I write this letter on the journey back from Norman, Oklahoma, where for the first time in University history, a basketball team (in this case, our women) competed in the NCAA Division I national championship tournament. As I am sure most of you know by now, we lost to the University of Oklahoma, 84-52, before 11,200 spectators, the largest crowd ever to see a women’s game in the state of Oklahoma.

Behind me on the plane are a group of about 40 exhausted members of the Pep Band and cheerleaders, and the student who serves as our mascot, Howie the Hawk. We were part of about 100 people who traveled to Norman to root for our team, and although outnumbered 110 to 1, every one of us had a great time. We didn’t get back to our hotel until almost midnight last night, and we had to be up around 4 a.m. this morning to catch the plane back. I’m tired, and most of the students now asleep around me spent even less time in bed than I did.

Our team qualified for the NCAA tournament by winning three straight games in the America East Conference tournament held, as you know, at the Chase Family Arena. Each night we drew crowds of around 2,500 fans, which included about 500 students each night. It was a loud and raucous tournament, and we won all three games by a total of eight points, with the outcome of every game coming down to the last few seconds of play. Many long-time observers told me they had never seen an atmosphere like that in the arena, and it was a great precursor for our trip to Norman.

It is hard for me to find words to describe how thrilling it was to be in the arena last night—and remember that I came from Michigan, where we routinely drew 14,000 for a basketball game. The difference here was precisely that this is not a routine experience for our students, our team, or our University, and being there marks (to my mind, at least) a major milestone. I think it was clear to me, and to many others there, that not just our women’s basketball team belonged there—we all did.

Now, athletics are not the true measurement of a university, to be sure, and the University of Hartford will never be, in athletics or nearly any other sense, a University of Oklahoma. We shouldn’t aspire to be. But we are a university of substance and distinction, in women’s basketball and in every other sense, and I saw that clearly last night.

A few memories and images from a wonderful evening:

Shanta Scott, a senior forward on our team, hugged me when I arrived at the hotel before the game and said, “Thank you.”

Before and after the game at least a dozen members of the Pep Band and cheerleaders said the same thing. A few minutes later, when I arrived at the arena, head coach Jen Rizzotti hugged me and again said, “Thank you.”

As the team left the hotel to head to the arena, the Pep Band and cheerleaders surrounded the hotel doorway and played and sang the fight song as the team boarded the bus.

Three students, members of the men’s soccer team, arrived at the game having driven from Hartford (as did about a dozen other students), dressed and painted entirely in red and white. Halfway through the second half, during a time out, they began running around the arena leading a “wave” cheer. The Oklahomans responded enthusiastically, and before you knew it, we had a loud and lusty “wave” in the arena.

As the Pep Band played, Howie the Hawk, clearly the best dancer among all college mascots, wowed the Oklahoma fans, and they gave him a loud and long ovation.

An Oklahoma fan, as he left the arena, stopped at my seat and said: “You’ve got great fans!”

As the team left the arena to board the bus after the game, Pat Meiser-McKnett, our athletic director, and I were walking toward our rental car. From behind us came a yell from one of the players, “Pat. President Harrison. Thank you!”

I recount these memories because they illustrate for me two important characteristics of our students: they have enormous spirit, energy, and creativity. And they do not take experiences like this for granted; every one of them is grateful for the experience their University education provides them.

Friday night, before I left on this quick trip to Oklahoma, I had another experience that showed me the same thing: I listened to a wonderful concert by the Hartt Symphony Orchestra. Conducted by Christopher Zimmerman, the Primrose Fuller Professor of Orchestra, the Symphony played works by composers ranging from Beethoven to Harry Sukman, father of Susan Sukman McCray, wife of [Regent] Kent. I was especially proud that Susan and Kent could be with us for that concert, not only because it featured Susan’s father’s work but also because Kent, a 1951 Hartt graduate, could see that Hartt continues its long tradition of superb music.

