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September 11, 2001 Oral History Project, 2001-2004



Alfred Farrugio
January 30, 2002

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September 11, 2001
Oral History Documentation Project
Northeast Region, National Park Service

INTERVIEWEE: Alfred Farrugio
Horticulturist
Statue of Liberty National Monument
(Interview No. 28)

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INTERVIEW DATE: January 30, 2002

PLACE: Ellis Island
Statue of Liberty National Monument

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START OF TAPE

Mark Schoepfle: Keep going.

Alfred Farrugio: I heard that there were a lot of people running outside, that there was some sort of incident at the — one of the towers at the World Trade Center. But you know, just being optimistic and I think being a native New Yorker I just said, well, whatever it is they'll put it out, it'll be fine, and it won't be anything to worry about. So, I just went to someone's office to ask a question about a contract or something and didn't even bother going out for a while.

Alfred Farrugio: But then there was a steady stream of people going out and — outside to see what was going on and I said, well, maybe I'll go take a look. And I went outside still carrying some documents related to contracts, and I went outside and just saw flames coming out of one of the towers. The first tower had been hit. And I kept looking at it and there were a lot of people outside there. We were out at the fuel dock on Ellis Island. And even looking at that I just thought, well, they'll put it out. I know in the past — way back I remember hearing that the — and seeing pictures of a plane hitting the Empire State Building. I thought, well, they'll put it out. Everything will be fine. But of course, the flames — we were just drawn by it and just stayed there watching and watching.

Alfred Farrugio: And I don't think many — I've even seen this in the news a lot, but a small plane came by while we were watching that. A small plane came very close to the tower and kind of just was observing what came by. Never saw this in any of the newspapers or on TV, but a small plane came by, kind of looked at it, and then went away. As it was approaching, someone said, watch, it's going to go right into the building. And that never happened. It went away.

Alfred Farrugio: But again, we were watching after that for about 8 minutes, 10 minutes, and the second plane flew over Ellis Island. And it was so low and made so much noise — and this I'll never forget, the feeling of that plane coming over us and just being so low, so fast and making so much noise and flying towards the second tower. But again, you know, just being optimistic it was going towards that tower, but my mind would not believe that it was going to go hit the tower. And even as it approached that tower, I didn't believe that it was going to go into the tower, hit it. I thought it was just going to observe like the smaller plane that I'd seen a little bit earlier. But even when it went into the tower — and it just went in like cutting through water. It was just absorbed by that — by the building. It just cut right into it.

- Alfred Farrugio: Before any flames, it just went right in, which was amazing. And the thing that amazed me so much was that my mind wouldn't even accept that. It was sort of like a defense mechanism not to accept that as reality, which was unbelievable.
- Alfred Farrugio: The plane went in and I thought I was watching a film. I just couldn't believe it as reality. It went in, the explosion, the flames. Again, it was all a film that I was watching. It wasn't really reality. And for me, it just wasn't something that I accepted immediately that it actually happened. It actually had a delayed reaction that this all happened.
- Alfred Farrugio: And here on Ellis Island, after watching it and the day progressing, after that we all had moved to the flagpole area on Ellis Island thinking that would be an area where we could all — the whole park staff would be out of the buildings in case anything happened on Ellis Island. We were out by the flagpole area just comforting each other. I know I was comforting some of the staff, talking to them, just trying to keep calm and still in absolute, utter disbelief of what was going on.
- Alfred Farrugio: There's actually — one of the things that actually struck me at this moment, being out there at the flagpole just watching the flames and then go on and all the smoke, was that every single seagull that's on the island that are usually flying all around the buildings, flying around the patio area looking for food, every single bird was on the ground. Just their reaction to it was so — they knew something wrong, terribly wrong was going on. Every gull was just huddled down into itself, its head pulled back into its body, not moving, not being stirred up and flying. They were all just totally still — is one of the things that stuck.
- Mark Schoepfle: Tucked into their wings.
- Alfred Farrugio: Yeah. Just seeing their reaction. And again, I think what was happening, this was all becoming real by seeing all these things that we had never seen or wasn't expecting. I mean, just going back to the original what I was going to do that day. I'm the horticulturist here and just dealing with some of the plant issues, some of the lawns, just I remember that morning before this all happened that that was my focus. And then just being turned totally around where that became so insignificant was another striking impression. That was just totally, totally insignificant because of what was going on.
- Alfred Farrugio: Okay. And I think one of the things as we're adjusting of what happened that day was that everything that was important to me, you know, again the plants on the islands and managing the grounds, all just collapsed. It was no longer important. I think a lot of people felt this, that what they actually do here was no longer important.

