

# The Link

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## Hebron's Theater of the Absurd

By Kathleen Kern

After our Christian Peacemaker Team had received its third death threat from the settlers in Hebron, we asked a friendly Israeli soldier there about how seriously we should take these threats. Re-

sponses from our Palestinian friends had ranged from, "Don't worry. They wouldn't hurt Americans," to "Well, some of them might just be crazy enough..." Israeli friends had told us that the Hebron settlers were all talk and no action.

We had not gone beyond casual conversation with Myron—an 18-year-old obviously ill-suited to military life. He had dropped hints that he did not approve of Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories, but his reaction to our telling him about the death threats surprised us.

"I hate these people. I just hate them," he said. "Do you know what they called me? They called me a Nazi! My grandmother was the only member of my family to survive the war in Europe and they called me a Nazi!" "Why?"

I asked, "Because I wouldn't let them park there," he gestured to a spot on the street in front of the Il-Ibrahimi mosque clearly marked "No Parking."

This conversation has stuck with me in the wake of the Ra-

bin assassination. It captures the irrationality and paranoia of many Hebron settlers and their supporters. To some extent, it symbolically reflects the relationship between mainstream Israelis and the extreme right wing. Israelis may say they despise the right wing, but they protect them as well.



Photo Courtesy Christian Peacemaker Teams, Chicago, IL

### Armed Settlers, Hebron

More than anything else, however, this conversation reflects the absurdity of the situation in Hebron. Four hundred Israeli settlers, protected by 1,200 soldiers, hold the rest of the city—120,000 Palestinians—hostage. Israeli soldiers consider Hebron a hardship assignment and we saw them turning their backs to avoid witnessing settlers attacking Palestinians. Many settlers feel the military presence cramps their style. Soldiers and police who challenge settlers' behavior are called Nazis. As the mainstream Israeli public debates whether it is permissible to criticize or condemn their fellow Jews, Palestinians live under permanent martial law, ongoing harassment, attacks and abuse from soldiers and settlers.

Among the more absurd things that happened to me in Hebron was getting rushed by 20 adult male settlers and socked in the head by one of them on a Saturday afternoon. Absurd because Orthodox Judaism forbids its followers from engaging in strenuous activity on the Sabbath and forbids its men from touching women not related to them.

It was absurd, too, to hear right-wing extremists in Hebron

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Kathleen Kern's latest book, *"When It Hurts to Live: Devotions for Difficult Times,"* was published by Faith and Life Press.

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## About This Issue

"... some broke ranks and attacked a line of Christian women peace activists who regularly placed themselves between the Jews and Palestinians, knocking two of them down and dragging them by their hair" was how The New York Times described a group of Jews led by Yigal Amir, the confessed assassin of Prime Minister Rabin, as he swaggered into Hebron.

We thought that the U.S. media would have descended upon these women to get their eyewitness account, the assassination being, after all, a major story. One of the women, Kathleen Kern, was even back in the country for a few weeks. But when we tracked her down, she said we were the only publication to ask for her story.

These Christian peacemakers have been cursed, spat upon, hit with eggs, punched, knocked down and stomped upon. "We've experienced a taste of what our Palestinian neighbors have faced on a daily basis during the occupation," reflected one peacemaker in an e-mail report from Hebron. [Yes, the age-old tradition of bearing witness now has an e-mail address: [cptnet@uci.com](mailto:cptnet@uci.com).] The daily tasks of these peacemakers include accompanying Palestinian girls to and from their school; standing in front of Palestinian shops to prevent vandalism raids; and intervening when settlers taunted the older men and women.



Kathleen Kern

And they pray. They pray for the Palestinians. They pray for the Jews. They pray that their own presence—and articles such as this—will shatter the absurdity of debasing human beings in the name of God. And they ask that others pray for them, that they will have the strength to take the physical risks that non-violent direct action demands.

Christian Peacemaker Teams is supported by Mennonite and Church of the Brethren congregations in North America. Their address is CPT, P.O. Box 6508, Chicago, IL 60680. Tel/fax: 312/455-1199; U.S. e-mail: [cpt@igc.apc.org](mailto:cpt@igc.apc.org).

AMEU's latest book and video selections are found on pages 14-16.

John F. Mahoney, Executive Director

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arguing earnestly about whether they should kill Rabin and Peres—or just kill as many Arabs as possible.

## Hebron's Invitation To Christian Peacemakers

Christian Peacemaker Teams became involved in Hebron after a delegation visited the city in February, 1995. Our group of twelve Americans from various church backgrounds and a Palestinian driver were entering the Il-Ibrahimi Mosque, where the year before settler Baruch Goldstein had massacred 29 people as they prayed. We had passed through two sets of metal detectors to enter the part of the mosque designated by Israeli authorities exclusively for Jews. The soldiers asked if we were Jewish when they checked our knapsacks. We told them we were Christian and they waved us through. Two of our group had already entered the mosque when an irate rabbi began yelling at the soldiers below for having admitted our party. "They've got an Arab with them!" he shrieked. The soldiers told us apologetically that Issa (Arabic for "Jesus") could not enter. "But he's Christian, too," I said. They shook their heads. "It doesn't matter. He's an Arab."

As we walked away, Russ Leinbach, a Mennonite social worker from Virginia, said "Shalom" to a red-haired settler boy of about 12. "Forget shalom," the boy said. "Get the f— out of here."

The larger delegation returned home after two weeks. Wendy Lehman, 24, and I, as full-time Christian Peacemaker Corps members, stayed behind and traveled throughout the West Bank and Israel for the next few months talking to Palestinians and Israelis—particularly those involved with peace and human rights work. Something kept drawing us back to Hebron. Each time we returned, we heard more incredible accounts of settler and soldier abuses that had gone unchecked and unpunished. We also met up with the Hebron Solidarity

Committee—made up of Israeli and international components—who had been working to call public attention to the situation in Hebron even before the mosque massacre of 1994.

