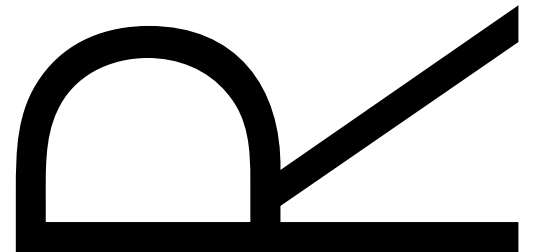




L. RAFAEL





// I left my office in a hurry the other night,” President Reif remarks to me, cleaning up the pile of papers on his desk. It’s Monday morning and the earliest I’ve been up all semester.

“So you’re following me everywhere?”

“Yep.”

“That’s crazy.”

I chuckle and glance around the spacious yet humble office. Light streams in through the large windows onto the carpet and wooden walls — it’s homey. President Reif sits down behind his desk overlooking his space, he’s now flipping through the day’s agenda prepared for him by his executive assistant Karla Casey. He gets back up to get some water and then heads over to the chairs on the other side of his office. “This is my morning routine” he jokes, “I go over here, and then over here and that’s it”.

To many, Rafael Reif is the president of MIT; he is an inspiring distant figure whose day to day happenings are an abstract thought. He is the important man in the suit who gave a speech at convocation freshman year and will deliver another one at commencement. To a handful of freshmen every year, he is an advisor and a mentor. President Reif is the first generation of his family to go to college, recipient of the United States Presidential Young Investigator Award, and the seventeenth president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “But at the same time, we have to remember he’s human” Karla tells me.

After all, Rafael is a father, a husband, and a meticulous clementine peeler.
And he’s funny.

It’s a detail that doesn’t come across through the myriad of accolades but is immediately apparent after spending the day with him.





Our day begins with his bi-weekly meeting with Provost Schmidt, ‘Marty’. They ease into friendly banter for a while before President Reif pulls out the meeting’s agenda — my cue to head out. I sit outside with Karla and we discuss his schedule for the day.

“I’m actually working on his schedule for next year,” she tells me, “I’m already scheduling this for 2020 and that 2021. It does feel distant, but 2019 is just a couple of years away. Time flies. The thing is we have to be super careful with his calendar — we have to make sure that we have everything that is MIT, like the academic things like commencement. Then we have the resource development travel but I have to make sure that the travel doesn’t conflict with all of the boards that he belongs to.



And when there are conflicts we try to see if we can fix it or if he’s going to not be able to go — but then I have to watch his attendance to each event and board because there’s a percentage that we have to have. So it’s a lot. Making sure he has times to meet with his senior officers, and faculty and still have time for students. It’s about making a little bit of time for everyone”

The Provost, the Chair of Faculty, the Vice President of Resource Development, a freshman advisee. Yet to President Reif, they are Marty, Krishna, Julie and Andrea. “He was always the empathetic one”, Chris Terman, a colleague from President Reif’s EECS days shares with me. The day continues and we bounce from meeting to meeting yet President Reif’s pleasant demeanor:” makes the time swing by.





At noon we head over to the Gray House, named after a former President of MIT and President Reif's temporary home, for a department head lunch. The Gray House is a beautiful place; a windy staircase greets you after you pass through two large doors, the elegant wooden floors resemblant of President Reif's office. The department heads trickle in and head over to the living room, they stand around taking like extremely well dressed, old friends.

“What time do you usually go home?” I ask President Reif. It’s Friday afternoon now and he’s wrapping up the week.

“Typically at six ish or so”

“And when you go home are you typically done with your day?”

“No no no no no no, not at all. I typically go home when the day is over here. I go home, I have a quick dinner and I go back to work until 11 o’clock or so. And then I go to bed and just read something that is not work related to split the day from the night. And around midnight I just crash. I normally read The Economist, although it takes me a few days to read through it. That’s the first thing, when I’m done reading that then I read books.”

