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## Races With Wolves

ISTANBUL, Turkey

October 1998

By Whitney Mason

After the abortive rowing race on the Bosphorus (see WM-1), the heat wave that guaranteed my shirt would be saturated with sweat by the time I sat down in Turkish class at nine each morning came into full force. By the time we met for practice at five in the afternoon, the atmosphere on Bogazici University's hilltop campus had the heavy, soporific feel of a plantation in America's Deep South. After summer classes ended, the chatter of students was replaced by the drowsy buzzing of bees. But while the heat and the quiet lulled us into a Mediterranean torpor, the crew was supposed to be moving into high gear in the buildup to the annual race against Oxford and Cambridge held on the Golden Horn, the long inlet that slices into Istanbul, in late August. But the guys were sluggish and surly and relations between the rowers and the coaches moved toward open hostility.

Refik, the irascible economics professor and team autocrat, told me that he and Recep, the aloof head coach, despaired of the talent on the team. (Recep was so disgusted by the rowers' technique that he would not deign to coach them. His contempt, obviously, was self-fulfilling; but my repeated attempts to get him to see this were unavailing.) Yet somehow, he told me in his cool, cavernous office, they had to find a way to coax a respectable performance from the crew in the race against the British. Most of the team's budget came not from the university but from the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Refik explained, and the Minister himself would be at the Golden Horn to watch the race against the British crews. If Bogazici did well, the Minister would give the team enough money to live like pashas for the next year; if not, he would turn off the tap and the team would be bankrupt. So: our inspiration came not from some naïve abstraction such as a determination to honor the school but from the need to wheedle money out of an official. I was bemused to learn that our little team seemed to be following in the tradition of crass sycophancy that had contributed so much to the ruination of the Ottoman empire."

Since I had already told Refik that at the time of the Oxford-Cambridge Race I'd be with my fiancée Amanda Wilson in France, for some time it wasn't clear whether I'd be allowed to continue rowing. Then one day in early August Refik called me into his office for a serious heart-to-heart. Recep, he said, had told him that my technique was "nearly perfect" and they needed me in the boat. If he provided two round-trip plane tickets to Istanbul from London, paid for the train from Paris to London, and put Amanda and me up in a hotel on the Bosphorus, would I come back for just three days and row in the race? After e-mails and phone talk with Amanda, I said we would. Refik, it seemed, was honoring another late Ottoman

tradition by bringing in a foreign mercenary: me.

The rowers' enthusiasm ebbed even further after summer classes ended and most of their friends left for vacations while our smoggy commutes to and from Ali Bey Koy Baraj (the practice reservoir) and daily workouts dragged on. Several guys went temporarily AWOL, which meant we could seldom fill an eight-man shell and had to row in fours and pairs. Refik tried to prop up morale with a few little perks. We received free, hearty lunches at the alumni club — usually rice with beef or chicken, cucumbers and dill in yogurt, and grapes or watermelon for dessert. We were also admitted free to the university's luxurious, Olympic-size pool, which usually cost students about a dollar fifty per visit. Practice time was moved up to five o'clock, though as usual we would always be at least half an hour late in getting started.

We received even less coaching than before — which didn't bother most people because they were convinced, with the arrogance of sheltered children, that their technique was already perfect. And perhaps in anticipation of competing against the British, the focus of horseplay on the minibus shifted from sex to another expression of frustrated ambition — nationalism.

Instead of yelling out the minibus window at women, the guys took to singing an emotive Ottoman marching song:

*"Neslin deden, ceddin baban (2 times)*

The ancestors of your grandfather, of your  
father's forebears,

*En kahraman Turk milleti,*

The most heroic Turkish people,

*Ordularin pek cok zaman,*

Your armies for so long

*Vermistiler dunyaya san..."*

Have given such glory to the world.

Over lunch one day I asked Mert what he thought about Turkey's fascist parties. What fascist parties? he answered. I'd assumed that as an educated liberal Mert would be comfortable applying this pejorative to Turkey's biggest right-wing party, the MHP, or Nationalist Action Party. I was wrong.

"The MHP aren't fascists," Mert said. "They are just proud to be Turks and want Turkey to be a strong country. I'm not a member but I support them."

Militaristic patriotism and nostalgia for Ottoman glory forms one pillar of the right wing in Turkey, according to *Top Hat, Gray Wolf and Crescent* by Hugh Poulton. Like most conservative movements, the MHP also supports "family values" and rejects both birth control and feminism. Though explicit racism has been suppressed in recent years in order to appeal to a broader electorate, the primacy of racial homogeneity has remained a staple of MHP rhetoric. These ultranationalists call themselves *Bozkurt* or "Gray

Wolves," the animal that in Turkish myth led the Turks' forbears from Central Asia to Anatolia.