On one visit I told Ahlam Muhtasib, the director of public relations in the mayor's office, about my work in Haiti with the Christian Peacemaker Corps. A Haitian priest had invited CPC to live and work out of his parish as a violence-detering presence during the regime of the military junta that had ousted Jean Bertrand Aristide.

Ms. Muhtasib seized on the idea. "That's what we need here in Hebron," she said, "people who will come and live here and tell the world about what they see." The mayor's office issued an invitation and a four person team moved into Hebron on June 1.

## Roots of the Irrational: The First Settlements

Hebron is said to contain the burial sites of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, and there was once a thriving Jewish Quarter there. Thus when Israel's settlement policy began to take root after 1967, Hebron became a special target for right wing Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) activists.

Kiryat Arba was founded by Rabbi Moshe Levinger and his wife, Miriam. In 1968, the rabbi and a band of armed cronies, posing as Swiss tourists, took over the only hotel in Hebron and stated that they did not intend to leave. To appease them, the army gave them an abandoned military camp on the outskirts of Hebron.

In 1979, Miriam Levinger moved into Beit Hadassah, a part of the old Jewish Quarter, along with several other women and children. The Israeli army immediately moved in to protect them and more Israelis began to occupy the buildings near the

central marketplace. In response to the growing settlements, initially regarded as "illegal" but now protected by the authorities, Arab militants attacked on May 2, 1980, from near Dubboya Street, killing six yeshiva students with machine gun fire and hand grenades.

Israel's swift response was to permit two more settlements to rise in the city center and to install checkpoints, bringing the heart of Hebron's commercial district under military control.

Relations between the settlers and Palestinians continued to deteriorate and reached their tragic consequences in the February 1994 massacre in the Il-Ibrahimi mosque. Official reports of the massacre stated that the settler Baruch Goldstein, a medical doctor, began spraying Muslim men and boys with bullets around 5:30 am. Twenty-nine died in the mosque. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) shot as many more in the demonstrations that followed.

The army put all the Palestinians in Hebron under curfew for two months, but allowed the settlers to roam the streets freely. By the time our Christian Peacemaker Team arrived there a year later, Palestinians expressed as much bitterness about the collective punishment as they did about the massacre.

## Rebuilding Homes, Countering Harassment

As our team visited with Palestinians throughout the city and drank cup after cup of Arab coffee, a number of ideas for projects evolved. We helped rebuild some Arab homes the IDF had destroyed, worked on opening the gates of Hebron University which had been sealed shut by Israeli authorities during the intifada, and taught English classes.

We spent most of our time, however, with families whose homes bordered the settlements. Sometimes merely

*(Continued on page 4)*

visiting these families several times a week alleviated the chronic harassment they faced from soldiers and settlers. We would also accompany them to the police station to make complaints. Many had given up registering complaints years ago, since it did not seem to improve their situation. On occasion we were able to connect families in Hebron with Israeli human rights organizations.

## An Illustrative Account: The Abu Haikel Family

The story of the Abu Haikel family illustrates the sort of abuse and indignities visited upon many Arab families in the area. The Abu Haikels live on the crest of a hill accessible only by passing through two military checkpoints. Seven mobile homes that constitute the settlement of Tel Rumeida stand on one side of their property. On the other side is an army camp.

On our first visit, the soldiers would not let us go up to the home. Hani Abu Haikel, who had invited us, had to come down and walk with us up to his house. He told us the soldiers had said that if we did not leave in two hours they would forcibly remove us.

"They will come in anyway and search the place," he said. "They always do. Once some people from Peace Now (a Jewish peace group) came and spent a week with me. They had a video camera and took pictures of the settlers here throwing stones at our house. It was on CNN and I got asked to speak at the Knesset. Now," he continued, "whenever I have people visit [the soldiers] always search the house afterwards to see if I have any video cameras."

Hani's neighbor, settler Baruch Marzel, is a leader in the Kach movement, which is classified as a terrorist organization by both Israel and the United States. During my time in Hebron, Marzel was officially under house arrest, although I saw him walking about freely. Hani told us Marzel frequently threatened the Abu

Haikel family by evoking Baruch Goldstein's murder of the mosque worshippers. "If the army makes us leave," Marzel reportedly said to Hani, "we will leave no one in the Abu Haikel home alive."

In general Hani responded to these verbal threats philosophically — "What can we do?" he would say, shrugging his shoulders. "As for me, the press is my weapon. I speak five languages, that is my weapon."

On September 22, however, Hani lost his cool. His 55-year-old mother was walking up the hill to her home when teenage settlers threw a rock which struck her forehead and knocked her down. When Hani called the police he was told that his mother should come in the next day to make a complaint. Hani knew how to get a faster response. He picked up a metal pipe, walked over to the soldiers' camp and told them he intended to hit a settler with it. He returned home and waited. The police came to arrest him for his *oral threat*, as he assumed they would, and he took the opportunity to tell them of the *physical attack* against his mother—which they evidently did not regard as urgent.

I came by the next day and found Hannah, Hani's sister, sobbing. I thought that she was upset about what had happened to her mother. I found out later that I had come to the house 15 minutes after two teenage settler boys had threatened to strike her five-year-old daughter, Wesam. When Hannah had run at them to intervene, screaming, "Don't hit Wesam," they hit her. The team in Hebron began accompanying Wesam from the bus stop to her house every day after school.

## Water Truck Incident: 'Why Do You Care?'

Our friendship with Hani led to an incident that received international attention. One day when we were visiting his tea shop, he related that

the cistern at the family home had run dry and that he had not been able to shower for over a week. The settlements between Bethlehem and Hebron often use up most of the water supply, cutting the water pressure for people like Hani's family who live on high ground, and forcing them to buy water from the municipality or private sources.