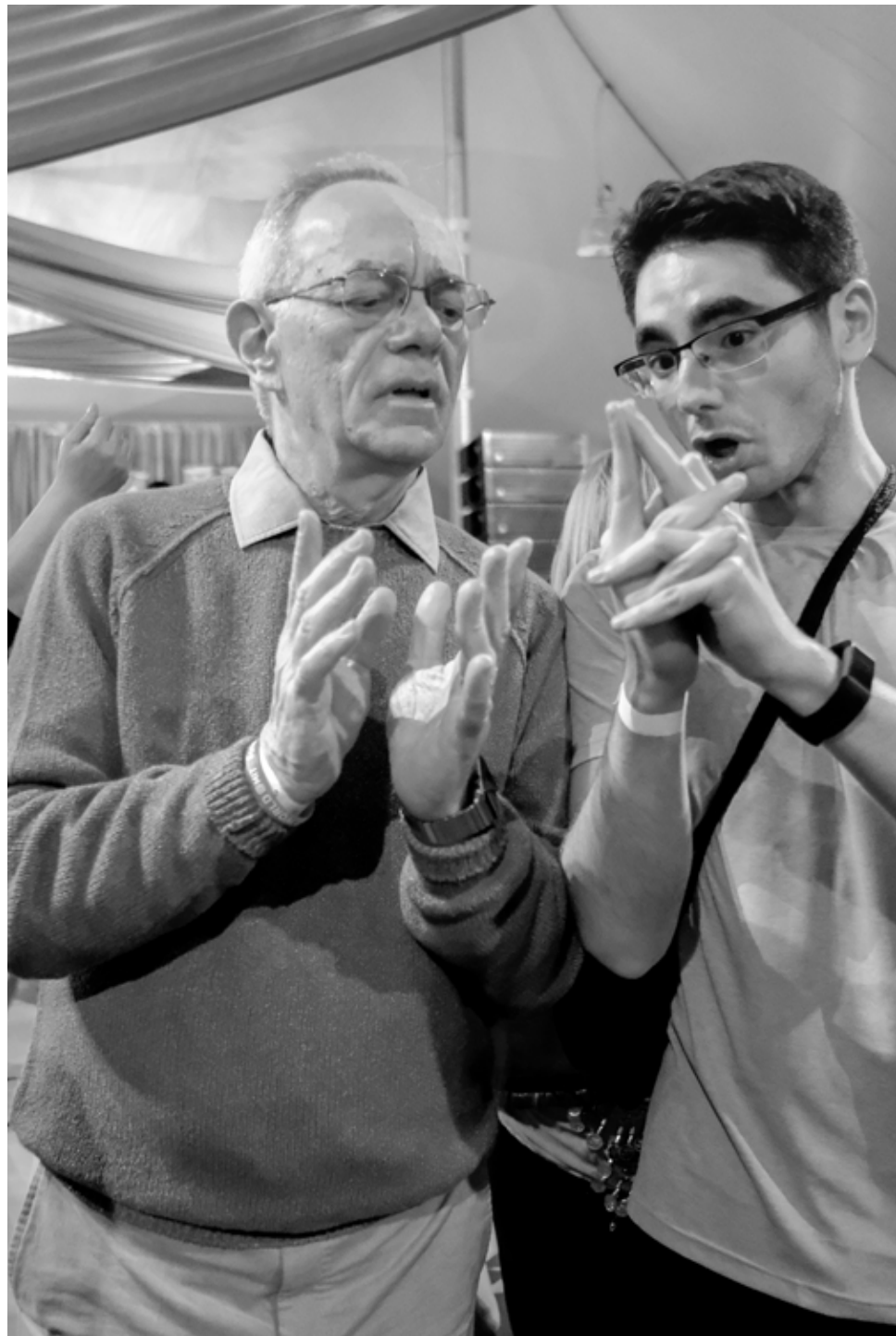




I catch President Reif again during MIT's One World celebrations. He greets me with an enthusiastic hug as we leave the gray house and head over to campus with his wife Chris and Sergeant Maribeth, "MB".

As we walk down Memorial Drive, heads turn and people slow down; "that's the president!" exclaim a group of students who are walking towards us. We arrive at Killian and duck into the tent President Reif just makes it to the dance floor before he is swarmed with enthusiastic students, faculty, and alumni. Some people ask for selfies, others greet him warmly and go back to dancing. He stops for every person, shaking each hand hello and patting each back goodbye. We spend about 15 minutes in Killian before we head over to Kresge. Some students stop and say hi, others nod in recognition.





Alexa Martin, the 2017 UA president stops by and says hello. Initially unaware of who she is, Presdient Reif greets her cordially and asks her what her name is. “Alexa Martin, we’ve met before” she tells him, “I’m the UA president”. Immediately, Presdient Reif recognizes her and falls back onto the wall. “Ah yes” he remarks and they exchange a laugh before we continue down the ever so familiar infinite that’s been transformed from students rushing to classes to a lazy drunken passageway for the MIT community.







Around ten we head back to the Gray House and I watch him high five students while walking along side Chris.

I recall a conversation I had earlier with him about the photographs in his office. There are photos of him and Chris, him with students, and there is a photo of him with two people laughing jubilantly. When I inquired he told me that the people were Millie Dresslehaus and Bob Solow, both winners of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

I told him the words people had used to describe him to me -- genuine, kind, brilliant.

“Ah Megan, I’m not brilliant,” he replied, “they are brilliant”. He gestured to Millie and Bob before finishing his thought: “I’m not brilliant at all. I just love what I do. I love the students”.





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