



The

a competition for

Simpson

year 9 and 10 students

Prize

**2008 runner-up
Tasmania**

**Ellie Cope
Kings Meadows High School**

To what extent was Simpson a hero? How have his heroic qualities been demonstrated by other Australians since 1915?

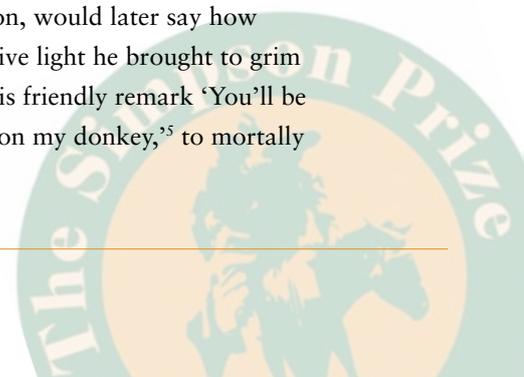
by Ellie Cope, Kings Meadows High School

John Simpson Kirkpatrick is one of the most commonly recognised figures in Australian history, admired for his heroism amongst the tumultuousness of Gallipoli. Simpson and his donkey, which he used to carry injured soldiers to field hospitals, have come to represent Anzac tenacity and fortitude, although they barely saw four weeks of combat¹. Simpson's heroism embodies traits such as mateship, courage and persistence, inspiring generations of Australian's to find similar qualities within themselves to better the local and global communities through various fields.

From a young age Simpson was always supportive of his family. Whether it was delivering milk when he was twelve or sending postal orders from Australia as a young man, John took responsibility for much of his family's finances and cared little for his own. Simpson sent a total of thirty-six pounds in monthly instalments of three pounds² during 1912, showing attributes of responsibility and selflessness which would eventually earn him his legendary status.

When the war began in 1914 Simpson was working onboard the ship, Yankalilla, off the Western Australian Coast which he deserted in Fremantle to join the Australian forces³. John enlisted in the army in Perth on the 25th of August 1914 where he was chosen as a stretcher bearer in 'C' section of the third field ambulance. Fearing that he may not have been able to join the army, as he was a deserter, John enlisted under the name of John Simpson rather than John Simpson Kirkpatrick. These actions, including deserting from two ships, are perhaps the only notable incidents during which Simpson showed signs of cowardice, though all are heavily outweighed by the courageous act of enrolling in the army.

After months of rigorous recruit training and sailing to the shores of Gallipoli, Simpson had created something of a legend for himself as a jokester who kept spirits aloft in the preparation for battle. A friend of John's, Captain A.R Davidson, would later say how Simpson was always 'Witty, cracking jokes...'⁴ Simpson's positive light he brought to grim situations would also be welcomed on the battlefield, namely his friendly remark 'You'll be all right, Dig. I wish they'd let me take you down to the beach on my donkey,'⁵ to mortally



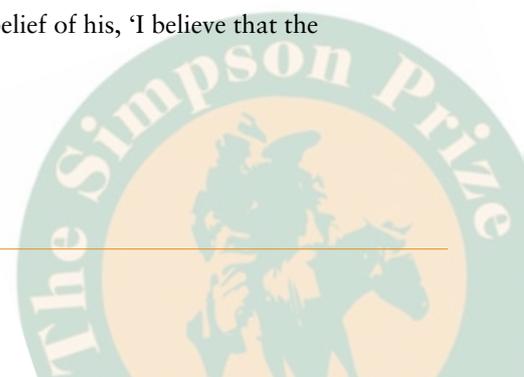
wounded General Bridges. Of course Simpson was at heart very aware of the peril the Australian forces constantly faced and made light of situations only out of compassion.

Perhaps Simpson's most heroic attributes were his selflessness and dedication to his duties. Making between twelve and fifteen trips per day into Monash Valley, never pausing to avoid fire, Simpson's priority was to bring injured soldiers back to the beach hospitals. P.G. Menhennett recalls riding Simpson's donkey when he turned to him and said 'That was a very nasty spot we have just passed. Jacko's snipers are wonderful shots.'⁶ Though this sometimes seemingly reckless behaviour led to the death of a donkey or even the soldier Simpson was rescuing, the same drastic actions saved countless Australian lives. Unfortunately Simpson's luck eventually ran out, on the nineteenth of May 1915 an enemy bullet pierced his heart as he was making his way up Shrapnel Gully to save more Australian soldiers.

Simpson's courage and daring have earned him the title as a hero and a true representation of Anzac, since 1915 there have been many Australians who have demonstrated such valiantness. One such person is Tania Major, whose spirited fight to gain much needed attention for the plight of young aboriginals earned her the prestigious title of Young Australian of the Year in 2007. Since becoming the youngest person to join ATSIC, Tania has been thrust into the spotlight and her concerns listened to.