Because settlers had taken to breaking the windshields of passing water trucks, the municipality had stopped delivering water to Arab families living near settlements. Our team contacted the municipality and promised to accompany any water trucks that needed to drive by settlements.

As it happened, Wendy and I were away when team members Cliff Kindy, 45, and Jeff Heie, 27, got the call that two water trucks were being dispatched. They dropped everything and walked with the first water truck through the settlement of Tel Rumeida. The soldiers there forbade them to continue, but Cliff proceeded on up the hill with the vehicle. An officer at the checkpoint arrested both of them.

By the time the second water truck had come up the hill, the settlers from Tel Rumeida had pulled their cars across the road to prevent it from passing. The soldiers would not order the settlers to move and the driver had to navigate backward down the steep incline.

In the meantime, soldiers began interrogating Cliff and Jeff. Cliff tried to explain to the officer that Hani had been without water for over a week. The officer said, "But why do you care? Why are you doing this?" Cliff told the officer that if he had lived in Germany during the time of the Third Reich, he would have done the same thing on behalf of Jews. "Are you calling me a Nazi?" the officer asked. Later, soldiers told Cliff and Jeff that they were being held on charges of entering a closed military zone and calling soldiers Nazis.



Photo Courtesy of CPT, Chicago, IL

### Girls of Qurtuba School with Palestinian Flag

Israelis from the Hebron Solidarity Committee told us that they, too, had been arrested for making statements nearly identical to Cliff's. I was touched at the time and a little surprised by their concern. I did not realize the impact Cliff's remark would eventually have.

The official IDF report on the incident said that Cliff and Jeff had called the soldiers Nazis and "cursed them in every known language." In the following weeks, if settlers saw us having friendly conversations with soldiers, they would draw the soldiers aside; we would hear the Hebrew word "Nazim" and concluded they were being told that we were the ones who had called soldiers "Nazis."

Three positive things happened as a result of the water truck incident.

1—Linda Brayer, a lawyer for the Society of St. Yves and an Israeli citizen, volunteered to represent us. She and her staff were also to be of help later with free legal advice to several Arab families in Hebron.

2—Washington Post reporter John Lancaster spent a day with us covering the local angle of the water truck incident. (Jeff Heie is from Washington.) When I accompanied Lancaster to the taxi circle from the Abu Haikel home, settler Gavriel Ben Yitzhak, father of nine, stepped out

of his mobile home and apologized for the eggs his children had thrown at the reporter when he attempted to talk to them earlier. "We didn't want to talk to you while that man—I believe Cliff is his name?—was with you. According to our information, he is a Muslim American from Chicago who pays money for Hamas to attack Jews." "That's funny," the reporter said, "I understood he was an organic truck farmer from Indiana. And I'm pretty sure he's Christian." "Christian?" the settler said weakly. "Yes." Lancaster turned to me, "What church did you say he belonged to?" "Church of the Brethren," I said, pulling out a CPT business card.

I handed the card to Ben Yitzhak and explained to him the core beliefs of the Mennonite Church and the Church of the Brethren. I felt a little sorry for the man. He obviously had believed the information he had received and was now at a loss for words. Cliff stopped getting death threats for a while after that.

3—The subsequent publicity drew both Israeli and international attention to the water shortage in Hebron. The mainstream Israeli public expressed outrage when they saw footage of the well watered lawns and swimming pools in the West Bank settlements and then learned that Palestinians in Hebron did not have enough water for drinking and washing. Prime Minister Rabin sent a fact-finding mission to Hebron to determine the extent of the water shortage—even though the West Bank cities had complained for years about their water supplies.

### Children Under Siege at Qurtuba School: Assaults, Bottles, Garbage, and the Flag

September 10 was the first day of school for Palestinian students throughout the West Bank. Since the Israelis had handed over responsibilities for education to the Palestinian Authority over the summer, thousands of schools raised the Palestinian flag for the first time. Two hundred and twenty-one schools in Hebron did so without incident.

But when the flag was raised over Qurtuba school, settlers from Beit Hadassah charged onto the school grounds, seized the flag and burned it. They then attacked the school headmistress, Fariel Abu Haikel, striking her in the chest.

A half hour later, Abu Haikel, several teachers and about 150 students from the school marched to the Palestinian Education Department to make a complaint. As they passed Beit Hadassah, the settlers attacked again. One of the aggressors, an adult male, seized a Palestinian flag from the girls, swung it around and then ran at them with it. A female settler threw glass liter bottles at the girls.

Ten girls were taken in ambulances to the hospital and treated for minor injuries. Many others fainted. The newspaper the next day printed pictures of the girls with eyes rolled up in their heads lying limp in the arms of the men who had rushed to help them. I thought of the many times I had seen settler boys making slashing motions across their throats when Palestinian children walked past them. I thought of the "Death to the Arabs" graffiti I had seen spray painted

in dozens of places around the area of the school. And I concluded that the girls who had faint thought that the settlers from Beit Hadassah were finally making good on their threats.

For the first week after the attack, members of the CPT and representatives from the Hebron Solidarity Committee met at the school in the morning. Since Dubboya Street, site of many settler attacks, was en route from our apartment to the school, we would wait there for a group of girls to gather and then accompany them past the settlement of Beit Hadassah. About a dozen fathers from the neighborhood welcomed us in the portico of the school.

On the day after the attack, the flag was raised again and the girls began their morning assembly with singing. Using a loudspeaker, settlers from Beit Hadassah began blaring music from a right-wing Israeli pop singer in an attempt to drown out the girls. Four or five jeeps appeared at the foot of the steps leading up to the school. Anat Cohen, one of the settlers most actively involved with Kach, began videotaping us. The police, backed up by several army officers, came up and took the flag down. The headmistress grabbed for the flag. A short tug of war followed. After a few seconds of gazing intently into the eyes of the police officer, she let go.

