

# A STORY ABOUT PUSH SINGH

BO MORGAN

Hi, my name is Bo and I have worked for Push off and on ever since I came to MIT as a freshman about 7 years ago. He wanted someone to help him build a robot simulator, and it was a fun project that I worked with him on throughout my extended undergraduate education.

One of the last times I talked with Push I was blabbering at him about my thesis project. I ran out of steam after a minute or two, and he said, “What you’re doing is pretty simple isn’t it?” I thought for a second, and said, “Yeah, I guess it is.” Push could just say something like that and it would make you think, “Is he crazy or is he brilliant?” I think he was brilliant and he assumed everyone around him was too, which put everyone into this game of trying to keep up with Push. And his brilliance was infectious, somehow his calm way of seeing everything as simple would flow out to inspire everyone that he spoke with. You would catch yourself believing some really crazy stuff sometimes in conversations with him. Push once told me that he thought giving computers commonsense would solve all of the world’s problems, so I kind of gave a double-take and asked, “even starvation in Africa?” He thought about it for a second or two, and said, “Yeah, I think so.” But then he was trying to figure out with Barbara what resteraunt to go to, so discussing the fate of Africa could wait I guess. Working with Push gave me a sense of calm because I knew that he could see the simplicity in my confusion, and although he was a very private person, I like to think that he saw me as a simple friend, a student and a friend.

I tried not to ask Push for anything because he was such a nice guy that if he even suspected that you wanted something he would go so far out of his way to find a way to give it to you. At one point I told him that I had been rejected from every graduate school that I had applied to, and I told him that I was probably going to move back to California to work for a robotics company. He didn’t like the sound of that, so he told me that he would talk to Marvin and Walter about getting me into the Master’s program at the Media Lab. I had never really talked with Marvin at the time although he had patted me on the shoulder a few times while I hacked on Push’s human simulator. I had hardly ever spoken to Marvin and I had never met Walter, so when Push told me that my chances looked pretty good for getting into the program I was shocked because it showed me how much trust Push’s advisors placed in him. I had just been rejected from every type of school across the country, good ones, bad ones, and now Push was taking it upon himself to get this flunky into MIT to work at his side in the Media Lab. Of course he succeeded, and I effectively became Push’s graduate student, and he was still a graduate student himself! This was very confusing to me, but I figured it was better if the obvious questions remained unasked, such as: “Are you allowed to do this?” Push had taken me under his wing, and he only asked one thing from me, he said, “When I become a professor, you had better write a lot of papers.” He said it with his laugh and his smile out the corner of his eye as he looked away, giving you his knowing trust. Push said something that will be lodged right there inside of me for quite a while when he said, “It would be a shame to lose you Bo.” Well, it is a shame Push. Push brought me up next to him at a time when he saw that I was low, and for that I don’t know how to repay him, but I will try to repay his family, his friends and his colleagues by keeping Push, my advisor, alive and active in my mind. After all, there is still a little Push in each of us. Push’s family has bravely given their Pushpinder Singh to the world. Push has given us a seed of simplicity and beauty that grows inspiration within our minds. I don’t understand the religions or the anti-religions of the world, but I pray to you today to keep his ideas of beauty and simplicity alive and growing in your minds, your hearts, and your work. I will let them inspire my students and my children as Push has inspired all of us.