love hearing from you and I hope you are all doing well.

Please pray for safety as we travel this upcoming week. ASC students are headed all over Australia, from Cairns in the north to Tasmania.

Blessings!