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Tracy Thetford
April 4, 2002

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

INTERVIEWEE: Tracy Thetford
Shenandoah National Park
(Interview No. Unlisted)

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INTERVIEW DATE: April 4, 2002

PLACE: Shenandoah National Park

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START OF TAPE

- Mark Schoepfle: Interview with Tracy Thetford, and the date is April the 4th, 2002. Well Tracy, my first question is going to be from the moment that that you knew something had happened, what went on?
- Tracy Thetford: Well, I was sitting in our headquarters office building in the receptionist's office.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: Speaking with her. And a fellow employee by the name of Deb Truax who works in our personnel office, came downstairs and asked if she had a TV in her office. And my first reaction was to laugh because I thought she was joking. And then she had mentioned she received a phone call from her husband saying that a plane had been — had crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center in New York.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: And so, I got up and, and came over, or drove over to the offices over here, and our communications center right across from my office has a telephone, so it was tuned in, it's always tuned in to CNN.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: So, I came over, and started watching the news, and saw the second plane crash into the second tower of the World Trade Center on CNN. And there were several people in there, most of the — the communications center employees, then Connie Rudd our assistant superintendent came over, and she was watching a lot of the news casts. Employees were coming in and out — patrol folks, and other people. They would come in, watch some of the news cast...
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: ... catch up on what was happening, and then go out and later I found out that they were going home, or not going home, but calling home.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- Tracy Thetford: To talk to their families. So that's what I did too. I, I left and came over and called my family and alerted them to what was going on, because they — they didn't know at the time. And I came, and just went back and watched the rest of the events that happened.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

- Tracy Thetford: The next thing that happened while I was over there, Connie Rudd received a phone call, not from Marie Rust, but the acting regional director on that day, and she received word that parks in the northeast region were to shut down. So, what she did, I remember, is she pulled management staff, law enforcement employees and supervisors — Robbie Brockwell our concessions manager...
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: ... or liaison, because if the decision was to shut down the park, did that mean we would have to evacuate people who were staying in our lodges? We needed to make a decision if we needed to evacuate visitors who were camping in our campground.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: So, she, she pulled me in, because I supervise the operations of the entrances and campgrounds.
- Tracy Thetford: And I remember actually going back over to the com center and catching up on what was happening and watching the first tower fall.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: And it was amazing. It was just — I'm sure you've heard this a lot — surreal?
- Mark Schoepfle: No, I haven't, no, I haven't
- Tracy Thetford: So, so we were all just completely transfixed onto, on the TV, watching the reactions of people in New York City. A lot of coworkers had cousins working in the World Trade Center, so they were very worried about them, and calling home. And then as the second tower fell, you could hear just like complete gasps. And I remember looking over at Connie Rudd and she was saying oh my God, second tower fell. Oh my god. And it was just the strangest thing to watch.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: You know, on TV. It's like events as they're actually happening, immediately. And then, you're standing there, you know — how many hours are we away from New York City, six hours away from New York City — and watching like all this, this complete motion going on and, and you have absolutely nothing— You can't do anything about it. You can't, you can't go out there and help them immediately. You can't, you just, you can just stand there and watch while it was going on and become pretty shocked at it. And then, then that's when we got into motion as far as what we were going to be doing.

[Telephone interruption].

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: I called— On a personal note, one of my best friends was actually flying into Dulles that morning. She was sitting down at her seat in an airplane in Las Vegas Airport, because she and her husband live in Capital Reef, Utah.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: And as the first plane hit the first tower, she was just sitting down in her seat in the airplane. And then they evacuated the airplane. They came out into the airport, and they didn't actually tell her, or tell the passengers what was happening. And so, she called and left a message at my home, and then I called her husband and she was on the phone at the same time, so she knew where to call me. And so, I was the one who told her what was going on and what happened.

Tracy Thetford: And it was so weird, because this was her first vacation from, you know, having a child two years ago. She was so excited. And she was going to fly into Dulles. And she said well, maybe I can fly into another airport. [Laughter].

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: And my immediate reaction was like no, go home, you know, don't, you're not going anywhere. Go home. You know, go to your family. And, but when I got home later on that afternoon, I got her, her voice mail message on my machine. And it was so weird because she was calling and saying well, we just got de-boarded from the plane. They said that there was an accident in New York City, or a plane flew into a building in New York City, so I'm going to see if I can get an alternate airport. And then you can hear this lady talking behind her on the telephone, and telling her exactly, because she had just gotten the news of what happened...

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: ... in New York City. And, telling my friend what happened while she's still on the phone, and hearing her reaction recorded on my answering machine. That was pretty wild.

