Avenging the nerds: the beauties of pi and Splash

Column by Adam Braff

Ah, precocious youth. Smart little boys and girls. The kind who can take pi to a high school with sparkly old people. Not that I've outgrown stereotyping entirely — I'm still not too bright. But my baseline stance against the Talent- ed-80s is still rightward.

The story of my mollification begins at Central Junior High School. In my second year at CJHS, and for reasons lost to history, I memorized the first 100 digits of pi. (This is relevant because I found that the best way to chart the development of gifted students is to follow his relationship with that most famous of transcendent objects.) Yes, I committed this incredibly useless trivi um to memory. Indeed, to the part of the mind which normally conspired to memorize batting averages — and sealed my fate by spending the next four summers at a Johns Hopkins program called the Center for Advancement of Academically Talented Youth. No doubt out there, so do CTA students, are cringe at this. We all have embarrassing pasts.

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In my rookie CTY summer, I found a support group of sorts. A boy from New Jersey who had memorized what he said was pi to the 10,000 decimal places. He was 16. Now, I'm not even going to pretend that what was going on was perfectly normal, because wasn't. We stood on a stage in front of a crowd of 700 kids, with a pi party going on at the front of 200 other losers. Outstanding. When you're looking for reasons not to be yourself, this is it.

Back home, nobody knew about my ex pertaining to math. Nobody ever had a reason to look at me in admiration. Nobody ever had a reason to look at me in disapproval. Nobody ever had a reason to look at me. I was just another kid with similar people, not exactly the most interesting. The little number in particular. But in high school, I was somehow revealed, leaving Todd to inappropriately see a transformation take place. Not in

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seen the day before.

"But you're right," he said. "As opposed to high school, where the kids care what you take, Splash lets them take what they want. If someone is teaching a class of students — they have to be interested, because they chose the course themselves."

It had been 10 years now, Splash last fall. In its first year, I had been a volunteer from the Boston area and from as far away as California. Part of the reason the program was initially big was the large number of positive reviews from incoming freshmen who let themselves be enriched.

Who had not have a single negative comment," Wozky said, "except for the stu dent who complained there were only 0.50 cents, or the one who asked it should take place every month instead of annually. The parents loved the idea."

I asked him how he had gotten parents involved in the program.

"Well," he said. "We physically yank the parents away from their kids, because some of the parents seem to want to do the choosing. We want the students to take what they want, not what their parents say."

Social interaction must extend beyond living groups

Column by Michael Franklin

The change given to the Freshman Housing Committee limited the scope of their inquiry to the fact that [Residence/Orientation] is one of the quality of life and character of the MIT community, with special reference to the freshman class. The committee concluded that R/O adversely affects freshmen, and proposed that it be changed. Thus the quality of life debate has been reduced to residence and co-curricular activities and hometowns.

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