- Alfred Farrugio: Everything now was important as far as being safe and security. So that was a devastating, devastating feeling that everything that I represent, everything that I can provide here is no longer important.
- Alfred Farrugio: Like I said, it took a few days really for it to sink in of what happened, you know. I had personally had a delayed reaction to it. And I think a lot of that and actually a good thing I stayed — I remember they asked if people wanted to stay on Ellis Island and help set up a triage center. And I said yes, I'll stay. And I remember being here until about six that night and never even knowing how I would ever even get home.
- Alfred Farrugio: But it was really, I think, good because I was not even thinking about what I was thinking or feeling because I was so wrapped up in trying to help set up the triage center. And then as people came over — they just swooped up people from Battery Park and were bringing them here and bringing people that were injured and all full of dust and just helping. I was giving out water practically all afternoon and just comforting people that were coming over. And what was good is my focus was on other people and other things other than myself, and I think this was part of the delayed reaction that I had. I was just focused on other people, other things —
- Mark Schoepfle: Sure.
- Alfred Farrugio: — and not what I was thinking and feeling.
- Mark Schoepfle: Could you go into a little more detail on a couple of things, if I can just backtrack for a moment?
- Alfred Farrugio: Sure.
- Mark Schoepfle: One of the things you had mentioned was that as of — at the crash, one of the first things you did, thanks to the fact that you had this delayed reaction to the complete shock I guess of what was going on, you sort of directed yourself outward and looked after other people. Right?
- Alfred Farrugio: Right, right.
- Mark Schoepfle: One of the things you were doing right around the flagpole was comforting people. Could you tell me a little more about what was involved in comforting people? What did you say? What did you do?
- Alfred Farrugio: A lot of the — I shouldn't say a lot, maybe it was only about two or three people that were just, you know, crying uncontrollably, concerned about their children that may have been nearby or even not nearby. People were just reacting of a concern about their children, and just saying that it'll be okay. It'll be okay. It'll be fine.

- Alfred Farrugio: I remember just taking one of the interpreters, you know, in my arm and holding her, and just holding her as she was crying uncontrollably, and just crying. And the words that came to me were that it's okay. The captain is on the ship. And the words just came and that's what I was feeling, that in spite of all this everything is okay. I'm not sure that was precisely what I was feeling or going to feel later when it hit me with what was going on, but that was what I was saying.
- Mark Schoepfle: The captain is on the ship?
- Alfred Farrugio: I mean that God is in control and the day — and things are progressing under the control of a greater entity.
- Mark Schoepfle: Sure. Another question that comes up as I'm looking at this, you said that you went from the flagpole to setting up a triage center. Am I right on that?
- Alfred Farrugio: Right, right.
- Mark Schoepfle: What happened — and you said at the triage center the main things you did was getting water to people and further comforting them, I gather.
- Alfred Farrugio: Right, but before people actually came, we were hauling out — we were coming into the building pulling out, you know, stretchers and materials and bandages and things like that and setting them up on the front lawn. Again, we were thinking lots of people were going to be coming and that this was going to be going on all night. I remember saying, I need to go down in the basement and shut the irrigation system off in case — you know — so the irrigation system doesn't come on tonight.
- Alfred Farrugio: So, I ran in the building and — and again, you know, just being terrified that, well, you know, while I'm in there thinking that, you know, a plane could attack and hit the building. And every time we heard any kind of loud noise everybody just, you know, looked up and was afraid that something was going to happen because we were getting all kinds of reports that other places were being hit. We heard things like in Philadelphia a building was hit. And it was all kind of jumbled information. Of course, only the one that was accurate that in Washington the Pentagon, but we were getting reports that a lot of things were going on.
- Mark Schoepfle: For example, just what were some of the rumors?
- Alfred Farrugio: I remember them saying Philadelphia.
- Mark Schoepfle: Wow.

