



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

## Memorial Days

Returning to the United States after a lengthy camping and hiking expedition through the Sinai, I have, as usual, made the normal contrasts that every citizen must make when he comes home. How much we take for granted: ice in our drinks, a clean potty (any kind of potty, for that matter), decent highways, gasoline that does not cost \$3 a gallon (not yet, anyway), freedom of religion, freedom of the press.

So I returned home with positive feelings. Even editor Schumann and my old college roommate, Jim Thompson, had nice things to say in their guest columns. (I've since wondered if that was because neither of them believed I'd return alive.) Whatever, it was good to get back and find a note from the editor saying he had not been able to find anyone willing to write my column for the amount they are paying me, so would I please report for work immediately.

All the contrasts are not positive,

however, I am still unable to shake the memory of Memorial Day in Jerusalem.

The little nation celebrated its 31st birthday while I was there. The day before they mourn those who died to help make it possible.

In Israel Memorial Day is not just for fallen soldiers. Rather, the nation mourns all who gave their lives for their nation. That includes those who died from terrorist bombs, school children butchered by the PLO, victims of the Holocaust, those martyred in Russia, Iran and Argentina. Almost every family in Israel has lost someone close.

I was in a small shop in downtown Jerusalem at 11 a.m. on Memorial Day when the first of three sirens sounded. The sound, like an air raid warning, lasted five minutes. Instantly the city stopped. Like a movie which halts, buses, taxis and pedestrians in the streets all stopped. The shopkeeper pulling out his tray of necklaces stopped, staring

straight ahead, his tray in his hands — until the sirens stopped. Outside on the street I saw grown men weeping; the bus driver, sitting motionless behind the wheel of his stopped bus, was crying. No one moved, not even to wipe away the tears, as the entire nation paused, and remembered.

Maybe, when you're only 31 years old, and your soil is still moist with the blood of loved ones, you take Memorial Day seriously.

I got back home just in time to make the contrast. One wonders what good it does to have ice in your tea, or even freedom to worship and print, if it's spilt beer rather than spilt blood which brings tears on Memorial Day.

There was a letter waiting when I returned. A friend was writing, expressing concern that I was turning cynic. No, I'm not cynical. Just sad. Mixed with the joy of returning to the greatest nation on the face of the earth.