Eric's Greek Travel Diary

Story by Louise Schofield
Illustrations by Rae Dale







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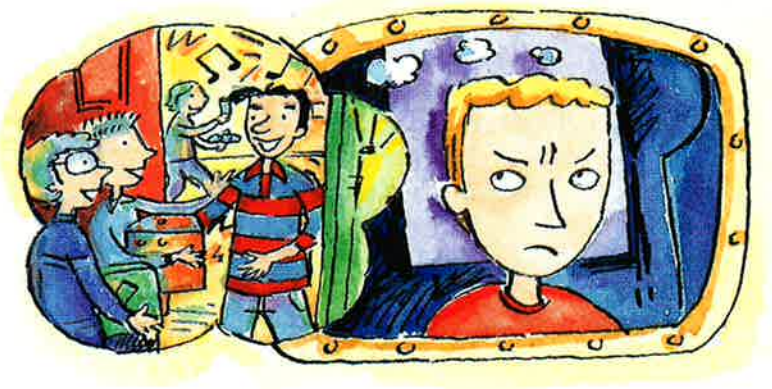
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Chapter 1

Flying



It's Aunt Matilda's fault. Here I am on a plane to Greece and NOT at my best friend's birthday sleepover which is happening at this very moment.

I really wanted to be there. I promised I'd tell the ghost stories at midnight. My stories are always the scariest and Pete is FANTASTIC at the sound effects.

But now nobody will be scared, and Pete's party will be just a party.

I've let my friend down.

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It's Aunt Matilda's fault alright.

She's the one who told Mum about Athens and the island of Crete. About "ancient temples and fascinating artefacts." About "quaint fishing ports and delicious food." She can be very convincing.

Last time, Matilda talked Mum into taking me on a trek in Nepal even though I begged her to leave me behind. I survived that trip pretty well (Nepal was a cool kind of place), but this time there is no doubt in my mind.

I'd rather be with Pete!



Oh well, there's nothing I can do about it now, so... I'll ask for another juice and settle down to watch the movie. I think it's a good one.

I wonder what's for dinner. What will be in those little plastic boxes? I wonder what they're having at the party...

(Mrs Smith, my teacher, asked me to keep a diary of the trip. I'll write more later.)





Chapter 2

Athens and the Ancients

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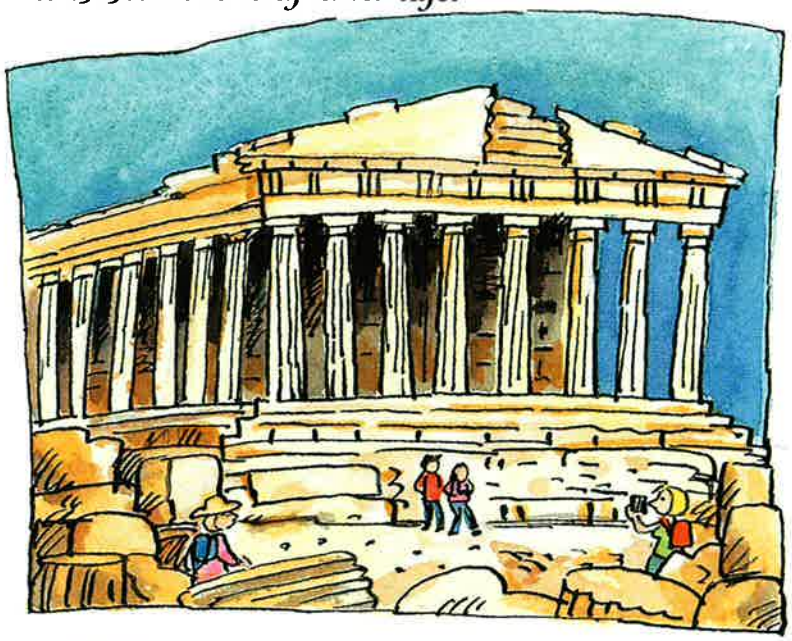
We're at our hotel in Athens now. Athens is the capital of Greece. It's been a busy day.

When we arrived last night we could see the ruins of the Acropolis (Uh-cro-pol-lis) lit up on a hill above the city. So today, that was the first place Mum and I wanted to visit.

We got out our guidebook, checked the map and off we went...

The Acropolis is the name of the area on top of this flat hill above Athens and, boy, does it have some old stuff up there! Thousands of years old!

The Parthenon is this huge temple with lots of stone columns. It's an amazing building and it used to contain one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World – a 12-metre gold and ivory statue of the goddess Athena. The statue was stolen a long time ago.



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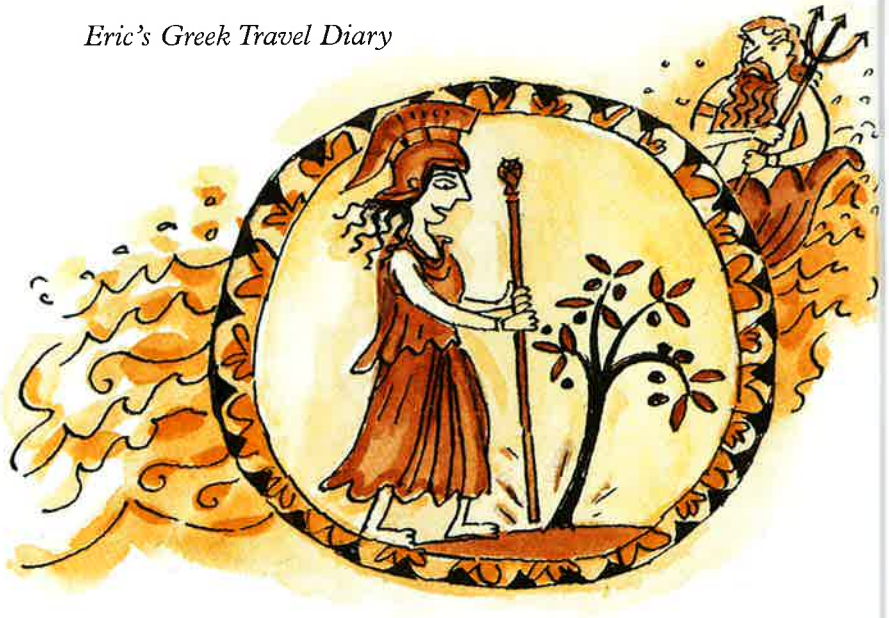


