

# Felix Laughlin



Felix Laughlin's wife, Betty Gayle, gave him his first bonsai in 1972 when they lived in New York City. She thought he needed a counter-balance to his work as a corporate tax lawyer. While there, he took bonsai lessons from the late Frank Okamura at the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens.

Most of Felix's legal career was spent in Washington, DC, where he became familiar with the bonsai collection at the U.S. National Arboretum, initiated by Japan's 1976 Bicentennial Gift of 53 masterpiece bonsai. In 1982, Felix helped form the National Bonsai Foundation, Inc. ("NBF") as a section 501(c)(3) organization to support the Arboretum and help create what is now the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Felix enjoyed collecting bonsai from the wild, mainly in the Rocky Mountains with Dan Robinson and Larry Jackel. Some of his favorite bonsai are the venerable ponderosa pines he brought home from those trips.

Felix studied the art of bonsai under various teachers, including the late Frank Okamura, the late John Naka, Dan Robinson and Boon Manakitivipart. In the process, he watched his bonsai collection grow out of control. After Daniel Coffey and his Japanese teacher, Junichiro Tanaka, visited Felix's bonsai garden a few years ago, Mr. Tanaka said to Daniel: "That guy needs help." Felix is thankful that Daniel is now providing it.

Felix currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Blue Ridge Bonsai Society and on the Society Board of Directors of the North Carolina Arboretum. Felix was President of NBF from 1996 to 2018, and Co-President with Jack Sustic from 2018 to 2020 (<http://www.bonsai-nbf.org/>). From 2001 to 2005, Felix served as Chairman of the World Bonsai Friendship Federation ("WBFF"), a world-wide section 501(c)(3) organization founded in Japan which promotes peace and goodwill around the world through the art of bonsai and holds World Bonsai Conventions every four years in different parts of the world, the 10th one scheduled in Kuala Lumpur in 2026 (<http://www.wbffbonsai.com/>). He currently serves as Legal Consultant to WBFF.