

CAVIN, Amanda
INTERVIEWEE

Interviewer: Andrew Russell
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September 11th 20 year History

Interview #650

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Abstract: In this interview with Andrew Russell, Amanda Cavin discusses her thoughts and memories of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Mrs. Cavin describes her experience during the events, the response of the local area she was in at the time, and of the country as a whole.

* This is an edited transcript. Our transcription guidelines are available upon request/on our website.

Time	Keywords
00:00:00	AR: Alright today is February 18, it is 11:19 on Thursday morning. This is a September 11th Oral history interview with Amanda Cavin and Andrew Russell. Mrs. Cavin, I'm going to have you go ahead and state your full name, where you were born, and where you grew up.
	AC: Ok, so my name is Amanda Cavin. I was born here in Rock Hill, lived here my whole life except for a couple years while my husband was in the Air Force.
00:00:33	AR: Ok, so what brought you to Winthrop?
	AC: So I went to Winthrop initially right out of high school, home town college. Promptly flunked out. Then life happened. I got married. I had kids. So right before I turned forty years old I came back to start my bachelor's degree. Earned a bachelor's degree in 2015. Earned two master's degrees in 2017. Worked as a teacher for a little while and then came back here. I'm currently the director of the Eagle STEMS Scholar's Program here at Winthrop. I love Winthrop. Winthrop has always been... I had a fabulous experience as a student here, and now I get to turn around and give back to my Alma Mater so I am good with that.
00:01:29	AR: That's excellent. I enjoy people that are Alums that are able to teach and give back.

AC: Yeah, I enjoy it. It's a great place.

00:01:41 **AR: Where you at Winthrop during 9-11?**

AC: I was not. It's funny Brittany and I were just talking the other day, I was here during Hurricane Hugo, but I was not here. No, I was not a student. I had not returned to college at that point. Um, so I was not actually on campus for 9-11.

00:01:59 **AR: But you were in the Rock Hill area?**

AC: I was living in the Rock Hill area yes. I was actually on vacation. My birthday is September the 14th. So we were actually at Garden City Beach down on the South Carolina coast to celebrate the week of my birthday. I was turning 30 that year. So it was kind of a big deal and it was our annual vacation. I had traveled with my mom, my brother, and then my husband and I and at the time we had three children. So my son was probably five. Trying to think of that year, yeah he was probably five. I had a daughter that was three and then I had a daughter who was about nine months old at the time.

00:02:58 **AR: How did you hear about the attacks?**

AC: As I said we were at the beach. My brother had come down but could only stay the weekend and had to be back at work that Tuesday. So he had gotten up about 5 a.m. to get ready to get on the road to drive back here to Rock Hill to go to work. He was driving and he called me. He was like, 'Hey I need you to turn on the TV' and I'm like 'Why?' We were getting ready to go to the beach, or whatever it was we were doing I don't remember specifically at that moment, and he said 'there's something happening and I can't tell from the radio, would you turn on the TV?' I don't remember very much of the rest of the conversation with him because, of course, by the time we turned the TV on the first plane had hit the first of the towers. Then just a few short minutes later the second plane, flew into the second tower. From then we were pretty much glued to the TV.

00:04:12 **AR: What was your first thought on hearing the news? While you were watching what was your first thought?**

AC: Just...my heart broke for those people. I can remember...I think it was probably after—it seems like there was so much time between the events but I know that there really wasn't. So when I turned on the TV the first tower is already burning. The second tower gets hit, and then however long later the towers fell. All that time you're sitting there and you're watching and the news, of course, is filming. They have cameras there and they're filming right on the buildings and what's going on. I was just horrified at the people. You know, we don't know what it was like in that building in either of those buildings. Especially for the floors above where those planes hit, we don't have any idea what that was like. I was just horrified that there were people who chose to jump

out of those windows. I can remember watching the people fall and thinking ‘oh my gosh, how bad must it be that that’s what they choose’. That was—it was horrifying. I had never seen any kind—anything like that before in my life and it was. It was just gut wrenching. It was awful.

