

Fairlington Historical Society
September 11, 2001 Oral History Interview
Barbara Kirkland

Scarlett Bunting: So, my name is Scarlett Bunting, and today is May 1, 2026, and I'm interviewing Barbara Kirkland?

Barbara Kirkland: Yes.

Scarlett Bunting: Yes? And can you tell us your age on 9/11, if you remember? How old you were?

Barbara Kirkland: I think I was 60.

Scarlett Bunting: So that's 25 years ago.

Barbara Kirkland: Oh, right.

Scarlett Bunting: I don't think you were that old.

Barbara Kirkland: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

Scarlett Bunting: No, no, no, no, no, no. I was like, "Man, you look good."

25 years ago. Okay, I'm 83 now.

Scarlett Bunting: Well, you still look really good. Wow. Okay. All right, do math, Phil. You're good. Come on.

Barbara Kirkland: I was 58.

Scarlett Bunting: 58, okay. All right. So you're going to have—

Barbara Kirkland: I'm young.

Scarlett Bunting: . So, okay, so you were 58. And so how long had you lived in Fairlington at that point?

Barbara Kirkland: I had lived there— I moved there in 1977.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, okay. So really, when they first went condo, almost. I mean, so, yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: Absolutely. Right.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, okay. And so you've been there for quite a while. And then and just when did you move out, or how long were you?

Barbara Kirkland: I moved out in 2022.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, okay. Wow, you did live there a long time. That's great. And which community were you in? Which of the neighborhoods?

Fair— North Fairlington.

Scarlett Bunting: North Fairlington. Okay. Great. So were you actually in Fairlington when 9/11 happened, or were you at work, or—

Barbara Kirkland: I was at work. I was teaching school. I taught school, and I was at Mount Vernon Elementary.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, okay.

Barbara Kirkland: And that day teachers got word of what was happening, but we could not let the children know.

Scarlett Bunting: No. My, my children were kindergarten and first grade at the time, and—

Barbara Kirkland: Right. I was teaching first grade.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: Yeah. And so parents started coming to the school and taking kids out, and so—

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: So that's how we knew it was really pretty bad.

Scarlett Bunting: It was real. Yeah. Yeah. So how did you find out about it? I mean, just word got out at school? Like, the administration kind of like—

Barbara Kirkland: The administration, right. Mm-hmm. Right.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. Right. Right, right. When— I'm just curious, like, when did you actually start to be able to watch footage of it or anything?

Barbara Kirkland: Actually during school that day, whenever we would have a break, like at lunchtime, we would— anytime we were away from the children.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: We could go watch the TV.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay.

Barbara Kirkland: Turn on our TVs and see what was happening.

Scarlett Bunting: Right. Okay. Yeah, that's— and then here you are at work, and you're like, "Okay." And then the parents finally all came, and—

Barbara Kirkland: Right.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah, dribbling in, yeah. Yeah. Do you remember, was the day like a— did it go as long as it normally would, or was it pretty much the last kid got picked up?

Barbara Kirkland: Yeah, because they couldn't arrange for— they had buses come and pick up kids.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Right.

Barbara Kirkland: Because it was such a short notice.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. So your day was pretty much a full day, and the whole time you're just, like, trying to maintain your cool.

Barbara Kirkland: Right.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. And as far as, like and you knew at that point that the Pentagon had been hit, too?

Barbara Kirkland: Right.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. And what were your thoughts then? Like, that's aw— you know?

Barbara Kirkland: That's awfully close.

Scarlett Bunting: Awfully close. Right, right. And were you aware— did you have concerns that Fairlington, being so close, or any of the, you know?

Barbara Kirkland: We— I did. I'm thinking, you know, we are so close.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: If they start striking again, or, or in Washington, DC, you know.

Scarlett Bunting: Right.

Barbara Kirkland: We're going to be impacted. And the thought of, "How do we get out of here if we know something else is coming?"

Scarlett Bunting: Right.

Barbara Kirkland: The thought was, everybody's going to be trying to get out. So there's going to be, basically, no way to get out.

Scarlett Bunting: Right. And, and did you have, like you know, family that you— like, that you lived— that you had a family at the time in Fairlington?

Barbara Kirkland: Well, I was married. Yeah. Yeah. No children.

Scarlett Bunting: No children. Okay. So you had your husband that was probably at work also?

Barbara Kirkland: He was, yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: And where did he work?

Barbara Kirkland: He worked— actually, he had an office there in Fairlington. One of the office buildings.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, okay. So he was at least out of harm's way, kind of.

Barbara Kirkland: Right.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah, you just didn't know. Okay. And then how did it impact you? Just, you know, the whole— I guess that day, and then the coming days, and your family, your husband, and the neighbors? I mean, how did— what was that all like?

Barbara Kirkland: Coming home the way I came from school, I went back streets always, and I had to cross over the bridge there on 36th Street.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, yeah, between the two sides.