By appearing on Television programmes such as *Sixty Minutes*, *Enough Rope with Andrew Denton* and *Four Corners* along with speaking publicly to John Howard, Tania has secured the issues of young indigenous Australians in the public eye. Major has also established the High Expectations Program which provides scholarships for adolescents from Cape York to attend boarding school in the hope of going on to further study at University⁷. But it has not been an unproblematic process to get acknowledgement for matters such as sexual assault, drug and alcohol abuse and education, Tania has had to deal with harsh criticism from the very community she comes from, Kowanyama, which was rife with the same problems. Ms Major's courage against oppression makes her the hero of not only indigenous youth but of all Australians.

Another Australian who has shared part of Simpson's heroism is Fred Hollows. Driven by compassion, Hollows worked tirelessly to restore sight to people in a number of developing countries in an effort to create a world where no-one is needlessly blind⁸. Having helped over one million people to see again in the developing world⁹, setting up the National Trachoma and Eye Health Programme in Australia and set up the Fred Hollows Foundation five months before he died, Fred was named the Australian of the Year in 1990 and is hailed as a hero by all he has helped. By pioneering such things as modern cataract surgery in developing countries Hollows has paved the way for further work to be carried out regarding preventing and curing blindness as well as being a caring role model for Australians to aspire to. Fred's work seems to follow a strong belief of his, 'I believe that the basic attribute of mankind is to look after each other.'¹⁰

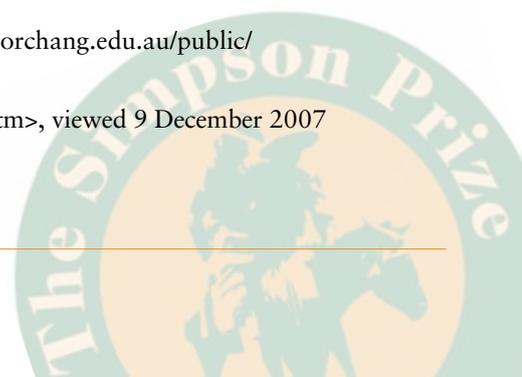


Selflessness was a major part of Simpson's courageous persona as it was with ground breaking heart surgeon, Dr Victor Chang. Dr Chang established the Australian National Heart Transplant Program in 1984 which has allowed over one thousand two hundred heart and heart-lung transplants to be performed¹¹. Chang's most publicised and time consuming work though was his development of an artificial heart valve and later, the artificial heart. The inspiration for the devices came from the shortage of organ donors and also because he said he would '... always get upset when I do this because it means someone has to die so that someone else can live...'¹² His caring nature was welcomed by his patients much like the injured soldiers appreciated Simpson's humour and wit. Unfortunately, even after the relentless hours Dr Chang put into working on the artificial heart, he would not see the finished product. Dr Victor Chang was shot in Sydney in 1991 after refusing to pay thugs three million dollars; the acclaim he gained through his selfless work was in the end his undoing.

The legend of 'the man with the donkey' is undoubtedly one of the best known by Australians. It is so well remembered because it represents all the best qualities a truly inspiring hero could have. If a hero is to be measured by his commitment to the wellbeing of others or by the inspiration he conjures in them, then John Simpson Kirkpatrick was such a man. Since 1915 there has been no shortage of Australians displaying such valiant qualities that Simpson held. Whether it is by Tania Major's courage, Professor Fred Hollow's compassion, Dr Victor Chang's selflessness or indeed other unmentioned Australian's heroic qualities Simpson's legacy is being proudly upheld athwart the nation.

Endnotes

1. *Forging the Nation*, Australian War Memorial, <<http://www.awm.gov.au/forgiving/australians/simpson.htm>>, viewed 20 August 2007
2. Ibid
3. Curran, T, 1998, *Not Only A Hero*, Anzac Day Commemoration Committee, Brisbane p.14
4. Benson, Sir I, 1965, *The Man with the Donkey*, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., London, p. 15
5. Ibid p. 45
6. Ibid p. 42
7. Australian of the Year, <<http://www.australianoftheyear.gov.au/pages/page310.asp>>, viewed 8 December 2007
8. The Fred Hollows Foundation, *About Fred*, <<http://www.hollows.org/AboutFred/>>, viewed 9 December 2007
9. Ibid
10. Ibid
11. Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute, <<http://www.victorchang.edu.au/public/DrVictorChang.cfm?cid=59>>, viewed 9 December 2007
12. ABC, <<http://www.abc.net.au/schoolstv/australians/chang.htm>>, viewed 9 December 2007



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