The second pillar of ultranationalist parties is their rabid hostility toward both communism and Kurdish separatists and it is this stance that has made them the darlings of the police and of Turkey's state security agency, MIT. Leftist parties have long alleged that the Gray Wolves did the state's dirty work, including assassinations, in exchange for legal protection of other lucrative activities such as racketeering. Any doubts about the existence of such collusion were put to rest two years ago when a Mercedes crashed while carrying the national Police Chief, an ultra-nationalist gang leader and assassin and his beauty queen moll and a deputy of the then ruling True Path Party.

One evening after practice Ibo, our cool, handsome captain, offered to give me and Mert a ride home. When we reached Mert's building he invited us to come in for a quick beer. The building, an undistinguished five-story structure in a labyrinth of dusty alleys, was nevertheless considered a fashionable address because it was within walking distance of a strip of overpriced Western franchises — T.G.I. Fridays, for one — that forms the backbone of one of Istanbul's most affluent neighborhoods. Mert's living room, where we each drank a can of Turkey's national beer, Efes (named after Ephesus, the Roman city to whose citizens Paul wrote his famous epistle), had the crude functional air of a boys' club rec room. Light came from an overhead bulb, a thin carpet covered the floor and we sat in naugahyde stuffed chairs. A big TV and VCR dominated the room. Only one shelf contained anything that reflected the values of the apartment's occupant: two plaster-of-paris wolves in howling position bracketed a metal plaque with an etching of a wolf's face, around which hung a small banner emblazoned with yet another wolf.

I remembered then one evening when the team had gone for an enormous meal to our favorite kebab place, Master Salami's. With what had struck me at the time as an odd excitement in his voice, Mert had whispered to me to look at a table full of burly men in the far corner. "They're all very senior police officers," he'd said, "and big Gray Wolves too." It seemed Mert's admiration for these guys ran deeper than I'd imagined. I made a mental note to remember that wolves could come in the clothing of affable and worldly sheep.

Other more worrisome omens dogged the last week of practicing with the team before I flew to Paris to meet Amanda. One day when the lads had been belting out the marching song as we bounced up the hill before the reservoir, Zorlu decided to have a go at me about being a CIA spy. MIT, Turkey's intelligence agency, would thwart me, Zorlu warned.

"But how could MIT thwart me when MIT itself is just

a subsidiary of our operation?" I answered. For two months I'd let the spy line and other jibes pass without a response. This time I decided to get in a couple of digs of my own.

"No, no," he said, "we're going to get you, you CIA spy," he said.

"But Zorlu," I said, "you can't seriously believe that MIT operates independently? Obviously the U.S. is Turkey's only solid ally and in exchange for our support, you do our bidding in the region," I said in a light-hearted tone of voice.

Zorlu sat back and thought for a moment. "I'm going to go to the U.S. as a spy and I'm going to fuck the U.S." he said, looking around the minibus for approval.

"Well if you go to the U.S.," I replied, "I suspect the first secret of our success that you'll discover is that when Americans are engaged in some collaborative enterprise — like a rowing team, for instance — they tend to follow through on their commitments and come to practices on time." Everyone guffawed but Zorlu, who flushed with anger. Zorlu had just begun coming to practice again after a couple weeks' absence, which the more dedicated rowers naturally resented.

"You'd better remember that I was on this team a long time before you came," growled Zorlu, dismayed that his nationalist crack had backfired.

An hour later we had rowed to the far end of the reservoir, in the middle of a one-minute power piece, when we heard a crunch and felt the abrupt impact of a collision with something hard. Turning around, we saw that the bow of our eight had lanced the triangular rigger of a single shell whose erstwhile sculler, a teenage girl, was now bobbing in the water 15 feet away, her face twisted in shock.

Everyone's first reaction was to begin yelling. The tone sounded particularly fierce between our coach Mehmed, who was sitting behind me, and the girl's coach who had just arrived in a motor launch. The indignant shouting continued to fly between our boat and the launch — directly over the girl, who was clearly traumatized and for all we knew injured — for what seemed like at least a minute before Ibo and the coxswain dived in the water and pulled her over to the coach's launch.

The girl was hauled into the boat, shaking and crying but luckily, unhurt. Then the boys swam over to disengage our bow from the single and we saw that the first two feet of our boat had been ripped off in the collision. After tying the single to the motor launch, we turned our boat around for

the long, slow row back to the boat house. With less than two weeks before the race — and only five days before I left for France — our boat was wrecked.

When we finally reached the dock, the cox, who was the younger brother of one of the rowers and was just filling in while the real cox was on vacation, had trouble maneuvering close enough to the dock for us to get out of the boat. Eventually the bow was within a couple of feet of the dock but the left-side riggers were caught on its edge, preventing us from getting any closer. I yelled for people to lean to the right so the riggers would clear. When the guys failed to respond, I leaped across the three feet of water onto the dock. The moment my foot touched the wood, Zorlu, turned around and barked at me to pull in the boat. "That's what I'm doing," I told the 21-year-old master-of-the-universe-in-training.

"Well just *do* it then," he retorted, apparently just for the pleasure of throwing his weight around.