Barbara Kirkland: Between the two. And you could still see the smoke rising from the Pentagon. And this was, like, at, you know, 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

Scarlett Bunting: Sure.

Barbara Kirkland: Yeah. So, and it was— everything was just kind of almost getting eerily quiet.

Scarlett Bunting: Yes, it was.

Barbara Kirkland: People were, you know, very concerned.

Scarlett Bunting: Were neighbors out talking to each other, or what? Because it was beautiful— it was a beautiful day.

Scarlett Bunting: It was a beautiful day.

Scarlett Bunting: It was a perfect September day.

Barbara Kirkland: Right, yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Not a cloud in sight, and no planes in the air anymore.

Barbara Kirkland: Right, right. No planes. That's why it was so quiet, because you could hear all the planes in Fairlington when they would come in and.

Scarlett Bunting: Of course.

Barbara Kirkland: Take off and land.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: So, very quiet. And neighbors were out, but— and we were all concerned, of course.

Scarlett Bunting: In shock.

Barbara Kirkland: In shock, yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

Barbara Kirkland: What was eerie— really eerie was that night, because it was such a nice night. We had the windows open, and not only could we— we could hear the, the plane that circled around the area, and you could hear it coming.

Scarlett Bunting: And going, and circling around.

Barbara Kirkland: Circling around.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Do you know what kind of plane it was? Was it a military plane?

Barbara Kirkland: It was a military plane.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. Yeah, I guess it would have had to have been. Everything else was grounded.

Barbara Kirkland: And, and that went on for many days, so.

Scarlett Bunting: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: Yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. So the mood of the people around you that day— I mean, we kind of talked a little bit about that, obviously, in shock, somber.

Barbara Kirkland: Sure. Yeah. Very, very quiet. Yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Yeah. It's hard— it was hard to put into words. Did you have many children in your neighborhood? I'm curious about the families with children.

Barbara Kirkland: Not really. The families with children. There were not many children. Because there's a lot now, it seems like there are.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Because I lived there when I was single before I had children, and then I moved away, and then I'm now in back as an older person.

Barbara Kirkland: No, there were not in my— I lived on 27th Road.

Scarlett Bunting: .

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: In Cul-de-sac.

Barbara Kirkland: So there were not many children there, so.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. Okay. All right. When you said you saw the, the smoke, you were, you know, coming home and you were going over the, the bridge there, the connecting bridge. Could you— I mean, you maybe didn't have your windows down, but could you smell the smoke in Fairlington? Like, was there any kind of smell or anything that you could—

Barbara Kirkland: I don't remember a smell.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. Because it's pretty close.

Barbara Kirkland: It was very close.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Right. Right, right. And what changed in the aftermath for you or those around you? Could you think of anything like that, short-term or long-term? What did—

Barbara Kirkland: Well, I think we were all kind of concerned that something else could happen.

Scarlett Bunting: Sure.

Barbara Kirkland: You know, and that was the main concern, I think.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: We were very wary.

Scarlett Bunting: And it wasn't even in the short-term. It was kind of like it went—

Barbara Kirkland: It went a long, long time.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Yeah. Wow. I mean, yeah, you just worry that, you know, is it going to stop?

Barbara Kirkland: Mm-hmm.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. And in the weeks after did you talk to neighbors? Did you get their situations, like who was at work and where they were? Did you share with that? Did it— anything like that, or any friends? Or even on phone calls with friends and, you know—

Barbara Kirkland: Oh, sure. Yeah, we, we did. Yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. And did you—

Barbara Kirkland: Everyone was as concerned, yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Did you have any or was anybody that you know personally impacted? I mean, anybody that got killed, or, you know, anything like that?

Barbara Kirkland: I, I, I didn't know anyone that got killed, but I had some friends who worked at the Pentagon.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: And they, they were lucky to get out.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: We'll put it that way.

Scarlett Bunting: Obviously not where the plane hit.

Barbara Kirkland: Well, they were fairly close.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Wow. And what, what, what was their— were they, like, in the military, or do you know?

Barbara Kirkland: Oh, no. They were civilians working for the military.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, okay.

Barbara Kirkland: Working in the library and things like that, in the Pentagon.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Okay. Is there anything else as far as— we kind of covered everything in the, the formal written questions, but, I mean, everyone's got kind of, you know, other perspectives and just anything else you remember or recall or would like to share about it?

Barbara Kirkland: Well, just wondering, you know, what was going to happen.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: With the world, The world. At that point, yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: The world. , for sure. For sure.

Barbara Kirkland: And hoping—

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Barbara Kirkland: Just hoping that nothing else would happen, yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Right. Okay. Well, unless you have anything else to add, I mean, you know. I mean,

Barbara: I, I was—

Scarlett Bunting: I think you covered it. That's really awesome.

Phil Snelling: Well, thank you very much.

Barbara Kirkland: you're welcome.

Scarlett Bunting: Thank you.

Barbara Kirkland: Thanks. Okay.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Thanks, Barbara.

Phil Snelling: That concludes it.