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Vincent diPietro  
February 1, 2002

Interview conducted by Mark Schoepfle  
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**September 11, 2001**  
**Oral History Documentation Project**  
**Northeast Region, National Park Service**

INTERVIEWEE: Vincent diPietro  
Park Ranger and Education Specialist  
Statue of Liberty National Monument  
(Interview No. 32)

INTERVIEWED BY: Mark Schoepfle, Ph.D.  
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Washington, D.C.

INTERVIEW DATE: February 1, 2002

PLACE: Ellis Island  
Statue of Liberty National Monument

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## START OF TAPE

Mark Schoepfle: Vincent, my first question is from the moment you were aware that something had happened, what went on?

Vincent diPietro: I was actually in the process, or I had just completed, putting together some children's coat racks for our education room. And in walking down our hallway in the kitchen and laundry building, headed towards our office, there's an alleyway. And the doors were open because it was such a nice day. And coincidentally, that's when I heard an explosion, but not thinking that anything had exploded, thinking more that a large weight had been dropped and then you hear the distant wave of that sound.

Vincent diPietro: We went outside anyway and looked in the courtyard, and lo and behold the smoke was rising from the first tower. And in seeing that, it wasn't too long after that, that other people started coming out and looking towards the north side of the island in view of the skyline, and hearing now report bulletins coming in from radios that a plane had struck the World Trade Center. And a number of us, two or three in the beginning, were outside and we were looking at it. And you could see the flames come out the window and heavy, thick, black smoke rising and flowing towards the east.

Vincent diPietro: And it was — there was an eerie quiet because we didn't know the extent of what had happened. The second strike hadn't occurred yet. And you know, it's just, I guess, the contrast of that beautiful blue, deep blue sky and this heavy, thick, black, acrid smoke coming out of a building that we look at every day — was just something that was a little surprising. But again, we didn't — we weren't even thinking of the extent of what this was all going to result in.

Vincent diPietro: So, we looked at it and we felt a little helpless being on the island. And the eerie thing about it was that before the second plane hit tower two, it seemed like time was going very, very slow. There was nothing going on that we could hear or see, unlike the '93 bombing. When that occurred, we heard the wave and then you could hear all the sirens from New York on the island. And this time we didn't hear that. And we were waiting as if something should happen. In other words, where — like a sprinkler system to kick in or the smoke to start to lessen or turn lighter as if it's being fought and battled. And none of that was happening. And there weren't any planes in the sky or news helicopters yet in the sky. And for that 15, 20 minutes, until the second explosion, it was as if we — nothing was going on from our standpoint because we were viewing it from a distance, not knowing in reality what Lower Manhattan was facing in that time.

Mark Schoepfle: Then what?

Vincent diPietro: Well, then from a distance since it was so quiet, the single plane that was flying in the sky, relatively very low altitude — I even had mentioned to a fellow co-worker who was taking pictures of the explosion in that — oh, here we go. Help's on the way. And some of us had thought that it may have been a firefighter tanker used to fight forest fires that may have been sent out to put out the — help put out the fire at the building. And we watched it go over the statue. And it flew right over Ellis Island.

Vincent diPietro: And as low as it was, I looked up and noticed it had the monogram of an airline, of a commercial airline, of United. And knowing that this doesn't seem right, but again not ever thinking that that plane was going to slam into the second building. And we just watched it sail in on an angle as if it wanted to cut the building in half. And then it just disappeared. The explosion occurred and all the flames that happened after that. And it is as if that building just swallowed up that airplane.

Vincent diPietro: It seemed from our angle that it did go in from one side and come out the other — or whether that was the result of the actual detonation of all the fuel. But we all stood there and just couldn't believe it. It was as if someone had just, you know, hit you over the head with a 2 by 4 and you're just shaking your head and thinking what just happened? Did we all see the same thing?

Vincent diPietro: You know, and everyone was saying whatever expletive was on their mind at the time. And then realizing that this was a much — an event of much higher magnitude in that, you know, it was no longer an accident but something deliberate. And I think after the second plane hit, we realized something of a much larger scale is going on and could we be a part of this. Not in terms of rescue at that point — we didn't think about that initially — but are there other things that are about to unfold that will change my life somehow?

Mark Schoepfle: Part of a much larger event?

Vincent diPietro: Right. Since we — most people who work here — and I've been here over ten years, you know — we know the seriousness of the site and how much political magnification or magnitude it has in the world scheme of things, and on a national note as well. So, we always knew in the back of our mind that the statue could always be a potential target, but we were never thinking, you know, was this the day it was going to become reality?

Mark Schoepfle: So, what went on from there?

Vincent diPietro: Well, after the second plane hit, more people — more co-workers were out at the fuel dock, which on Ellis Island probably gives the best vantage point. And at this time, it should've been the time where our park was just about getting ready to open, and yet we had no visitors and I guess boats were turned away and ships sailed back to wherever they were coming from.

Vincent diPietro: And then there were reports that we heard secondhand that there are other things definitely going on, possibly more planes that were hijacked, that their ultimate targets were not readily known. And that's when we knew — where we started getting more directions as to what should be the next steps. And that was, you know, let's be prepared and start to collect our resources and — one, in case we're called to deal with the medical aspect or the ramifications of the actual explosions, and two, let's be prepared for anything else that might come about. And that's when other divisions did what they — park police and law enforcement took out the heavy artillery and a game plan was formed because this was something that caught everybody off guard.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. A couple of questions first. You mentioned that you had gotten some information on the radio. Was this a Park Service radio or just the media?

Vincent diPietro: We had heard from other people who were then in offices, secretaries, administrative assistants, who then had started to hear the accounts and that there was more information being given to the public, whether true or not no one really knew. We heard at one instance that there were — could have been as many as 8 to 10 planes that were hijacked at the same time. Targets definitely in Washington. We hadn't heard the Pentagon struck or the other one. I think those came later. But it was just a haphazard collection of information that really started to raise the level of caution on everybody's part that, you know, we started getting everyone out of the buildings. We evacuated the main building and all the offices and started to wait to evacuate anybody who was not considered essential.

Mark Schoepfle: So, you mentioned a game plan?

Vincent diPietro: Yes.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. What did that —

- Vincent diPietro: Well, one was the accountability of all the staff to make sure that no one would remain in the building. Get them outside on the lawn in the front of the building. Start to call our Marine vessels to get people off the island and back to a safe point, whether they could get back to Battery Park was unknown. But the idea of getting out of a building was paramount.
- Vincent diPietro: And for myself, being a newly trained EMT, this was a wakeup call because it's not a way you want to start that sort of career with that magnitude of, you know, oh my God, what could we expect. And we started amassing all our medical gear and bringing everything out onto the front lawn to start a triage center on the island.
- Mark Schoepfle: So, the first thing was to get the staff and everybody out of the buildings?
- Vincent diPietro: Correct.
- Mark Schoepfle: Get the people over to the — I think this was actually by the flagpole?
- Vincent diPietro: Right.
- Mark Schoepfle: Initially?
- Vincent diPietro: Uh-huh.
- Mark Schoepfle: And then call the vessels in to make plans to get all nonessential staff off the island?
- Vincent diPietro: Correct.
- Mark Schoepfle: And then start the triage?
- Vincent diPietro: When that would occur, we were then preparing to — it took some time to get the word out to the local authorities in New York that we would actually be a repository for victims and/or those who just need to be rescued off of the southern tip of Manhattan, since there were so — thousands of people there in that downtown area. You know, you're on the southern tip of New York. Where do you go if the Staten Island Ferry is off and the subway systems don't run? You know, there has to be some way of mass exodus of getting people away to a safe haven. And once they found out that we would become a repository for all those people, then we were just in waiting, not knowing what to expect and the conditions of those folks being brought over.
- Mark Schoepfle: Was there some prearranged idea that you all would be a repository for these folks or for anything like this happening in a disaster? Had there been some kind of disaster plan that this was all part of?