One of our friends from Dubboya Street protested loudly when the soldiers came for the flag. They immediately arrested him. He spent a week in jail and paid a fine of 3,000 shekels (around \$1,000).

The next morning, we found garbage strewn all over the school grounds, with big piles in front of the door and the gate. On the door was a sign in Hebrew: "There will be no school today." The Palestinian flag went up and again the police came and took it down.

The harassment continued. The next day we arrived to find dirty disposable diapers thrown in the school's

foyer and bathtub caulking around the edges of the front door. Someone had tried—unsuccessfully—to seal it shut. The flag went up. The police took it down.

The authorities declared the school a closed military zone and told us and the Hebron Solidarity Committee to leave. Later we watched two young settler women reading aloud from prayer books. At certain intervals they would stand and wave towards the school. An Israeli reporter told us that they were putting curses on their enemies—the elementary school girls sitting in their classes at Qurtuba school.

Fearing our presence might provoke the settlers, Headmistress Abu Haikel asked us not to come to the school in the mornings anymore. We made a point, however, of arranging to walk by the school in the morning and around noon when school let out. The fathers of the neighborhood continued to stand guard and would wave as we walked by.

## Violence, Intimidation On Dubboya Street

Possibly the CPT's most important on-going project has been our Saturday afternoon presence on Dubboya Street, which connects the settlements of Beit Hadassah and Tel Rumeida. Because the street was once part of the ancient Jewish Quarter, Hebron settlers claim it belongs to them and have tried over the last few years to intimidate residents and shopkeepers into leaving. Violence had generally peaked on Saturday afternoons when Israelis from the West Bank settlements and Israel proper came to Hebron to demonstrate solidarity with the settlers.

On July 15, a group of about 15 settler teenagers stormed onto Dubboya Street and used slingshots to launch construction staples and other small metal pieces at Palestini-

ans. A 6-year-old boy required medical attention and stitches when a staple lodged under his eye. Several settler youths jumped on the leg of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy until they broke it. In response, a coalition of neighbors on the street and the Hebron Defense Committee asked us to spend our Saturday afternoons—the Jewish Sabbath—on the street to monitor this violence.

I find memories of those Saturday afternoons almost surreal. More than any of our other Hebron experiences, those Saturday afternoons most resembled Theater of the Absurd. When I quote to people the things I heard on the street, I sometimes find myself laughing, even though the views expressed are astonishingly racist.

Miriam Levinger was a recurring character in this grim comedy. [On December 18, 1995, Mrs. Levinger was sentenced to three months in jail for hitting Israeli policemen. Her husband, Rabbi Moshe Levinger, spent less time in jail—ten weeks—after he was convicted of killing an unarmed Palestinian in a fit of rage.—Ed.] My first conversation with her occurred one Saturday afternoon on Dubboya Street. Our team would wear buttons with symbols of broken guns on them and they were a big hit with some of the pre-teen neighborhood boys. An 8-year-old, developmentally disabled boy kept pointing to my button. Since it was my last one, I didn't want to give it to him and kept moving his hand away.

Several hours later when I walked up to Tel Rumeida to check on the Abu Haikels, Miriam Levinger approached me and said, "I saw that Arab grabbing for your breast. I know these Arabs better than you do," she continued. "They will spit on you and show you their behind. I grew up in the Bronx," she said. "I know all about the Puerto Ricans and the schwarzers [a Yiddish term for blacks]. You know the schwarzers would kill with guns, but they were afraid of the Puerto Ricans. You know why? Because the Puerto Ricans would slit you from

here to here without even talking to you first." She pointed to her abdomen and throat. "That's why we Jews would pay the Puerto Ricans to protect us."

She embarked on a 10-minute monologue on Arabs, Puerto Ricans and blacks, brooking no interruptions. I listened, fascinated, as she leaped about in a stream of consciousness between Hebron, the Bronx and Nazi Germany as if they were different neighborhoods in the same city.

Our Saturday work included writing down conversations such as the one with Mrs. Levinger. We also recorded the numbers of settlers walking past on the street and the time of day they did so.

As the date approached for Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization to sign the Oslo Two peace accords, we observed large tour groups of 50-60 settlers walking between Beit Hadassah and Tel Rumeida every afternoon. These groups, consisting of settlers from throughout the West Bank, were relatively quiet for the most part. The violence and harassment usually were instigated by smaller groups of teenagers and men in their early twenties.

We began applying code names to some of the men whose names the residents of Dubboya Street did not know — "Rambo," "Bosnia Guy," "Goldstein Guy," and — because they were always his words when he walked by us — "Kill the Arabs Guy." As I watched CNN Headline News at my father's house after I returned to the States, I learned that "Kill the Arabs Guy" was Avishai Raviv, the third man arrested as a conspirator in the Rabin assassination.

[For Ms. Kern's account of conversations and observations on Dubboya Street, see "Nine Scenes of Drama on Dubboya Street" starting on Page 11. — Ed.]

## The September 30 Attack: Settlers on a Rampage

On September 30, about 15 hours before I was scheduled to leave the country, Wendy Lehman and I arrived early for our Saturday afternoon presence on Dubboya Street. Wendy had gone to investigate noises and shouting coming from around the corner of Beit Hadassah; she called me to follow. Some settler teenagers were throwing bottles at Arabs in the marketplace.

As I turned to walk in her direction, I heard peo-



Photo Courtesy of CPT, Chicago, IL

### Author Kathleen Kern required medical attention after unprovoked attack by Hebron settlers on Sept. 30.

ple farther up the street calling, "Kathy. Don't go. They are coming."

