

GARRICK, Debbie  
INTERVIEWEE

Interviewer: Andrew Russell  
Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections  
Winthrop University

September 11<sup>th</sup> 20 year history

**Interview # 653**

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Abstract: In her interview with Andrew Russell, Debbie Garrick discusses her memories and thoughts of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Mrs. Garrick describes her experience during the events and the response of the Winthrop and Rock Hill communities.

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

<b>Time</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
00:00:01	<b>AR: Today is February 9. It is 11:30 am. This is an oral history with Debbie Garrick. This is Andrew Russell with the Louise Pettus Archives. Mrs. Debbie if you will go ahead and state your full name and where you were born and grew up please.</b>
	DG: My full name is Deborah Anne Garrick. I was born in Orangeburg, South Carolina and grew up in the Norway South Carolina area.
00:00:30	<b>AR: What brought you to Winthrop?</b>
	DG: I came here as a freshman in 1983 to go to school here.
00:00:47	<b>AR: Can you give a little bit of information about your connection to Winthrop during 9-11?</b>
	DG: Yes. I was working here in Student Affairs as a career counselor in the Career Services office which was at that time in the Psychs [Psychology] building across campus.
00:01:02	<b>AR: So how long had you worked for the University at that point?</b>

DG: I came to work here in 1996. I graduated here in 1987 with my undergrad. In 1989 with my masters and left to go work at Brevard College. Then came back and did some other things in Rock Hill and got the job in 1996 as Career Counselor at Winthrop. That's what I was doing at the time.

00:01:37 **AR: Let's go back to that morning, how did you initially hear about the attacks?**

DG: On Bob and Sheri in the Morning. I was listening to the radio program at my desk and they announced the first plane crashing into the Trade Center. At that time, we didn't know it was the first plane but I remember they were talking about it. Oh my gosh it was like a breaking news thing that this plane had crashed. They were watching it on TV in their studio. I didn't really think anything at first except that it was a plane accident. An airplane had lost power or something.

00:02:10 **AR: So you were in your office, was there anything special about what you were doing when you heard about it?**

DG: I was typing something on the computer. I had the radio on because I liked to listen to Bob and Sheri in the Morning when I was driving to work and then when I got to work. Their show lasts normally until like 10 am in the morning. They're still on the air obviously and Sheri is an alum; so [unclear] to get her perspective by the way. She's not an undergrad alum but she's a graduate alum and still was broadcasting that day. I was sitting there listening to them and they're a comedy early morning show. It was—I remember her going 'oh my god there's a plane crashing and we just saw this breaking news story. This is so terrible.' So...

00:03:01 **AR: What was the first feeling you remember after hearing the news?**

DG: Well, when the first plane hit, again I just thought it was a tragic accident but then...I can't remember what exactly was second. Whether or not I heard that there was a plane at the Pentagon second or whether or not I heard that the second plane had hit the towers. I have to go back in my mind, maybe in my journals to find out, but I do remember that whenever whichever thing I heard was second, I knew that this was not just an accident.

00:03:38 **AR: That obviously leads into the next one about how you found out that they were terrorist attacks. How *did* you find out? You obviously knew something was wrong.**

DG: Right. Well, I think when the Pentagon—I think when there was a plane at the Pentagon I knew then that something was going on. What I did—as soon as I heard there was a second plane involved anywhere I called Barbara Davis who was the Administrative Assistant for Frank Ardaiole, who was the Vice President for Student Life. I called her and I said, 'You need to have Frank go to the lobby of Dinkins right now and turn on the television. Something horrible is happening.'