At that moment I was crouched on the dock pulling on Mehmet's oar, doing what none of his sprightly young team mates had deigned to do. "Hey Zorlu, don't be a shit with me, alright?" I said as the gunwale met the dock.

"You'd better watch your mouth," Zorlu snarled. "Or you're going to find out what happens." Not quite up to New York standards, but I gathered he was steamed.

"What are you talking about?" I asked Zorlu as the other rowers milled between us. Doruk and Mert drew me aside and explained that Zorlu was just nervous because of the accident but that having already threatened me, his pride wouldn't allow him to back down immediately. Their advice was to ignore him for awhile. I suggested to Zorlu that we discuss the misunderstanding. Failing to get an answer, I let it lie. For the next couple of days Zorlu played the tempestuous macho man, stomping around with an angry glower on his face, while I tried to maintain the placid expression of one who's above the fray.

Then one day on the way back from practice everyone decided — spontaneously, it seemed to me — that the time had come for us to make up. "Whit, kiss Zorlu and Zorlu, you kiss Whit," several voices urged in English. Coming out of the blue, I was a bit taken aback by the suggestion to kiss and make up with a young dude who still radiated hostility toward me. But perhaps in lieu of sensitive, new-age-guy approaches, *i.e.*, a frank conversation, kissing was how young Turks ended disputes. And hell, I thought, I'd never tried it with a man.

As the lads' baritone chant of "Kiss, kiss, kiss, kiss!"

reverberated through the minibus, I made my way over to Zorlu and planted a comradely kiss on each of his bristly cheeks. He accepted them but made no move to reciprocate. "Well, it takes a big person to offer a guy an unrequited kiss," I thought, trying to console myself for the rebuff. But it turned out that it worked: by the next day Zorlu began joking with me as if nothing had ever happened.

But no sooner had one conflict blown over than a new one arose — this time, with Doruk, the guy I'd gotten to know the best. We had boarded the minibus, as usual, sometime after five and I assumed we were hurrying to practice when we made our usual detour to Doruk's dorm. Not being the most efficiency-minded person, I'd never questioned why we had to make this 15-minute stop every day. But in order to be on time, I'd just run the kilometer or so from the weight room, which was close to Doruk's dorm, back to our designated meeting place on the south campus. I asked the other guys in the minibus whether they knew why we were stopping. "So Doruk and Burak can change clothes," someone said.

This infuriated me. I ran into the dorm, found their room and burst in as Doruk was leisurely pulling a tank-top over his head. "Who in the hell do you think you are, making us wait for you like this?" I demanded. Both boys had already been wearing shorts and t-shirts; if they wanted to wear a different set to practice, I told them they could damned well carry them in a bag like the rest of the world.

Doruk looked sulky. "It's not convenient to carry it," was his only answer.

"Not convenient?!" I screamed at him. "You have got to be joking. All of the rest of us manage to carry our workout clothes. Senators and doctors and Wall Street bankers manage to carry their gear. But for YOU it's too much trouble?! Have I got that straight?" I fumed.

"Yes," he said, looking down at the floor.

"And you feel good about making everyone else wait for you, you think that makes sense?" I said.

"Yes," he answered, flashing an angry look. "Who do you think paid for the repairs on the boat?" he asked.

"Certainly not you," I retorted.

"Well no, not me," he conceded. "But I carried the check from Refik to the bank today — on my own time," he said, asserting the infinitesimal grounds for his bluster indignation.

"So you talk to me about how you despise lazy people,

how you admire capitalism and competition and want to get an MBA at a top American university and then you have the gall to stand there and tell me that I and all your other team mates should waste a quarter of an hour every day because carrying your gear *isn't convenient*? That is too pathetic to even comment on." We never again stopped for Doruk and Burak to change clothes. But while Burak and the others all told me they understood my point and promised to be punctual from then on, Doruk never looked at me again.

By the last days in Istanbul the accretion of these incidents had nearly convinced me to bail out of the Oxford-Cambridge Race. On August 18<sup>th</sup>, my last night in Istanbul before meeting Amanda, my roommates Yelhan and Serder made a going-away dinner for me. I invited two friends from class, a Pakistani journalist and a linguist from the University of Chicago, a Turkish journalist and Mert.

After supping on sauteed shrimp, a delicate white fish and a spicy Pakistani chicken dish, accompanied by a few bottles of wine, Mert's cheeks were flushed and he began talking expansively. "You know, I think we have a good chance in the Oxford-Cambridge Race," he declared. I regarded him dubiously. Did Mert know something I didn't?

And how. "I'm the only rower who was on the crew that won the race in 1993," Mert continued brightly. "For that race, I participated in something we called 'Operation Gray Wolf': we entered the boat house in the middle of the night before the race and changed the pitch of the oarlocks of number one and number eight in both boats." In a racing shell, the oarlocks are tilted so the blade is not quite perpendicular — or "square" in rowing parlance — in the water and not quite parallel to the water during the part of the stroke called the recovery. "We made them completely square," Mert continued, laughing at the recollection. "After the race, the English guys were all complaining about how heavy the water felt (referring to the difficulty of pulling the oar) and how hard it was to clear the water on the recovery."