0:05:50 **AR: Right. A lot of people that I’ve interviewed said that when they first heard about the first tower being hit at 8:43 in the morning, that they thought it was pilot error. Then after the second plane, they pieced it together that it was terrorist attacks. When did you personally find out that it was an act of terror and not pilot error?**

AC: I don’t think I believed that it was an act of terror until... probably until we had the whole picture. I think... I am an optimist by nature and I believe that there is good in most people. Well, I believe there is good in all people. I just kept thinking, it’s not terrorism. It can’t be terrorism. It’s—Why? Why would anybody attack the U.S.? I mean, are they stupid, you know? Surely they didn’t attack the U.S.? In this sense of—it’s almost like when you’re a teenager and you think you’re invincible. I think the U.S. had this sense of invincibility. I bought into that. I had not—there had not been a real war in the U.S—that the U.S. was a part of in my lifetime. We dealt with things, with Saddam Hussein and things like that but there was never really an all-out war. Especially not one on U.S. soil. I think it was probably by the end of the day, when they were like... Ok, two planes into the World Trade Center, one plane into the Pentagon, and one plane that crashed before it could get to its destination and then I was like ok, you can’t refute this. This was obviously a terror attack.

00:07:50 **AR: What was your first feeling after getting the news, other than disbelief?**

AC: I was thankful that I was with my people. I was thankful that my family was together. I wasn’t terribly concerned. I would have liked for my brother to have been there but I wasn’t terribly concerned. I wasn’t in fear for him or where he—he was coming back to Rock Hill. So there wasn’t that but I was... I can remember wanting to reach out to the people who were important in my life. And just, just share that grief and that, that sadness together. So I know there were... I had several close friends at the time and I can remember later in the day, calling them and just talking for a few minutes. Making sure they are ok. Being sure to make sure that you tell people that you care about them. That was kind of my reaction.

00:08:58 **AR: Ok. Were you concerned for your safety or the safety of your family? Because after New York, Charlotte is the next largest banking city on the eastern seaboard.**

AC: It is. I do remember hearing that in the news and all the speculation about what are the—are there other targets? Are there other attacks coming and we just don’t know it? There was a sense of...fear for my country and fear for the people,

and people that I might know. I did not have a personal fear for my own life. No. I did not.

00:09:52 **AR: Ok. You didn't take any extreme actions to ensure your safety? No lockdowns or anything?**

AC: No. The only things I remember doing that day, again remember we were on the coast, I remember I assumed that the local newspaper there would run an evening edition. So I can remember going out to like the drug stores and places and trying to find a newspaper. Not only to have whatever the newest information was but because I knew this is going to be a day we're talking about forever. Everybody is going to remember where they were when this happened. I wanted to have—and I have that newspaper still so... The other thing I remember—I remember looking that whole rest of that week...back then the thing to do were the car flags. I can remember looking everywhere for an American car flag to put on my car and not being able to find one. Even that next Saturday when we were driving back to Rock Hill from the coast, stopping along the way and all the places that we thought might have one. Not being able to find—because everybody was buying them up because there was the surge of...of patriotism and strong feelings of protection for our country. I mean it was just very difficult to find those things.

00:11:30 **AR: Yeah. You did say this was the event that we'll remember where we were. This is our generations Kennedy moment. When you hear September 11th, 2001 what's the first most vivid memory that pops into your mind?**

AC: I can see the living room of that rental house where we were staying. I can see... I can just remember getting that call from my brother, going over and turning on the TV, and sitting down on the couch. We pretty much stayed glued there for most of that Tuesday. Then every morning after that—it kind of put a damper on things. You know, here I am I'm on vacation, it's my birthday, it's my 30th birthday. We were there to celebrate, and there was some guilt associated with that. Can...am I allowed to even enjoy this? When there's so much suffering and there's so much horrible stuff going on in the world right now? But I just—I very distinctly remember... I couldn't tell you anything else about that house. I don't even remember exactly where it was, but I remember that. The kitchen and the living room joined and I can remember standing in the kitchen when my brother called. Walking into the living room, and turning the TV on, and sitting down, and that's kind of where we were. That's where we spent the rest of the vacation.

00:13:03 **AR: Obviously you weren't here in Rock Hill, so what was the response of the city that you were in out on the coast? What was their response the day after the attacks?**

AC: I think it was very similar. There were people just in disbelief. We can't believe this has happened. How could this have happened? What did we miss? We had no idea what kind of changes would come from 9-11 of course, but we were already wondering... how could this have happened? What? Did we become complacent as a nation? What are we—obviously, if this can happen and we didn't know it was happening, we're missing something. So just disbelief, sadness, compassion...towards the people involved.