Frank was my Vice President for the area. It was funny because I remember thinking I need to call him. I need to let him know. Then when I heard the next thing going on I literally got up out of my desk and ran to Dinkins to watch part of it on the television there. But then I remembered thinking—I don't know why I thought I needed to tell everybody that something—I had heard this. I guess I thought I was the first to listen to the radio or television because most people were in class and things like that. I thought it kind of unusual because most people aren't sitting and watching TV. Because it was early in the morning for students to be up, I didn't think people were gathered around the TV in Dinkins second floor lobby like they normally are in the afternoon watching soap operas back in that day. In the morning time the TV wasn't even on. I remember that Barbara had gone and cut it on. Then I ran to Visual and Performing Arts to the Dean's office because I knew he had a television. I was teaching adjunct classes also in CVPA [College of Visual and Performing Arts] at the time for Career Services. I taught three or four classes. Those were my other set of colleagues so I ran over there and sat in the Dean's office for a while and watched the TV. But then—that was all in a short span of time because I ran back to my office and...again I was in a frenzy because I thought 'oh my lord, we're under attack.' My colleague Laura Rankin Foster, her office—she had a small black and white television. She and Tom Injaychock who was the Director of Career Services at the time. We sat there and watched as the second plane—I mean as the towers fell. We watched both the towers falling on this tiny little black and white television. I just remember that even on that small screen what was happening was so big.

00:06:10

**AR: How did you feel about your safety? Can you describe how you felt?**

DG: I immediately thought that—literally I thought 'oh my gosh'. By this time, we knew there were four planes. Two had hit the Trade Center, one at the Pentagon, and one had been diverted or was going down in Pennsylvania. I remember thinking 'oh god they were headed for the white house probably, or the Capitol.' The fact that they hit the World Trade Center—I have a lot of friends who work for Bank of America in Charlotte and there were a lot of alums who work there. Again, I'm an alum so I had a lot of friends who were working there. I had one friend in particular who was traveling in the air a lot. I used to nanny for her children. So my first thought was 'where is she?' She was at the World Trade Center a lot. As far as my family, I called my mother. I remember she was very very panicked. My parents...my dad worked for the Post Office at the time. My mom was working for a small company, like a bookkeeping position. I don't remember thinking that they were not safe. I just remember I wanted to talk to everybody in my family because I thought... So I called my sisters. I remember thinking we were all going to die. As far as safety, I'm thinking in a minute there's going to be planes everywhere and bombs are dropping. It's going to be like World War II. There's not going to be air raids because nobody's got time. What are they going to hit next. I really did think Charlotte, because they were beginning to evacuate the banks. Because the thought was the World Trade Center had been targeted, again at the time, because the banking industry was

heavy there and a lot of financial—that was what they were trying to get to. Charlotte was like a mini New York as far as the bank so I remember thinking as Charlotte began to be evacuated that we were just all going to die. That was going to be the day.

00:08:06 **AR: Did you take any steps to ensure safety for you or your family?**

DG: I knew that my parents...they had a landline and back then cell phones were flip phones or whatever. I remember calling my parents and saying if anything happens since, again because Charlotte I felt like might be a target, I said 'don't try to come here if you don't hear from me. I'll come to you.' Telling my sisters that if something happens and the world starts to blow up we're going to mom and dad's because they live out in the middle of nowhere and they won't be a target. There's nothing in that area that anybody is going to target. [laughs] Middle of the country. I just feel very apocalyptic. Like that was what was going on. No, I mean I'm not married and don't have kids and did not at the time either so I didn't feel—I felt more about my students and what was going on on campus.

00:09:12 **AR: What's your most vivid memory? Obviously that day lives for a lot of us because like Dan Rather said 'This is a day you will remember.' What's the most vivid memory that comes to mind when you hear 9-11?**

DG: Two things: one was that I was walking across campus later that afternoon...I remember first of all that morning that it was so beautiful. It was the most sunny, clear, September day. I remember later that afternoon thinking I haven't seen a plane. Normally there was always planes because we're in the pattern for Charlotte-Douglas [airport] and I remember how *quiet* campus seemed that afternoon. It seemed like, because it was no air traffic, it just seemed *still* once the initial news was out. My second vivid memory was watching those towers fall on that tiny little TV like I said and it feeling like it was so huge even on a small black and white television.