- Vincent diPietro: Not that I'm aware of. I think we would always figure out that being on an island that we would be the area that would need to have people evacuated off the island because we're isolated, and we're surrounded by water. And here it was the other way, turned around, where those — even though Manhattan is an island, we consider it the mainland. You're on solid ground. You're not on this little small multi-acre island, and here we are taking people off of this larger area and bringing them onto, you know, Ellis Island. And it's just very — it seemed very, very strange, although at the time it made perfect sense to do so.
- Vincent diPietro: Jersey City Medical Department came over and the medical director for the center then basically set up — acknowledged that a triage should be set up here on the island. And then all the medical reinforcements started coming. We had about 30 to 40 ambulances parked on the island and a long line of ambulances out through Liberty State Park just waiting — waiting their turn to do whatever they'd have to do.
- Vincent diPietro: We had a number of other things occur within a relatively short amount of time. Again, we don't know if — we didn't know if that event was finally over or there was more still yet to come. I mean, it was — the few minutes that had passed so much had happened. And then we started hearing more air traffic, seeing more air traffic, jets, military jets flying in the air. And not knowing, because these jets are fairly loud, not knowing — you know, every time you heard something in the air you just looked up and wondered if that was coming for you.
- Vincent diPietro: And then there were two other events here at Ellis Island, which occurred at the same time, which kind of fit together. They weren't related, but because of the timeliness of what had occurred it had seemed like this was a part of a bigger thing and we had — we might have been affected by it.
- Vincent diPietro: We had a speedboat with three individuals, and this speedboat was going pretty fast headed right for the island. And we were wondering if that was going to be like a suicide bomber because they didn't stop and they didn't heed the warnings of park police initially or they went right through our sign, which says no docking permitted. And they were just coming right at an angle, right for the seawall in front where all our staff was waiting to board our boat to evacuate the island. And everybody began to run and scream and head towards the other end of the island.
- Vincent diPietro: There were also reports of a boat passing underneath our bridge, which connects the island to Jersey City. And they had stopped underneath the pylons of the bridge, which is very unusual. And that had to be investigated because we didn't know if anyone had placed any device or anything there to detonate the bridge and really keep us isolated.

Vincent diPietro: So, there were a lot of things going on. Although people tried to keep order, many, many of the staff people were very upset and there was a — to say that some people were hysterical would be mild.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. And this was mainly park staff?

Vincent diPietro: Correct.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Just for me to understand things right, at this point you were not bringing in people from outside?

Vincent diPietro: Not yet.

Mark Schoepfle: This was mostly just evacuating park staff?

Vincent diPietro: Correct.

Mark Schoepfle: And this was just about shortly after the second building had been hit?

Vincent diPietro: That's right.

Mark Schoepfle: All right. So, you were aware that as you were — okay, you're mentioning here that as an EMT you knew that you were going to play — this was going to be your time to play a part.

Vincent diPietro: Right.

Mark Schoepfle: And you were definitely aware at this point, after the buildings were hit, that you all were going to play a part. You had contacted the Jersey emergency management people. You mentioned some organizations, but I'm not sure which ones they were.

Vincent diPietro: Yeah, Jersey City Medical Center would've been —

Mark Schoepfle: The hospital?

Vincent diPietro: — the medical authority here for Ellis, so the chief basically became the incident command officer here on the island for medical services that would be provided.

Mark Schoepfle: You contacted them, the Park Service.

Vincent diPietro: The dispatch, Park Service did. U.S. Park Police did in fact contact them.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay, and offered services?

Vincent diPietro: And everyone, I mean every volunteer organization that was available and many city agencies as well started to collect their resources and bring them to the island for this presumably mass wave of people that were expected to be brought here, because no one knew the extent of the damage and the loss of life over in — at the trade center.



- Vincent diPietro: We thought there'd be, you know, so many more survivors that were brought here. And as those first boats started to arrive, New York City Police boats, fireboats, the Army Corps of Engineers, and other vessels, they were bringing rescuers, firemen, policemen. And those were basically the people who were injured to an extreme. Although everybody — I mean, the first images of what those people looked like were nothing like what one would've seen on TV later on in the days that followed that incident.
- Mark Schoepfle: How so?
- Vincent diPietro: They literally — many people looked like they were in shock. People arriving on the island, many of them in business attire, both men, women, children, people with their pets. You could see that all of them were displaced in a very, very quick amount of time. No one had time to think. They just had to leave and escape. And they looked like living ghosts. They were completely covered in debris, dust. People were injured. Some of them didn't even know that they were injured. Some of them didn't care that they were injured. They just wanted to leave. And I guess not having seen what they were seeing or they had seen while they were trying to leave, we were then seeing the real magnitude of what was going on in the city and that this was only a brief taste of the horror that everyone was going through in downtown New York.
- Mark Schoepfle: So, it brought the magnitude home to you all?
- Vincent diPietro: Absolutely.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. So, at this point, things have been set up and you began receiving some of the rescuers, mostly people who were injured at this point, right? Or just a combination?
- Vincent diPietro: There were several hundred people who were placed on boats who were not injured but covered in debris. Some of them were decontaminated with hoses to just allow them to be able to breathe better and see better. Many people couldn't open their eyes or had trouble seeing, a lot of them with respiratory symptoms.
- Vincent diPietro: And then it was an issue of accounting for them. I mean, it was, during the very early phases of this, knowing we were going to collect these survivors and victims, that there would be an area where their names and their personal information would be kept just in case, just in case something happened to them, just in case they needed to — relatives inquired about them.