- Alfred Farrugio: And I guess that got — was just jumbled information about the plane that was in Pennsylvania. They said the White House, that there was an incident at the White House. The Pentagon. I think that was it.
- Mark Schoepfle: And so you were getting — so while you working all the — you were sort of working under the apprehension that all these — of all these rumors that every other place was getting hit that looked important, yours would be hit too?
- Alfred Farrugio: We were — you know, certainly we thought the statue would be hit and we thought Ellis Island would be hit too. So, there was this sense of fear and a kind of — any kind of threat we were kind of scared. And this was really shown in the fact that at one point while we were all at the flagpole area watching the towers and then at one point the first tower coming down, which was interesting, which is not anything like it was on TV. But some — a few people — were in a small boat and they were coming toward Ellis Island, and there was a small motorboat. And I don't know who they were, but they were coming towards Ellis Island real fast.
- Alfred Farrugio: And everybody saw that, and we thought — I don't think anybody even said it, but we all thought the same thing — they were coming with bombs and they were going to attack us. And we all just started running. Everybody just started running away from the corner of the flagpole towards the western end of the island, until somehow the Coast Guard intercepted them and stopped them or whatever. But that's just how jittery we were. We were just on edge and —
- Mark Schoepfle: I hadn't heard a thing about this.
- Alfred Farrugio: Oh, no? Yeah, everybody just ran. Everybody just ran.
- Alfred Farrugio: But about the tower collapsing, the first tower, which was kind of strange, but on TV you saw everything just come down to the ground. From what we observed things were shooting up into the air, which is again something that I'll never forget. And that when I see it on TV or in video, everything came down to the ground, but things were shooting up into the air as the building collapsed, which is again one of the things just, you know, engraved in my mind.
- Mark Schoepfle: Well, what went on then as you shut down the irrigation system and you — because out of concern that, well, that would turn on and wouldn't help matters any.
- Alfred Farrugio: Well, I thought it would go on at night and there would be, you know, people out on stretchers and all that. And you know, I didn't want to be sprinkled — sprinkling everybody.

- Alfred Farrugio: So, I remember running in, telling one of the park police that I was going to go into the building and shut down the irrigation system. And he said, yeah, shut it down. We don't need any of that happening. So, I ran in and remember running down into the basement, no one around, and of course this is all strange because no one is around in the building, and then coming right out.
- Alfred Farrugio: But at another point too, after we set up the triage center and again waiting for people, there was a report that we were going to make a morgue on the island. And the area that was identified was the metal garage all the way at the fuel dock on Ellis Island. And I remember being involved too in helping clear that out of material, emptying it out. I remember some of the people came from, I don't know where, but the rescue people or whatever needing tarps because again they were thinking, well, about 200 bodies are going to come in two hours and we were cleaning this thing out.
- Alfred Farrugio: I got — a talk that I had was they wanted to be able to cover what they had. And so, there was a major shift after the triage center to clear the morgue and be ready for about 200 bodies or remains. So, we did that and I remember bringing my — the tarp that I had stored — that I had in one of my lockers and I brought it out and gave it to them in case they needed it. Of course, no one ever came.
- Alfred Farrugio: And then by then the two buildings had collapsed, and we kind of were focused on, well, that's probably — it was more calm. I remember we were back in the offices. I remember calling my — and this was pretty amazing too. I remember one — coming back into my office. It must have been about noon, one o'clock or so, and people were contacting me to see if I was okay. And I had gotten e-mails from a friend of mine in Italy. You know, he had known about what was going on and just wanted to know if it was true. And I got an e-mail from a friend of mine in Italy just wanting to know what's going on, is it true that one of the towers collapsed? And then the phone rang, and it was a friend of mine in Brazil that called and wanted to know if I was okay. And I said yes. And I was calling my folks to let them know that I was okay.
- Alfred Farrugio: And I had sent out an e-mail just to let people know that I was okay because — and apparently it had never gone out because all those people eventually called me at home or at work later on then the following week. People were just trying to get in touch to see if I was okay.
- Mark Schoepfle: You mean they had never gotten the e-mail message? Or you just figured they hadn't?

