I t was with great interest and much concern that I read in the Summer 2000 issue of The Observer that the University had bestowed an honorary degree on Salvadoran President Francisco Flores.

As the first University of Hartford alumnus to lead a nation, President Flores might seem an obvious choice for such an honor, until consideration is given to how and with whose help he came to power. His affiliation with the ARENA party which, (as the Hartford Courant pointed out) in the past has been linked to death squads, raises troubling questions. What kind of Faustian pact did he make with ARENA? Is he simply another of its victims? Who is using whom? What was it that made him acceptable to ARENA?

Did the University know of his background? If his background was known, was the intention to do more than honor a successful alumnus? Does awarding the degree lend itself to a perception that he (and ARENA) are thereby “sanitized?” Does the degree suggest our indifference to the avenues to power? Does the award encourage wings of either side to seek the favor of a place like ours, in the hope that doing so will cleanse them of their wrongs?

President Flores has been described as an enigma. So is every new leader. The issue is not that, but how does the system create a means of deciphering the “enigma”? Is it by example, by threat? Is it he who provides the key? That is critical. If it is he, fine, then we can, to a degree, be encouraged, but only if democ-

T his past Easter Sunday, my wife, Michele Adirim Sherman ’85 (ENHP), and I, our four-and-a-half-year-old twin daughters, and parents were in a very serious car accident. While other members of the family suffered very minor injuries, Michele remains in intensive care. Michele has come a long way, and the prognosis looks hopeful, but we are expecting a long recovery.

As of the July 4 weekend, Michele is starting to become aware of what has happened and can really appreciate the visits from her family and friends. She would welcome e-mails, cards, letters, and/or visits.

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I read with interest the article in the Summer 2000 Observer concerning the Class of 2000 starting a new tradition of leaving a gift of $25 each to the University.

Observer readers may be interested to know that the Class of 2000 is not the first to make such a gift. The graduating accounting majors in 1975 each made a pledge and later a donation of $500 each in honor of one of our professors—Dr. Bernard Goodman.

Will Shapiro ’75
I am writing in response to the article “Bethsaida” [Summer 2000 Observer], written by David Isgur. I feel a sentence of it was anti-semitic.

My name is Lisa Lyons, and I am from the class of 1992.

I started to read the article happily, as I had just returned from my fifth trip to Israel, just a few weeks before. I am Jewish and love being in Israel for all the history and religious significance it brings to me and others that live there.

I enjoyed reading the article until this sentence: “I prayed with a couple of Hasidic Jews at the Western Wall—and then found that I was expected to pay for the privilege.” I am astonished that David Isgur would think such a thing, let alone publish it. There is and NEVER HAS BEEN, an admission fee to get to the Western Wall. Many Hasidic men beg regularly for money all over the city, due to the fact that most of them study all day and receive only nominal monies from the Yeshiva (religious school where they study). I have been approached by these men many times in Israel and never misconstrued this as a fee to be somewhere or [to] engage in prayer.

And furthermore, it is not a “privilege” to pray at the Wall; it is a choice. A free one. I am sure David knew this was not an admission fee; therefore, why would he publish something I feel was anti-semitic.

I am offended by the statement made by David Isgur and feel he should respond to my letter both personally and in the next Observer.

Sincerely,
Lisa Lyons ’92

David Isgur responds:

As a Jew and someone who cares deeply about the land of Israel, I am sorry that you misinterpreted my words in the Bethsaida article. I never said that there was an admission fee to gain entrance to the Western Wall. I was merely trying to relate a humorous incident that happened to me, due primarily to my own naiveté.

My Hasidic guide stopped me and asked for an offering for Rebbe in return for the prayers. I took out my wallet and looked at the bills. My guide suggested a donation of 200 shekels (about $50 in U.S. dollars). I declined and gave him a 100-shekel bill. He then asked if I would make a donation to him to thank him for leading me to the rebe. I gave him a 20-shekel bill. He then beckoned to another Hasidic gentleman nearby and suggested that I make a donation to him as well. At this point, I smiled, put my wallet back in my pocket and headed out to the Western Wall—$30 poorer, but wiser. I did say a silent prayer while touching the Wall, which was a moving experience for me.

As I walked away from the Western Wall, I still wondered how that gentleman knew my Hebrew name. Then I looked down and saw that I was wearing my name tag from the tour group. I laughed at myself for being such a knucklehead.

When telling the story later to people on the trip, both Jews and non-Jews, we all had a good laugh at my expense—a rube and his money are soon parted. This tale is a humorous one, poking fun at me and not meant to denigrate any person nor any religion.

I am sorry that you did not take the comments in the comedic way they were intended. I believe it’s important that we all be able to laugh at ourselves and our foibles.

David Isgur
Assistant Executive Director
for Communications

Correction

A photo that appeared in the Summer 2000 Observer with a quotation from honorary degree recipient Howard Gardner, the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs professor in Cognition and Education at Harvard University, was not Professor Gardner. The Observer regrets the error.

The Observer welcomes your comments, whether you wish to praise, criticize, analyze, or simply to communicate with fellow alumni or warmly remembered faculty or staff. Our e-mail address: observer@mail.hartford.edu Postal address: Letters to the Editor The Observer University of Hartford, 200 Bloomfield Avenue West Hartford, CT 06117 Letters may be edited for space consideration.