Mark Schoepfle: Wow.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah. And so, I explained to her what happened with the, the World Trade Towers, and that the airplane had flown into the Pentagon.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

- Tracy Thetford: And, and it just really freaked me out because she was going to be flying straight into Dulles and I was going to—
- Mark Schoepfle: God.
- Tracy Thetford: — be picking her up in a couple of hours after all of this just happened.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: And that was wild.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. So, this was just during your friend, you had called, or your friend had called in just about the time that you were all sort of waiting to see what was going to happen.
- Tracy Thetford: Exactly. Probably, just, my, my friend had called in just as we were, it was probably just as the first tower fell. And I can't remember exactly when Connie Rudd got the call from the Acting Regional Director to shut down parks. But to get back to the administrative part of that, Connie had called all the management staff that were available and on duty at the time to see how Shenandoah was going to react to — not only Washington, DC and New York City but to the regional director saying we should shut down the parks.
- Tracy Thetford: Mostly, if I remember correctly, and I may not, I think it was mostly for safety and security of government offices, since the plane had gone into the Pentagon. My interpretation of why we were closing is it was nobody knew what was going on next, or you know, what planes were going where, what other possible terrorist attacks might happen, where. So, my — my feeling when I heard Connie walk out from the office when she got the call was that wow, you know, is this a potential danger for anybody and everybody, or is it here in the northeast region, since we're the parks and the government closest to DC and New York City? So, I don't know.
- Tracy Thetford: So, we went over and met here at the Ranger Activities Office where you were just speaking with Ginny Russeau and sat down and decided to make an action plan. I wasn't involved in the very beginnings of that conversation. I was calling my staff out in the field, the, our employees that work in the entrance stations and campgrounds. I think what had happened was we as a park had decided to follow the spirit of that directive, but not to actually close down and evacuate our lodges and our campgrounds in response, but to, as Ginny was telling you earlier, but to leave Shenandoah open as a sanctuary, for a place for people to go to. And I called all my employees, since in government-ese they're not considered essential. You know, they don't need to be on duty to protect life, property, etc. We decided if they needed or wanted to go home, or, confer

with family or to be with their family, then they had every opportunity to leave. They could shut down a station, and just leave.

Tracy Thetford: So, I called all of my folks out in the field, and all of them decided to stay and, and work at the stations, greet the — the visitors that were coming in, and just be out there. Because they felt that if they went home, they would just be sitting in front of a TV as opposed to being out and at work and being productive, and somewhat distracted from the events that were going on.

Tracy Thetford: After I made the phone calls, I went back into where all the management staff was meeting. And I remember Connie sitting at the table. She had both of her arms up on the table, and her fingers intertwined. And she was just sitting there, and she goes you know, — How did she say it? — She, she was saying I'm trying to figure out why this day is so important. Why on this day would, would these events happen? And it's the eleventh day of the ninth month, 911.

Tracy Thetford: And, and that was pretty wild, you know? Just to put that together.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: So, as I said the management team went into their incident action plan and decisions on what they were going to do. I do remember them saying that we will support Washington, DC in any way we can in this national emergency. And Ginny will, and Greg Styles—

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: —will fill you in on most of that. But yeah, we just decided to stay open as a sanctuary and a place of refuge.

Tracy Thetford: And actually, later on in the day I, I called down to our employees that are working in the entrance stations, to find out if there has been an influx of people into the park who were saying that it was overwhelming, and they needed to get away or away from the TV. And there were groups of people who actually were leaving Washington DC and just drove out of the city. And they came to Shenandoah and decided to come into the park and, and just either drive or walk. And they were telling our folks at the entrance stations that yeah, they, they just needed to get away. And um...

Mark Schoepfle: This was happening already the first, the very first day?

Tracy Thetford: The very first day. There was, it wasn't a huge influx.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

Tracy Thetford: But there were, there were people coming in. And then that weekend we, we had a lot of people coming in just — you know — they wanted to get away from the TV mostly, is what we heard.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: Just because they were seeing the events over, and over, and over and over again. But yeah, our campgrounds were pretty busy that weekend.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: So that was neat to see, actually. And I liked — I was very happy about the fact that we did not shut down and we did not evacuate our campgrounds and our lodges. And I know that that decision was a very tough decision and they had to get more information, I'm sure, as far as, the safety and security of our visitors and our employees. But I'm glad we didn't immediately knee jerk and close down everything.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: Because I like the fact that we were open.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

Tracy Thetford: — and available for folks — and ourselves. I didn't want to go home.

Mark Schoepfle: Backing up for a minute—

Tracy Thetford: Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: — on some of the things you mentioned. First of all, you had been at the office, and — let's see if I can track —

Tracy Thetford: [Laughter].