00:14:10 **AR: Later on that week when you got back to Rock Hill, what was changed in Rock Hill in the aftermath? Was there any difference that you noticed?**

AC: No I think the attitudes of people were the same. Very much disbelief, compassion towards those involved, and because by then we were getting more stories. We were getting recordings, and voice mails that people had left, and we were finding out about what happened on the plane that went down in Pennsylvania? Right, Pennsylvania. And what happened on that flight. These heroes were beginning to stand out so there was... The talk was still, just a week later we're still in total disbelief that this has happened. But I can remember, wanting to do something. What can we do? The church I was attending at the time was...they were planning. We have organizations within our church that did disaster relief and things like that. They were already doing drives and—what can we send to people? What do they need? And how are we going to get it up there? I can remember our church had a preschool in it and our preschool kids doing [unclear] American flags to send up and things like that. I can remember talking to my husband. What can we do? I didn't have a lot of money I could send so we donated to drives and what not. There was a need for blood. We gave blood. We gave blood several times. I think we gave blood two or three times before the end of that year just because we felt like that was all that we could do. But there was just this strong sense for the rest of that year... of patriotism. It was a different time than anything I had experienced.

00:16:25 **AR: Did you see any of the backlash toward any of the Muslim community? I know Rock Hill doesn't have a big Muslim community but we do have a few. That was one of the concerns, the backlash on anyone who was Muslim or of middle eastern decent.**

AC: At that point that's probably the first time that I took the time to educate myself about the different types of Muslims. I wanted to know how did these religious people come to *this* as a solution. How did they arrive at this decision? I can remember asking friends...I didn't know anything about Muslims at the time. Asking what is the—and learning some of the older faiths, Judaism, Islam, Christianity. They are not that different from each other and they all start in the same base. At the time, being a Christian I was like 'how did somebody who holds such similar beliefs to mine come to this?' Doing research and learning that there are different sects of Islam. There is a much more radical sect versus a very much more peaceful sect. So I don't remember there being a terrible out lash

toward Muslims in Rock Hill. I do remember people talking a lot about it. I can remember saying—having to say on several occasions ‘ok whoa, hold on. There’s two different types of Muslims, not every Muslim is *this*. Not every Muslim is bad. Not every person who wears a hijab needs to be put in jail.’ Learning that for myself. I definitely did not know that prior to 9-11.

00:18:42 **AR: I’m glad you took the time to educate yourself. Other than that, how did your experience during the attack affect you personally?**

AC: I’ll be honest, I don’t have any personal connection what-so-ever to 9-11. What I mean by that is I don’t know anybody who was on a plane. I don’t know anybody who was in New York at the time. I don’t have that kind of story or that kind of experience. My experience is just what I’ve shared with you. The watching it happen. The sadness. The horror at seeing... I’ve said it before it’s one of those images that my mind always goes back to. Those people jumping out of that building and I just can’t fathom that. I can’t wrap my head around that. So it’s difficult for me to...[sigh] it’s difficult for me to process that. Most of my thoughts, when I think of 9-11, I think about that particular moment of where I was. I think we all do that. Where was I when I heard the news? I think about that image of people jumping out of the towers. Then I think about how encouraging although sad it was to hear about the heroes on the flight that crashed in Pennsylvania. After that it just...I don’t have that personal connection so I don’t really...the biggest change for me was the education that I got when I started learning about Islam myself. Learning not every Muslim is a bad person. So that was a positive experience for me to learn those things. It makes me sad because I think as a nation... that sense—I don’t know—I think for some of us that sense of pride and that sense of patriotism and all...cost us to be more exclusive instead of inclusive. When I happen to be of the opinion that inclusivity is what’s going to benefit us in the long run. So that part of it still continues to make me sad but there’s not a lot that I alone and do about that so....

00:21:46 **AR: Well that’s all the questions that I have prepared. Do you have anything else that you haven’t shared that you would like to share?**

AC: I don’t think so. I think your questions pretty much covered it.

00:22:00 **AR: Well thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I hope you have a good rest of your day.**

AC: You too. Thanks Andrew.

00:22:11 **End of interview**