



**Author Abroad -ITEF- Istanbul Tanpinar Literature Festival, May 2016**

***Susanne Gervay exploring Theme ~City and Voices***

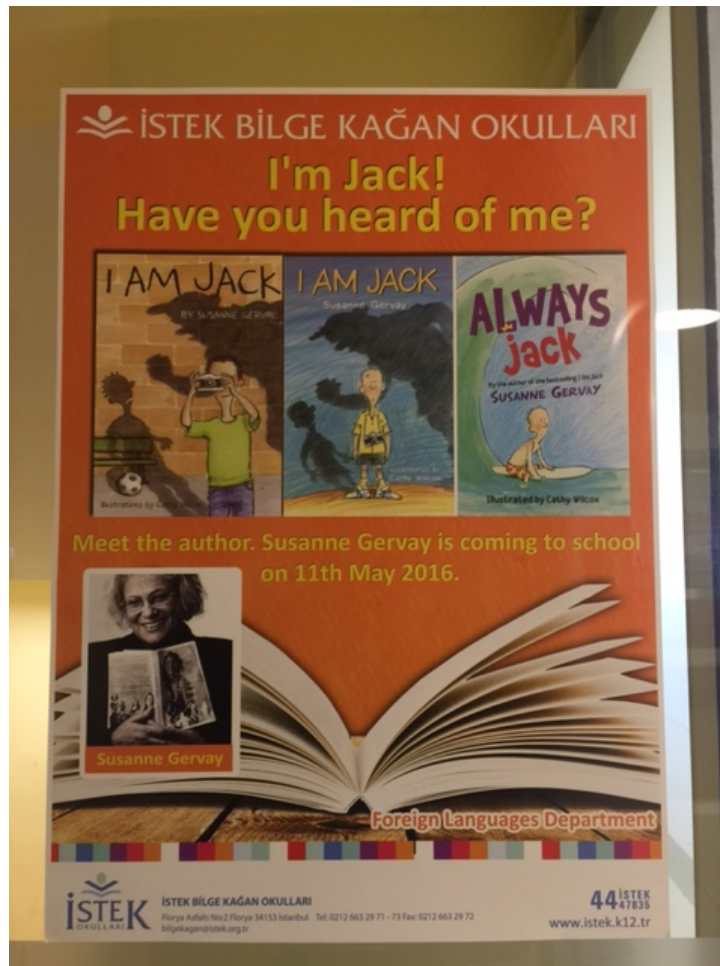
Flying to Turkey with a suitcase of my books and Australian Government warnings not to go to Istanbul due to threats of terrorist attacks, could not stop me from embarking on this great literary adventure. I'd been invited to speak at the Istanbul Tanpinar Literature Festival. My children's series, the 'I AM JACK' books published by HarperCollins had been sold into Turkey and were now published by Marti, a major Turkish publisher. Last year Markus Zusak was the Australian author flown to the ITEF festival. This year it was lucky me. The other 25 international authors were from UK, Holland, Romania, Germany, Israel, Syria, Norway, Sweden, Ireland, other countries and of course Turkey. The international fellows included publishers and rights managers from Germany, USA, Wales, Holland, Scandinavia to Mongolia.

Turkey crosses into both Europe and Asia, and includes the Arabic world. Conflicts past and present of Kurdish nationalism, Syrian refugees, the Armenian genocide intermingle with antiquities from the ancient Roman, Greek and Ottoman empires and modern day democratic Turkey. It is a country so different to Australia and offered inspirational experiences that enrich writing. A casual decision to eat spinach goslème at a local restaurant in Antalya ended up with my daughter and I being included in the family with Grandma, four kids from 12 to 4, the father, uncles and aunties sharing food, clicking photos while they spoke Turkish and we spoke English and we understood each other. Driving up a steep narrow and windy road to the Ottoman village of Sirance, we swerved around a huge tortoise on the road who just expected us to miss him. Exploring the Mediterranean coastline, we stayed at Kas a quaint town on the rocky cliffs, descending into an ancient town. Looking out, there were so many Greek islands. We took the 30 minute ferry ride to tiny Meis, a Greek island, with its Roman fortress and seaside village. From there, a Greek fisherman called Nicolas, took us out to sea and through the rocky cliff face to enter the Blue Grotto. It was extraordinary. What was even more extraordinary was that the fisherman had saved more than 1200 refugees. He'd pulled out a 10 day old baby from the water. Life jackets swept in by the tides were littered on the cliffs. It was emotional.