Mark Schoepfle: — understood what you're saying.

Tracy Thetford: I know. I think I jumped around a lot.

Mark Schoepfle: No, that's all right, that's all right. You had been at the receptionist's office and, when you had heard that the first plane had hit. And basically, Connie Rudd had come over to tell you that something had happened.

Tracy Thetford: No. It was, it was Deb Truax from the Personnel office —

Mark Schoepfle: Oh.

Tracy Thetford: ... had come downstairs and had, had asked Sandra Rushing, who is our information receptionist for our headquarters, asked if Sandra had a TV in her office.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: Because Deb's husband had called her and said that a plane had flown into a building in New York City.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh, that's what ...

Tracy Thetford: Yeah. And then I had left that office and come over to our communications center, and then Connie Rudd had come over later.

Mark Schoepfle: That's right. Because the report was that Connie Rudd had received a call from the regional director—

Tracy Thetford: Right, well, she was in the—

Mark Schoepfle: — to shut down the northeast region parks.

Tracy Thetford: Right. Well, she was in the communications center. And I don't know how long after she came over there, or what time she got over there.

Mark Schoepfle: So, you got a chance to call before anything happened? You were all there just sort of transfixed, I think you were saying for, for a minute. And then the second tower now was hit, and it was falling. And at that point people began feeling like what can we do?

Tracy Thetford: You were saying you were overcome with emotions, but you couldn't, you couldn't act. There was nothing you could do but just stand and watch.

Tracy Thetford: That's how I felt.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: And then you sort of got, as you were just about to get into motion, your friend called in from Las Vegas. This was, was sort of this, this really weird situation.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah. Well, I called her husband.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh.

Tracy Thetford: To find out what was going on. And she was on the phone with him on the other line.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh.

Tracy Thetford: So, she was able, once he hung up, we all hung upon, and then she called me directly.

Mark Schoepfle: I see.

Tracy Thetford: From the airport in Las Vegas.

- Mark Schoepfle: So, you were able to tell her what, what had actually happened, or what you had seen happening?
- Tracy Thetford: Mmhmm.
- Mark Schoepfle: What was her reaction? I mean, when you said stay home, don't come out here?
- Tracy Thetford: Well, it, it was complete disbelief. All she could say was oh my God, oh my God. And I think what, well I can't put thoughts into her head, but her reaction was, I don't know, probably like a lot of folks, it was, it was very delayed.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: You know, she wanted so badly to have a vacation, and to come out and visit and, and this was something that we had been planning for a very long time. You know, she wanted to do that, so she was like well maybe I can fly into another airport. And then when I think it didn't really sink in — all the events that had happened, not only with New York City, but telling her about the Pentagon, and also the fourth plane in Pennsylvania.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: You know, after telling her all of that, and telling her, and then I said no planes are flying. Everything is being grounded. Nobody is going anywhere. That's when it really kind of sunk in. And I talked to her a couple of days later and, and she had mentioned to me that she said, well I couldn't, I didn't believe you that I wasn't going to be able to go anywhere, you know, when I told her that when she was in the airport. It just didn't ...
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- Tracy Thetford: It didn't sink in at all. And — and I was telling her, it was like you just need to go home. Go home to your family and yeah, it took a while for it to sink in, I think, just because, she didn't have immediate access to information.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: There was very varied, information that was going around the airport. Nobody — my understanding is — nobody got a full story. They just de-boarded planes. Everybody was in the airport, and no information was getting to flyers or people there ...
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: — until they started calling out to friends and family. And that must have been weird.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. I was going to say, it was very important, I think to everybody it seemed, to be able to call friends and family at this point...

Tracy Thetford: Oh, absolutely.

Mark Schoepfle: — I don't know what would have happened if you all hadn't been able to do that.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah. I don't know either. And, everybody was calling home.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: Everybody was. And there were employees who just were so overwhelmed, they just wanted to gather up their kids, gather up their husbands or wives, and make sure that everybody — they could go home, and see and touch...

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: — their family, and just huddle there together.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: — and I saw a lot of that reaction too.

Mark Schoepfle: So, some of them, when this came, when they had the option to take off, they did...

Tracy Thetford: Oh sure.

Mark Schoepfle: Just to be with their families.

Tracy Thetford: Oh sure. Some employees did, definitely. You know, they, they were out of there.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Now as the day went on, visitors started coming in. I mean, what time of the afternoon do you think this was when the visitors started coming in, or you got reports that they did?

Tracy Thetford: When I, when I called them, I think it was probably about 3:00, 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon to kind of get a feel for what was happening out in, what—Are you allergic to wasps or anything?