I had wondered how Mert's team had beaten Oxford and Cambridge, a result that had gone down in the annals of Turkish rowing as perhaps the proudest triumph since the time of Barbarossa. So this was it: just grit, determination, several members of the Turkish National Team — and sabotage. The rest of us — two Turks, two Americans and a Pakistani — looked at one another in amazement. Oblivious to our mortified expressions, Mert declared that this year he planned to lead Operation Gray Wolf Two.

I realized then that I had to go through with the race:

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my position on the team was affording me insights too bizarre to miss. But under the circumstances I had to dispense with the Prime Directive (the rule in Star Trek that forbade Federation Starships from interfering in alien worlds.) "Mert," I said feeling uncomfortably like the hero of a school morality play, "if I'm going to be in the boat, there's not going to be any cheating."

"But it just gives us a few extra seconds," Mert answered good-naturedly.

"We can get the few extra seconds by pulling harder," I said with the stony probity of a young Al Gore.

"Oh, Okay, never mind," said Mert. But I was unconvinced and determined to warn the English if I suspected any foul play. Most of the rowers didn't seem to feel that cheating was wrong, so what was to stop them from pulling something?

Sure enough, another plot revealed itself at practice the next day. Mehmet was rowing, as he would in the race, in number eight, the position that sets the tempo for the rest of the boat. I sat behind him in the lead position for the starboard side. As we pulled away from the dock, Mehmet turned around and explained that at the start he and I alone should take several very quick, short strokes. Since we'd been experimenting with various stroke combinations for the start, I was a bit confused. "Why just you and I?" I asked in Turkish. Because no one would see us taking these strokes before the start, he explained, but we'd get a jump on the competition. Just a few seconds. Unsure how to confront the coach, I decided to deal with it through Refik before the race.

Two weeks later, after staying with friends in Paris and Brittany, Amanda and I made our way to London for the flight back to Istanbul. When we reached Heathrow, Amanda and I didn't have to look long to find the ticket desk handling the flight to Istanbul. Apart from their reserved demeanor and sport coats, the crowd of young men standing in front of the Turkish Airlines desk could have been American basketball players. At just over six feet, I was the third tallest guy on the Bogazici crew. Only one of the English guys, a bloke with a prematurely receding hair line and sporting a blue jacket with white piping of Oxford, was as short as I. Their average was 6'4" or 6'5". Tall, ruddy-cheeked, composed — oarsmen in the classic mold. I tried not to picture my own physically bulky, emotionally tempestuous team-mates, who at the that moment were probably sitting in traffic somewhere in Istanbul, smothering in carbon monoxide and singing centuries-old fight songs. I, meanwhile, had managed to catch a cold that Amanda picked up almost as

soon as we met in Paris. I boarded the plane for the three-hour flight back to meet my quixotic destiny in Istanbul feeling old, puny and sick. And I was supposed to be Bogazici's secret weapon. Ha!

By the time we reached the Bebek Hotel it was well past midnight. Bebek lies a couple of miles from the city center and is considered posh: members of Istanbul's westernized elite flock to its gelato stands, expensive bars and coffee shops, Chinese and Mexican restaurants and McDonald's. But the trappings of affluence are recent and not much deeper than the façade of a film studio's Old West town; a small army of feral cats still paces the dusty, tortuous alleyways that back Bebek's cheaply constructed buildings.

Bebek's appeal lies in its position on a choice part of the European shore of the Bosphorus.

The hotel's pride is its terrace over the water, with pines and cypresses on the hills behind, a glimpse of charming wooden buildings on the shore seven hundred meters across the water and a perfect vantage point to view ships negotiating the narrowest part of the passage between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. On this terrace Refik held court with the coaches from Oxford and Cambridge and invited me to join them. We drank a couple of Efes as we looked across the dark water at Asia and Refik regaled us with a barrage of self-aggrandizement masquerading as a welcome speech. The next day I rode with Refik and Mert to the boathouse on the Halic, or Golden Horn, and I took the opportunity to tell them that I wasn't going to tolerate any monkey business by Mehmet or anyone else. Refik said he agreed unequivocally and promised to convey our determination to compete fairly to the rest of the team.

Refik had also assured us that while there was still plenty of chemical pollution, raw sewage no longer flowed into the Golden Horn. Be that as it may, the accumulation of centuries of excrement and garbage on the floor of the inlet still makes a large area around its shores smell like a well-used outhouse. Along with the overpowering stench, the fetid Golden Horn offers stunning views of some of the older monuments of Istanbul's richly textured heritage, including the crumbling battlements built by Emperor Theodosius to protect Constantinople and the mosque of Mehmet Fatih (the Conqueror), who breached them. There is something poetically apt about this combination of visual seduction and olfactory assault. Both, after all, reflect the dual legacy of the generations that had occupied this city through the centuries: creation and putrefaction.

