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To the Editor

Since graduating from the Dramatic Art Department in 1982 with the department's *Undergraduate Achievement Award* and an accompanying invitation to lunch in Chancellor Meyer's back yard, I have returned to Davis literally hundreds of times. During the years I spent there as a student, I either performed in or contributed to the production of many theatrical and performance events, many of which were authorized. Seminal events from my years in your town have continued to manifest themselves in the way I live, in the way I work, and in the information about what is important that I impart to my son. In short: I am fortunate to have had the time there that I did and the memories of what I accomplished there I guard.

Yesterday, while returning home to Berkeley after visiting a new client in Sacramento, I ventured off of the highway, purchased a copy of your paper and stopped for lunch at a café on Third Street. I was distressed to read in your pages a story about a singing group that your writer described as being "UC Davis' first a cappella group." That is simply wrong. Because of what I assume is a lack of institutional memory at your paper with regard to Davis' history, my quiet lunchtime escape from the I-80 corridor was instead fraught with angst and a feeling that what had been accomplished in the theaters of Davis during my years there had been severely marginalized by your writer.

As many of your long-time readers and residents will recall, in an approximately 20-year period that culminated in December, 1990 at the Palms Playhouse, but most of which took place on the properties of the University of California, the late Dramatic Art Professor Dan Snyder and retired Art Professor William T. Wiley produced a number of performances. Many of them were memorable but all of them produced memories. They were known as *Out Our Way*, each production was numbered and, as it would turn out at the end, the numbers were in sequence. Your Jan Halsey attended and wrote about many of those productions. Each of the *Out Our Way* productions, which for educational purposes were produced with minimal budgets primarily to prove that such a thing is possible, featured literally dozens of performers and even, on two occasions, managed to sink scaled replicas of the Titanic on the University's Main Stage. Billy Barty took part, as did Tower of Power, a Coca Cola spin-off of R2D2, Terry Allen, *Dick Bright and his Sounds of Delight* and a number of chickens. There was a camel and there was talk of an iceberg. In keeping with the academic

setting, many foreign languages were employed, often for the purposes of furthering dramatic tension. Chancellor Emeritus and Mrs. Emil Mrak were spotted at a performance and the late Vice Chancellor Bob Cello contributed his voice and acting talents to a performance or two. Visiting Art Professor William Wegman was there in person and with video camera. In many of these shows, animals did things on University stages that caused more than one Veterinary Medicine professor to shake his head in collegial envy. My late retriever made his theatrical debut at three months of age in the final *Out Our Way* production, so exhausting himself (no animals were ever abused) that he actually slept through a post-performance feed at which Professor Wiley served fresh salmon to Jimmy Jalepeno, Bohdi Chicken and Spoonman. I am trying to convey that a lot happened.

And so, in the later years of this ongoing series of performing events, one of the recurring acts was *The Four Tunes*. They were young men who sang and there were four of them. They hailed—by declaration or inclination—from the Music Department and they sang without musical accompaniment. As I understand it that is a *cappella* and it happened at the University. They were wonderful performers and—as they say—*crowd pleasers* in their many return engagements with *Out Our Way*. Those four lads may not have been UC Davis' first *cappella* group, but they certainly predated anything that is happening in the current era. And I'm sure there are others still in your reading community for whom *The Four Tunes'* contribution to that 20-year period in Davis' theatrical history was valuable.

I was passing through town, I read what you wrote and I wanted to set the record straight.

With best regard,

Tom Ford, UC Davis '82  
Berkeley, California