Mark Schoepfle: No, I don't think—

Tracy Thetford: Because I have a wasp flying around in here.

Mark Schoepfle: I mean well, I don't like getting stung by them but I'm not, I don't swell up to double my size or anything.

Tracy Thetford: That's good.

Mark Schoepfle: I wouldn't worry about him.

Tracy Thetford: Okay. If we leave him alone, he's usually okay.

Mark Schoepfle: Fine.

Tracy Thetford: Okay. [Laughter]. Um, yeah. I think it was about 3:00 o'clock or 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon when I called out to the employees in the entrance stations, just to get a feel for what was happening, what was the traffic like, what were people saying. And it was mostly in the southern districts, the two south entrance stations, that I got feedback about people saying they wanted just to get away from the TV and come to the park.

Mark Schoepfle: Could you give me an example of things — if you managed to get any sort of quotes or anything from people? What were some of the things that you remember that they said, or was reported that they said?

Tracy Thetford: To be honest with you, I really don't remember.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: I really don't. I can't remember quotes. I just remember saying, hearing I don't want to be, I needed to get away from the TV.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: That would be a quote. Or I just wanted to be in nature. That was another quote.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: I remember talking to the folks, and hearing, I think as I said before, that folks were coming from DC area who just got in their cars and wanted to get out of the city.

Mark Schoepfle: These people that were in the cars, they would just drive through and then they went back, or did they...

Tracy Thetford: I don't know.

Mark Schoepfle: Do you know what happened to them or anything?

Tracy Thetford: No, I don't.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. But what were the campgrounds like that night? First of all, I don't think I've even gotten through the end of your day yet here. About 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock you were receiving these reports. Then what happened?

Tracy Thetford: Well, I was calling out to, to get some feedback.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah?

Tracy Thetford: Not much, really. I worked in the communications center a little bit, trying to help Brenda Ritchie — when you talk to her. She was just overloaded with, you know a lot of tasks of organizing incident management teams, trying to get some— One of, one of the things that she asked me to do was to call Pat Buchello who works in the Ranger Activities Division Office in Washington. And she's our CISD — Critical Incident Stress, or CISM — Critical Incident Stress Management Coordinator—

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: — to talk to her so she could start coordinating debriefers to go up to Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, and get a crew out there to start helping employees.

Mark Schoepfle: Was this like, when you're saying debriefing, was this like with counseling or what?

Tracy Thetford: Yeah, a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing is when there is kind of — I'm just paraphrasing. You know, catastrophic, completely unexpected event, like a coworker that's been around for a while unexpectedly passing away, maybe in a violent way. We have employees that are trained to be kind of peer counselors, to have group discussions, or individual discussions with employees to help them work through—

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: — emotionally what they have experienced. So, they were trying to get a crew of, of employees together to get up to New York City. And Pat Buchello is one of the main coordinators, I understand.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: So, I worked on that a little bit, and then just did some, you know, errand stuff, and called in some of my folks who were available to be runners, drive people around or go pick up— Actually, my supervisor's husband — my supervisor is Linda Green —

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: Her husband was attending training in Philadelphia.

Mark Schoepfle: Wow.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah. It was a two-day training, and so that training of course was canceled. So, we sent one of our employees up to go pick him out of Harper— He actually caught a ride with somebody to Harper's Ferry. So, we sent an employee up there to go pick him up and bring him home.

- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. So then what?
- Tracy Thetford: Then what? Just—
- Mark Schoepfle: To the end of the day or what—
- Tracy Thetford: To the end of the day is just more coordination. There wasn't much I could do because they were getting more specialized people in as far as radio operators and, and incident management teams, and—
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: — part of the whole incident command system folks who have training in special areas. So, there wasn't really much left for me to do and so I just went home. It was the end of the day.
- Mark Schoepfle: What happened when you got home?
- Tracy Thetford: When I got home?
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. I'm keeping my eye on the tape here. Go ahead.
- Tracy Thetford: I fed my dog [laughter]. And just called my family, talked to them, and played computer games. Actually, I stayed away from TV probably for about two months after the events. To me personally I think that was a huge part of my reaction is I could not turn on the TV. I could not watch it. Because I knew that the news would just show it over and over and over again, the planes going into the building. I had seen it once, that was enough for me.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: And I still to this day, what, more than, just a little bit over six months later, barely watch the news, and hardly any TV at all. I just surf the Net, do a lot of reading and walking my dog. [Laughter]. I guess it's kind of like, maybe unconsciously, but in the beginning, but now more consciously, trying to go back to, not go back to, but lead a very nice, simple life and be happy and not watch the TV news because sometimes, you know, all the news is, not all the news, but a lot of the news is always about bad things.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. Well then what happened in the days following?
- Tracy Thetford: In the days following? As far as my job and my involvement in Shenandoah's support of the national emergency, I wasn't very involved.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: I just continued on to do my job, to supervise the entrance stations and campgrounds, make sure that we were open, employees were available,

and if they weren't — If people could not come in, in reaction to this, that was fine.