(Scenic though it may be, the Golden Horn may seem

"Be that as it may, the accumulation of centuries of excrement and garbage on the floor of the inlet still makes a large area around its shores smell like a well-used outhouse."



an unlikely venue for a rowing race. But in fact rowing has played a far more significant role in the waters of the eastern Mediterranean than on the Thames, where ferry-men reinvented rowing as a competitive sport in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rowing, of course, was the locomotion of the ships of war that determined the fates of nations in the classical world. Jason and his argonauts, five hundred heroes who'd volunteered to man the boat pursuing the Golden Fleece, rowed for their lives as they ventured up the Bosphorus and into the Black Sea some years before the siege of Troy. Less well known is the contribution of superior rowing to the maritime dominance of Fifth Century Athens. Recent archaeological evidence suggests the Athenians' galleys were faster and more maneuverable than their rivals' because they maintained a crew of professional rowers who trained year-round. Still more importantly, the Athenian rowers added leg power to their rowing stroke by sliding up and down a smooth board on greased leather shorts, adumbrating the modern rowing slide.)

On race day all the rowers had a quiet lunch on the terrace of the alumni club. If any occasion this summer would be devoid of surprising color, I thought, it would be this meal. That was before I'd seen the ashen-faced, hollow-eyed young man seated to my right at the table. Mert introduced him as a former rower whose technique

Recep had once judged perfect. To me he had the gaunt, gray and unnaturally subdued look of an inmate in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. That impression turned out to be dead-on. When I asked what he was doing now, he explained that as a student of biology at Bogazici, his dream had been to study genetics in grad school in the U.S. "But my parents aren't rich and I couldn't afford it. So I tried to rob a bank," he said with a faint and rather eerie smile. After he was caught, his brother pulled some strings and hired a good lawyer. Instead of a long prison sentence, he was judged to be temporarily insane. Now he was serving a year in a psychiatric hospital, from which he was released just once a week. This week he'd decided to spend his day attending our last supper. Naturally.

Down at the boathouse, surrounded by Navy dry docks on an industrial stretch of the rank inlet, all three teams spent a while quietly fussing over the rigging. About half an hour before the start, we set out for the starting line. I was feeling weak and congested; an endurance contest on a cesspool in the sweltering heat was the last place I wanted to be. But this was probably the last time I'd ever race. I'd trained a lot and owed my best to the team. And Amanda was watching from the finish line.

The start of a rowing race is uniquely taxing in two respects. First, in order to overcome the inertia of the boat, you have to row faster, exerting more energy at the beginning of the race than in all the rest of it. This ensures that within seconds of the start you will plunge into oxygen debt. The second peculiarity is that for the minutes before the start you are busy following the coxswain's orders — on this occasion in Turkish, of course — to take small strokes backward and forward in order to line up evenly with the other boats. As usual, the command to start took me half by surprise. Still, while I wouldn't say the boat felt like a finely tuned machine, it went fairly well. Since the first race was just 500 meters, we rowed at a very high rate — probably 38 strokes per minute — and were finished within a minute and a half. There had been some hopes on the Bogazici team that being smaller, we might also be quicker over the short distance. On the other hand, there had also been fears, on my part at least, that we would be blown out of the water. In the event both the other crews were beside us as we crossed the finish line. I was glad to hear shouts from the umpire's boat that we'd finished second to Oxford and ahead of Cambridge.

We paddled slowly back to the Ataturk Bridge for the second race, which would be 1700 meters. Again, we started pretty well. But after some 40 seconds I became aware through the haze of exertion that the other boats had somehow converged with ours. Moments later came the dissonant slapping sounds of a multi-shell pile-up. It seemed Oxford had careened into Cambridge and in their effort to avoid a collision, Cambridge had moved into our lane and crashed with us. My teammates, embarrass-





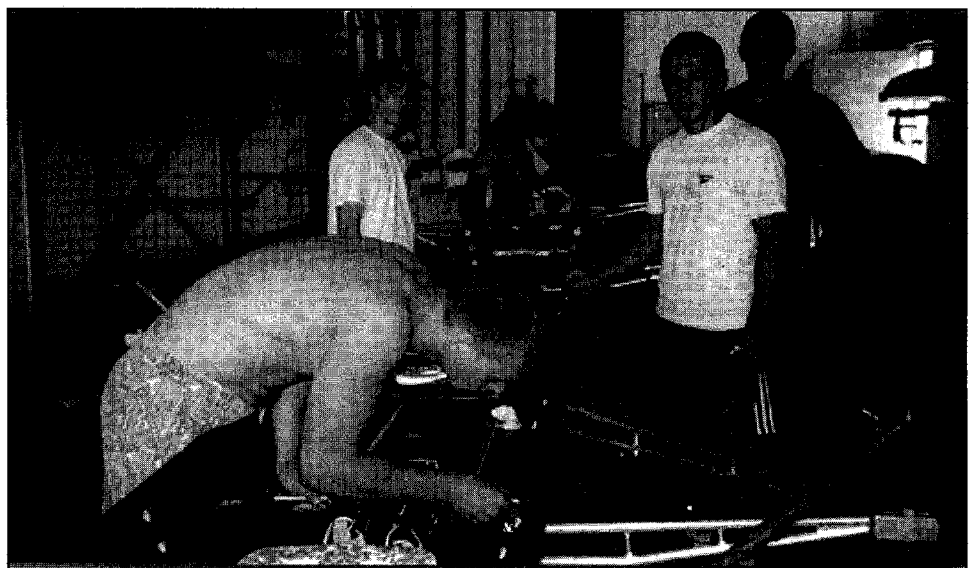
*Team photo at our last supper. The erstwhile bankrobber is in front of me.*