I saw and heard in that performance the same creativity, energy, and spirit that I found in the arena 2,000 miles away the next evening. On Friday, I went backstage during intermission to prepare to say a few words before the second half of the concert,
and several members of the orchestra approached me and said, “Thanks for coming.” Sound familiar? As I prepared to go onto the stage, one of the symphony members, a percussionist, said to me: “I’m going to be playing the drums a little differently tomorrow night in Oklahoma.” Maybe the style was different, but the spirit was the same.

As I reflect on all this, I remember a discussion we had at the Campaign of Commitment Steering Committee last year as we reviewed an early design for the campaign case statement. That design featured a number of historical shots and a text that talked about the University as a young institution. I distinctly remember [Regents] Belle Ribicoff, Arnold Greenberg, and Harry Gray all saying they thought we had heeded to the line of being a young university long enough. It was time we celebrated ourselves as a mature university of substance and distinction.

On two successive nights, in two very different venues half a continent apart, I saw what they meant.

I just took a stroll to the back of the airplane. The last dozen rows or so are filled with sleeping cheerleaders and musicians. I see in their faces, even as they sleep, a sense of contentment and happiness. Chalk it up, if you will, to the untroubled sleep of the young, but I see in their faces something very different: the fulfillment of a University of Hartford experience.

Thank you all for your commitment to the University of Hartford. It is your efforts that make this experience possible for all of our students—and for everyone in the University community. It occurs to me that they say thank you to me because I embody for them an entire group of people whose efforts enable them to experience a first-class education here. So, on behalf of our students, faculty, and staff, I say thank you.

Sincerely,

Walter Harrison

### LETTERS

I would like to comment on Professor Friedman’s letter to The Observer in relation to Irreconcilable Differences: The Waning of the American Jewish Love Affair with Israel by Steven T. Rosenthal.

Professor Friedman’s use of language, describing Israel as being “surrounded by savages,” can certainly not be considered a catalyst for encouraging some international students to attend the University. Regardless of whether this is his own opinion or not, it will reflect on the University.

It was less than two years ago that President Harrison and Mr. Steve Jeffrey visited the area with the aim of enticing more “savages” to attend UHA. I sincerely hope and trust that the gentlemen did not come back from their visit with a similar impression. In fact, I understand that Mr. Jeffrey is now taking up a new post in one such “savage” country.

If I may suggest, perhaps The Observer should avoid and not publish political matters, especially related to the Middle East conflict, which is a touchy issue for all sides of the conflict.

Thank you,

Mazen M. Dajani
Class of 1986
Amman, Jordan

Welcome from Greeley, Colo. It was a pleasure reading your Winter 2001 issue of The Observer. You publish an outstanding magazine that keeps us informed of the ongoing activities of the faculty, staff, and students at the University of Hartford.

We read with particular interest on page 6 the article titled “Home for the Holidays.” The excellent story by Jessica Levine-

Pizano discussed the holiday CD Broadway Cares: Home for the Holidays, which included strings players from the Hartt Orchestra, and the efforts of Associate Michael Morris at The Hartt School. The article described the musical contributions of Liza Minnelli and Alan Cumming, the work of The Hartt String Machine, and engineering of the recording session by music production technology faculty member Justin Kurtz. Bravo!

Another aspect of this incredible CD project also warrants mention. The highly regarded Music Production Technology (MPT) program in The Hartt School used their recording studio facilities to edit and produce numerous tracks on the album. Hartt MPT students Lynette Wilson and April Cech were assistant engineers on numerous tracks and used their skills learned under Professor Scott Metcalfe and Professor Kurtz.

Imagine our parental pride when we purchased the Broadway Cares CD from our local Borders Books & Music store, opened the jewel case, and saw our daughter’s name on the list of credits, along with other students from the Music Production Technology program, next to the names of Broadway stars such as Liza Minnelli, Alan Cumming, Christine Ebersole, and Gary Beach. Thank you, Professors Metcalfe and Kurtz, for the opportunities you’ve given to students in the Music Production Technology program at the University of Hartford. Well done, and congratulations!

Sincerely,

Tom and Grace Cech
Greeley, Colo.