- Alfred Farrugio: Yeah, the e-mail had never gone out for some reason. And so, all those people that I thought that had word that I was okay were frantically calling me, trying to reach me at home —
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- Alfred Farrugio: — the next few days. And it's amazing. People that I haven't even seen in years, you know, we've made contact again. And now I see one of them every week. In fact, we're going to dinner tonight.
- Mark Schoepfle: Wow.
- Alfred Farrugio: We kind of, you know, touched base again and now resumed contact. So that was kind of reassuring. But it was amazing that people so far away were connected with what was going on, and you know, I thought it was just a local thing but didn't realize the worldwide implications of it. But you know, it was kind of sinking in when I got the e-mail from Italy, my friend in Italy, and my Brazilian friend calling me that they were all tuned into what was going on. It just wasn't, you know, our backyard kind of thing.
- Mark Schoepfle: Right. I'm sorry. Go ahead.
- Alfred Farrugio: And then at the end of the day — I mean, I was here until about 6 o'clock, and we found out that a boat was going to take us back to Manhattan. And the management office, the superintendent asked me — the deputy superintendent too, they asked me if I can escort our last two visitors to Ellis Island. They got kind of picked up on Battery Park early in the day. One had some medical training and he was going to stay on Ellis Island in case he was needed. But they needed to get back to — they were actually tourists from California, and they needed to get back to Little Italy. And the management office asked me if I could bring them back to Little Italy on that boat. And I said I would be glad to bring them back.
- Alfred Farrugio: I wasn't sure how we were going to get back, if we could walk through Lower Manhattan or what. But they were staying at a friend's house in Little Italy, so I said, okay, we'll go back. And our boat went to Lower Manhattan where it usually goes. And I didn't think it would be good to get off there because it was going to make another stop in Brooklyn under the Brooklyn Bridge. And I thought, well, it's probably better to get off in Brooklyn and walk over the Brooklyn Bridge to Little Italy. And I live in Greenwich Village and I could walk up to Greenwich Village from there. I didn't think it was safe walking through the, you know, Lower Manhattan where all this was going on.

Alfred Farrugio: So that was — we got off at the Brooklyn Bridge, and we walked — actually they wouldn't let us over the Brooklyn Bridge. We got off the boat at the Brooklyn side of the Brooklyn Bridge and they wouldn't let us — there were police on the Brooklyn Bridge, and they wouldn't let us over. But I don't know, things just happened. We met people from the Red Cross, and we told them the situation and they gave us Red Cross tags. And then the police allowed us to go across the Brooklyn Bridge. And that was an incredible experience walking over the Brooklyn Bridge looking at Manhattan and seeing all the sky — first of all, it was a beautiful, beautiful sunset. The sky was just naturally red — being so beautiful, but just all covered in smoke and darkness of all the smoke coming up out of the Ground Zero area.

Alfred Farrugio: It was so amazing that I asked these tourists — and now we're in touch. We kind of became friends and we keep in touch with each other, and I asked them to send me some of the pictures that they were taking as we went over the Brooklyn Bridge, which were unbelievable. So, I got them back to Little Italy and I got home. And then I think it kind of was starting to settle in of what was going on and I started thinking about what I was feeling. And then, you know, I became very, very sad about what was going on and really felt an intense sense of loss, even though I didn't know anybody that worked there but just so many numbers of people that were dying. And also, I think being a native New Yorker I felt an incredible sense of loss to the city that I love so much.

Alfred Farrugio: It was — and one of the ways of dealing with what I was going with was to do some writing. And I remember just writing, is it possible to mourn for two towers? And then I was walking around in the village, you know, and I would stop and write in the park. And I would say, well, they're not there anymore where I used to see them, and now I only smell them because of that metallic smell in the air. And I said, why, it's certainly possible to mourn for two towers. They were part of my everyday experience, not only seeing them here on Liberty and Ellis Islands every day, but I live in the village and I would see them every day, you know. They were there. So, it was absolutely possible to mourn the loss of those towers.

Alfred Farrugio: But it was incredible too being in the village those — that night of the attack but also the next few days when no one was on the street. One of the things that's so wonderful about New York is that it's so vibrant. The streets are just full of people, full of life and activity, and there was nothing. Stores were closed. Restaurants were closed.

- Alfred Farrugio: No cars on the streets because this was all below 14th Street where everything was closed off. It was a sealed-off zone. No cars could come in, no deliveries. Restaurants were closed. People were not out on the streets.
- Alfred Farrugio: So, everything that was not what it's about to live in New York, it was the absolute opposite. No one was out on the street. And people that were out on the street, of course they had masks on. People didn't want to be out smelling that odor of the metal and dust and all that. But then again there was nothing outside to go outside for. The restaurants, the cafes were all closed. And people I think were home too, glued to TV, watching what was going on.
- Alfred Farrugio: So that was again, you know, hitting home that this was really serious. And it was sinking in that this did happen. That it was horrible. And didn't know whether I was safe in my own building in Greenwich Village.
- Alfred Farrugio: So, it was very difficult, not only the next few days after the attack, and of course we weren't coming to work because we were — the park was closed. So, it was basically being home watching TV and just going outside every once in a while and just seeing everything opposite that you're used to, that I was used to.
- Alfred Farrugio: Then it was Friday the day after — Friday after the attack was the national day of mourning. And I remember watching the services on TV from the cathedral, the national cathedral. But they were showing shots of the Statue of Liberty and Liberty Island as the ceremonies were taking place on — at the cathedral, and just was so proud when I saw the statue with the huge garrison flag flying.
- Alfred Farrugio: And then remember seeing also how beautiful the island looked because it was a beautiful day, but I could also see that a lot of — the lawns looking so beautiful and also the trees looking so beautiful. And then feeling, well, in my own little way I made some sort of contribution because that's what I do here is keep those resources healthy and alive and looking great. And she looked — the statue looked great and her setting with the green trees and the green lawn looking just so good and it made me really feel good.
- Alfred Farrugio: So that was the — that first week following. And I remember getting out of the city the weekend with a friend of mine who has a house out in Sag Harbor, and it was good to get out of the city for that weekend. It was a beautiful weekend. Saturday and Sunday were absolutely beautiful, and again, it's sinking in how the — that this was not just a local thing, but once we got out in Sag Harbor which is out, you know, way out on Long Island, the town just covered with flags all over the place.

