

The City

Sunday, June 26, 1994

S O A P B O X

Lost Car: Panic. Ire. Joy. Resignation.

By JOHANNA GARFIELD

AT 10:30 A.M., go out to move car for alternate-side parking. Car not there. Panic. Carefully review previous afternoon. No, wasn't drinking. Yes, definitely parked on southwest corner 89th and Madison.

Back in house, call police precinct. No answer. Call again. No answer. Twenty minutes later, reach officer. Since car leased, he says, owners must make report.

Call rental car company. Have two-year lease, now in 24th month. Boss No. 2 says this happens all the time. Says he'll speak to Top Boss and call back. Says not to worry. I worry.

Forty minutes later, Boss No. 2 calls. Says I must make report since I was last driver. Says I should call precinct to send squad car to take report. Call precinct. Told I must make report in person.

Worried about 12 noon dentist ap-

pointment downtown, so take cab to precinct. No one at complaint desk. Everyone around tiny Italian man who's waving tiny piece of paper and crying. Italian-speaking officer found.

Brawny officer appears at complaint desk and takes report. Says squad car should have been sent to house. Says civilians manning precinct phones don't know what they're doing.

Wall clock shows noon; call to cancel dentist appointment. Leave precinct with beaming Italian man. Glad somebody happy.

Call car rental company. Request "substitute vehicle" promised for emergencies in leasing contract. Due in New Jersey by 4 P.M. to teach three writing classes. Boss No. 2 says he'll speak to Boss No. 1 and get back to me and not to worry. I worry.

Must leave for New Jersey by 3 o'clock. At 2:45, call rental company again. Turns out Boss No. 2 "just stepped out of the office." At 3:10, Boss No. 2 calls. Says Boss No. 1 says no substitute vehicle possible for 48 hours after theft, this according to

small print in contract. Says company will be happy to rent me another car at their usual overnight rate. Apologies.

Hang up. Furious. Call back. Want to know why not told of rule earlier so I could make other arrangements. More apologies; no change in policy.

Borrow car, miss. most of first class in New Jersey. Return at 9:30 P.M. Big news. Son spotted stolen car three blocks away on side street. Re-joice.

Check out car. Nothing missing, not even crushed Burger King cups. Just some gasoline.

Call car rental company. No answer.

Call police. No answer. Twenty minutes later, at 10:30 P.M., reach officer. Says report of discovery must be made immediately at precinct by same person who filed original report. Says I probably just forgot where car was parked to begin with. Says registration — in car three blocks away — must be brought. Told squad car out of question.

Hang up. Go to bed.

Johanna Garfield, a freelance writer, is the author of "Crusins."