G’Day mate! Before I left for Australia, I was not sure what to expect. I had heard all the typical stereotypes, like kangaroos are jumping around everywhere, there are large amounts of great white sharks, and everyone is going to act like Steve Irwin. However, after spending 5 months in the country, I found there was much more to it than that. Not only is it one of the most beautiful countries, it is also complemented by an amazing culture.

When I first arrived in Sydney I was in disbelief that I was actually going to be able to live and explore this magnificent city. I was actually going to see the Opera House up close instead of in a picture. It was definitely a dream come true.

I lived out in one of the Eastern Suburbs called Coogee Beach, if you know Australia at all, its about 3 miles south of the famous Bondi Beach. Coogee was a laid-back little beach town. It mainly consisted of college students attending the near by University of New South Wales. I lived in an apartment complex with some fellow Americans who I grew to love. Our days basically consisted of going to class (sometimes), grabbing a bite to eat, laying out on the beach, and going for a swim in the ocean. And if you were wondering, no we did not see a great white shark. It was definitely a great life though.

I went to school at the University of Sydney, which was about a 45-minute bus ride away. The school was gorgeous. It is the oldest university in Australia and parts of it reminded me of a castle. School was much different there. I was taking three classes and had only nine hours of class, but I was not complaining about that. All of my classes consisted of a two-hour lecture with about 200 people, and then a one-hour tutorial, which broke the class down into groups of about 20. It was very interesting to hear the perspectives of these kids from another part of the world. I felt they were much more educated on what was going on outside of their own country.

When I was not in school or at the beach, I tried to travel as much as possible. One weekend, some friends and I went to Brisbane, which is north of Sydney in Queensland. Brisbane is a smaller city but also very beautiful. That is where I held my first koala and fed a kangaroo. Since I was so close to Asia it gave me an opportunity to see parts of it. For spring break (which was in September because the seasons are switched) I went to Thailand. I had never expected it to be as beautiful as it is. It has also been very grounding to see the areas affected by the tsunami, because I was in those same places not too long before it happened. I wish I could tell you more about Thailand, but that would be a whole different paper.

Towards the end of my time there, my family came to visit me. It was nice to share with them the experience I was having. They stayed in Sydney for a few days and I showed them around there. Then we headed up to Cairns where we were able to scuba dive and snorkel on the Great Barrier Reef. Then we went to the Whitsunday Islands, which are a set of

Figure 1. Kaysen on a boat tour and the Sidney Opera House. (Photo by Kaysen Brennan)
islands on the Reef and stayed there for a few days. Then we went down to Melbourne and saw the Great Ocean Road. From there we went to New Zealand for a week, and like I said about Thailand, I could write another paper just about New Zealand. But I will say it is some of the most beautiful landscapes I have ever seen in my life.

Overall, my study abroad experience was easily the best time of my life. I was able to experience a different culture that I fell in love with. The people are so nice and very laid back. In addition, I made some the greatest friends that I know I will continue to keep in contact with. Not only was I able to learn a lot about another culture, I learned a lot about myself too. I did things I never thought I could do. It taught me to open my mind up more about the world and it has definitely made me want to travel and see as much as I can. People always say; I wish I would have done this or I regret not doing this, but I cannot say that about my time there. I saw things many people will never see in their lifetime and I made memories that will last forever. I would recommend studying abroad to anyone. It is something that will change your life forever.