- Vincent diPietro: And I think that was also somewhat eerie is that now you're going to be a name on a list and no one knows what may happen to you, because in the event of having to notify your loved ones, we would have this sacred list and be able to do that.
- Mark Schoepfle: Start bringing some order into chaos.
- Vincent diPietro: Yes.
- Mark Schoepfle: Well just to make sure I have this straight, these — some people just covered with ash —
- Vincent diPietro: Almost everyone.
- Mark Schoepfle: — in shock, displaced very rapidly, you were saying. You had actually injured people, firemen and policemen already coming in.
- Vincent diPietro: Yes.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. And you had then perfectly healthy specialists and rescue workers coming in, waiting to take action on the others who were coming in—
- Vincent diPietro: Right.
- Mark Schoepfle: —expected to come in, because you expected a lot of casualties as a result of this, am I right on that?
- Vincent diPietro: Yes, yes.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. So, at this point then, seeing some of the people coming in in total shock and this sort of thing, it brought it home to you that this was a catastrophe. Am I right?
- Vincent diPietro: Absolutely. Living in New Jersey and having — coming from New York, all of my family was in the city. We had lost phone service on the island, which is never comforting. Since I've been here, we've lost electric, phone service, and radio service two or three times and that really leaves you powerless with no ability to communicate with the outside world. So, while many of us were waiting for more to happen or for more people to be brought over and getting more equipment, we went into the building very sporadically. In other words, just in case something happened we wouldn't want to all be caught in the building and then many of us being harmed or injured. So, one designated person would go in and get some more oxygen tanks or get some more wheelchairs or stretchers or bandages or whatnot.

- Vincent diPietro: Every time someone, or every time I went in the building, I would try to see if the phones were working. And most of the time the signals were not functioning. Everything had been tied up in Lower Manhattan, and cell phones didn't work. I managed to get an outside line, and I called a relative who lived on Long Island. I picked up the phone. I didn't know if the circuit would be cut, and I just wanted to get the information out to them regardless of whether they were going to answer me or not.
- Vincent diPietro: I said just listen to what I have to say, and I'm here right now. I'm okay. Nothing has happened on the island, but we watched this happen, because I don't know if you're listening to the news, and informed them as to what is going on. And if they could get word to my parents that their son was okay, not knowing that my family was also in the area of the World Trade Center.
- Vincent diPietro: My mother, who works for the New York City Board of Education, was going to Lower Manhattan to find out about what it would take to put in for her retirement. So, she went to the retirement office, which is located right near the World Trade Center. And they were in the building when the first plane hit. They ran out of the building and were covered in the soot like everyone else. And I didn't find that out until the end of the day, because every time I had an open circuit here, and I kept on calling home knowing that my father is retired, I expected someone. Someone is always there, and no one answered the phone all day long, and not knowing that they were scheduled to go to a meeting in Lower Manhattan near the Trade Center.
- Vincent diPietro: I said, "of all days, this is the one day you had to go into New York City." I think the only other time that they would ever expect to go into New York would be during the holidays to see the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree. Other than that, they really don't partake in going into Manhattan, but that day they were there. And then I found out that they were trapped in the subway and they walked from Lower Manhattan to the 59th Street Bridge, which is a good half of the length of Manhattan Island, for a 70-year-old man and whatnot to do that. So, they went through their own living hell.
- Vincent diPietro: And I had no idea that that was going on, and I'm glad I didn't because it might have impacted how I felt, because I had — I wasn't really thinking of leaving the island. I wanted to do my part, and whatever was going to happen was going to happen. I think if I would have known that my family, that my parents were in that mess as well that I was experiencing on the receiving end, I might have maybe not wanted to stay.

- Mark Schoepfle: Understandable. Okay. So occasionally people were going back into the buildings to get supplies, make phone calls. Was there any point at which — other people had mentioned that throughout the day they would be making phone calls for some of these people who were coming in, but that must have gone on much later.
- Vincent diPietro: Yeah. Those who were frontline medical people, trained to help the victims, the patients who were coming in, we really didn't have that latitude. We tried to get basic necessities for these folks. And everyone really chipped in from our concessionaires to administrative staff, all the water in the building, bottled water was brought out for these folks. Because when you saw the condition of how these people were, it was just — you know, you knew they had been through hell already. And just to try to make them comfortable, because many of them were in shock, many of them were separated from other people that they were with, not knowing about other people who were left behind.
- Vincent diPietro: When you see people in professional business attire walking on the ground without shoes and their clothing is torn, you know, it's just as if what the hell is going on here. This is civilization. This is not a war zone. We are in the greatest city in the world, a metropolis. And yet, why does that person look like that? And that image just never leaves my mind. And the noise of planes do not leave my mind anymore either. That's a pretty constant and sobering noise.
- Mark Schoepfle: I want to get back to that later on if I could.
- Vincent diPietro: Sure.
- Mark Schoepfle: Before I do, what then happened? You were setting up this triage center, looking after these different groups of injured and just in shock people. What was going on and what happened then?
- Vincent diPietro: Well, after a relatively short period of time, the boats arriving with victims and just people being rescued stopped. And that kind of quiet just set in.
- Mark Schoepfle: When did this happen?
- Vincent diPietro: Well, obviously after the second plane hit and I believe after the first building had collapsed.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Go ahead.
- Vincent diPietro: And that was also — we also then had to deal with many of the staff members who were still on the island and who were amassed by the flagpole. I think unfortunately, knowing what we know now, a different location might have been the best thing because everybody witnessed it.

- Vincent diPietro: They were in a position to just simply look and watch the smoke, which continued forever. And then the structure — well, the first structure just disappeared, and it was no longer there. And that brought about a whole other set of feelings from people in being hysterical and emotional and whatnot just to see that building come down in such a short period of time.
- Vincent diPietro: That you wonder if now, you know, this is getting to us. This is now not over. I mean, when we get a medical call here, we handle it, transport. I mean, the objective is speed of service and delivery of care. And here we are all having all these resources here literally, you know, more than a hundred medically trained people here on the island, surgeons in hospital garb, and paramedics and whatnot, just waiting for something to happen. Waiting for people to be brought over so they can be cared for. And there was again this sense of helplessness because nobody was being brought over. And that was another somewhat disturbing reality of the seriousness of what was going on.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. You had all the systems set up and nobody came.
- Vincent diPietro: After that initial wave, the harbor had also been shut. So, for security reasons I don't know if that led to the difficulty of people being brought out by boat. Again, it's easy to second-guess now, but we didn't know what was going on in Manhattan being separated from Manhattan. But that lack of people being brought over, you know, you wonder is there anybody left and just the extent of what was going on there.
- Mark Schoepfle: Well, I know a number of people had supposed that this signaled — or at least they concluded later that it's just because there just weren't very many injured people.
- Vincent diPietro: Correct.
- Mark Schoepfle: They were either out of there or they were dead.
- Vincent diPietro: Right.
- Mark Schoepfle: But it may have — some of this factor may have also partly been that boat traffic was kind of shut down a little bit. Okay.
- Vincent diPietro: Other resources began to show up on the island. And seeing how things are arranged — I mean, you often wonder, it's like when you're a young person in your family and parents are relatively young, siblings are young, and you don't have a great extended family, most people don't experience the death of a close family member until they get older in years.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

