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## D.C. Means Living History for Stanley 8th Graders

By T.R. Audley



Stanley School students take a break on memorial steps in Washington D.C. Photo Victoria Shegoian

For most, a visit to Washington, D.C. brings American history to life. Victoria Shegoian, eighth grade history teacher at Stanley School, agrees. One of six chaperones on the Stanley School spring break trip, Shegoian has served as trip coordinator for the past 13 years. "Seeing the sights of D.C. through the eyes of eighth graders each year is a new and exciting experience," she says.

On the first day of spring break - 4:30 a.m. on Saturday morning - 96 Stanley School eighth graders assembled in the school parking lot, ready for a hands-on history lesson.

The trip fell within the first 100 days of the new presidency, and although students did not have experience to compare, Shegoian did see changes relative to past visits. "D.C. felt more relaxed. There were kids and families on the white house grounds in areas where only security was allowed before," she says.

"Probably the most memorable thing we saw was the Washington Monument. There was a great view of everything from the top," eighth grader Jack Burford says.

Seeing the original Declaration of Independence at the National Archives also struck students as did the 9/11 memorials which mark events within their lifetime. "There was a bench at the Pentagon for each person who died there on 9/11," says Buford. "The benches looked like they rose out of the ground."

A visit to the White House, however, was only one stop. The busy itinerary also included monuments and museums as well as side trips to Arlington National Cemetery, Williamsburg, Gettysburg and Jamestown. According to strict trip rules, students were to act respectfully or go home. Shegoian proudly noted that students exceeded expectation.

At the solemn and serious Holocaust museum, for instance, Shegoian was impressed when students lined up without instruction and the docent dubbed her group "the most respectful and quiet of the day."

The \$1,980.00 cost for the trip included everything from airfare to accommodations, social events and meals. Scholarships were available through Stanley and affiliates of WorldStrides who also offer one (1) credit toward a high

school elective.

Beyond cost, academic credit, friendship changes and tales of late nights, Shegoian sees the big picture. "At first it will appear to parents and other adults that they just had fun on the trip, yet over the course of the next couple of months, it will become clear that they gained a great deal of information and understanding about our country."

At night in the hotel, there were new challenges. "On their own they had to do the basics: budget spending money, eat at mealtimes and refill their own water bottles," said Shegoian. "They also learned to be flexible, help each other remember things and advocate for someone who was not feeling well." Security was hired for the halls at night where sometimes sleep was scant. Nevertheless, students remembered their days.

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