Tracy Thetford: And one of the interesting things I wanted — I got out in the field on a weekend, on Saturday and Sunday immediately following, and I went to Big Meadows Campground which is our largest campground in the park...

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: And talked to the employees there to find out what were people saying to them. And they said it was busy, that a lot of people were coming in, and it was the same reaction as — as we got on the afternoon of September 11. People just wanted to get out of the city, get to nature, get away from the TV. And that's mostly what we heard is just get away from the TV.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

Tracy Thetford: I think that's the largest reactions I've heard.

Mark Schoepfle: So, the camp, so were the campgrounds being used more than usual or...

Tracy Thetford: Not really more than usual. I, they were busy, a little bit busier, but not a huge percentage increase in visitation.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. But was the activity in the campgrounds any different? I mean, was it hushed, was it more, were people talking more, was it more agitated, or what?

Tracy Thetford: That's a good question. No, it was not agitated at all. It was more, and it wasn't hushed, but there was — how would I say it — Maybe more a sense of community.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: A lot of the reactions that our employees saw were people were nicer to each other. There wasn't, there wasn't rudeness, there wasn't fights over camp sites or noise. People, people were relating...

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Mark Schoepfle: So, there were fewer fights over the campgrounds.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah, people were just nicer to each other, more amenable than they normally area. And certainly, nice to our camp staff. Sometimes you get instances of people who get a little irate who hear no to a question or a request. And people were great. Very calm.

- Mark Schoepfle: Could you describe just what some of the normal campground dealings are like? I mean—
- Tracy Thetford: Some, well—
- Mark Schoepfle: — for example.
- Tracy Thetford: A lot of the normal campground feelings — people are happy, you know? They're on vacation. They're out camping. They've got their kids. A lot of activity. You know, you're cooking, your barbecue, your lunch, kids riding their bikes around the campground. At night you have your campfires. Some of the negative aspects of it would be large groups being loud and noisy, might be alcohol involved, or campsite disputes, because we let people choose their own camp sites, and if two people choose the same, or one gets it over the other, or one wants it, they are unhappy about it.
- Mark Schoepfle: Are these individually designated camp sites, or are these more like the Canadian ones where you just have a field?
- Tracy Thetford: Individually designated.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay.
- Tracy Thetford: Yeah, their own spot. And there are a lot of people who have been coming to Shenandoah for years have their, you know, they've been camping in the same spot for, for the past 20 years and they like to be in that spot. And if it's available or we can work it out if we know ahead of time, we will be more than happy to accommodate that.
- Tracy Thetford: But if it's not accommodated, you know, I'd say the most percentage of the time there is some disappointment, but not anger.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: That's few and far between. But yeah, one, one of my campground staff did say that weekend, you know, people just seemed to be nice.
- Mark Schoepfle: But I also infer that it was maybe there were fewer large groups, that people were coming out in smaller groups perhaps, or that there was less alcohol from what you were mentioning? What do you think?
- Tracy Thetford: I don't know. I don't know. That's a good question, and I don't know.
- Mark Schoepfle: I'm just curious about it.
- Tracy Thetford: Yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: Because we certainly all had the same impression and were very much surprised that people who were pouring out all over the weekends at all

felt a little guilty at first, you know, taking off. And then we just, you know, we had to get out too—

Tracy Thetford: Absolutely.

Mark Schoepfle: Then saw everybody else on the road, and went—

Tracy Thetford: Okay.

Mark Schoepfle: [Inaudible].

Tracy Thetford: [Laughter]. I mean I could get that information, or talk to the staff, or I could give you the names of the folks who were working if you wanted to talk to them.

Mark Schoepfle: That would be interesting. What would, who would some of them be that had, that would be sort of first-hand witnesses of that?

Tracy Thetford: Oh gosh. For the Big Meadows Campground, it would be George Dowery. He was working that weekend.

Mark Schoepfle: That would be D-o-u-g-h or how to spell that?

Tracy Thetford: D-o-w-e-r-y.

Mark Schoepfle: I shouldn't try to make it hard on myself.

Tracy Thetford: [Laughter].

Mark Schoepfle: Okay, good. So, this was that first weekend afterwards when you were getting reports in from the way the campgrounds were. What then went on in the weeks afterwards?

