

Fairlington Historical Society
September 11, 2001 Oral History Interview
Betsy

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. So we are interviewing Betsy Faga. Today is May 1, 2026. And what do you recall—or if you might have to do some calculations—what was your age when 9/11 happened?

Betsy: What is—well, I'm 82 now, so if you can do the math. I was 57.

Scarlett Bunting: 57. Oh, okay. All right. And what—what line of work were you in then?

Betsy: I was president of the North American Millers Association, trade association for the wheat, corn, and oat milling industry.

Scarlett Bunting: Wow. Like, mills? Like, that—

Betsy: Mm-hmm. Wheat flour, corn meal.

Scarlett Bunting: Wow. Okay. How interesting. Wow, that's cool. Okay, so we know what you did and how old you were. At the time, how long had you lived in Fairlington when 9/11 happened?

Betsy: It was 1976.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, okay. So you're—you're similar to our last interviewee. And which community did you live in?

Betsy: North Fairlington.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. Same. Okay. And then how long did you live there? Just kind of what was your span?

Betsy: Until I moved here (Goodwin House) in 2023.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, wow. Okay. Awesome. And so were you actually in Fairlington, or were you at work when—

Betsy: I was at work.

Scarlett Bunting: You were at work when 9/11 happened. Okay. And where was that physically located?

Scarlett Bunting: It was at L'Enfant Plaza. Oh my. So you were in the city and had to get out of there somehow. Okay. L'Enfant Plaza. So did you hear or see anything when it happened? I mean—

Betsy: I didn't. I was actually—I knew it had happened because my partner called me, actually, on my way into work and said, "Get to your TV." So we saw the second plane go into the tower in New York City.

Scarlett Bunting: Mm-hmm.

Betsy: But, you know, nothing more was happening.

Scarlett Bunting: So, the time your—when your partner called it was just to say that one plane had flown into the thing?

Betsy: Yes. So, I had an appointment at the Rayburn office Build—uh, Building at Capitol Hill.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Betsy: And was walking up to the building to go in. And.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, wow.

Betsy: The, you know, police and Capitol Police came out and said, "Go back. Go back. A plane is coming to the Pentagon"

Scarlett Bunting: Get away from this building.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Betsy: And so that's how I knew something had happened.

Scarlett Bunting: Wow. Okay. And then so you—so that's when you found out, okay, you knew that New York had been hit, and then he just told you that Pentagon had been hit. But you hadn't heard—you couldn't hear it or anything from where you were?

Betsy: No.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. All right. And what were your thoughts? I mean, when you, you know, how did—like, immediately, or how did it impact you and just—

Betsy: It was like, Oh my goodness, what's coming next? Could this possibly be, you know, more like, I'm right by the Capitol. What's next?" And getting out of there, my first thought was.

Betsy: Yeah. I tried to call the staff just to say, "Go home. Get out of the city."

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Right.

Betsy: And of course, cell phones were not working.

Scarlett Bunting: No.

Betsy: So, I just hot-footed it back to the office because it was like three blocks.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Betsy: From the office.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay.

Betsy: And, you know, my head just in a swirl.

Scarlett Bunting: Right. And then so at what point did you think, "I need to get home"? Or, "Out of here"?

Betsy: I went into the office, and fortunately, everybody else had left. So, I was there alone, which felt a little spooky.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. And what time of day was that by then? Do you—can you think about?

Betsy: This was late morning.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay.

Betsy: And I thought—well, I called my partner, and he said, "Don't—" because I drive to work.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Betsy: Don't try to drive home. You have to go 14th Street Bridge. 14th Street, right by the Pentagon. So, I sat in the office watching the TV for a couple of hours.

Scarlett Bunting: Mm-hmm.

Betsy: And I finally thought, "I'm just going to take my chances. Anybody who has driven probably is out of here."

Scarlett Bunting: Mm-hmm.

Betsy: "And the traffic shouldn't be bad." And that was the case.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. Were you able to go over 14th Street Bridge?

Betsy: I did.

Scarlett Bunting: You were.

Betsy: I did. And it was not busy.

Scarlett Bunting: And then you went to drive by and see what was going on.

Betsy: Right by the Pentagon. Yeah. And it's almost like a blur. Because I know there had to be a lot of...