I looked behind me and saw about 20 men ranging in age from their mid-twenties to early forties walking purposefully up the street. I turned and continued walking toward the lower Tel Rumeida checkpoint. Suddenly, a sort of battle cry went up behind me and I heard the sound of them running. Someone yanked at the red-checked keffiyah I had tied to my backpack. I kept walking. Then an attacker yanked harder, and pulled me over onto my back. Several men spit on me as I lay on the ground.

The men ran past and began breaking car windows all along the street. I got to my feet and began taking pictures. A settler of formidable size shouted at me, "No! No pictures!"

A half-dozen men rushed back and went for my camera. One punched me in the ear and knocked me down. I maintained a determined grip on the camera. As the men dragged me around on the ground by my camera strap, I noticed there was not a single soldier at the Beit Hadassah checkpoint. I screamed for attention.

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By this time Wendy was back. I was on my feet now and told her they were trying to take my camera. She had the presence of mind to use her own camera to take the picture that accompanies this article, then joined me in trying to retain the camera. We both went down. The same assailant who had socked me stomped on Wendy's hand and the camera was gone. He raced toward the settlement of Beit Hadassah holding the camera high above his head. His friends ran with him, laughing and cheering. They reminded me of high school jocks strutting with the football after a touchdown.

Police arrived and drove us to the police station. We rode with one of the men arrested for attacking us. Hundreds of settlers tried to block the police jeep. A woman I had observed putting curses on the Qurtuba elementary school girls was arguing with the police officer. Hearing her say "cameras" and "photo" I guessed she was telling the officer that the men had only attempted to keep us from violating the Sabbath by taking pictures.

As I waited there in tears, the young man we called "The Goldstein Guy," came up and asked in a tone of seeming concern, "What happened?" "You know what happened," I replied, "You were there." "No, no, what happened?" "You were there," I repeated.

Finally, Wendy snapped, "About 20 settlers just assaulted us." "Ah," the man laughed. "Very good." He walked away.

I was taken to an army medic who examined my bleeding ear, the scrapes on my elbows that came from being dragged around on the ground, and the friction burns on my fingers from holding on to the camera strap.

"What were you doing walking by yourself in that neighborhood?" he asked after hearing my story. "I've never had any problem there," I responded, "I have lots of friends in that neighborhood." "They didn't know

you were a foreigner," the medic said. "They probably attacked you because you look Jewish." "They attacked me because they thought I was Jewish?" "Yes. You must be more careful. This is a very dangerous place."

Hours later, when I recounted the conversation to Jeremy Milgrom, director of Rabbis for Human Rights, he explained the medic's words: "He thought you were talking about Arabs."

I regretted leaving Hebron so soon after the attack, but I had a non-refundable ticket. It bothered me to think that the settlers would assume they had scared me off.

The team, however, continued the Saturday afternoon presence, and the following week six Israeli and expatriate friends from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv joined them on Dubboya Street. Wendy wrote recently to say the day had been calm and concluded her e-mail message as follows:

*One more thing about today's Dubboya Street run. Miriam Levinger passed by. . . . She's telling us that the Arabs are saying that we sleep with them and the soldiers are saying they pay us to sleep with them. She asked if that was true and I said, "No." Then she said, "Oh it isn't for the money then, eh?"*

*[Mrs. Levinger] also told us about the Vatican Trail and how the Vatican hid Nazis. She asked if I knew about the Vatican Trail and I said no, I'm not Catholic, I'm Mennonite.*

*And then she asked what our friends were - some were Lutheran, etc., and Jeremy and Hillel were Jewish. "Now they are the cream of the crop. of course," she said. And she was going on about the attacks or something and I mentioned last week's attack against us and she said, "Oh,*

*so it's always the Jews. It's always their fault throughout the world . . ."*

## In the Aftermath of Rabin's Assassination

On November 4, the same day that Yigal Amir assassinated Prime Minister Rabin, right-wing Israelis again attacked a member of the Christian Peacemaker Team in Hebron. A group of approximately 80 filled the road between the settlement of Beit Hadassah and Qurtuba School. Because they were blocking the exit of the school, the girls were afraid to leave.

Team member Dianne Roe, 53, was talking with two Palestinian girls of 14 and 18. Five teenage settlers approached and kicked the older girl in the leg. After Roe turned to confront them, one of the boys roughly shoved her down and someone knocked off her glasses. A youth then grabbed the 14-year-old girl by her braided hair, pushed her down, then dragged her along the ground by her hair for several feet while his friends kicked her.

The New York Times incorrectly reported that a member of our team had been the one dragged along by the hair, but said that two of the people involved in the attack had been Yigal Amir, the self-confessed assassin of Yitzhak Rabin, and Haggai Amir, his brother, who is under arrest as a conspirator in the slaying.

Those involved in the November 4 attack appeared to be younger than the Amir brothers, according to Roe, but they could well have been involved in the September 30 assault on me and Wendy. The Times may have confused witness accounts and compressed the two events.

As of this writing, the reports I receive from the team remaining in Hebron say that the settlers are walking around less heavily armed. Palestinians who have made complaints for years about physical assaults and verbal death threats suddenly find that



Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPTs) place themselves between conflicting parties in areas of open hostility—such as Haiti, a drug-plagued section of Washington, D.C., and—the subject of this *Link*—Hebron in the Occupied West Bank. As an initiative of the Mennonite and Brethren churches, CPTs seek nonviolent solutions in the face of aggression, deter violence by their very presence, and, as human shields, stand between victims and those who

assault and abuse them.

The explanation of how *The Link* came to find Kathleen Kern, author of this issue, is told in "About This Issue"

## The Peacemakers

on Page 2. In speaking to *The Link* about her experiences in Hebron, Kathleen has mentioned others with roles in this story of courageous witness and intervention. While obviously an incomplete list, we offer these capsule backgrounds as further insight into the people behind the peacemaking.—Ed.