ingly, at once began shouting that the collision wasn't our fault. For 20 minutes or so we bobbed around on that pungent brew while I struggled to ignore how awful I was feeling. As soon as the initial surprise had passed, there were hopeful mutterings that the other teams might be disqualified. When we were told to row back to start again, the disappointment was palpable.

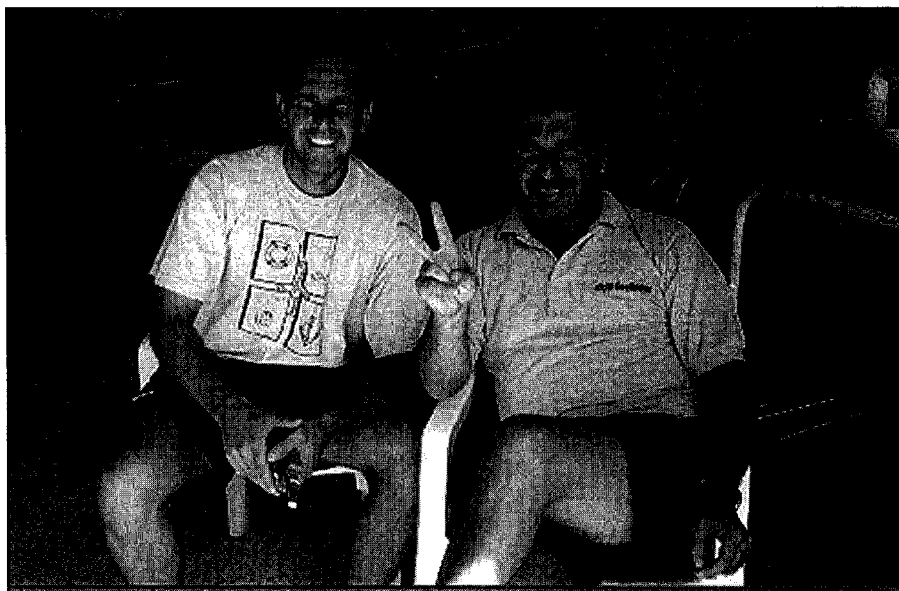
Our third start of the day wasn't nearly as good as the first two. In an effort to compensate for some rough strokes in the beginning, Mehmet kept the stroke rate at around 38 for at least five hundred meters. The balance was off. My blade missed the water entirely for one stroke. Mehmet felt it and screamed my name. We had never trained at this stroke rate and we couldn't do it well. With no sign of either Oxford or Cambridge in my peripheral vision, Mehmet lowered the rate to about 34. We began to settle down. Our strokes grew longer and

firmer and I could tell we were beginning to move.

But I was feeling wiped out. As my body continued to go through the motions of a rowing as well as I could, my oxygen-starved brain began considering how I might end this torture before the finish line. Perhaps, I thought, I could wait for another lurch in the balance and make myself catch a bad crab. With the blade sucked down into the water, the handle would hit my belly and, with luck, lift me out of this torture machine and into the water. The water. Despite my delirium, I remembered that being in the Golden Horn would be even worse than being in the boat. Meanwhile the boat had stopped lurching. We felt smooth and powerful and I realized that my fatigue had hit a plateau that was survivable. We had been rowing well for a couple of minutes when I saw that the water had changed from black to a milky gray, indicating that we were less than five hundred meters