- Alfred Farrugio: And I had seen that going on in the village too, but again it was just, well, this is not just something that I was exposed to. It's just all over. But it was good to get out of the city for those two days to help heal.
- Alfred Farrugio: But I have to say that for five weeks I really was — was really down. I was really hurt, and again it just kind of came to me what I was — what I would feel in a day. And I remember just writing that today I just don't feel well. I silently weep. I put myself back together and then I silently weep again. It was just the way I felt. I just don't feel well. And then you would just kind of, you know, your eyes would well up with tears, but you wouldn't actually cry but you would just not feel good. And then you'd get yourself composed again and then you'd wait until it happens again that you would just silently weep.
- Mark Schoepfle: Well, tell me more about what happened in the five — I mean, what I'm understanding you're saying is that for the first — for the remainder of that week you were pretty much home and just watching the TV —
- Alfred Farrugio: Right.
- Mark Schoepfle: — glued to the TV, seeing what happened, communicating with friends as best you could, and getting out of town on the weekend to go to Sag Harbor. That also sounds exactly like what we did, and to my surprise everybody wanted out of town. I thought everybody — you know, that the highways would be completely bare, you know, the way the city itself was for the first couple of days afterwards, but no such thing. I mean everybody was out, just had to get out, it seemed like.
- Alfred Farrugio: Yeah, yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: What happened in the — okay, did you — I mean, did you return to work the next week or did you remain home for longer? What happened in these ensuing five weeks that you were mentioning?
- Alfred Farrugio: Well, from the day that we returned — the following week we returned to work. I think it was on the Tuesday or the Wednesday after that weekend. And from there we had a — it was very nice coming back. It was, well, you know, it was hard coming back because all of a sudden, this new world was in front of you. You know, no longer — my subway line was gone. I couldn't use the subway that I had taken. I had to, you know, find other ways of getting here. So that was difficult, but I could handle that. That's okay. I could deal with it.
- Alfred Farrugio: But I remember coming up out of the subway down here in Lower Manhattan that day and then it just really was — this is not the world I was remembering.

- Alfred Farrugio: I come out and I see military people all over the place, bright lights shining, people with guns, the military, the National Guard all over the place, rescue workers. And it was just like people, you know, directing you where you had to walk, what streets were open, what wasn't open, where you couldn't go. And that was just something that — I can deal with it, but it was not the world that I used to know. It was really like, well, now the whole world has changed, and I just didn't look at anything the same anymore.
- Alfred Farrugio: And so, we went to work and then it was nice seeing the, you know, the familiar faces and the people that live over — that, you know, I like so many people here. I like everybody here, and it was good to see them again. We were all hugging each other and just catching up on what they've been doing and dealing with and so on. But they also had a team of people to help if we wanted to talk to some of the — I forget what they call them, but people that were able to help you deal with what you were going through.
- Mark Schoepfle: Kind of like counselors or what?
- Alfred Farrugio: Yeah, some counselors. And I know I had been talking about it all through the weekend with everybody that I had seen and with so many people, and it was the last thing I wanted to talk about. So — and again I was pretty much holding up pretty well, although again I would go through that silent weeping kind of thing and just dealing with it in my own way.
- Alfred Farrugio: But I knew I did not feel well. I was concerned about a lot of things that was kind of stressful. Just concerned about the — whether the city was going to be the same city that I love and treasure so much. The economy. I remember people just e-mailing me, what can I do for New York? What can I do? What can I do to help? And I would e-mail them back and say, do something to stimulate the economy of New York, even if you have to go on-line and buy a candy bar from a New York City-based shop. Just do something.
- Alfred Farrugio: And I had been going to restaurants just to eat out more. I just actually — two days after the event I remember making a point to go out to dinner with someone in Greenwich Village. And I remember when I walked in, how are you doing, I was asking them, how's business? And they were saying, oh, it's not so good. But we went out to dinner, and then I started going to shows like every week which I had been doing before the attacks, but I made a point to get back and go to enjoy what New York is all about and to help support that, to be able to help support the economy is whatever I could do. And going to museums again and just being out there on the streets, and so that's pretty much what I was going through.