Scarlett Bunting: Loss of life and...

Betsy: Vehicles and, you know, ambulances, police cars, fire engines. But I just sort of kept my eyes on the road.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Betsy: And kept going straight until I got back home.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Betsy: And once again, turned on the TV.

Scarlett Bunting: That's amazing that you could get home relatively easily.

Betsy: Yeah. Yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Because, I mean, people in New York obviously had a very different experience, so.

Betsy: Yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Wow.

Betsy: Yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: And then who were you—did you have a husband or children or anything like that that you had to be concerned with?

Betsy: No. Well, my partner was living—we were living together.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. Okay.

Betsy: But he, he worked from home, so he was already there.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, so he was fine. Okay. Good. And then.

Betsy: No children to worry about, fortunately.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. And then, like, neighbors, anybody that you, like, talked to when you got home in Fairlington and.

Betsy: We just kind of hunkered down in front of the TV.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah.

Betsy: Yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay. And then, like, in the coming days, like, what were your thoughts? I mean, first about, you know, going back into DC or just kind of the—was it—it was like, "Take the week off." What was the situation with, like, getting back to.

Betsy: Well, even before thinking about that, the one thing we did probably as, as it was getting darker, so this would have been 6 or 7 o'clock. Greg and I drove up along Arlington Ridge Road. Which you can go to and overlooks the Pentagon.

Scarlett Bunting: Sure.

Betsy: And overlooks that back—what I consider to be the backside of the Pentagon. And you could still see the flames. Couldn't see any vestige of an airplane. But saw the fire going up.

Scarlett Bunting: Flames still. Wow. Yeah. Yeah.

Betsy: And that, that just really brought it home.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Wow.

Betsy: And then the next day, you know, talking with the leadership of the association, who were the members, you know, they said, "Definitely stay home." So everyone stayed home. And stayed glued to the TV.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Wow. So not a lot of interaction, out and about, the neighbors or anything like that?

Betsy: No. No.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Okay. More of hunkering down.

Betsy: Yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Okay.

Scarlett Bunting: And then anything, like, that you changed, like, your—well, you probably had different thoughts after that. So kind of like it was like a before and after, you know, kind of thing, like, we're in a new era. That's the way I thought of it.

Betsy: Yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: But what—I mean, anything, like, immediately or versus long-term, like, what you kind of had thoughts about or, like.

Betsy: Well, the thing that disturbed me and, and still does, just as change in a way of life is all the security. Things that were slowly put in place over the years. But you know, having the bollards around the buildings and everything.

Scarlett Bunting: Buildings and the capitals ...

Betsy: And you know, Department of Agriculture was where we went most frequently. But even to the Capitol, and office buildings, but very quickly having all the security. Operations put into place. Having to go through security everywhere.

Scarlett Bunting: Mm-hmm. That was definitely very different.

Betsy: Yep. Yeah.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. Okay.

Betsy: So how, how young were you at the time?

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, I was in my 30s.

Betsy: Oh, okay.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. I don't remember exactly, I think. Anyway.

Betsy: But not as a child.

Scarlett Bunting: No, not as a child. But I did have—I did have kids, though. Yeah. But they were—they don't really remember it, so. But yeah. And so, yeah, any other—anything else you'd like to add or anything other re—other recollections you have about Fairlington after that? Anything?

Betsy: I don't have any specific thoughts about Fairlington. I do remember that in the day or two afterwards, I go to the church that's right on the property here.

Scarlett Bunting: Oh, okay.

Betsy: So it's a one-mile drive from there. And we did gather at church for to be together for some prayer.

Scarlett Bunting: That was important for a lot of people. My community, my community as well. It was kind of a joint service for different denominations and whatnot.

Betsy: Yeah. And frankly, you know, I have to think that there was all kinds of buzz going around in Fairlington, but I'm not remembering it.

Scarlett Bunting: Yeah. That's okay.

Betsy: Blocking it out or just not remembering it.

Scarlett Bunting: We like your—we like your story. It's an interesting one. It—everyone's story is different. Yeah. So we really appreciate you doing this..

Betsy: Thank you.

Scarlett Bunting: Thank you so much.

Betsy: Thank you.