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September 22, 1995 • Jo Anne Miller and Renee Bain talk about their experience at SIU Carbondale

## A VERY SPECIAL EVENT!

As Administrative staff we are often asked to represent the college at a function or meeting. Usually the meeting is informative and interesting. Sometimes it becomes "a very special event."

On Friday, September 8, Renee Bain and I were asked to attend a speech on Higher Education and Financial Aid to be given by President Clinton at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Illinois. We knew that we were supposed to have reserved seating since we were representatives from the College. Renee and I joked about getting to meet the President.

On Saturday morning, my home phone rang and a voice identified itself as "the liaison from the White House," confirming directions to the SIU campus. Also, I was told that there would be a reception at ten o'clock and we should arrive by nine-thirty for a security check.

Renee and I quickly

adjusted our plans to arrive before ten o'clock. After arriving at SIU and filling the last visitor parking space (next to the building that was secured for the Presidential visit), we asked a lady in the information booth (armed with a clip board and a list of names) about "the reception at ten," and we were immediately told to follow a man in a grey suit (identifiable as a secret service agent by his lapel pin). After clearing security, which I triggered three times, we were escorted by Secret Service into a small auditorium where about 125 people were visiting on the platform.

A gentleman, identified as White House staff, announced to the group, "The President will be here shortly, each of you will have your picture taken by the White House photographer. You will each have a moment with the President."

Renee elbowed me and whispered, "Are we supposed to be here?" I answered, "I don't know, but I'm not moving."

As we tried to look around (we did recognize the Illinois senators and representative from television), the White House Staff called us to attention to announce, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States." As all eyes went to the doorway and the flash bulbs popped, I walked President William Clinton! The doors closed behind him, excluding the press.

President Clinton walked on stage, smiled at the group, met several "important" people, and then started to talk to each of us.

He is very impressive, warm and charismatic. Renee described his "Beautiful clear blue eyes" and I said, "Taller and slimmer than I expected" and "More handsome than on television." We truly did have a moment with the President and he focused totally on each of us when he talked to us.

From the time that we went through the security check at 9:30 in the morning until after two in the afternoon, we were

never without a Secret Service agent. Because of the reserved seating for the President's speech, we were privileged to watch the "operation of the Presidency." It was fascinating to watch the little things - how "his copy" of the speech arrives on the podium, the constant working of the security around him, the management of the crowd, even watching the Presidential limousine as the driver tried to figure out where to pick him up (it was moved three times) while he shook hands with the crowd.

Regardless of one's political position, the opportunity to meet face to face and shake the hand of the President of the United States is awesome, exciting, and overwhelming. Representing Missouri Baptist College is always a privilege and sometimes it becomes a "very special event."

Jo Ann Miller

How do I begin to describe an experience that appeared to be bigger than life? I could be-

gin by describing the trickle down effect and how I was not even supposed to be at this amazing event, but due to the "blessing" of conflicts and schedules I was given an unforgettable opportunity.

As I think how the day fell together, a line from the Wizard of Oz is appropriate. Jo Ann Miller and I could have shared Dorothy's sentiment when she tells Toto, "I don't think we are in Kansas anymore." We started our race to Carbondale early Monday morning. After the phone call from the White House Jo Ann received Saturday inviting us to a reception, we agreed it might be fun to try and make the event. Neither of us had ever been to Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, but as we drove down the blockaded motorcade route taking us to the University we felt fairly confident we were on the right path. Our excitement grew as we drove into town. Air Force One flew directly overhead. Were we pressed for time? Slightly!

Upon arriving at the campus, the White House liaison told us to look for the reception parking.

We could not have been received any better even if we had found the correct parking lot. The one visitor parking spot we found, in a loading zone area, behind the sealed off building which unbeknown to us was the exact building of the reception. This was truly amazing since the University was bussing people from miles away. We followed a crowd of people to the middle of the campus and quickly found an information booth. Jo Ann was very persistent in our quest for the reception. As she explained at the information booth who we were and our goal, we were informed we were not on the list to check with the "lady in blue." We were not on the "lady in blues's" list either but we were quickly ushered into the sealed off building by a man in a dark suit and dark sunglasses. He requested another dark suited man to take us to

the reception. We were then quickly scooted out a back door to a stairwell full of secret service men and metal detectors. After the metal detector search, we were very politely requested to follow another dark suited man. Disbelief and reality quickly set in as we were never without secret service men from that moment. We were directed into an auditorium and up onto a stage area with approximately 125 people. As soon as we stepped on stage, a secret service man told the gathering that the President was in route and would be present shortly. We were told that he would come to each of us and shake our hand and the White House photographer would take our picture. At that moment Jo Ann and I looked at each other and I am not sure even she and I can find the words to describe the look on our faces. I gasped "Jo Ann what did you do to us? How did you get us in here?"

I looked around and started focusing on such people as Jerry Costello,

Carol Mosley-Braun, Paul Simon and I knew I had stepped into a place slightly different than my reality. As Jo Ann and I started picking out people a deep voice said "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States" and applause ripped through the room. There he was! President William Clinton. I am not describing politics. I am stating position. He came down the aisle, up the steps, and onto the very stage where Jo Ann and I were standing. President Clinton greeted the Costello's the Simon's, Jo Ann Miller and me.

As you can tell I could babble on and on about a moment that was once in a life time. President Clinton did speak to a crowd of over ten thousand people. As I sat there totally in awe of the experience I realized I was experiencing the freedom, education, and God's blessing that our country and Missouri Baptist College was founded upon.

Renee Bain