

The Union Jack at half mast

A student's perspective from the streets of London

**SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE
BY SULLY AHMED**

(London) — As I look through the glass of Selfridge's department store, here on Oxford street, I see an image. It is a large black and white photo of the Princess of Wales. The photo is surrounded by a large bouquet of beautiful flowers. Nothing fancy, quite simple when you think about it. People stop, look, and then move on with their busy lives.

However, that is not the case a couple miles away at Buckingham Palace. People from all corners of the world are here (it seems) and the sight is stunning. Flowers are flooding the gates of the palace and the side-streets. They are taped to monuments with cards, candles, poems and flags. One card written by a four-year-old read "Diana-I love you." And amidst all of this, the Union Jack (after much controversy) flutters atop Buckingham Palace at half-mast. The emotion here is rather overwhelming and many people are crying openly as they stop to read the cards, say a prayer, take a picture, deliver some flowers and pay their respects.

The British have responded overwhelmingly. England's grief only reflects the sorrow felt around the world, which was rather shocking since the English are renowned for their "cool under fire". But even I was surprised to see the outpouring of grief and emotion in the days following the death of Diana. I guess I figured that the English were too boring and stuffy to show their emotions. That's the danger with stereotypes — you can often be dead wrong.

As the youth of today and future leaders of tomorrow (as cliched as it sounds), we have been rather fortunate. Fact is, Princess Diana was our first celebrity death and won't be our last. Our parents

have witnessed many more celebrity deaths. Names such as Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Jimi Hendrix, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, Malcolm X and John Lennon come to mind.

Of course one could say River Phoenix and Kurt Cobain have passed away. And their deaths were tragic, but on a completely different level. Now why do I say that? Well there was no formality about the crowd that had come to pay their respects to Diana. They did not come because they had respect for her station in life. Nor did they come because she was a member of the monarchy. They came because she was more in touch with the ordinary Joe Bloo than other celebrities. How do I know? Well, standing here among the masses in front of Buckingham Palace is probably a good indication. The kind of warmth that came from Diana was not scripted, rehearsed or marketed — it was genuine and it was the real thing. Fact is, how many celebrities do you know who will gladly hold a malnourished Somali child in their arms, even if it does mean a public relations bonanza? It's called dignity and class.

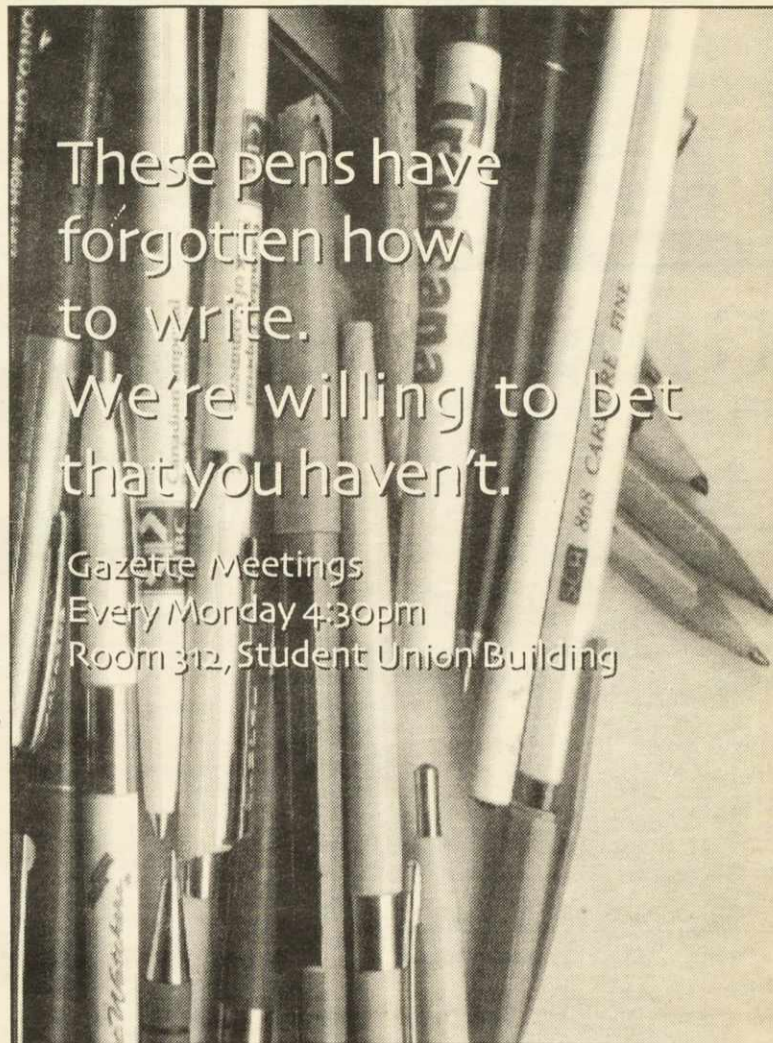
So while the debate rages on as to who is to blame: the House of Windsor for snubbing Diana, the paparazzi, the editors who pay the big bucks for the photos, the people who buy the tabloids or the drunk chauffeur — before pointing fingers take a look at yourself. The fact is, if you bought *People Magazine* or watched *Inside Edition*, you are just as guilty as the paparazzi who took the photos and who may have been ultimately responsible for her death. And I am just as guilty as well. We must not forget about this loss. Blood is on all of our hands and two young boys are now without their beloved mother forever.

So as I walked back to my hotel

on this beautiful sunny day in London, amidst all the flags at half mast, a few final thoughts filled my mind. Maybe (God willing) we can learn from this. Instead of spending \$5 on the *National Enquirer* we can donate that money to AIDS research, Women's breast cancer research or towards the abolition of land mines (some of Diana's many causes). Instead of hounding a celebrity or sports figure by sticking a camera in their face and demanding (not asking) for an autograph, we can say a simple hello and shake their hand. Instead of drinking and driving, we can call for a cab. And instead of pointing fingers and saying who is to blame for this entire debacle — we can look into the mirror and accept responsibility for our own actions in life. Then maybe we can carry ourselves with the same dignity and class as Lady Diana, and maybe her death will not be in vain.



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