There is strong security everywhere and I felt safe amongst the warm hospitality of the people. Turkey is a secular democracy established in 1923 by Mustafa Ataturk whose pictures and statues are everywhere. When I spoke to hundreds of students, it was against a backdrop of the flag and Ataturk. Sadly, democracy there is threatened today.





The ITEF Istanbul Literature Festival is the first international festival in Turkey providing a platform for collaboration between Turkish authors and publishers and their international counterparts as well as editors and translators. Organized by the non-profit Kalem Culture Association with Festival Director Mehmet, the festival has hosted over 450 authors in seven years.



*“You get the feeling that if the ghost of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, the great 20th-century Turkish novelist and poet, is lingering in the baroque silver-and-white dining room of the Cezayir Restaurant ... over the four day event ... Just as Tanpınar set out to mix Western and Turkish literary traditions, so the festival named after him seeks to bring together diverse writers in a conversation around common themes.”*

**The TelegraphUK**

The festival was held in bookshops, cultural centres, libraries, art galleries and embassies. The glamorous opening was in the Romanian Consulate packed with writers and dignitaries and traditional Turkish music and singing.

The authors included Tibor Fischer who I called ‘Tibby’ as I identified our Hungarian roots. It was pretty funny. Tibor is a shortlisted Booker Prize winner who lives in the UK. The fantastic Dutch author Linda Polman is internationally recognized for her books on the UN peacekeeping missions in Somalia and Rwanda. She was off to Lesbos to report on the Syrian Refugees and the UN there. Irish Keith Ridgway awarded Prix Femina in France and The Rooney Prize for Irish Literature was great company. He’s Irish after all. So many outstanding authors became my friends. What a privilege.

My Turkish publisher MARTI took me and Jim Smith best-selling UK children’s author to an amazing Turkish banquet. We drank raki with the editor of our books, publisher and rights manager and feasted on grilled eggplants, yogurt dips, exotic vegetables, tenderest red mullet, meats .... and it went on and on ending with Turkish coffee and baklava. The whole festival was a gourmet experience.

The ITEF published an anthology from the authors at the festival called ‘Cities and Voices’. My short story ‘Days of Thailand’ translated into Turkish by Hazal Baydur was emotional. ‘Days of Thailand’ included the tragedy of the Kurds. Hazal cried as she was Kurdish. Hazal had a tattoo on her arm of an elephant. It connected us further as her elephant joined my peace picture book ‘Elephants Have Wings’. The editor of the anthology joined us. It was Just lovely.

(Photo below of elephant on Hazal’s arm; Photo of Kaan Kurt, me and translator Hazal Baydur.)



I spoke on a panel in a historic bookshop with the literacy advocate, Turkish author Defne Oongun Muminoglu and Sima Ozkan who is a children's author, editor and the translator of my 'I Am Jack' books. My young Turkish minder Busca who spoke German, English and Turkish was the translator. Everyone seemed to speak multiple languages unlike me in the packed bookshop.



(The photos above the Bookshop and Defne, Susanne and Sima)

I loved the interview by the English edition of Nattional Turkish TV with a multicultural production team.



ITEF posters were plastered across Istanbul celebrating books and diverse voices. At this time of conflict, it was an especially meaningful festival.

Susanne Gervay  
[www.sgervay.com](http://www.sgervay.com)