◆ Wendy Lehman, 24, Kidron, OH; recent journalism graduate of Goshen (IN) College. She and Ms. Kern, both Mennonites, are full-time volunteers—a three-year commitment—in Christian Peacemaker Corps (CPC). Under the

umbrella of Christian Peacemaker Teams, CPC members are dispatched as needed to emergency situations of conflict at the invitation of the local people.

◆ Cliff Kindy, 45, married, father of two, organic farmer from North Manchester, IN, Church of the Brethren member. ◆ Jeff Hele, 27, Washington, D.C. As a member of the Reserve Corps of CPC, he stands ready to work with CPC projects three to eight weeks a year. Member of a CPT which used conflict resolution methods to close a crack house in Washington, D.C.

◆ Carmen Pauls, 26, Henderson, NB, previously employed with Mennonite Board of Missions in Elkhart, IN, currently enrolled in Bir Zeit University in the Occupied West Bank. ◆ Hedy Sawadsky, 65, Vineland, Ontario, where she works with the Mennonite Central Committee.

◆ Dianne Roe, 53, artist from Corning, NY. ◆ Anne Montgomery, Catholic sister from New York City. ◆ Dr. Kathy Kamphoefner, 46, professor of Communications and Inter-cultural Studies at Manchester (IN) College, Quaker. ◆ Dr. John Reuver, 40, Radford, VA, emergency room physician, Catholic. ◆ Tony Asta, Chicago area, father of two, computer systems analyst, Catholic. ■

(Continued from page 8)

the police are listening. House arrests are being enforced against people like Baruch Marzel and police are questioning dozens of people in the wake of the Rabin assassination—which has only increased the persecution complex of the settlers.

The settler community's official response to the assassination, quoted below, in effect blames the government's peace initiatives:

... *The Jewish Community of Hebron joins all Am Yisrael [People of Israel] in calling for national unity. The sad and tragic events that have culminated with the killing of a nationally elected leader by one of his countrymen demands a public accounting by the national leadership, whose decisions and declarations [since the Oslo Accords] have led to overwhelming despair among large segments of the Israeli population. This has resulted, unfortunately, in an unwarranted and*

*unjustified act of aggression and desperation by a lone gunman.*

## Conclusion

Before I left for Hebron, I asked people back home to pray that we would resist the temptation to demonize the settlers there. The dehumanization of people not belonging to one's particular religious, political or ethnic faction perpetuates the cycle of violence in the Middle East. I did not want to become part of that problem.

I did meet settlers who had lived in Kiryat Arba for the last 20 years who had a sincere wish to work at building positive relationships with their Arab neighbors. Some Palestinians from the Hebron area told us that before the intifada they had been invited to weddings of people within the settlements.

I also know that the settlers with whom we most often came into con-

tact tended to be the ones who most aggressively persecuted their Palestinian neighbors. I am aware that some of the Hebron settlers did not participate in these acts.

That being said, however, the residents of Kiryat Arba tolerate the presence of a shrine near the entrance of their settlement to the memory of Baruch Goldstein—a mass murderer by any rational definition. Settlers in Hebron who may have deplored acts of violence against their Arab neighbors did not intervene to stop it. In fact the only Israelis we met who worked actively to support Palestinians in Hebron were members of the Hebron Solidarity Committee.

The presence of the settlements in the West Bank is in itself problematic, given that they violate the 1949 Geneva conventions—which Israel signed. Article 49 (6) of the fourth convention reads: "The occupying

(Continued on page 10)

I was hurrying back to our apartment one day when a red-headed soldier from one of the recently deployed brigades in Hebron stopped me as I attempted to enter Dubboya Street. "I can't let you go in there," he said in American English. "No, really, it's okay," I said. "I live in Hebron. I have a lot of friends on this street."

After he again refused to let me enter, I said, "Okay, well how about if I just cut through the market?" He looked shocked. "If I let you go in there I swear to you you'll never get out alive." I told him that I walked through the market every day and had experienced no ill effects, but he remained adamant. "Just wait here until some of the soldiers come through and they can walk with you."

I told him it was against my religion to walk with people carrying guns. He looked confused (I realized later he had assumed I was a settler), and replied, "It is against my religion to let you walk in there without protection."

As we spoke, one of the residents of Dubboya street walked by carrying bags of bread. I recognized him even though I did not know his name. "Excuse me, sir," I said. "This man seems to think I would be in danger if I walked down that street. I am in a hurry. Will you walk with me?"

And so we left, leaving one astonished soldier behind us. A soldier who had been raised on the premise that Arabs—even middle-aged fathers carrying bread home to their families—were dangerous and not to be trusted.

I don't think I understood racism in my own country until I went to Israel. I had attended workshops and dialogues on racism. They had helped me to understand intellectually that American culture is so suffused with white bias that it is difficult for white Americans to empathize with non-whites. But it was not until I got to Israel and Palestine and saw the same dynamics in action that I understood how racism can grip an entire culture.

*(Continued from page 9)*

power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies."

The mandate of CPT is not such that we can call for the Israeli government to remove the settlers as have the Hebron Solidarity Committee and

## FACES OF RACISM

For most Israelis, the egregious racism of the Hebron settlers is an example of why the settlers are not like them. If I told them that the settlers talk as disparagingly about African-Americans and Puerto Ricans as they do about Arabs, they would shake their heads knowingly. If I told them what Miriam Levinger had told me about the wars between the former Yugoslav republics being the result of interracial marriage, they would register disgust.

Yet even Israelis who considered the Hebron settlers to be right-wing lunatics would still warn us about what Arabs were like. A friend in Haifa who has a real appreciation for Arab culture told me in all seriousness that the Arabs who had been kind to him when he first came to Israel would probably bomb his building as soon as his back was turned. The fact that our team had lived with Arabs, ate with them, joked with them, argued with them, babysat for them did not qualify us to have opinions. Nor, in the eyes of many Israelis, was it sufficient to show us what Arabs "were like."