Tracy Thetford: Kind of went back to normal.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: Really. Our visitation didn't increase by a high percentage, or as high as we kind of projected in reaction to September 11. It kind of got back to normal.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. Looking back at it — what you saw and from the way people were reacting and what you see here, what would you have as an idea for memorialization? You know, if we were going to do some kind of commemorative event or something like, that a year from — September 11, 2002, what do you think about that? What would you like to see stressed, or what do you see as important?

Tracy Thetford: Nationally, or in the parks, or personally?

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah, whatever. All of the above.

- Tracy Thetford: [Laughter]. Gosh, what I would really like to see is to make sure that further down the road, long term—
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: And I believe this with all major historical events, that it does not get forgotten. And that's why I'm glad that you guys are going around and getting perspectives of people. Same with like World War II and Hitler. You know, that's a piece of history that should never be forgotten so we don't fall back into complacency.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: So, I liked — what was it, Veteran's Day weekend — the director of the National Park Service, we had all the national parks open to visitors for free that whole weekend in reaction to September 11. And I thought that was great.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: A lot of people were making suggestions as far as like — well, you know, should we give a discount or, or let firefighters or police officers, rescue workers in—
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: — even if they were not immediately responders to, to D.C. or New York City, but you know, let those folks in to thank them for their efforts and what they do in this world. But — and that information trickled up and the reaction was, you know, why just target a specific group of people? I think all of Americans and all visitors should come in for free, and I liked that reaction.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: And it was a very positive reaction from employees. They really liked it too. I think that if we continue doing something like that in the national parks, I think it's wonderful.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. I mean, just a simple gesture like that sounds very significant.
- Tracy Thetford: It is. I agree 100%. You know, because, well especially for national parks, you know? If we can open our doors and make it accessible for every single person, you know, there is a cost to running an operation like this, but in memorialization to September 11 and how it affected Americans as a whole — you know — to open our national parks which are areas of respite and sanctuary and contemplation and getting back to nature, make that available to every single person for three days, two days, a weekend,

Veteran's Day Weekend, I think is pretty spectacular. And I think it says a lot too as citizens.

Mark Schoepfle: That's a neat point. Were these, during the Veteran's Day Weekend, they were available then for three days?

Tracy Thetford: Three days, all national parks suspended collecting fees — entrance fees.

Mark Schoepfle: Ah.

Tracy Thetford: So American citizens, anybody, could come in for free.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: And that was — I thought — that was a really great gesture nationally.

Mark Schoepfle: Very good.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: Good. Are there, this has been really very helpful. When you're saying things are normal, okay—

Tracy Thetford: [Laughter].

Mark Schoepfle: This is one question. Could you describe to me — and this may be a little bit weird — but describe to me what normal means. What is a normal day like? What is a normal cycle like here?

Tracy Thetford: I figured that, because normal is very subjective.

Mark Schoepfle: No. It's well defined. I just wouldn't know what it is.

Tracy Thetford: [Laughter]. Right. That's a good point. Going back to normal means our visitation fluctuation did not increase or decrease dramatically in reaction to September 11. Comments from the field decreased as far as comments from visitors saying they were coming into the park in reaction, to get away from the news were finding were getting away from the city in direct relation to September 11.

Tracy Thetford: Camping remained the same as far as number of people, number of nights. Not exactly the same. I mean, we had minor variances — increase — but as I said, the visitation didn't dramatically increase. It...

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: It did for a short while, and then it came back down to the bell curve.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. What else, as far as normal is concerned?

Tracy Thetford: As far as normal? In my operation it's running the entrance stations in the campgrounds and taking care of employees.

- Mark Schoepfle: Just remember, although I'm part of the Park Service — this would be, you know — running a campground would be a mystery to me.
- Tracy Thetford: Right [laughter].
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay? Tell me a little more about some of these things, could you?
- Tracy Thetford: Running a campground is just making sure that we have staff out there to help assign sights, collect campground fees, provide information to our visitors, and all the administrative aspects that go along with that.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: You know, just paperwork, and then managing employees, as far as scheduling, and personal requests and employee development and performance management.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: Same with entrance stations. Just managing schedules and supplies and operations.
- Mark Schoepfle: What would be — as a result of this — were your staff placed on any higher alert level, or was there work hours increased or anything like that?
- Tracy Thetford: No.
- Mark Schoepfle: None of those changes?
- Tracy Thetford: No. The immediate reaction was if the entrance stations were closed, you know, if our employees wanted to go home and be with their families on September 11, then they would close them and people could drive in and out of Shenandoah as they pleased.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.
- Tracy Thetford: And then after that, work schedules went back to how they were originally planned. There was...
- Mark Schoepfle: When did they start doing that — I'm sorry. I interrupted you. Go ahead.
- Tracy Thetford: No, that's okay. When did they start going back, operations...?
- Mark Schoepfle: When did people return to their post? Was it like the next day or...?
- Tracy Thetford: The next day.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay.
- Tracy Thetford: Mmhmm.
- Mark Schoepfle: So, it was like just that first evening that there was a problem?