- Vincent diPietro: And when that happens, and when it happens for the very first time, you see what automatically takes place because of the death of a relative, such as funeral arrangements, going to a hospital to identify someone, or maybe going through the pain of having to identify someone. And when other resources began to arrive on the island through whatever calls either the Park Service had made or the state police or medical services, and we hear that truckloads of biohazard suits are coming over and refrigerated trucks with body bags being leased and brought over to the island and that the place is now shifting for the possibility of it being set up as a morgue instead of a triage center, was very, very depressing to hear that and to think that, you know, what's the next phase of it going to be.
- Vincent diPietro: I guess the reality of someone being injured or needing care has never bothered me. Seeing either myself bleed or another person bleed doesn't have the effect on me as it would maybe some other people. But now knowing that there is this mass — possibility of this mass introduction of now people who are not living or body parts or other things, and excuse me for the graphic description of that —
- Mark Schoepfle: That's fine.
- Vincent diPietro: — but that was something I had never thought of because you always think that you're able to help someone. If you're trained and the equipment's there and the system's in place that at least you have the ability to help. And when there was more discussion and we heard more of that sort of discussion, it took some of that hope away and that was disheartening.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. I can see where it would. And that's an important bit of thought, and I would imagine it would go through a lot of people trained as you are, you know, toward saving lives.
- Mark Schoepfle: What then happened? You began — the boats kept — there are fewer boats coming in. It was clear that your role was changing from being a treatment center to possibly a morgue. What then happened?
- Vincent diPietro: For a good portion of the midday and early afternoon, not much. Many people were in waiting. I guess we started, to ourselves, become more knowledgeable of the event that had occurred, because we weren't all listening to the news and we didn't have TVs or radios out in the field where we were. And the picture — although still unclear, the information started getting to us as to what had happened and what was going on and the magnitude of the condition of the trade center and the Pentagon and the fourth plane in Pennsylvania and whatnot. That it just wasn't us. That it was other areas. So, there was a lot of people were still cautious.

Vincent diPietro: One thing that also — you'd let certain things enter your mind which under normal circumstances personally I wouldn't want to have to think about, such as the mistrust of other people. In other words, we had people with suitcases come on the island and people who just grabbed anything they could. And you were wondering, you know, well, what about these people? And you know, we're trying to make sure that we're all safe and that the resource is safe. And we also knew that people would eventually need to be escorted and brought into the facility to use bathrooms. And we had those who — mothers who or women who were expecting their first child and needing a women's room.

Vincent diPietro: And you know, the island was treated — it was literally locked down. I mean, we didn't want anyone going into the facilities not knowing who they were. If people were able to commit suicide and render such destruction, who's to say someone wouldn't put a bomb — bring a bomb in our facility or at the statue — well, the statue had already been shut, but you were looking at it as almost self-preservation. I want to get home tonight, and you know, do I have to see or to what extent do I see these folks coming in knowing what they've just faced but still looking at them in a skeptical — with a skeptical eye and saying can these people do harm to me as well because I don't know anything about them, because we didn't know what to expect.

Vincent diPietro: We had always assumed that, you know, if anything major were to happen in New York that the Statue of Liberty unfortunately might be a possible target and to us that means Ellis Island as well, because we're working in one area. And that — I'm not one that was brought up to have those feelings towards other people, but on that day, you looked at people somewhat in a different light too, as well, for your own safety and that was unfortunate. And I hope that would never happen again.

Mark Schoepfle: I'd like to get back to that question, too, later on.

Vincent diPietro: Okay.

Mark Schoepfle: But let's go on for just a moment to this was sort of mid to early afternoon. You began finding more things out. I guess, I'm also getting under the impression there was less to do?

Vincent diPietro: There was less to do. As the day went on, again we were just waiting. Weather wasn't a problem. Nobody really thought about eating or doing anything that was normally a part of your day. And then we had to think of, well, we're not only here. We have several hundred people here who now have no way of getting off the island. And then we started to think about, you know, folks who were on the island waiting to be brought somewhere, not necessarily a medical facility if they weren't injured.

- Vincent diPietro: But people now started asking the basic questions. Do you have a phone I can use? Or you know, how am I going to get off this island? Where am I? Some people honestly didn't even know that they were on Ellis Island or what Ellis Island was. And you start to think about their — what thoughts are going through their mind, and you didn't really want to ignore anyone because there needs to be some sort of comfort offered to them as little as you could do for them because of what they went through.
- Vincent diPietro: So, we really tried to accommodate those folks by bringing them over — I believe some were then brought over — most were brought over by van to New Jersey, and I'm thinking what do they do when they get to New Jersey? They're out of their comfort zone. They're out of their area. Many of them may not even know where they are, how to get home, and from that point on. So, all of these other secondary issues were — we were all trying to help them with the logistics of being displaced.
- Mark Schoepfle: What did you do? I mean, how did you help them?
- Vincent diPietro: Whatever we could try to do for them. Some just wanted blankets. Some people you could tell were in mild shock, which would then hit them later on as several hours had gone by. A beautiful day and yet people were very cold and nervous and tense, and who had asthma and now who can't breathe. So, all the secondary things that would happen to someone after the initial evacuation of getting out of that danger area. And then realizing — I guess your functions kick in and you tend to think about what was happening. And by that time both buildings were down, so the thought of — many people didn't even want to go the front of the island and just look and see that there was nothing there anymore.
- Vincent diPietro: But it was a very long afternoon. And for the most of that afternoon, because by that point there was no one left to help and they were mounting the next phase of it, which was preparation of deceased to be brought over. And everything, you know, takes time to get all these resources — you wonder where are they coming from and where do they store 40,000 body bags and all of a sudden, they're here. And you know, there's these big tractor-trailers and things coming over.
- Vincent diPietro: So, a lot of personnel — many of us also had the — and again, it's that because you're in this situation and you start to distrust things and you think about, are we letting all these ambulances in? You know, is someone out there checking those ambulances or are they being searched? How do we know that someone just didn't take over a fire truck or an ambulance and is going to drive it over the island and pack it with explosives and, you know, kill us all?



- Vincent diPietro: And then other agencies were there, state police, New York City Police, all different entities, and they tend to group amongst their own because they're colleagues. And when you see that and you look around and you step back and say, all right, this is my familiar home because I work here. For most of these folks they don't know anything about this place. And you know, there are 75 officers standing in one spot, or whatever the situation is, waiting for the next instructions from a higher officer or whatever the case may be.
- Vincent diPietro: And I'm thinking, if more happens, we're all sitting ducks here because we have all these resources packed up on this small island. And you know, we're still — potentially this still may not be over, and no one really knew when it was going to end. And you just wanted to make sure that people weren't — in the time that you had to think about the next step or what was going to happen — I mean, everyone was kind of reassuring everyone else or reminding everyone else don't let your guard down. Even though we can't actively help and we're not out there in New York City in the rescue efforts, you know, let's just make sure we don't — we keep our wits because it's easy to just forget that because you're so exhausted of what took place today. You know, it may not be over.
- Mark Schoepfle: How were you on guard? What were some of the things you thought about?
- Vincent diPietro: Well, earlier in the day when we thought we were — we had people possibly looking to come onto the island. We had reports of people over on islands, too, and park police investigated some of these events or some of these calls that came in. You wonder if the ultimate is going to happen, do I have the ability to escape? Or you know, no one wanted to be trapped in a building regardless of how important the resource is. Life comes first. The statue or the main building, you know, the museum could be built again. It's a manmade object.
- Vincent diPietro: I just didn't want to die that way. You know, if that were the case, so be it. We really had no control over it. But I at least wanted — would want to see my family again, because again I had no contact with anyone other than that one relative who managed to get through to my home, my folks' home in Queens, and they too didn't get an answer and were very surprised. So, we all found out later on what had happened.
- Vincent diPietro: But I guess just self-preservation, what was going on. I don't think anybody could believe or did believe at that time; you know. It was like you were going to wake up and everything was back to the way it was the day before.