A conversation I had on Dubboya Street sticks out when I think about racism in both American and Israeli society. Because of my own standards of modesty, I tend to dress like many of the women settlers in Hebron. Since I was sitting on Dubboya Street reading *The Jerusalem Post*, it was natural for the young man in the prayer shawl to assume that I was an American-Israeli immigrant like himself.

He struck up a conversation and told me that he had come from the settlement of Maaleh Adumim, near Jerusalem. I asked if he liked it there. "Oh yes," he replied. "We had been living in Jerusalem and it was pretty dirty and crowded. For my wife and kids, living in Maaleh Adumim is like living in the suburbs."

I did not respond and he said, after a moment's reflection, "And Maaleh Adumim is an Anglo-Saxon community. That was important to us." ■

Bl'selem. Many of our Palestinian contacts have said they would welcome Jews to Hebron, but say that the current settlers must leave.

CPT believes that, at the very least, the settlers should be disarmed. Headmistress Abu Haikel told us, "Once there was much friendship

between Jews and Muslims here. It is again possible if they live without weapons." ■

*[After completing this article, Kathleen Kern returned to Hebron before Christmas Day to rejoin the Christian Peacemaker Team and resume her efforts toward nonviolence, reconciliation and peace.—Ed.]*

## Nine Scenes of Drama on Dubboya St.

*What follows is a dramatic reconstruction of one Saturday afternoon in September as our Christian Peacemaker Team monitored the day's human interactions on Dubboya Street in Hebron. While I would not say that September 23 was typical, the encounters we had on that day do typify some of the absurdities at work in Hebron.*

### Scene I: THE DANGEROUS SODA BOTTLE

Early in the afternoon, I was sitting outside an Arab home on Dubboya Street. At any given time, there are 12 or more children in the three-story house, many of whom peer through the bars of a small bay window. They often drop toys or food out the window—sometimes by accident and sometimes in play to see if those below will pick them up.

As three adult male settlers were passing by on the opposite side of the street, one of the children dropped an empty plastic soda bottle from the window. It landed directly under the window, about 20 feet from the settlers. Nevertheless, Gavriel Ben Yitzhak hailed a passing military jeep, pointed at the bottle on the ground and insisted the soldiers do something about it. Reinforcements arrived about four minutes later and eight heavily armed soldiers got out of their jeeps and sent a young man who lived there inside to fetch his father. The father came to the window to speak to the soldiers, which seemed to satisfy them. They left after barking what sounded like a stern warning.

### Scene II: SETTLER HOOTENANNY

Two male settlers in their late teens or early twenties walked past singing in Hebrew with mocking expressions on their faces. One then began singing in nearly perfect English, "All we are singing is 'Give war a chance.'" When he passed by again about two hours later, he sang, "If I had an Uzi, I'd shoot 'em in the morning. I'd shoot 'em in the evening, all over my land." Then, speaking, he said, "It's MY land. It's not their land. It's MY land." The man later identified himself as Azrael Ben Israel.

### Scene III: THE CLASH

Between 2:00 and 2:30 p.m. a confrontation occurred between Palestinian youth and soldiers near the checkpoint at one end of Dubboya Street. This was one of several clashes that erupted after the settler attack on Qurtuba School. As I watched, some soldiers shot in the air and threw sound bombs. One soldier smiled and waved at two settlers who approached the checkpoint. A few minutes later, Azrael Ben Israel walked past me briskly, muttering, "There should have been 50 or 60 dead Arabs by now."

### Scene IV: A MESSIANIC HOPE

Another young Israeli also became interested in events at the checkpoint and asked me about the explosions. "They were sound bombs," I said. He asked for a definition of sound bombs and then inquired whether the army or the Arabs had thrown them. I told him that only the army uses sound bombs. "It doesn't matter," he said. "Pretty soon the mashiach [messiah] will come and [the Arabs] will all move to Jordan. I'm not like the others," he continued. "I don't want to kill them. I only want them to leave."

Then he asked, "Are you Jewish?" "Christian," I replied. His face stiffened. "The messiah will come and kill all the goyim—Arabs and Christians—and drink their blood," he said as he walked away.

### Scene V: COFFEE

The young messianic hopeful was joined by Ben Israel. He noticed a group of Palestinians quietly watching him and his friend. "Why don't we invite ourselves for coffee?" Ben Israel asked. "I hear they are very hospitable people." Abruptly changing his tone, he pointed at them and said, "First, we'll deal with you [Palestinians] and then we'll deal with the Germans." "They are the same people," his

*(Continued on page 12)*

friend said. "Let's go," Ben Israel said. "It's making me sick to look at them." As he walked away, he called over his shoulder, "Go back to Greece."

Scene VI: CHILDREN AT PLAY

Around 3:45 pm, about eight girls walked onto the street from the settlement of Beit Hadassah and began yelling insults at Palestinians watching from balconies across the street. Several began throwing stones at their homes. A soldier tried to cajole them into leaving. They ignored him and continued shouting and throwing stones. They were joined by several small boys and a teenager in a prayer shawl who began reading from a prayer book. Another soldier approached the group and the two of them ordered the children to leave. They ignored both soldiers. The girls began chanting the name of Baruch Goldstein and saying "Goldstein is our father." They began throwing rocks and spitting in our direction.

A visiting Quaker professor engaged one of the settler men who was watching the children in conversation and told us later, "I asked him how he, as a parent, felt about the children throwing rocks at Arabs and yelling 'Goldstein, Goldstein.' He spent the next 20 minutes not answering the question."

Scene VII: MORE FROM BEN ISRAEL

After the girls dispersed, Carmen Pauls, Wendy Lehman, Hedy Sawadsky and I sat near the Beit Hadassah checkpoint. Ben Israel and the young man who had talked about the messiah again passed the group. Ben Israel proclaimed loudly, "We should gas them all. Does anyone know where we can get Zyklon B? I heard you can get it in Germany. I think we should take some Zyklon B, put all these—I don't know what you call them—they're not human. Take all of them and put them into little camps and gas them."