Tracy Thetford: Actually, as, before I, I said that I had called out to all the entrance stations to see if any employees wanted to go home and be with their families, and every one of them decided to stay.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh.

Tracy Thetford: So, none of them actually went home. There were some coworkers here in headquarters office that did go home to their families.

Mark Schoepfle: I see.

Tracy Thetford: But yeah, all of our employees stayed, and our operations — nobody, we didn't close down, or we didn't tell anybody to close down and go home. We left that door open if somebody personally decided to. But we did not increase hours as far as making sure that there was staff out there 24 hours a day —

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: — to with visitation or to be on alert. I'm sure you'll hear a different story from our law enforcement patrol folks.

Mark Schoepfle: Sure.

Tracy Thetford: But for us, no, we, our operations did not really change.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. This has been very interesting. Are there any other questions that I should ask that I haven't thought of?

Tracy Thetford: No, I don't think so. When you first called me, I started thinking a lot about, you know, what the events of the day were and my reactions and my personal experiences, and I think you've covered everything. I've said everything that I've thought about for the past couple weeks.

Mark Schoepfle: Well good.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: Is there anything else that you'd like to know about us that I can at least try to answer?

Tracy Thetford: Not right now, but I've got your business card [laughter].

Mark Schoepfle: Well, you...

Tracy Thetford: Can I feel free to call you?

Mark Schoepfle: Yes sure, oh definitely.

Tracy Thetford: Good.

Mark Schoepfle: Any time. Any time.

- Tracy Thetford: Well actually I do have a question. I would be very interested in, in how all of this comes together; all of these interviews, not only Shenandoah but you know, you said you went to Ellis Island Statue of Liberty. Are they going to be put on tape and, and made available for people to listen to, or what's—? Is there a proposed outcome for this project?
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh yes.
- Tracy Thetford: Yeah, I'm sure there is.
- Mark Schoepfle: First of all, the tapes will be placed in an archive.
- Tracy Thetford: Mmhmm.
- Mark Schoepfle: So, they're not going to be rotting in my office someplace to be forgotten, okay?
- Tracy Thetford: Yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: That's the first thing. The next issue is what is going to get written about it.
- Tracy Thetford: Mmhmm.
- Mark Schoepfle: Because in many cases, a lot of oral histories are done, and then they're just archived.
- Tracy Thetford: Uh-huh.
- Mark Schoepfle: That's the end of it. They become a resource for somebody if they later on want to do something.
- Tracy Thetford: What to research...
- Mark Schoepfle: We're pushing right now for writing something up. Kate Stevenson has asked for a report, and we're working out how we're going to put that report together.
- Tracy Thetford: Wow. It's a big project.
- Mark Schoepfle: Because it's, well, it's— It will be. But at the same time, there are a lot of things that you've been saying, I mean, as pedestrian as you may think some of this is, or ordinary as you may think this is, it's important to know these things. I mean, the fact that people did see what was going on in the campgrounds.
- Tracy Thetford: Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: The fact that when push came to shove, the people at the, at the posts said, “No, we’re staying.”

Tracy Thetford: Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: People got a chance to call their relatives and make sure everything was okay.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: And if their family were okay, then they stood at their posts.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: It happened all over the Park Service this way.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: And so, all of that may sound pedestrian, but when you think about how was government functioning, you know, at this time, I think that there are some very important facts that come out of this.

Tracy Thetford: That’s a good point, yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: And that’s, that’s one observation I’m having. And of course, I’m recording myself for posterity here.

Tracy Thetford: [Laughter]. Here, you want to hold the mike?

Mark Schoepfle: I have to listen to myself enough as it is. But that’s part of it. And the other part of it is okay, writing something up, getting these transcribed. It takes a long time to listen to a tape.

Tracy Thetford: I bet.

Mark Schoepfle: And to get them transcribed would be very important. And that’s — I think when it started out a lot wasn’t really thought of but as this went along people began thinking about it a little more. So, I’m in the awkward position of saying no, I wouldn’t want to promise you something I can’t deliver. But we want something written up, and that’s—

Tracy Thetford: That would be neat.

Mark Schoepfle: — the direction we’re working towards.

Tracy Thetford: Well great.