- Mark Schoepfle: So, most of being on guard and just being in this sort of uneasy state was just making sure you had a way out if something was going to happen.
- Vincent diPietro: Yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: Kind of keeping an eye around for that kind of thing. You weren't so much profiling peoples as they came in.
- Vincent diPietro: We had so many aircraft circling around and jets flying over and such a presence, although after the fact, I felt a little bit angry in thinking that, wow, this one — they really caught us off guard. And of the greatness of this nation and how much resources we have and the ability to defend ourselves, we let people in a primitive way orchestrate something that will change us forever and they really got the best of us. And that to me is a shame. And I'm thinking, are we living in a myth? Are we really not protected by our government?
- Vincent diPietro: I felt as a government employee I was a little bit disappointed in our government and thinking, you know, is this it? I mean, we're supposed to be able to do so many things and yet this just took us by sheer surprise, and not once, not twice, but four times. And that was disappointing. And I felt very sad for the people in the plane, who were on those planes because they had no control over anything.
- Mark Schoepfle: Right. Well, so as the afternoon went on, what did you do? You found, I gather, that the bodies were not coming — showing up at the morgue.
- Vincent diPietro: Correct. There were other talks of then rethinking the arrangement of not using Ellis Island as a morgue and possibly using the Military Ocean Terminal at Bayonne and other areas, because if people — or if bodies of other victims were brought here on the island, they'd only have to eventually be moved off the island again. So, it was almost doubling the process. I think that whole thing was rethought, and some plans were in the midst of being changed.
- Vincent diPietro: Towards the end of the day, it was also then talk of, you know, do we stay here? Do we go home when our day is over? Some people wanted to leave. Other people didn't want to leave. Other people were eager to go into the city to try to help and whatnot. Other people were just simply exhausted from that level of excitability and adrenaline and going through the whole day in preparation for the worst. You know, that day felt like you worked a whole week.

Vincent diPietro: So, the other comforting thing is I managed to help about five or six people. Two of them were firefighters. And as we were wheeling one firefighter into an ambulance who had a fractured leg, and he looked up and said I'm going to visit you one day. And this man who was just built like double my size, you could tell this man was strong. He grabbed my hand and just the strength in his hand made me look like a, you know, paper doll. And this man was, you know, battered and injured and whatnot, and you could still see he was just a powerhouse taking the pain of his injuries. And he yet had the clear mind to look at me and say, you know, I'm going to visit you guys when you reopen.

Vincent diPietro: And I said you come back anytime, and I'll take you anywhere you want. And he looked — he goes, you know, I looked at your Website and it seems like you have some interesting things. I've lived here all my life and I've never been to Ellis Island or the statue. I said, well, that's a common occurrence from the locals here. I said but please come back anytime. And I called him by his name, and he called me by my name. And we actually shook hands. And I said, you know, you're looking at the person who created the Website. And he goes, oh, you put that information on it.

Vincent diPietro: So, he was actually able to take himself out of the suffering of going, you know, through that whole thing. And of all this man has been through, you know, I look at that and I'm like, whatever allows you to do that as a human being, whether it's courage or whether it's adrenaline or whether it's just something in you that still gives you the opportunity to go beyond the situation you're in, is just courageous. It's just amazing.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. So, you're getting to the point where you were wondering, well, what else are we going to do here and maybe how are we going to get home. What went on then?

Vincent diPietro: Well, towards the latter part of the afternoon my boss was concerned with who was going to stay and who really needed to go home. And since most of the staff in my division, the interpretation division, is deemed nonessential, so everyone who stayed who was medically trained was doing so on a voluntary basis because we had the option to leave. And I guess there was the thought, well, we saw many other agencies start to send people back and some of the ambulances were called to other locations because other points in Jersey City were repositories for people who were brought over. And you almost felt guilty in leaving, knowing that you couldn't do any more without physically leaving your workspace and going to Manhattan or going to another area. And not having contacted my family the whole day, I decided at the end of my shift to go home. I had had enough.

- Mark Schoepfle: This is about what time?
- Vincent diPietro: Six p.m. So, it was almost 12 hours. And the ride home was probably the loneliest car ride I have ever experienced. I wanted to talk. I wanted to hug my wife. I wanted to see my family. I live about 60 miles away.
- Mark Schoepfle: Where in?
- Vincent diPietro: In central New Jersey. And we didn't know actually if we could leave the island and get on the major roadways because by that time the whole New York-New Jersey area was in a lockdown. All the city bridges and tunnels were closed. By that time, they had people, you know, blocking every major roadway. And using the two biggest roads in New Jersey, the Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway, I'm thinking, well, if I can't get home where am I going to go? I have no other relatives. I have no place in New Jersey to go to. And New York was out of the question.
- Vincent diPietro: So, I'm thinking this might be another whole episode in the experience of what has happened today. You know, can I even get home? So, we remained — we were told to remain in uniform because it would probably be — might be easier to pass through whatever security checkpoints if you had your credentials and your uniform and remain in that way.
- Vincent diPietro: And I was driving out of the park, driving down through Liberty State Park. I drove 60 miles and it was like a ghost town, other than emergency vehicles going the other way towards the city, and I was leaving it and going south. It was just something that I had never experienced before. I mean, you could've driven 120 miles an hour and there was no one who would've stopped you or done anything because you were leaving the devastation. You weren't going into it. And it's just a sight that you never see.
- Vincent diPietro: And every so often, just turning around, the further you go away, and you just see the trail of smoke and there's nothing there that — which used to be there in terms of the skyline, and what's that image that was so familiar. You just — I just couldn't believe it.
- Vincent diPietro: It's like then all these emotions come in and a good portion of the ride was not comforting for me. At that time, you're sitting there and you're saying, oh my God, what's just happened? And then, you want the — I turned on the radio just to hear, you know, were we at war? Does this mean we're at war? Are we expecting more attack?
- Mark Schoepfle: Right.

Vincent diPietro: Having my parents come from Europe and having gone through World War II, you know, they always talked about living with air raids and having their towns bombed and attacked. And I'm like, this is the closest I ever want to come to war in my lifetime, I hope. I hope that never happens again.

Mark Schoepfle: What happened when you got home?

Vincent diPietro: I was happy to see my wife, hugged her a lot. And her company had let their employees go home early. And she later told me that wasn't really a good thing because when she got home there was no information to make her feel comfortable, knowing how close we worked to the site. And again, cell phones were dead. Regular phones were gone.

Vincent diPietro: And I was glad to see her. We spent most of that — actually we didn't sleep that night, through the whole night just talking about what had happened. We didn't turn the TV on because I didn't want to see that image anymore. And the news was just showing the same images over and over and over again of those buildings falling down and the planes and whatnot.