00:10:23 **AR: What did Winthrop do the day of the attacks? Was there any lockdown? What happened here?**

DG: No and that was kind of controversial. Dr. DiGiorgio made—he was the President and he made the decision that everything was going to go on *exactly* as it had been. People were up in arms. We should cancel classes. We should...you know. It's funny because he reacted to that day very much like he reacted to Hurricane Hugo, which was we're very self-contained. We're almost like our own little mini city and it's safer for students to stay here and be here than it is for them to go away. But people didn't like the fact he wasn't cancelling classes. That he wasn't...I mean. I think we lowered the flag a day later or something like that, or maybe even later that day. I know in the next couple days. There were—the response of the community was...this is really kind of getting into the next question. We had, and I wrote this in my journal I'll provide this for you, I had—

we wore black ribbons. We went—that was the big thing. Like the next day everybody in Dinkins had a table. Every club and organization, they had a table and were giving out black ribbons for the people that were lost. We thought at the time, and I was looking at this in my journal too. We were being told that maybe 20,000 people died. That's what we thought because they had not accounted for everybody. We were thinking 'oh my gosh.' We did candle light vigils all over the place. We did—I signed up to give blood. We did...there were water drives to send to the first responders that Winthrop did. There were trucks going out and stuff. So as far as the community response—oh and the big thing was you could not find... If you didn't get within 24 hours an American flag lapel pin, if you didn't order that from somewhere or pick it up, you couldn't find them. You couldn't find—that's the other thing I remember, flags everywhere. Flags up and down Oakland Avenue. Flags on businesses. Flags in the windows of students rooms. Window clings. Everybody had a flag on their car. That was the whole community as well as the Winthrop community. I do remember the Winthrop community, aside from the vigils and stuff, I remember the angst of it being business as usual. We didn't stop classes. We didn't stop whatever campus performances we had. We did have the flag lowered at half-mast it seemed like forever. We had a lot of prayer ceremonies, vigils, and things like that.

00:12:58

**AR: Did anything at Winthrop change? The way business was conducted after the attacks? After we knew what was going on?**

DG: Really, I don't think anything changed so much as how Winthrop handled things in that perspective. [background talking] I do recall we changed more after the Virginia Tech shooting. Was when we started putting in the yellow boxes on campus, more of the safety boxes inside, the radar, the alert-us system and stuff like that. That was more of a response to Virginia Tech. As far as...No, I just remember a lot of criticism about why didn't we stop campus classes. In hindsight, I think it was the better thing that we did not and try to provide some normalcy. I think maybe the other thing that did change was there was an effort, I do remember, that the Student Affairs folks were trying to really make sure that our Muslim students and our Middle Eastern students were not targeted. I don't remember people doing anything but I do remember staff over there checking to make sure that those folks were taken care of and not feeling like anybody was lashing out. Like I said, I don't remember anybody—I feel like—I remember the campus being very united during that time. I don't remember anything untoward happening toward students. I don't believe anything changed other than for several weeks we felt like we were much more united just like the whole country did.

I would say that maybe the thing I noticed about the vigils and things were *everybody* came. Everybody wanted to do something. Everybody wanted to run to New York and we couldn't. I think everybody had this sense of we need to do something. So there were a lot of things. Like I said, blood drives, water drives, things like that. The vigils. It was almost like every club and organization on

campus wanted to do something. Even in the years after—the year after they were chalking—or years after they would chalk on Scholar’s Walk a little flag or something for everyone that passed away. I think [unclear] you guys probably have them in the archives too. There was big chalk drawings of the Twin Towers. The other thing too, was we had veterans on campus. We had students who were being called up after this because of they were people that were in the National Guard and things like that. I do remember worrying about those students and thinking ‘oh boy’. I think our Veterans groups got stronger after that as far as recognizing those groups already existed on campus and stuff.