- Mark Schoepfle: So, in the next few — this is in the next few weeks, this is all within that five-week period, you're going out to shows more, making a point —
- Alfred Farrugio: Making a point of going out.
- Mark Schoepfle: — of going out, a conscious point. Not necessarily going out more, you're saying, but making a conscious point to do it when at times you didn't necessarily quite feel like it or what?
- Alfred Farrugio: Right. Well, trying to get back into a routine of going out and doing the things that I love about New York, but doing it more with a different emphasis. And the emphasis was I wanted to stimulate the economy. And it's still something that I'm concerned about now is just to, you know, to be out there and to throw whatever, you know, money that I can out there to help the city. And I'm so concerned about how I can help the city recover. I'm concerned about the city. I know historically New York usually, you know, comes back and has gone through a lot of hard times. But it's been great the past 10 years. New York's been great, just doing so well with Wall Street and all that. But I know it probably will change somehow, but I just want to keep it going.
- Mark Schoepfle: Sure. So, what else went on? I mean, what else was happening here and elsewhere?
- Alfred Farrugio: Well, one of the things that was again making this all real was that there were makeshift shrines going — being set up all around, I shouldn't say all around the city, but in two places that I had come across and visited a lot. One was right in where I live is in Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village. There were shrines and there were memorials. I think it was maybe the second day after the event or the next night there was going to be a candlelight vigil. I remember going to a candlelight vigil in Washington Square Park. It must have been either Wednesday or Thursday night after the attack.
- Alfred Farrugio: And I was just so moved by it all because here we're in Washington Square Park and one of the things in Washington Square Park right through the arch you always would be able to see the twin towers. And of course, they were no longer there. And I remember one of the — an NYU student that was not from New York, he said, were you able to see the towers from here? And I said absolutely, they were right over there, and pointing to where you could usually see them. And now you can only smell them.
- Mark Schoepfle: And there was still that metallic smell?

Alfred Farrugio: Oh yeah. That lasted for quite a while. But the vigil was going on, people were singing, you know, “We Shall Overcome,” and people putting up posters, and then the posters and the pictures of the people that were missing. And then this started putting a face on all this. This became not just an event, but a person. And again, that was hurting — made me hurt so much is when I would see these beautiful people that were gone. You know, most of them just young people that were working in the building that were — they were just missing.

Alfred Farrugio: So, there was that one in Washington Square, and then there was another one which was the southernmost barrier where people could come when the — south of 14th Street was basically a closed zone. So, Union Square Park became a shrine where people could come to. It was the closest south they could come in Manhattan because 14th Street was blocked, and you couldn’t get through it unless you lived down there. So, Union Square Park became a big, big shrine area. And just the sight of people not wanting war, people wanting war, people putting up posters of missing people, and that was pretty moving seeing that going on there.

Mark Schoepfle: You mean regardless of what the ideas were, quite often it was just moving to have people out there expressing themselves?

Alfred Farrugio: Yeah, to see how people were reacting and seeing — what also amazed me is how we were healing. This is the way we heal is having these candlelight vigils, singing, you know, draping the American flag everywhere. You know, a lot of people, you know, hated that idea and a lot of people, you know, found a lot of comfort in it. And you know, I felt a lot of comfort in seeing the flag. Just people singing and just people being brought together so, so close which was so unusual. You usually don’t see that in New York.

Mark Schoepfle: So, this was going in, I would imagine just in the few weeks or so after the attack, right?

Alfred Farrugio: Right, right.

Mark Schoepfle: What happened in the weeks after that?

Alfred Farrugio: At one point then a lot of the stuff was, you know, just started to disappear. As things became somewhat normal, a lot of those things that were put up, whether they be posters were all taken down, and now there’s — and they just kind of disappeared. I remember in Union Square Park people actually painted the statue of George Washington. And I think it was the people that were opposed to war. I think they painted his boots red or something like that, I’m not sure. But they put up peace — you know, a flag with a peace symbol in his hand.