Vincent diPietro: And about 8 o'clock that evening I managed to get an open line to my parents' home and talked to them for a long time and not realizing that they were in that mess. And I had originally thought they were going to go to the Board of Ed headquarters in Brooklyn. She said, no, I was going to the retirement office in New York and it's like right down the block.

Vincent diPietro: And they had been trapped in the subway. They tried to leave via the train and the train stopped in the middle of the tunnel and let everybody out because of all the collapse and all the debris that was falling in the tunnel. And you see this — like the images on TV of that smoke as the plume just would outrun anybody and was faster than anybody could get away from it. You know, as they described all that, I'm like, oh my God, I didn't know you were in it. And I'm just glad that I didn't know anything about it during the day.

Mark Schoepfle: What happened in the days afterwards?

Vincent diPietro: Well, the park remained closed. We weren't permitted to return until the 18th, I believe, for about seven or eight days. And during that time just a very uneasy feeling not knowing if more things were going to happen by that — in those later days following. You know, you're glued to the TV set because you want to know what was going on. You want to have hope for those who —

Mark Schoepfle: Hold on just a moment.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. And you were uneasy just in these days — in the days ensuing what was going to happen.

Vincent diPietro: You know, several nights of not sleeping and just every strange noise that I would hear in the air would cause me to stop what I was doing and look up. And I have several Air Force bases near the — near where I live, and there were flights in and out and training. So, you heard jets all the time. And you were just hoping that although you knew the people responsible for the planes were not around anymore, you — we knew that there was this bigger picture, this broad thing that was now trying to be tackled by our government and our resources. And you know, you just want justice. You want the right thing to happen.

Mark Schoepfle: So that whole week just was just a very uneasy time.

Vincent diPietro: Very depressing.

Mark Schoepfle: Just forming this idea of wanting justice and being just part of a bigger picture.

Vincent diPietro: Yeah. Well, just being at home, I think, and having too much time to think didn't lend to that — didn't lend to the help of that by much. My wife had to report to her job the next day, and long-distance phone service — I made a lot of phone calls and talked to a lot of people and called all my friends and realized that, you know, life can change in an instant. And I think just not letting some of the smaller things which would've normally bothered me are like who cares, that doesn't make a difference anymore.

Vincent diPietro: You know, I'm worried about health, death, survivability, and make sure I have food on the table, all the major things. And everything else is secondary. Who cares? Look what these people just went through and look what they're going through. And then you find out that some of the people, there were a number of people that I used to work with in my prior job who were employed in the trade center. So, you find out that people you knew were missing because no one knew if they were tragically killed yet, although now there's not much hope.

Vincent diPietro: And that bigger picture just is pretty bleak, and I was just thinking that, you know, this was one that felt a little bit — not a little, very angry at how vulnerable we have made ourselves. And then you know, seeing some of the things at your workplace that can improve and things that you know are going to change. And you say, well, they should've changed a long time ago and we've been very lucky, and this should be our wakeup call too.

Mark Schoepfle: Well, let's get to that. What went on when you got back to work?

- Vincent diPietro: We — well, I knew that from having telephone conversations with my supervisor and other co-workers that things were going to change. Security had been dramatically increased. We would have to report with very little baggage or parcels, and our cars would be searched. And I think for those who were there that day, it's like, good, you know, great. This is great. Let it happen. That's what we need. You know, we need to do everything we can to make sure that we remain alive and that we're going to go home at night.
- Mark Schoepfle: And from what you're saying, we should have been more careful to begin with or kind of like that or —
- Vincent diPietro: Well, if you don't — I mean, no one thought that an act like that would occur. For us here at the park, most of us would think that someone would try to sneak in an explosive device or something like that or a weapon and then cause either a hostage-type negotiation or a takeover. The statue has been taken over, you know, over a dozen times, many times through whatever cause or whatever organization has deemed that something they should do over the years.
- Vincent diPietro: And interpreting the park's history, most of us know of these events, what have happened. In the 10 years I've been here, the park has been taken over two or three times by people who have demonstrated and chained themselves up to the beams and doors and whatnot. And the '93 bombing changed our operation somewhat with the introduction of metal detectors and x-ray machines. So, we were used to that.
- Vincent diPietro: But this was something that really forced us into a corner that we needed to really rethink what we can do and what potentially could happen and how it could happen, because what occurred on 9-11 wasn't conventional. It was the extreme and it was the simplest plan that took everybody by surprise and how easy it was to be able to do that. And just knowing that, look, we have to always ensure that we do everything that we can since we're such a potential target.
- Mark Schoepfle: You were mentioning security. What else was going on?
- Vincent diPietro: We started to — well, there was a whole host of meetings. Every day we had meetings and not training, but like we had grief workshops and we had counselors come in and give us an arena to be able to talk and share our thoughts and feelings and ideas if we would have any, which was good for some. And everyone handling these extreme conditions in their own way. Some don't like to talk. Some don't want to share their feelings and others do.

- Vincent diPietro: But at least it gave us an opportunity to do that and to possibly voice people's concerns as foolish or as extreme or as important as all of them may or may not be. The park doesn't get an opportunity many times because of its extreme visitation, being separated by two islands. I mean, there is no time where we can all get together and assemble and share our thoughts and feelings on a particular topic, where now we had the opportunity to do so.
- Vincent diPietro: And not having visitors here was quite strange. That hasn't happened for an extended period of time in the years I've been here. We've only been closed occasionally, usually due to weather. The place didn't feel like a park because of the extreme things that we were thinking about, how we were going to protect ourselves and the resource. And you wonder, it's like, well, this is a recreational place. It's like I didn't become a ranger to think about biological weaponry and weapons of mass destruction, I'm working at a vacation spot, an icon that people are supposed to be here and enjoy and be happy. It's like, you know, working at an amusement park. This is a park, a place of enjoyment.
- Vincent diPietro: And yet there was nothing enjoying about all of the conversation that everyone was talking about because all it meant was — all it dealt with was the security of this facility and how serious of an impact this icon, this park has in the eyes of extremists and certain groups who would like to do this nation harm. And you wonder if there was ever going to be any normalcy brought back to the place where, you know, people once came for enjoyment and for solitude and for solace and whatnot.
- Mark Schoepfle: So, the strange just feeling of no visitation. What else was going on?
- Vincent diPietro: Well, the unsureness of many people as to when we were going to get back on track. Being the division that deals with the public, I answered the park's e-mail, answering several hundred e-mails, why are you closed? And it was the same questions over and over again. And I think people who were not in the area or from other countries who were looking to find that we were open, and as time went on, trying to get New York back into normalcy by media and commercials and politicians saying, look, New York's open and we're open and get back to business and live your lives. And we weren't doing that here. It's as if we were the exception to the rule, as we often are because this site is so unique.
- Vincent diPietro: And it was somewhat challenging because it took us out of all our normal positions of being able to bring this site and interpret it to the public and there was no public. And so, we're making other plans to go offsite and do other things.