*Doruk double-checks his foot stretchers before the race*



*Memet and Recep before the race*

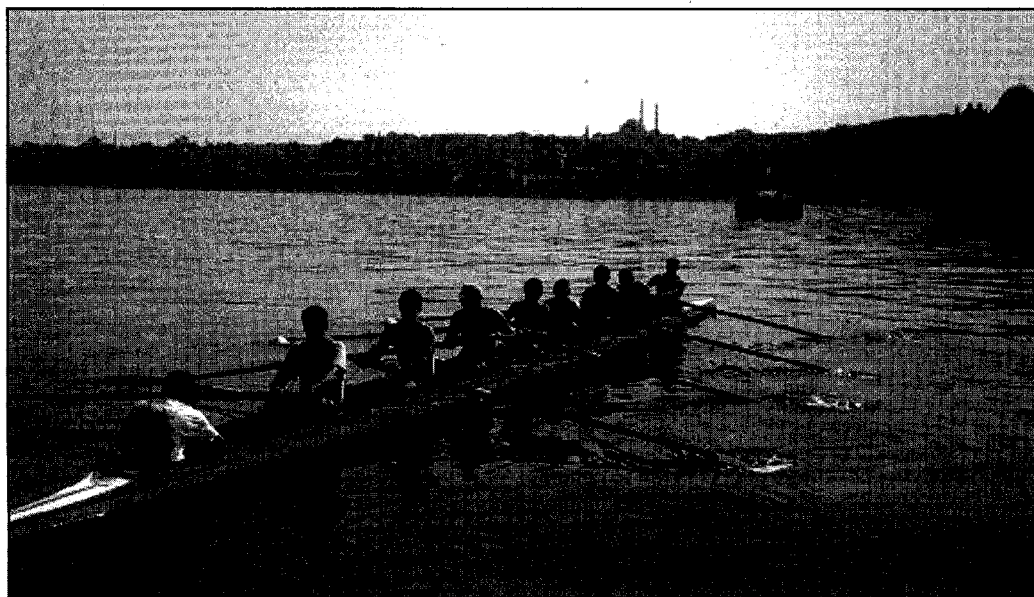
from the finish line. I could hear cheering from the shore on our right and then the air horn announcing that the first crew had crossed the finish. Feeling loose and lucid now, we continued pulling hard, hoping for second place.

We missed beating Cambridge, it turned out, by three seconds. Friends watching on shore told me later that we'd been gaining quickly on them and looked great at the finish. I was thrilled it was over and relieved that we'd rowed honestly and respectfully.

We paddled over to the park for the awards ceremony. I saw Refik amid the crowd of reporters, officials and on-lookers. From the relatively soft look on his unsmiling face I could tell he was pleased. As the winners of both races, Oxford mounted the central podium. Cambridge arrayed to their right, we to the left. As we stood there in our immodestly tight lycra bodysuits, I saw Amanda. In

her white dress and sun hat she looked like a turn-of-the-century British colonial straight out of a story by W. Somerset Maugham. My archaic darling waved and shouted that she was proud of me.

The mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, presented medals for the sprint, hanging a silver medal around each of our necks. The mayor didn't look particularly happy to be there — and no wonder. Last year Erdogan was convicted of inciting religious hatred by publicly quoting from a 14<sup>th</sup>-century poem about the importance of piety. There is little dispute that Erdogan's real offense was being the popular heir-apparent of the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*), which was banned last year under pressure from Turkey's secularist military because of the party's Islamist orientation. Polls show that Welfare's equally religious successor, the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*), remains Turkey's most popular party to-



*Bogazici setting out for the starting line. From bow to stern: Mert, Ibo, Zorlu, Doruk, Ilhan, Fatih Abi, Whit, Mehmet*





*A tight finish of the 500-meter sprint.*

day. In early September — just after our race — a Turkish court rejected Erdogan's appeal of the conviction. Barring another last minute appeal, within the next few weeks Erdogan will begin serving a ten-month jail term, after which he'll be banned from public office for life.

Our sugar daddy, Sports and Youth Minister Yucel Seckiner, on the other hand, looked ebullient. When he presented the medals for the longer race and another just for participating, he shook hands with the English rowers. But as native sons we all received family treatment: ministerial kisses on both our cheeks.

It was apparent that Cambridge had approached the race much more casually than had Oxford. (Perhaps because Cambridge had won this year's famed Boat Race for the sixth straight year and in record time.) At a pool-side dinner and party after the race the Cambridge guys were dressed in jeans and casual shirts, while Oxford all wore blazers. Oxford's head coach and boatman were with the team, while Cambridge were being coached by two friendly students who'd just

graduated, a rower who was becoming a doctor and a boyish coxswain who had studied architecture and had exhorted Cambridge to its record victory in the Boat Race. At the party, Amanda persuaded both of them to hike up their shirts and try belly dancing.

When the Oxford rowers had a few drinks in them, they took off their coats and ties. The man rowing number seven, my seat, in the Oxford boat turned out to be a Swede named Henry who'd rowed for his country's national team for the past five years, including the Atlanta Olympics. Henry told me that three of the Oxford rowers were from the vaunted Blue Boat and four others from the second eight. One of these was an enormous American named Toby who's studying linguistics and philosophy at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. Henry said that given the enormous depth of the English universities' rowing programs, he was astonished and impressed that Bogazici had been as competitive as we had been.