Joe, the visiting Quaker professor, asked, "So you think what the Germans did to the Jews justifies the Jews using the same tactics against the Arabs?"

"Absolutely. We've learned our lesson. I'm a member of the Jewish Nazi Party." His friend tried to hush him. "I'M not," he said. "Well I am," Ben Israel said. "I'm a Jewish Nazi." He then told the CPers that he had no particular desire to kill Arabs. "We'd be much happier shooting Rabin and Peres."

After a pause, Ben Israel told us that the people living on Dubboya Street had roots that went back only about 100 years. "They're not from Ishmael. They're mixed. Mostly they're from Greece. The Ottoman Turks brought them over."

"Where are you from?" Wendy asked. "I'm from here," he said. "I mean, where were you born?" "I was born in Romania," said Ben Israel, "but I don't see what that has to do with anything."

Carmen and I went farther up the street at this point and the two young men continued their conversation with Carmen and Hedy. "We're at war. We are at war with these people," Ben Israel told them, pointing at the Palestinians up the street.

Hedy tried to tell him that all people—Jews, Arabs, Christians—have the breath of God in them. "So does a dog or a goat," said Ben Israel's friend. "These people are immoral," added Ben Israel. "Terribly immoral. Homosexuality came from these people." He continued, "We know what we're doing is between us and God . . . If I kill an Arab, I will know I am doing it for the right reasons. Not because I hate him, but because he'll kill me."

Ben Israel ended the conversation by saying he had one uplifting thing to share at least. "We're going to rebuild our temple. We're going to keep our land. They can't take our land. The world can't take our land. We are going to retake Jordan, retake Lebanon, retake Syria. "Soon," his friend added. "Yes," agreed Ben Israel. "Very soon."

Scene VIII: THE DAY'S LONE BRIGHT SPOT

A young man dressed like the settlers had watched quietly while the girls from Beit Hadassah had shouted insults and thrown rocks. He came over to a group of Palestinians on the street and began talking to

(Continued from page 12)

them in fluent Arabic. At first skeptical, the Palestinian young people began asking him rapid-fire questions. A journalist friend, interpreting, told us that he was telling the group that his family had come from Iraq, but that he had been born in Jerusalem. A young woman brought a newspaper out of her house and asked the young man to read aloud to test his Arabic.

The journalist shouted, "What do you think of the situation in Hebron?" "It is very beautiful here," he said. "But Nablus is more beautiful."

Soldiers approached and tried to drag the young man away. I called out, "Shabbat shalom." ["peaceful Sabbath"]. "God helps you," he called back.

He resisted the soldiers' attempts to remove him. "But they're my friends!" he protested. As the two soldiers each took one of his arms and physically forced him to walk away, he called back to the assembled Palestinian young people, "Come visit me in Jerusalem."

I thought it poignant that pleasant interaction of an Israeli with Palestinians was behavior the soldiers would not tolerate.

#### Scene IX: HARBINGER OF THE FUTURE

At 4:35, four settlers strolled past, among them Avishai Raviv, who said, as usual, "Kill the Arabs." Another one of the men called to us rhetorically, "Why are you interviewing Arabs when you should be interviewing Jews?" "Kill the Arabs," Raviv said again.

"Thank you very much," our journalist friend responded. "F--- you," one of the men said.

We witnessed this particular young man ram into a 75-year old man like a linebacker 10 minutes later, after the old man became angry about the comments the settler had made about the reputations of his wife and daughters. ■

## Suing the Messenger

We met Prof. Moshe Zimmerman, head of the German department at Hebrew University and an internationally recognized authority on German history, in September. He was in Hebron collecting data to fight a lawsuit brought against him by settlers there.

Why the lawsuit? In an April interview with the Jerusalem weekly *Yerushalayim*, he had referred to the emergence of Nazi-like sectors in Israeli society:

"Look at the [Jewish] children in Hebron. They are exactly like the Hitler Youth. They are repeatedly told from birth that Arabs are bad, that everyone is against us. They are being brainwashed to become paranoids of a "higher race." [In our society] there is a dangerous tendency toward tolerance of this group."

Zimmerman's comments provoked outrage in the Israeli public. Within the academic community, the debate centered on whether Zimmerman should be allowed to remain in his post at Hebrew University. No one suggested investigating whether what he said was true.

Yud Hershkovitz, who covered the public reaction to Zimmerman's interview, wrote in *Challenge* magazine:

*It is only natural to expect that settlers would protest Zimmerman's comparison of their children to Hitler Youth. The public outcry led by media people, journalists and Zimmerman's own colleagues in the Hebrew University would seem to indicate that when the choice lies between challenging the taboo of the Holocaust or ostracizing a scholar, blindly boycotting an intellectual is the preferred option.*

Members of our team accompanied Prof. Zimmerman and several Pales-

tinian journalists through the streets of Hebron. To bolster his case, Zimmerman was looking for racist graffiti. We had observed an example earlier: "Why are Gentiles alive?" He seemed surprised that so many Hebron residents willingly agreed to testify on his behalf at the upcoming trial.

"You don't understand," said one of the Hebronite journalists. "If you win, we win."

When Hebron police found out that the mild mannered professor accompanying the group of Palestinians was Moshe Zimmerman, they refused for reasons of his own safety to let him pass by Jewish settlements and on to the Il-Ibrahimi mosque. "If the settlers find out who you are, they will kill you," the police explained.

Zimmerman told CPT member Wendy Lehman how strange it was to feel safer with his Palestinian guides than he would among fellow Jews.

"Ironic, isn't it?" she agreed. ■

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