- Vincent diPietro: And it was rethinking how we're going to do business and to try to mediate and assure the public that, yeah, we're closed for a very good reason. And many people understood by their comments, and some people didn't, whether they didn't — weren't fully aware of the situation. So, it was a very unique time for us and that we've — many of us, myself included, never having to go through.
- Mark Schoepfle: What were some of the public reactions?
- Vincent diPietro: They ranged the entire gambit from I sympathize with you. We're praying for you. Some people heard that Ellis Island helped victims of the World Trade Center and that people were brought here and we were closed. And the number of caricature and editorial cartoons and articles about the event of 9-11 and the association of that event with the Statue of Liberty, showing the statue crying, and huddled down as the planes going overhead, and wearing a gas mask.
- Vincent diPietro: It's — you could see how, you know, not many people go home knowing that the place that they work influences so many other people for good and bad. And now more of the bad was coming out. It's like, this place really ticks some people off big time that they're willing to kill me for it. And you want to make that part go away, but you can't because you take that with the strength of what the park does for people and what it signifies.
- Mark Schoepfle: Sure. So, a lot of your job was answering the e-mail during this time?
- Vincent diPietro: Yeah. We started putting other programs together, trying to make life here somewhat normal. But it really — it really was not. Just by all the counseling sessions and training sessions and the auxiliary things that we had to have happen to — some out of necessity and other things just to really pass time and be somewhat contributing towards the job because I think a lot of people here felt, you know, we're not doing our job. We're doing other things and we're keeping busy, but we want this place to go back to the way it was and be a park and with kids screaming and go from five million visitors a year to empty halls.
- Vincent diPietro: And some of the things were left the same day back to September 11th. I actually saved the National Park Service passport cancellation stamp, because for months, I mean, no one worked the information desk. And one day in probably beginning December, it was after Thanksgiving, I just happened to do some cleaning up at the desk since no one had touched it since that day and grabbed the stamp and wanted to change it to the current day. I'm like, there's nobody here today. I don't have to change it. When I looked at it, it was still on September 11th for that day.

- Vincent diPietro: And I said, you know what, we're not going to keep this out anymore. We're going to haul that back and save it for whatever.
- Mark Schoepfle: It's a memento?
- Vincent diPietro: Because it's a special day. It's like one thing that froze that day in time.
- Mark Schoepfle: Well, you were mentioning the idea of getting back to normalcy. Have you all ever gotten back to normalcy?
- Vincent diPietro: No. I don't think we should go back to normalcy because there are things that bring us to a higher level of thinking and a higher level of action that needs to have a constant commitment to make sure that what happened at the World Trade Center and hopefully whatever we can do, to never let that happen here. And being charged, you know, with protecting this resource — and the agency hopefully includes the human resource in that whole equation as well, and I think they do by what steps they've taken — is that whatever they have control over to do is really a responsibility for them to do. And it's going to cost some money and take some other resources, but we all have the obligation and responsibility to do that and not take things for granted.
- Vincent diPietro: But then some of the aftereffects of when you say, did we return back to normalcy, after the initial week or two, after coming back and then with the advent of the anthrax situation, gave us all a whole other set of concerns and issues like many other people. You know, do you touch your mail? And we have people searching mail. And you know, you're getting a package and I'm sending traveling kits to schools because they're not visiting us. And you know, it's coming back and I'm putting on three pair of gloves to check this and wearing a respirator.
- Vincent diPietro: And I'm like, this is crazy. Who wants to do this in their workplace? I didn't go to work for some laboratory where I wear a clean suit and walk into some sterilized room. This is my workplace. No matter what I do, whatever level I take it to, I can't a hundred percent, you know, protect myself or through something that nobody knows about. And we got strange mail, which we occasionally do from extremists and people who threaten us and people who threaten the park, and that occurred and some of that was turned over to the U.S. Park Police for investigation. And you just wonder if the rest of the world is as normal as you would want it to be, and that there are people out there that would do you harm in an instant, without a blink of an eye.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. You live in a dangerous place. So definitely one of the aspects is that there's not going to be normalcy nor should we really ever return to it because we've really got to be more alert —

- Vincent diPietro: Exactly.
- Mark Schoepfle: — for these kinds of threats in the kinds of jobs we do, even though they make our jobs a little less pleasant than they would otherwise be. What else has changed in that regard?
- Vincent diPietro: I think for — on a personal standpoint or from a professional view?
- Mark Schoepfle: Whatever is important. They kind of mix up, I have a suspicion.
- Vincent diPietro: I think they do. I tend to recognize some things that I may have taken for granted before. Having an afternoon off if I'm not doing anything: so, what, so be it. If I'm with my family, I — it's made me want to be closer to my family. I don't have a large family, but I'm almost sorry I live 60 miles away. Although that's not a great distance in relative terms, but the barrier of not being able to — because for many occasions I've wanted to go across and visit my family and having to cross a bridge or tunnel or whatever. And you know, the bridges were closed, and I couldn't see them for a long time.
- Vincent diPietro: And I'm like, this wasn't such a — maybe a great idea to move this far away, which was done out of necessity for my own economic reasons and owning a home. But it would've been nice to live down the block or right around the corner and say hello to mom. You know, today I'd just like to say hi to mom and dad today and see how they're doing and whatever. And you know, it doesn't happen.
- Mark Schoepfle: A little harder to do. How long — you mentioned you've been with the Park Service for about 10 years?
- Vincent diPietro: Yeah, I just completed being here at this park for 10 years.
- Mark Schoepfle: Congratulations. How long have you been in the Park Service?
- Vincent diPietro: This has been my first site.
- Mark Schoepfle: Your first job with the Park Service.
- Vincent diPietro: Uh-huh.
- Mark Schoepfle: Did you grow up around here I gather?
- Vincent diPietro: I'm born and raised in the Brooklyn-New York City area.
- Mark Schoepfle: And you moved over — and did you go to school here?
- Vincent diPietro: I went to school. I went to school in — college in Manhattan, avid subway taker. All the areas that were affected I knew very well, so I'm here to stay.

Mark Schoepfle: Good.

Vincent diPietro: It hasn't caused me to want to move and leave New York or the New York City area or any further than I am right now. Initially there were thoughts of do I want to come back and work here.

Mark Schoepfle: Because I know some people have really wanted just to leave.

Vincent diPietro: Yes. Because the talk of many workshops or many sessions that we all have had with a variety of different experts in different fields, there wasn't much positive information being given to us, and not because they wanted to withhold information. It's just because the nature of what they were talking about and the reality of what had just happened is not pleasant and isn't positive, and there needs to be some rethinking. And when you hear, well, you know, an expert in terrorism say terrorists always have their next event surpass the one before it for their own — to display their own power and the reasons behind that. And you're like, well, this was pretty devastating. I mean, what's next? Do we see the mushroom cloud go up in the sky and the next thing you know there are a million people vaporized in a second? That's not going to be any solace to the comfort level.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

Vincent diPietro: But sometimes you don't want to hear it anymore. You just say, look, what I can take is full right now and whatever's going to happen is going to happen. But I just can't hear it being discussed 24 hours a day or every moment of the waking day, you know, because that also creeps into your subconscious as well. You know, like I've had dreams and nightmares and stuff regarding that event, and it takes a toll.

Mark Schoepfle: Well, what do you see down the line for the park?