Mark Schoepfle: How that is going to work out, stay tuned.

Tracy Thetford: Oh yeah. Well, I will definitely keep in touch.

Mark Schoepfle: Good.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: How long have you been here, by the way?

Tracy Thetford: I've been at Shenandoah since July 2000.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: Almost two years.

Mark Schoepfle: Where were you before?

Tracy Thetford: Oh, I've worked in Yosemite National Park for about eleven years.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: Seasonally and then permanent, and that's where I was working before I got here.

Mark Schoepfle: So, you started out at Yosemite?

Tracy Thetford: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: How did you pick Yosemite?

Tracy Thetford: [Laughter]. I, this is a, I love telling this story. I went to college in Rhode Island, because I walked out of high school and I wanted to be a yuppie. My goal was to live in—

Mark Schoepfle: [Laughter].

Tracy Thetford: — Boston, be an investment banker, and live in this huge apartment. And so, I went to school and got my degree in accounting, and by the time I was a senior, I realized that I did not want to wear pantyhose or suits, or interview with any of the big eight companies. So, my stepdad was a seasonable ranger in Yellowstone. So, he said, "well why don't you apply to the National Park Service, and if you get a seasonal job that will give you six more months to decide what you want to do with your life."

Tracy Thetford: And my immediate reaction was, "Well, what's the National Park Service?" [Laughter]. So, I found out you can apply to two national parks for a summer job, and this was in 1989. So, I opened up a map of the United States and I looked at it and I said, "well, I've never been to California," so I looked at California and Yosemite was the first park that jumped out at me, so I applied to Yosemite. Had no idea what it was. Then I also applied to U.S. Virgin Islands because I figured it would be fun to spend a summer down there too.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. You could manage probably, yeah.

Tracy Thetford: [Laughter]. Yeah, I could hang out there for a while, sure. And so, I got a seasonal job in Yosemite and, and continued on ever since. It became a part of my heart and soul.

Mark Schoepfle: That's wonderful.

Tracy Thetford: I love that place. I love the National Park Service.

Mark Schoepfle: Wonderful.

Tracy Thetford: I love the mission and the goals and the reason why we're here, and that's why now I think the National Park Service is going to be my career [laughter].

Mark Schoepfle: Good.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: Excellent.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah, it's great.

Mark Schoepfle: So, do you want to stick around here for a while, do you want to go on, or what do you think?

Tracy Thetford: Well right now I'm focusing on career. But I would like to get back to a large Western park. I love the openness, I love the space of, of the west.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: And I do have to say the Sierra Nevadas became a part of my soul. And so, you know, I love big huge mountains and vast miles of wilderness.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: So, I'd like to eventually get back there, but right now I'd like to kind of move up my chain of, of work that I'm doing right now.

Mark Schoepfle: The chain of command, line of authority?

Tracy Thetford: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: Sure.

Tracy Thetford: Well, not really line of authority, but the — the branch that I'm in right now is I think a, an exciting one, because it's new, Fee and Revenue Management. And—

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: — due to the Fee Demonstration Program in 1996—

Mark Schoepfle: I hadn't made that connection, okay.

Tracy Thetford: Mmhmm. So, this is a new career ladder. And it fits really well with my accounting degree, because I do like business, and I like numbers and accounting and organizational management.

Tracy Thetford: And, and so it fits very well being in the National Park Service in this new career path that's pioneering, and I like that.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

Tracy Thetford: You know, being part of that pioneering. So, I think I find that exciting.

Mark Schoepfle: That's great.

Tracy Thetford: So, I'd like to continue. Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: So, you live here on, in the park, or...

Tracy Thetford: I live in Stanley Virginia about eleven miles south.

Mark Schoepfle: Right.

Tracy Thetford: About seven miles south of Luray and I have this great farmhouse right on the bottom of, of the Blue Ridge Mountains, 80 acres of land with cows and my black lab and my neighbor's two golden retrievers, and it's a great place. It's beautiful.

Mark Schoepfle: I can understand why you're not in that great a hurry to move...

Tracy Thetford: I'm not in that great a hurry to move on. [Laughter]. And I have to say too for posterity, my supervisor, Linda Green, is one of the most amazing people to work with. And actually, everybody in this park are pretty spectacular people and coworkers. I mean, talk about team effort, you know, exceptional, exceptional coworkers.

Mark Schoepfle: Well, that's great.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah. So, as you said, I'm not too in a rush to move on [laughter].

Mark Schoepfle: Very, very good.

Tracy Thetford: Yeah. Thanks for asking.

Mark Schoepfle: Well thank you very much.

Tracy Thetford: You bet.

END OF TAPE