Alfred Farrugio: And all of a sudden that stuff was all gone. The city finally, you know, I think they gave people the time to go through the motions, the healing, the ceremonies, the singing, and then a lot of that stuff just was cleaned up at some point. I don't know precisely when, and now pretty much it's all gone.

Alfred Farrugio: But with me, you know, it was again those five weeks, and one of the things that — and a lot of people are critical of people going to see Ground Zero, one of the things that helped me a lot was actually going to Ground Zero, going nearby and just seeing what I could see. And I hadn't been down there but about maybe about two times and it really helped me heal. I don't know why, whether, you know, it sank in that this really did happen, that I mean it's ridiculous not to believe that it happened, but I think it's just a defense mechanism to not believe that we could do — or this can be done — that people would do things like this to each other. You just block that out. But it was somewhat comforting and healing to see Ground Zero.

Mark Schoepfle: Others have mentioned that. I mean, even though they didn't feel there was much they could do there necessarily to help out. I mean, you know, the trained people were all there doing what they were doing, but just being there seemed to be personally very helpful to them.

Alfred Farrugio: It was very helpful, and you know, it wasn't that you were gawking or anything, but it was a comforting experience to connect to the reality.

Alfred Farrugio: And then things started to get better, and still if I'm going to write a letter it's going to be to the MTA. I think one of the comforting, most comforting things is when the subway lines started to get back together. And when the N and the R subway line, which is the one that I take to work, they had gotten that back after talk of it being closed for a year or so, and they got it back together. And I said, wow, this is great. New York is — really comes together, and just because of that. I remember just being so happy that the escalator was working again. And I said, wow, this is New York, you know. This is great. And then the, you know, the subway line was working then that I used to take. And now just this — three days ago another subway line just opened. The E train is now going to the World Trade Center. It goes — the stop over there is going, is working again. And I'm going, that's great, and just being so — seeing so many positive things like that.

Mark Schoepfle: Neat.

Alfred Farrugio: You know, just kind of nice.

Mark Schoepfle: You mean just getting things back to a normal routine again?

- Alfred Farrugio: Yeah, yeah. And just that people are working on them. I'm so thankful that these people, whoever they are, putting together and trying to bring things back to the way they were. It's just real comforting.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. What was going on here on the grounds at the same time? Were any — were there — did things change here as well that were more along that line or what?
- Alfred Farrugio: In the park?
- Mark Schoepfle: Uh-huh.
- Alfred Farrugio: Well, in the park was — it was — again, things change so much for us because it was sad to go out onto the grounds and not see the thousands of visitors that we get. And it was — and even today we don't get what we were getting and it — I remember commenting just two days ago that it was — to one of the rangers how sad it is that we don't have all those people here and how much we miss them. For me a lot of it was actually a little bit better because more work can get done on the grounds. But — and a lot of times all those visitors were in the way of things happening on the lawns and all that. But without them there, I really miss it.
- Alfred Farrugio: I remember I did take advantage of the fact that we weren't — that the park was closed, and we didn't have any visitors and got all the trees pruned. And being on Liberty Island with nobody around and I had two arborists working up in the trees and I was assessing things on the grounds as they were there and just — there was just nobody around. You know, it just felt so lonesome.
- Mark Schoepfle: Could you — could we digress for a moment? You're bringing up an interesting point, and you brought it up a little bit earlier, that of course that on the first day of this event that your normal routine just got — well, it ceased to exist I guess is kind of the way you were putting it. Maybe I'm drawing a kind of broad stroke. But tell me a little more about this normal routine and what it took to get that back up because you're talking now even with the visitors gone — and I can understand that being just around Washington, D.C. I miss them too, and I don't even — I'm not even in charge of a park. It's just nice to see them around. They're appreciative, they ask you stuff, and you know, they're curious and they can be kind of fun. I mean, that's my personal experience on it.
- Alfred Farrugio: Sure.

Mark Schoepfle: And I'm wondering, you know, tell me a little more about the routine with the trees and the lawn and these things, and you know, you had a little time from what you're saying to catch up with things. But tell me a little more about that and how that changed and how that switched around to normal.

