

end we'll all have to wait for our luggage anyway.

But then, 25 minutes into the wait, when nerves are a bit more frayed, it happens. The defining moment, signaling that I'm back in Israel. Not that the flight had left much in doubt. All the normal bizarre things that happen only on Israel-bound flights happened; all the stock figures were represented: the ultra-Orthodox man who refused to be seated between two women; the passengers who disregarded instructions and lunged for the overhead compartments as the plane taxied — causing items to fall on other people's heads; the Arab-American teenager who sat in my row and was carted off the tarmac by a sunglassed security man the second we deplaned.

But that was baby stuff. What's now



brewing before me is the Real Thing, the falafel of return-to-Israel experiences. A middle-aged couple in front of the two T-shirted young women suddenly signals for "the family" to cut in and join them near the head of the line. "Come, come," they wave eagerly to an unlikely trio, waiting far behind us.

The three purported relatives are a twentysomething woman with long bleached-blond hair, big teeth and a dark pants suit; a young man, same age, in fitted jeans; and, improbably, a teenage girl in yeshivah dress. They start to sweep regally past us. Maybe they're genuine family, maybe just airplane friends. Does it matter?

Astonishingly my fellow Israelis are silent, as though making a fuss has become passé. But I decide to keep tradition alive. "What you're doing is wrong and impolite," I tell the trio as they pass. "We're all tired," I note, motioning to my sleepy son.

"But we're family," argues Long Blonde with a forced smile. "Together."

Mr. Contented behind me stops humming and bursts out laughing. "Why are you being so mean?" he asks me, in the height of sarcasm. "To separate families! You're cruel."

"Now you know why everyone hates Israelis," chorus the black T-shirt women at the line-jumpers, calm but bitter. "Everywhere we went, we were hated."

The invaders are impervious. I try a different tack. "It's Elul," I remind them —

the most solemn month in the Jewish calendar. "It's not worth lying about trivial things. Why don't you repent and go to the back of the line?"

Partial success: the religious girl starts to drop back. "Elul, Elul," I repeat to the other two, still heading forward.

"They hated us in New York, L.A., Chicago, New Orleans," sings out one of the T-shirts. "The minute Americans hear Hebrew, they freeze. Instant hatred."

Long Blonde sneers and keeps moving. But tight jeans stops to offer a defense: It's not Israelis like him who are to blame, he offers, but those who live in New York. "You have no idea what they did to me," he wails, "what sort of abuse I endured."

Mr. Contented claps effusively, admiring the chutzpah. "You're terrific," he tells tight jeans.

Other passengers are complaining now. No frontal assaults, just running commentary on the rudeness of it all. A gentle rain. Suddenly a parallel line comes to a halt and someone dares to try and cut ahead of Long Blonde. "What do you think you're doing!" she demands aggressively.

"What goes around comes around," I tell tight jeans. "It's Elul."

Just before the passport control booth, tight jeans breaks down. "Go ahead of me," he snaps at me and some of the others he's pushed past. "You, you and you."

"What are you doing?" stammers Long Blonde, horrified at his lack of resolve.

"I can't take it anymore," he mutters. "These two (the black T-shirt girls) are blaming me for everything short of starting the Yom Kippur War. And she (me) is *hocking* me with Elul."

But it's too late. We won't be mollified. We all wave our passports at him, telling him to move forward already, get on with it.

"That's Israel," chirps Mr. Contented behind me. "Even apologizing isn't easy."

Netty C. Gross

## The Other Side of the Road

A few weeks ago I drove to Beersheba, via the Etzion Bloc south of Jerusalem and down through the Hebron hills, where the winding roads afford some of the most beautiful vistas this country has to offer. I often do reserve duty in that area, so I wasn't afraid of getting lost.

Reading David Margolis's Up Front item, "On the Road," in The Report's last issue — about his misgivings over whom he does and doesn't give lifts to — I was reminded of this trip, and an experience

rather different from the one he described.

At the Alon Shvut junction, two religious women were hitchhiking. I slowed to pick them up, but the car in front beat me to it. As the dust cleared, I saw an Arab waiting a few meters further down. He looked to be in his mid-fifties, with a stubby beard, red *keffiyeh* and chalky clothes. He too was hitchhiking, but he knew better than to hail a Jewish car. We eyed each other through the windshield. It was a brief moment of silence pregnant with many noisy thoughts.

Finally I motioned to him to get into my car. He turned to see if I were pointing to someone behind him, but no one was there. He hesitantly approached, and got in.

As we conversed in his pidgin English and my even more pathetic Arabic, Moussa told me I looked very familiar. I glanced at him and told him the same.

He told me he was on his way home, to the village of Samoa. "That's funny," I said, "I did reserve duty in Samoa a few months ago." A look of recognition broke out across Moussa's face. "That's where we know each other from. You arrested me for the stolen car."



"The BMW?" I asked.

"Right," he smiled.

I remembered the incident well. Our officer had arrested a Palestinian and ordered him to follow our jeep to the police station in Kiryat Arba. But we couldn't find the station and drove around the city for an hour, asking for directions. The settlers weren't particularly pleased that an Arab was driving in their town on Shabbat, and cursed him out. When we finally arrived at the police station, it turned out that the whole matter was a mistake. The Palestinian proved that he did own the car, and was told he could go. I protested that, at the very least, he deserved an apology. None was forthcoming. So, on behalf of the Israel Defense Forces, I apologized to him for the inconvenience.

"By the way," I said as Moussa was getting out of my car at Samoa, "how come you're not driving your BMW?"

"It was stolen," he said.

Robby Berman