Steve Solnick

Music of the Domes

Eighteen months ago, in the first column I wrote for these pages, I said, "I hope to use this column to place the emphasis where it belongs — that is to say, on issues I consider important because this is, after all, my column. I'll try to be objective, usually. And I'll try to be brief."

As I sit before my typewriter now to write the last column I shall write for this space, I would like to summarize what I have accomplished, what I have failed to accomplish. I don't care. But I can't.

I've wrestled with this for a few days now, but I seem only able to conclude that I was rarely brief. And may not be objective. But I can't for the life of me break the last eighteen months up into little failures and successes.

We've talked about Burger King and buttons, draft protesters and Delayed Gratification, Gensiles and Genetics, Nicoo Gardena. Sending your kid to MIT. Death.

Something about a student's death due to cancer touched a nerve in me, and I tried to share my feelings with you. A number of you gratefully let me know that I had. An acquaintance died suddenly in Israel and I felt disoriented at losing somebody I knew. Much later a friend committed suicide and I cried as I wrote for obeyity.

I grow in many ways in the last eighteen months. I tried to share that with you, too. I think growth is what college is all about, at the heart of it. Anybody who can say he leaves college the same as when he entered is either lying or to be pitied.

One of my gripes about MIT is that it sometimes masks those changes. Students are too busy being trained for a career to realize how far they are learning from their starting point. Few can make a clear statement and understand their metamorphosis.

Nobody can do the understanding for them. But, at times, by discarding our own individualism, I hope to ease the tension. To make changes in ourselves something to enjoy and use, not avoid. To create an atmosphere more conducive to growth. I aimed for this in other ways too. Many went west of the mark. Some got too rowdy and I'm sure, they were right enough.

Two items in particular emerged as I scanned my thoughts of the last forty or so columns. One is that MIT administration though frequently stupid, is not malicious. The administration is not out to "screw the students," but sometimes their preoccupations can have the same result for small-minded, single-issue people. But they are there anyway. And anybody in the faculty or administration who is unable to remove his or her blinders can only hurt the community.

MIT is breaking up all too rapidly into special interest groups. Before our very eyes. There are faculty who view students as commodities, modified as of students. There are administrators who see the management of MIT and its community as separate from the education it provides. And there are people everywhere who see the community as composed of minorities, left and right, gay and straight, and religious groups, who fail to see the underlying unity of that community.

The other recurring theme I found is the special nature of the MIT community. MIT people simply don't see the world in the same way that many other people see it. There is a great tendency for there to be this foremost center of scientific education to nurture technological aloofness. And this, I believe, is just one source of wonder and detract our sense of the absurd.

Yet there also exists at MIT a great potential to replace aloofness with something resembling a sense of the place of science and technology in today's (and yesterday's, and tomorrow's) world. I have talked about officers who are really making a move toward the synthesis of so much of what I write is just my expression of longing. I'm longing for about it, for there is so much to say, but my time is up. Education intervenes. There will be other forum for what I write is just a little expression of longing, learning to deal with these things — or at least learning and acknowledging that they exist — is important. Learning quantum mechanics doesn't make you a scientist; learning how to deal with people does.

Other forms of obsession abound at MIT as well, even though they're not in stereotypically overt. I know of students who got so involved with one woman that for almost every one of the nine terms it took him to graduate, his professor would have to give him enough units to keep the CAP from getting too high.

I don't mean to be deliberately offensive to those of my fellow students who spend what I consider to be an inordinate amount of time in the library. No doubt many of them come toMIT with a specific objective in mind, and near-constant studying is the way to meet their objectives.

What saddens me is that these students are missing out on the whole other side of a college education. There is a large social and emotional education which, although never mentioned directly, is equally important. For most of us, coming to college means escaping from some part of a community, family, or religion. And many students have anything better to do? I find myself thinking.

The most obvious danger with becoming obsessed with one part of college life is that it will result in poor grades, possibly leading to expulsion. Some years back, the Tech had to elect a "back-up" Executive Board, it is looked like the CAP was going to take care of the originally-elected members to withdraw.

The other, more harmful hazard isn't as obvious. A student who devoted all his time to one obsession will find himself suddenly unable to cope with the "real world." This is especially disconcerting when our incalculably increasing technical world thrusts engineers into positions soon after graduation.

"Moderation in all things, extreme to none" was the Athenian motto. It would be an admirable goal for the President of MIT to reach. But we must be realistic in our expectations as to what he can pay for a weekend they won't remember on Moscow Monday.

One of my gripe about MIT how the army is there anyway. And anybody in the faculty or administration that's enough.

Steve Solnick

Single-minded pursuits

Obession, according to dictionary, is "a compulsive preoccupation." While it does say than it is often coupled with anxiety, the definition makes no direct mention that obsession is unhealthy — only a slight implication.

It is also found a great deal at MIT, and if not unhealthy, it is a bad waste. I'm referring to the single-mindedness with which many students pursue their MIT education.

One is most quickly struck by this when walking around an MIT library. Looking around, I often find myself wondering who some of these people pay their rent to — landlord or librarian. I've tried to get a seat in the library around finals week. Forget it. The "obsessive" permanent residents would have all locked up since Add Date.

I don't mean to be deliberately offensive to those of my fellow students who spend what I consider to be an inordinate amount of time in the library. No doubt many of them come to MIT with a specific objective in mind, and near-constant studying is the way to meet their objectives.

What saddens me is that these students are missing out on the whole other side of a college education. There is a large social and emotional education which, although never mentioned directly, is equally important. Learning quantum mechanics doesn't make you a scientist; learning how to deal with people does.

Other forms of obsession abound at MIT as well, even though they're not in stereotypically overt. I know of students who got so involved with one woman that for almost every one of the nine terms it took him to graduate, his professor would have to give him enough units to keep the CAP from getting too high.

Colleges means, for many, a new freedom to experience with various "controlled" substances. Several students I know look enviably at their friends who, having dropped out because of excessive drug use, now work as programmers for Route 128 firms, piling up huge amounts of money so they can pay for a weekend they won't remember on Monday morning.

The traditional cure for such obsessions — the first one mentioned above in particular — is to get involved in some activity. Inconsistently obsession runs at least equally rampant here, as well.

Several times, I've been in the newspaper office only to be told, "shh Joe's sleeping on the couch." There are, of course, occasionally reasonable explanations for this. But sometimes sheer parochialism can have the same effect. MIT is no place for small-minded, single-issue people. But sometimes sheer parochialism can have the same effect. MIT is no place for small-minded, single-issue people. But sometimes sheer parochialism can have the same effect. MIT is no place for small-minded, single-issue people. But sometimes she