Who is Athena?

According to my guidebook, Athena was the Greek goddess of war and wisdom (and a few other things). The Romans called her Minerva.

The owl is her sacred bird, which is why owls are associated with learning. Her dad was called Zeus (Zoo-ss). He was the king of the gods.

There's a story that explains why Athens was named after her, and it goes like this:



Athena and Poseidon, the god of the sea, were competing to become patron of a new city (a patron looks after something). To show his power, Poseidon (Pos-eye-don) struck his trident on the rock of the Acropolis. It opened and salt water gushed out. Great party trick!

In reply, Athena struck the ground with a rod and created the first olive tree. She was chosen, and so the city was named after her.

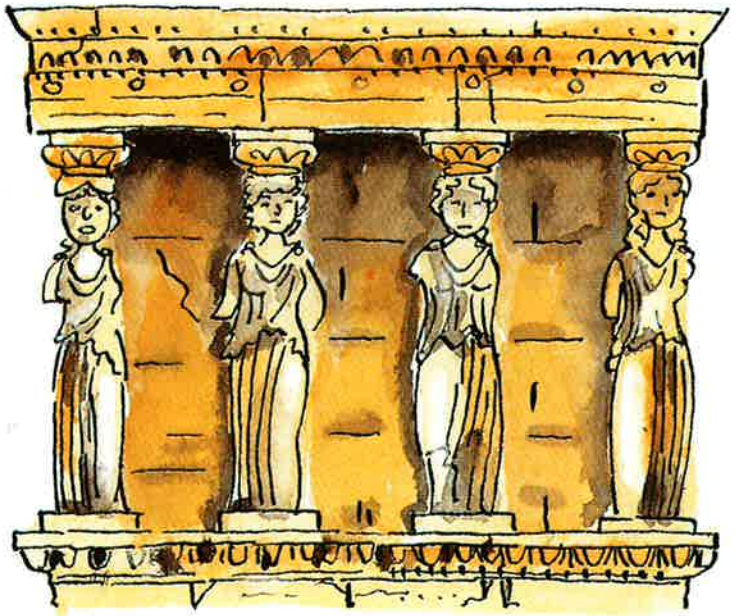
Mum says that olives are very important to the Greeks for food and oil. So I guess they made the right decision...

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Another of the important buildings at the Acropolis is the Erechteum (E-reck-tee-oom) where both Athena and Poseidon are honoured.

You can't go into the old buildings anymore but apparently, inside the Erechteum, there is a rock with the holes made by Poseidon's trident. It's said that when the wind blows south you can hear the sea.

We also saw the famous group of columns called the Caryatid Porch (Kari-atid), where ladies hold up the roof with their heads! Ouch!



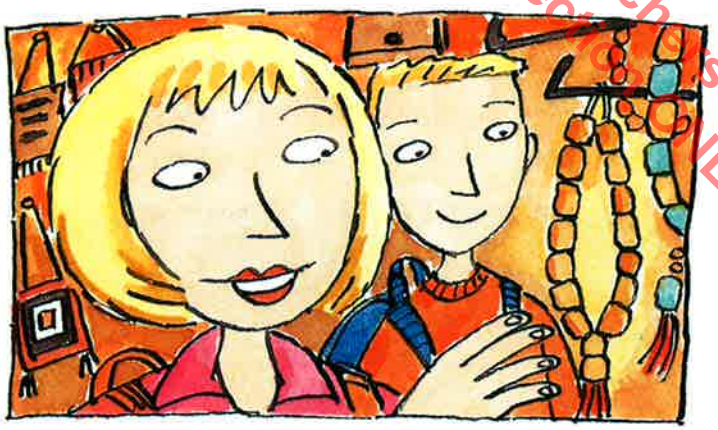
After the Acropolis, Mum and I wandered down the hill into Plaka (Plark-uh), which is a maze of narrow alleys and winding stairs, shops and restaurants.

I was starving, so we found a place to eat lunch. First I noticed there was octopus on the menu. No way was I going to eat octopus! Can you imagine what that would be like? Mum says it's delicious, but I don't believe her.

We settled on souvlakis (soov-lark-ee) with salad. Souvlaki is little pieces of meat on a skewer, grilled with herbs and stuff, served with bread that looks like a pancake. Yum!



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On the way back to our hotel we passed a market.

Mum bought some beads from a man at a stall. She said they were worry beads, and you "play" with them when you're worried or thinking about something important. They are made out of amber, which is the fossilised sap of ancient trees. These beads are a mix of golden yellow and red; Mum thinks they're beautiful.

Maybe I need some worry beads. I'm still worried that Pete will be cross with me for missing his party! Maybe he won't be my best friend anymore.