This is the full report written by Ms Simpson, an abridged version of which was published in the Burwood GHS newsletter, *Event* 19 October 2015.

**EX-STUDENT STUDYING HER PHD IN USA**

*Patrice Simpson, Head Teacher, HSIE*

*In the July holidays, I travelled to South Africa and was excited to catch up with former SRC President and School Captain from Year 12 in 2002, Saarah Jappie. Her story since leaving school is quite amazing and really inspirational so I asked her to share it with our school community. Here’s what she had to say:*

At school I focused my studies on the areas that I was most passionate about: language and culture. From year 8 until year 12 I studied Indonesian and in year 11, I picked up beginner's French and Society and Culture. I believe those subjects really helped to mould (or perhaps strengthen) my personality and approach to the world: I became increasingly fascinated with intercultural and inter-lingual communication, and exploring other ways of living in and viewing the world.

I enrolled in a Bachelor of International Studies at UNSW, majoring in Indonesian and French with a minor in Linguistics. I loved this degree, particularly because it had an overseas study requirement and I spent a year studying language and culture in Indonesia. This was one of the most stimulating academic and personal experiences I have ever had. Living and studying in another country made me see education from a different perspective - from the way classes are conducted to the manner in which particular disciplines are viewed. After Indonesia I completed my “first class” honours in Indonesian Studies and linguistics, and following at least three unsuccessful job applications in Canberra, I left Australia again. Planning to take a 'gap year', I headed to my parents’ home town, Cape Town in South Africa where I was offered a job as a research assistant in the History Department, specifically in the Tombouctou Manuscripts Project. By chance, my skills in Indonesian and French together made me the ideal candidate to work in that research group: with my French I was able to help with communications with our West African counterparts, and with my Indonesian/Malay (and Afrikaans) I was able to begin what became pioneering research into the Islamic manuscript of Cape Town. This textual tradition was developed by the South and Southeast Asian Muslim slaves in Cape Town in the 18th and 19th centuries in Cape Town. They used their knowledge of the Arabic script to write their own texts in the Malay language and later, the Afrikaans language. They wrote in Arabic script because they were not taught how to read or write using roman script. Through my job in the Tombouctou Project I was able to travel to Mali twice, and even got to see Timbuktu, and I met all sorts of interesting researchers, attended and helped to organise cool seminars and more.
After my contract had ended I had to make a choice between going back home to begin a new job related to Indonesia or to pursue my academic interests. It was a tough decision and I think I would have been happy either way, but in the end I chose academics.

In 2009 I began my MA in Historical Studies at The University of Cape Town. Through this experience I realised that I was quite happy in academia. It gave me the opportunity to pursue the kinds of linguistic, cultural and (because of my work as a research assistant in a history department) historical questions I had. I also found that I was quite passionate about the teaching and learning process, and that research gave me the chance to see the world, to meet and interact with really interesting people with fascinating ideas and to write (which I also love). I thus decided to begin my PhD in History. After some advice from some mentors, I applied to the US and that is how I ended up at Princeton.

My thesis looks at connections across the Indian Ocean World, in particular links between Indonesia and South Africa, through narrative and memory. The main focus of my thesis is Shaykh Yusuf of Makassar (1627-1699), a Sufi scholar from Indonesia who was exiled to Sri Lanka and then to South Africa by the Dutch East India Company because he was seen as a political threat. He now has at least three graves in the world: two in Indonesia and one in South Africa. Although he lived over 300 years ago, he is still revered and actively remembered by people all over South Africa and in Indonesia: his graves have become sites of pilgrimage and his story is retold often. By conducting archival and ethnographic fieldwork in Indonesia and South Africa, I will weave together a history of Shaykh Yusuf’s story, including how we have come to know about it, the ways in which the story has been remembered, forgotten, re-emerged and changed over time, and how it has been used to forge new links across the Indian Ocean world. Incidentally, to really work at this thesis, I needed some skills in Arabic, so I also completed an intensive course in this language in Jordan.

My advice to students at Burwood Girls would be to follow what moves you, and to see where that passion takes you. When I was in year 12 I really was at a loss for what exactly I wanted to do in terms of future study or work. Even after undergrad I struggled with finding a job in my ‘field’ at that time. But I chose to take some risks and then to follow the paths I met along the way that excited me. It can be unsettling not knowing what lies ahead. Sometimes even after you feel you have made the right choice, you will meet sizeable challenges along the way, but things get better (even if they have to get a bit worse first).