

Hi everyone,

Let's start with the bad news, which may be considered also as good news from an Israeli point of view: the Israeli bureaucracy can learn a lot from the American one. Since my arrival here the American bureaucrats have done everything to show me that they can make life as hard as possible. You want some examples? Voila: How much time it takes to pay some lousy travel expenses? 5 months! How much time it takes to update my name in the health insurance lists? 9 months and only after I made a move to accelerate that! How much time it takes in Israel to sell a car (I mean - the registration of the buyer as the new owner; not the negotiations)? 10 minutes. In the USA? 6 months and it's still not over!! (I know many people here who still don't own the car they bought months ago). And - how much time it takes for letters to get from the payroll office to the math department (in-campus mail!)? Infinity!!! Two letters that were sent to me were simply lost and never arrived! The address was extremely accurate, if you wonder about that. So - now I know the meaning of the American expression "for crying out loud." There were times when I really felt like screaming. In Bolivia, for instance, the tourists are told that things go slowly and that's part of the Bolivian way. But here it's the empire of the USA, not Bolivia, for crying out loud!

I was in Andrew Lloyds Webber's "Sunset Boulevard", starring Glenn Close. She has definitely reached the stature of a mega-star. When she made her entrance as the old silent-movie star Norma Desmond, the audience applauds for several minutes. When she sang (Glen Close singing!) the audience admired her (oh well). When she said the final famous words "...and now, Mr. De-Mille, I am ready for my close-up...", the audience was on the verge of an orgasm. And when she took a bow (after the rest of the 873 performers, 453 musicians etc.) the audience gave her a "standing ovation" - an American honor that is granted only for the truly noble and mighty ones. Well, she was OK. By the way - it was the first time that the stage and scenery in a theater play received applause, and rightly so. The designer was Yael Pardess, whom I don't know, but she's one of ours. "Na-ri-a!" (as Gafi Amir uses to end some of her items in the gossip column "Stam"). As for the price of that evening: 140\$ for two tickets! My partner for that night didn't have to work very hard in order to convince me to let her pay for her ticket. But- that's not all! A small "sample" of orange juice - \$5. I was afraid to ask for the price of actually a glass of juice... And valet parking (namely, a nice Pedro or Miguel in a red jacket smiles at you and takes your car for you) is \$12+tip!!! For the total cost of that evening I could get Glen Close to massage my feet and sing only for me in the privacy of my own house!!!

On the other hand - we saw Jimmy Smith (Sifuentes from LA-Law) in "The Death and the Maiden" for only \$10 (best seats in the theater) and two great concerts of the LA philharmonic (in the Dorothy Chandler pavilion, where the Oscar ceremony takes place every other year) for almost nothing. I guess I haven't entirely lost my touch to get tickets for free.

Two weeks ago we had a conference of applied math in the UCLA recreation center. It is located only 2.5-hour drive away from Los Angeles. This place is very high (about 2500 meters above sea-level) and it was snowing heavily! With the forest, lake, the white snow all around, the wooden houses with smoke rising up from their chimneys and the superb food that we got there - it really felt like Switzerland. We barely escaped back to LA after that due to a snow storm and freezing temperatures that made the drive downhill extremely dangerous .

It's about time to tell you all that two of our subscribers (Haim & Gadi) will be my colleagues here in the UCLA math department in the next 2 years. Within 4 minutes I got an email from Haim and a phone call from Gadi who told me the amazing good news. So - starting next year, Hebrew will be heard more around here. What about the rest of you - wouldn't you like to get out of my mailing list and get into the UCLA math department? (those of you who wish just

to get out of my mailing list - no deal!).

I'll be back at home in less than 2 months and I really hope that things in Israel will look better by then.

See you,
Tamir