

POINTS OF VIEW

'Pilgrims' journey to shores of peace

Pence dawns in Mideast" was the headline staring up at me Friday from the breakfast-room table.

I thought it would be anticlimactic. For the past two weeks, I had been travelling the small state of Israel (it's one-fourth the land size of Michigan) from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, from the Negev to the Golan as part of a group of Humanistic Jews. It had never been either my husband's or my dream to go to Israel. It was just that Huntington Woods resident Connie Wolberg was planning a one-of-a-kind trip through the International Federation of the Society of Humanistic Jews — and we thought it might provide one of the more ecumenical opportunities to go.

As we stood overlooking Jerusalem from Zion Hill on our arrival date, Aug. 26, we had no idea that peace was at hand. In a group which included David and Esther Littman from Bloomfield Hills, and Jim Harley and Yolanda Cohen from Southfield, we were just one more group of "pilgrims" — be they Jew, Moslem or Christian — journeying to their religion's birthplace.

Three days later, Avner Regav, a former Israeli intelligence expert who's in line to chair a major peace group, told us we were in Israel during the most historic time since the declaration of statehood in 1948.

He was positive that the mutual recognition agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization was imminent. And the newspapers soon confirmed his statement — some of them, such as the Jerusalem Post, more reluctantly than others.

"It put a different slant on our travels. As we walked through Jerusalem's Old City, divided up into Jewish, Christian, Moslem and Armenian quarters, spoke with representatives of Arab groups such as the Druze and Bedouins — who are already Israeli citizens — who are already Israeli citizens — nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and visited with Josef Abas, at Kib-

butz Misgav-Am directly on the Israel-Lebanon border, we sensed the excitement.

And as we saw how the young state of Israel is capturing the desert and turning it into a garden, building new cities to house the recent wave of Russian immigrants, and harnessing the salty waters of the Dead Sea for profit, we thought that they might now help their former enemies to do the same. (They are already building economic bridges with Jordan.)

Although we were in Tel Aviv on a night of demonstrations, they had to be extremely limited since we saw no unrest at all. The young people at the all-Israeli (except for us) night club were much more interested in socializing and the music.

On an evening cruise on the Sea of Galilee, a busload of Romanian young people to whom the Israeli government was giving a free tour of the country, in hope of luring some of them to emigrate, were visibly having a good time.

Contrary to the idea that they can not settle the numbers of Russian Jews, the government is actually soliciting more people.

Another myth, judging from the people we talked with, is that giving up the Gaza and Jordan will eventually lead to giving up Jerusalem. Jerusalem will never be anything but Israeli was what we heard from the right, left and middle. And most also scoffed at the idea of making the Old City into a kind of international Vatican.

I was struck at the care that Israel

has taken to excavate ruins dating as far back as 2500 B.C., as well as the care they take of their present-day children. In a country whose infrastructure is very much in its infancy, they have cultivated imaginative parks and playgrounds.

In fact all people — young and old — congregate on the beaches of Tel Aviv, on Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem, and on the promenade above Haifa Bay. Neither are separated out from the rest of society, as we tend to do in what we consider our more developed country.

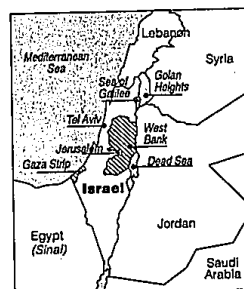
As a Jew, I found the presence of the soldiers in Israel comforting, rather than scary. But I hope the military installations all along the Golan, which soar above the bunkers and live mine fields from past wars, may now be used to make peace not just keep it.

So, no, seeing that headline "Peace dawns in Mideast" wasn't anticlimactic. It was the perfect ending to an historic trip, and the perfect beginning to the new Jewish year.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric.



Bunker hill: Surrounded by well-marked, but live mine fields, area residents Ed Berne (Tigers hat), Connie Wolberg (foreground) and Esther Littman (far right, front) sit in front of a bunker near the Syrian border.



Military cemetery: Israelis hope the steps toward peace mean no additions to Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem, where those who died in Israel's wars for independence are buried.



At the borders: Josef Abas thanked us repeatedly for not being afraid to come to Kibbutz Misgav-Am, on the border of Israel and Lebanon. Jim Harley of Southfield observes a barbed wire fence just below which cannot be crossed. With Harley is Judith Doner Berne, assistant managing editor of Oakland County editions of Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.



For the children: Youngsters play on a plot of playground in the Old City's Jewish Quarter. Israelis of all political persuasions are determined Jerusalem will remain governed by Israel.

Blue collar bashing hammers at value of work

The woman on the phone was angry. "Why should a plumber make more than a teacher?" she asked in an indignant manner.

My first reaction was to ask the woman if she had ever tried to get a plumber to even come out to look at a job and much less do it. Anybody who has ever gotten any plumbing work done realizes that a good plumber is harder to find than a math teacher.

And that's the reason they make more money than a teacher. It's simple economics.

The call came during the most recent crisis in the Plymouth Canton schools during which teachers were asked to take a 3 percent pay freeze. The teachers accepted it.

The woman's question kept echoing

through my head during, appropriately enough, the Labor Day weekend. It wasn't the first such blue collar bashing that I've heard in our suburbs.

Earlier this year, a banker at a service club meeting complained to a speaker from an auto firm that the banker had just done a loan for a fork lift driver who made \$48,000 a year.

The banker wanted the auto executive to share in the outrage over the large salary. My instinct was to question the banker's sanity. Let's face it, if that fork lift driver wasn't making enough money to buy a house, Mr. Three-Piece Blue Suit wouldn't be working.

To me that incident said it all. Being blue collar and making enough money



JEFF COUNTS

Anybody who has ever gotten any plumbing work done realizes that a good plumber is harder to find than a math teacher.

to live on just isn't cool anymore. It's low class to work with your hands.

And pity the poor auto worker. He or she gets blamed for every ill that befalls the auto industry. If cars cost too much, it's because auto workers make too much money. I even had one editor who blamed auto workers for bad car designs. This college educated fellow kept it up until I pointed out that auto workers don't design cars, they just do what the foreman tells them. It's college educated engineers who design the vehicles.

The tragedy of this blue collar bashing is that, if we keep it up and devalue blue collar work to the point where these folks can't make a living at their trades, we won't either.

Somebody who can't make a living as a carpenter or on the assembly line doesn't tend to buy new houses, cars, newspapers or pay many taxes.

But somehow I don't think that will happen. As long as folks continue to bash blue collar workers and try to enroll their kids in medical school or the Harvard Business School at birth, there certainly won't be enough plumbers to go around.

It's too bad. Our tickers will be working fine with all those doctors around, but flushing will be another matter.

Jeff Counts is the editor of the Plymouth and Canton Observer Newspapers, who really always wanted to be a carpenter. He can be reached at 459-2700.