00:15:51 **AR: It’s interesting you mentioned that the Veterans got called up because personally, I know this is supposed to be an interview about you. My experience with 9-11 was that I was in day 6 of basic training. The platoon Commander and the First Sargent came in, turned on the TVs and we thought it was a joke. We had all heard how they haze you in the military. So we thought it was a joke and then they let us call our families on a Tuesday which was...unreal. That’s how we found out.**

00:16:29 **So the final question I have for you is: How did your experience during the attack effect you personally overall? Maybe change your outlook on things?**

DG: I did write a lot of this in the journal that I’ll provide to you. The first entry I wrote after the attacks was ‘Everything changed yesterday.’ Basically nothing remains the same. I remember thinking we would *never* get over this. Much the way I feel about the pandemic right now. It’s like ‘oh my gosh the world just changed.’ I think initially I felt overall more patriotic. Overall, I felt more that I didn’t want to take things for granted. Life’s too short to wear uncomfortable shoes, things like that. [laughs] I will say that lasted for a long time because I did know people who had been affected. I—the lady I was talking about at Bank of America actually ended up being on a plane that day... but had not—she wasn’t thankfully hurt or at the World Trade Center but had been like the day before. Friends that I had in the service. I kept thinking everybody was going to get drafted immediately. Students of mine. Overall, it made me pause and I would say that for me, *that* reaction response lasted a lot longer than I’ve even had as a reaction to the Covid thing. I do remember for years we really were very vigilant in... We always gathered and played Taps out front, had the flag at half-mast, and had a 9-11 ceremony out in front of campus. When I left here in 2014 to go work for the City of Rock Hill we still were doing that at City of Rock Hill. Having a September 11 memorial. So I felt like that significant event was seared in my soul. I’ll be honest in the last few years I’ve felt not as patriotic. I’ve felt—I wanted to be patriotic but I felt our country had been so divided. Of course there’s been a lot of inferences to 9-11 brought us together why did the pandemic tear us a part? Or the race relations? Or the current political climate—or the past political climate. I think it—part of it too was Facebook was kind of new back then. That wasn’t really where we were seeing a lot of coverage at all. I remember the day that I found out that Facebook existed, also on campus. [laughs] The Dean of

Students saying ‘have you heard of the Facebook?’ I was like, ‘what?’ She was like ‘these ivy league students—it’s going to be a bad thing. It’s going to be a bad thing.’ I think that was the other thing too. We weren’t getting our news—we were still reliant on television anchors, radio announcers, the newspaper. We were talking about things in our small groups of people we do life with and reacting to this. Of course we were mesmerized by CNN’s coverage of the Trade Centers. The whole 9-11 attack. We couldn’t turn it off but that really in my opinion was the pivotal moment when we decided that we must have news at our fingertips all the time. We must know everything that’s going on all the time because somebody might try to hurt us. It was the beginning in my experience of the paranoia that we now experience as a society. We think we need to have all the information all the time and that’s actually kind of killed our civil dialogue unfortunately. So 9-11 was great till you [unclear] sort of created a platform that has torn us apart with media I think.

00:20:43

**AR: I can understand that. So that’s all the questions that I have. Is there anything else that you want to share? Obviously we’re going to get your journals in the coming weeks. Anything else you would like to share?**

DG: Yes. It’s just a couple entries. No. I think—I just think the campus was shocked and shook just like everybody else. I do know that a lot of professors, and I’m sure you heard this from [John] Holder and others, that they pivoted in political science and history, those courses particularly, to sort of figure out—I think there were a lot of students that had no idea what a terrorist was. I do remember that my mentor, the former Dean of Students here Kristina Grabielle [spelling?] who was Cuban. I remember talking to her on the phone. I don’t think she was the Dean of Students at the time but I can’t remember when she left Winthrop. I remember talking to her on the phone and her saying this was inevitable to happen in the United States. It happens in all other countries. There is domestic terrorism and foreign terrorism. It was just a matter of time until somebody attacked us. We’re not really invincible. I guess I remember thinking up until that time that we were.

00:22:05

**AR: That’s a sentiment that a lot of us had, myself included. Thank you for your time.**

00:22:13

**End of Interview.**