Vincent diPietro: For this particular park, knowing how important it is and how political it also is, I think management has been very strong to fight for the needs of this park. And that unfortunately, money always comes into play in the decision making or at least some of it. But not to be paranoid that the worst is going to happen, but to be smart enough to know that it can happen. And if management keeps that thought in their decisions as they have been since the event took place, and they have looked out for the welfare of their staff and the resources. And some of the decisions that sometimes we see the park taking, we may not fully understand because we're not privileged to know every bit of information and decision making that's going on.

- Vincent diPietro: But for the overall good of the people who work here and the resource, I don't see or haven't seen many decisions that I could say, you know, the park or management in the park had no business doing that. They really have taken the advice of a lot of other experts and people and are taking it as a learning experience because none of us here are experts in biochemical whatever. And even though we have a security staff and a full police force here and other trained people of different fields and expertise, this is a waking experience for all of us and we should learn from it and not — and be vigilant.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Looking about a year down the line, supposing we're going to commemorate the September 11 events, what should be commemorated?
- Vincent diPietro: Well, you have — I know you have many opposing ideas as to what that should be. And that's starting to surface now. Families and victims of families have one sort of way of thinking about it. The public has another. Politicians have a third. And as many people as there are, you could think of as many ways to memorialize that.
- Vincent diPietro: I think the government or whatever organization would spearhead this can learn probably from the Oklahoma City memorial and how successful — or learn from the do's and don'ts of placing that, because that's been the closest thing we have to the September 11th day.
- Vincent diPietro: I mean, before September 11th in describing immigration and some of the reasons why immigrants were not allowed in, when I explain that to children and I mention those who were anarchists were not allowed in the United States. And the kids say, well, what's an anarchist. And you know that question is coming up. And the way I used to describe that in recent memory to any child who asked that question was, well, the person who blew up the Oklahoma Federal building is an anarchist to this country. And they readily understood what I meant.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- Vincent diPietro: And these people are just the same. Personally, I don't think the building should ever be built back in that site. I've been to other areas in the world, in Europe. I've visited concentration camps from World War II and Germany, and there is some sort of — we revere those sites. We respect them for the negative things that happened there, but we revere them for the memory that other people hold to them because they have a personal relative who was in a building. It's the same thing for Ellis Island. Ellis Island could remain the same, but if we took down all these buildings and built something else on top of it, people coming here would feel — many people would feel very hurt and would be upset about it because it's — this is sacred to some people.

- Vincent diPietro: And I think the ground there at the World Trade Center is sacred ground. It's a burial place for people. You can build buildings around it. I don't think buildings 110 stories tall should ever be constructed. And that doesn't necessarily show our weakness toward others. I've heard the comment saying, well, we should build it right away and build it exactly the way it was and that shows other people of our strength and our unity. But well, that building — those two buildings caused, and it could've been a lot worse if it weren't for as many people being rescued from them, caused the nation to change in an instant by collapsing and causing the devastation that occurred.
- Vincent diPietro: I think once the names of everyone who was involved in that and tragically passed away from that, once that's decided what that final listing is because I don't even know — well, that's still changing —
- Mark Schoepfle: Right.
- Vincent diPietro: — on a current basis so it's really — I think the talk from some entities to memorialize that came about a little too soon.
- Mark Schoepfle: Good point.
- Vincent diPietro: And we try — I know some people may feel, well, it's out of respect that we do that or lest we not forget. And we use all these typical phrase and buzzwords that we may have used 60 years ago in our past history as a nation. But the event is not over. Those who perpetrated the event are not all caught. No one has been brought to justice. It's an ongoing — if you were to equate it to a crime, it's still an active crime scene.
- Vincent diPietro: I think even a year down the road once all the debris is completely removed this year there still should not be plans to immediately do something with it. I think a lot more thought should be placed into it, because we tend to want to satisfy certain wishes from people or organizations or someone might claim from an economic standpoint it's good for the city if something's built there. It'll generate jobs, it'll generate whatever, and they'll take a positive spin on it.
- Vincent diPietro: But the fact is that if we resolve some of the issues that are still associated with it, we don't know who sent the anthrax letters. We don't know anything. We need to come to closure, and I hate using that word. It's been used too many times.

- Vincent diPietro: But there are many open areas which I think need to be resolved first as the strength of this nation — as much strength as we have and the resources that are available to us, we need to resolve some of the unknown issues about this event before we place another building or a granite wall or an eternal flame or whatever you want to place there to memorialize that. We will ultimately respect the memorialization of those involved on that day I think in due time.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- Vincent diPietro: And that's just my opinion on that. At least we're talking about it, and that's okay to talk about it. But I don't think anybody should rush into what that exactly should be.
- Mark Schoepfle: Well, you were mentioning the Oklahoma City memorial. You've seen that then?
- Vincent diPietro: I've seen pictures of it. I haven't been to Oklahoma City. And I don't want to negate that event by saying it was lesser of magnitude. Loss of life is never —
- Mark Schoepfle: No, I understand.
- Vincent diPietro: — less of magnitude in terms of numbers of people. And just the fact that the building, the facade of much of that building still remained, it was deliberately torn down. It was deliberately removed, and therefore — there was no one missing there. Everyone was accounted for. We've brought that person to justice. And it's a slightly different scenario.
- Vincent diPietro: And this — to have that happen within months of such an attack, I mean, the Pentagon, how do you memorialize those who were hurt or affected or killed in that event? I mean, it's still a working building. Then you could argue that that whole building should be torn down and made into a memorial. Do we respect those who died in the Pentagon any less than those who died in the World Trade Center because we still keep that building open, and there's still a cafeteria that serves hamburgers or food to the government employees who work there on a daily basis? No, it's a working office, the biggest office building in the world.
- Vincent diPietro: Well, what do we do in the field? If we don't do anything in the field in Pennsylvania? Are we respecting those individuals less? It's a big issue and it needs to be —
- Mark Schoepfle: Not one to have a judgment call made on it early in the game?
- Vincent diPietro: Right. And then people looking at in saying you know what, we really should have done that differently. Now redoing it or doing or tearing something down is — you know, it's not an easy issue.

Vincent diPietro: And maybe I wouldn't want to be the one who makes that final decision. But it's something, we've — to this magnitude, we've never had to do before.

Mark Schoepfle: That's a good point. Well, those pretty much are my questions. Have I failed to ask something that I should have asked?

Vincent diPietro: No. I have nothing that I could say I'm still having to mention it to you. I think most of what I wanted to share with you has been covered in the questions that you posed.

Mark Schoepfle: Good. Is there anything about what we're doing that I haven't told you or that you would still like answered?

Vincent diPietro: No. I think the idea of preserving that, and I would agree with you in that the more time that passes in this regard, it's good that this is being done in the time frame that it's being done in and not two or three years — or once people, say, decide to move to another park are or no longer here. I didn't run away. I'm still here. This is still my second home. And changes are still happening every day, and I still look that way every day and see that skyline changed forever. I think it was good that the Park Service decided to do this at this time.

Mark Schoepfle: Great. Thank you very much.

Vincent diPietro: You're welcome.

END OF TAPE