



FROM THE CCAR CHIEF EXECUTIVE **Steven A. Fox**

## One Special Moment At Biennial for One Special Person

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I was at Biennial in my position for the CCAR. After a week of intensive work, the professional turned into the personal on Friday afternoon in an unexpected way. While CCAR rabbis may not reach as many people as the President of the United States, my experience reminded me of the ways in which you as rabbis touch the lives of individuals and families, and each in your own special way have the power to help transform moments into the sacred.

On Friday afternoon, President Barack Obama finished his speech to the Biennial community and then, instead of exiting behind the podium as anticipated, proceeded to walk down from the stage and along a hastily constructed temporary divider the length of the stage where he greeted those who had immediately pushed forward for an opportunity to meet him in person.

The President came upon one young man, inquired about his name; “Adam” was the reply. “Where do you go to school?” the President asked. “Carbondale, Illinois, Mr. President.” Looking the young man in the eyes, the President said with good humor, “Be sure to tell all my friends in Carbondale, go Salukis” (the name of the Southern Illinois University sports teams).

Adam is our son. He is a very special person. Well, yes, all of us say that about all of our kids, but in this case Adam is often defined by his specialness. In our society, he is called a “special needs” child.

Little did the President know that in many ways he did more for Adam than many of the professionals involved during the past 18 years of special needs intervention including 12 years in “special needs schools.” That may sound a bit harsh, but until Adam moved to a special needs school in Carbondale it has been pretty accurate. Certainly in the past two years Adam’s progress has exceeded all expectations (including his own) and, prior to meeting the President, he had begun talking about completing a transition program at the Carbondale community college and then attending SIU where he would become a Saluki.

Keep in mind that this is a child who until 2 ½ years ago did not really believe that he would go to college. Now he can and now he will. Yes, the change in both Adam’s ability and his attitude has come over the past couple of years. But, that one moment with the President helped bring it all together.

Thanks, Mr. President. Adam’s motivation has increased exponentially in the past week. Now, he WILL become an SIU student, a Saluki; after all, the President told him “go Salukis.”

Thanks, Mr. President. Adam’s confidence as a person in the world has increased significantly in the past week. He CAN talk with anybody; after all, he spoke with the President of the United States.

*Rabbi Steven A. Fox is the Chief Executive of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Adam Fox is a student at Brehm Preparatory in Carbondale, Illinois. Adam has agreed that Steve can share this story—after all, it is Adam’s story.*