Brief encounters

Three years ago, I sat on the lawn of Killian Court with three kindred spirits that last hour. All three of us were in our senior year. One, a B.A. (one in this year's R.O. coordinator). Of course, we had no way of foreseeing the realities of life. We were eating food together, not because we envisaged great political alliances (although the group went on to become a dormant presidency) or lifelong friendships. We were just sitting on the lawn, and perhaps I should do the same with someone. It's even easier with four or five people. Besides, we were hungry.

Some older people stood between the stately columns which held up the ivy-faithful buildings. They left everybody embarrassed, unable to shake the one passage above. He accompanied it with a little smile by looking down, and "smart smilers," who respond by looking from grace in the eyes of administrators and other students.

We were left out of a belief, although the memory is dim. He was introduced as Peter Berke, the Undergraduate Association President. Students were already broadly and we began to feel that we were being left out of a big secret. Or, more accurately, a big joke. Because Peter Berke was something of a joke on the campus at the table.

Peter Berke ran on a "Greening of MIT" platform and quickly fell from grace in the eyes of administrators and other students.

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Well, for three years I remember one thing that Peter Berke said. I looked up his speech the other day to be sure I had it right:

"...You will learn what to do when a friendly stranger says hello to you. You will learn what to say when you speak to a new acquaintance. You will learn what to write when you are replying to a letter. In short, you will learn what to do when a friendly stranger says hello to you.

The rest of the speech still seemed, three years later, pretty bleak.

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