But the Bogazici rowers seemed less pleased than their coaches, opponents or I were. Perhaps, I thought at first,



*Me shaking hands with Recep Erdogan, Istanbul's popular former mayor, who is now serving a 10-month jail term for "inciting religious hatred."*

it was because they had never appreciated what an uphill battle they faced against serious crews, that despite the lack of coaching, the tiny pool of people they drew from, the squabbling and the disorganization, they'd believed we really had a chance to win outright. Our coxswain, Erhan, had a more specific reason to be frustrated. Mehmet, Erhan told me, had shouted at him throughout the race to steer to the left. Erhan felt certain that swinging in an unnecessary arc had cost us several seconds — more than the three between us and Cambridge.

At the formal dinner after the race, I asked Mehmet why he'd told Erhan to go left. Mehmet explained that he had taken his cue from Recep who was signaling and

shouting furiously from the coaches boat behind us. Recep felt sure that Oxford and Cambridge would crash again; if we could avoid getting entangled the collision, we could cruise to victory.

Henry, the rower from the Swedish National Team, was right: against daunting competition, the young Turks had hung tough, given the last ounce of their strength, and finished remarkably well. The irony was that we could have beaten Cambridge in the longer race. If only we hadn't been undermined by our supposed leaders looking for an easy way out. If only we'd been allowed to row straight. Not that it would have made a world of difference — just a few seconds'. □

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## INSTITUTE FELLOWS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

**Adam Smith Albion.** A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is studying and writing about the republics of Central Asia, and their importance as actors within and without the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. Degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**Shelly Renae Browning.** A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Vanuatu to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology. [SOUTH ASIA]

**Chenoa Egawa.** An enrolled member of the Lummi Indian Nation, Chenoa is spending two years living among mesoAmerican Indians, studying successful and not-so-successful cooperative organizations designed to help the Indians market their manufactures, agricultural products and crafts without relying on middlemen. A former trade specialist for the American Indian Trade and Development Council of the Pacific Northwest, Chenoa's B.A. is in International Business and Spanish from the University of Washington in Seattle. [THE AMERICAS]

**Paige Evans.** A playwright and former Literary Manager of the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York City, Paige is looking at Cuba through the lens of its performing arts. With a History/Literature B.A. from Harvard, she has served as counselor at the Buckhorn Children's Center in Buckhorn, Kentucky (1983-84), as Arts Editor of the International Courier in Rome, Italy (1985-86), and as an adjunct professor teaching a course in Contemporary American Playwrights at New York University. She joined the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1990. [THE AMERICAS]

**Whitney Mason.** A freelance print and television journalist, Whit began his career by founding a newspaper called The Siberian Review in Novosibirsk in 1991, then worked as an editor of the Vladivostok News and wrote for *Asiaweek* magazine in Hong Kong. In 1995 he switched to radio- and video-journalism, working in Bosnia and Korea for CBS. As an ICWA Fellow, he is studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**Marc Michaelson.** A program manager for Save the Children in The Gambia, Marc has moved across Africa to the Horn, there to assess nation-building in Eritrea and Ethiopia, and (conditions permitting) availing and unavailing humanitarian efforts in northern Somalia and southern Sudan. With a B.A. in political science from Tufts, a year of non-degree study at the London School of Economics and a Master's in International Peace Studies from Notre Dame, he describes his postgraduate years as "seven years' experience in international development programming and peace research." [sub-SAHARA]

**Jean Benoît Nadeau.** A French-Canadian journalist and playwright, Jean Benoît studied drama at the National Theater School in Montreal, then received a B.A. from McGill University in Political Science and History. The holder of several Canadian magazine and investigative-journalism awards, he is spending his ICWA-fellowship years in France studying "the resistance of the French to the trend of economic and cultural globalization." [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**Susan Sterner.** A staff photographer for the Associated Press in Los Angeles, Susan received her B.A. in International Studies and Cultural Anthropology at Emory University and a Master's in Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt. AP gave her a wide-ranging beat, with assignments in Haiti, Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexican border; in 1998 she was a co-nominee for a Pulitzer Prize for a series on child labor. Her fellowship topic: the lives and status of Brazilian women. [THE AMERICAS]

**Tyrone Turner.** A photojournalist (Black Star) whose work has appeared in many U.S. newspapers and magazines, Tyrone holds a Master's degree in Government and Latin American politics from Georgetown University and has produced international photo-essays on such topics as Rwandan genocide and mining in Indonesia (the latter nominated for a Pulitzer). As an ICWA Fellow he is writing and photographing Brazilian youth and their lives in rural and urban settings. [THE AMERICAS]

**Daniel B. Wright.** A sinologist with a Master's Degree in International Relations from the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University, Dan's fellowship immerses him in southwest China's Guizhou Province, where he, his journalist-wife Shou Guowei, and their two children (Margaret and Jon) will base themselves for two years in the city of Duyun. Previously a specialist on Asian and Chinese affairs for the Washington consulting firm of Andrae, Vick & Associates, Dan also studied Chinese literature at Beijing University and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary of Pasadena, California. [EAST ASIA]

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