Alfred Farrugio: Well, generally there's always something going on in the grounds as far as — and this is always kind of going on behind the scenes, you know. You don't realize that, you know, a shrub is getting fertilized or, you know, irrigation is set to go off and go on. And so, all these things are things that, you know, I would monitor or program in a day. And we have contractors that come in and do either the mowing, the fertilization, pruning, and I was setting up things to happen. I mean, we were in the fall. This was the fall, and fall is a crunch period in horticulture. This is when a lot of things take place. This is when you do fertilizations. And so, I was concentrated on doing a lot of restoration on lawn work. And in fact that day we were — and I say we because the contractor was going to come and we were going to do some programming of what lawns got reseeded and over seeded and — but I think the point I was trying to make was that that which is what was important before September 11th, on September 11th and the weeks afterwards was not important, was insignificant. Because everything that was important or everything that I could help, where I come in and protect this park's resources, was not important. And that's what — that's where this programming and the — where it hurt the most. It was everything I stand for, and I think everyone can say this in each little division of what they do in this park was not important.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

Alfred Farrugio: There was something greater and bigger and the focus was there. It slowly has come back. You know, like I said, I got things done and trees pruned and now gearing up for spring for all the work that's going to happen in the spring. And — but back then those weeks all you could think about is, well, where are you going to go next and something's going to explode in your face or, you know, is going to get blown up or you're basically concerned about protecting yourself.

Alfred Farrugio: And really taking this to a more realistic thing, I had a trip planned to the Grand Canyon that I had been planning for months before September 11th. And it was supposed to be the first week in October I was going to fly out to New Mexico and drive with some friends to the Grand Canyon.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh, yeah.

- Alfred Farrugio: And I was planning to do it. I was, well, I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it. And the day before it was the day we started bombing in Afghanistan and that Sunday I waited until midnight and I called my friends up at New Mexico and said, you know, I just can't do it. I'm not afraid to go on a plane or anything, even though I still look at planes today and they look like just big bombs to me. But I just have no desire to go, and I just canceled that trip.
- Mark Schoepfle: Sure. Hold on just a minute. A couple of more things I want to ask in this regard but we're just about near the end of the tape.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Regarding some of these, you know, the routine activities and they had just sort of become meaningless to you, did you go on and do them anyway, or did they just or did they just slack off on them while you did other things, or what happened there?
- Alfred Farrugio: Well, again, it was a perfect opportunity to do some work because the visitors weren't around.
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh, I see.
- Alfred Farrugio: But then even trying to get it done — like I said, well, I had been planning to prune all the trees and even before September 11th, you know, it's on a cycle and I do it every two years. But the thing is I couldn't even do it. We weren't even allowed to come to Liberty Island. We had to stay on Ellis Island. They didn't want us to come on Ellis — on Liberty Island for a while. And I couldn't bring contractors over. So even though I wanted to jump on the opportunity I couldn't do it. So, I was being — basically not just feeling that it wasn't important, but I was being or couldn't do what I couldn't do. I mean, I couldn't do what I wanted to do.
- Alfred Farrugio: So basically, I was doing stuff in the office. I don't even remember what I was doing, probably catching up on a lot of clearing and cleaning up the office space and filing stuff that you never get a chance to do. And — but when we were finally able to bring contractors back, that's when I got back into more of a routine of programming, getting in touch with the contractor, programming the work, going out there and getting it done, and monitoring it.
- Alfred Farrugio: My first day back on Liberty Island was kind of an experience too. I mean, this must have been about two or three weeks maybe, maybe even a little bit more when we finally got back and started doing some of the tree work, or I was maybe by myself, I don't remember exactly, and was looking at the trees I think of what needed to be pruned and what and that I would eventually go over with the contractor.

Alfred Farrugio: But I had said let me go to the nearest point on Liberty Island where I could see the World Trade Center. You know, I was just drawn there at one point and I walked over there. This is the nearest point to where the World Trade Center on Liberty Island and I'm looking over at the World Trade Center, where it was. I mean, this is a new — I mean, you know, the first time I'm seeing it from Liberty Island that way. And then I turn around to the tree right, you know, again this is the closest tree to the World Trade Center on Liberty Island, and I see carved into the tree in letters about four inches the word Pakistan. And I was going, well, what's that all about? I never seen that before and this is, you know, out of all the 650 trees on Liberty Island, why is that tree — somebody carved in the word Pakistan.

Mark Schoepfle: Right.

Alfred Farrugio: And out of the four sides of the tree, why this side that's facing directly looking at the World Trade Center. So, I went and reported it to the dispatch and park police and, you know, maybe that meant something. Maybe it was something that they should look at and try and find out and see if there's something else there. But, still today I believe that the person that carved that in — and I could see that it was done a while ago. It wasn't a fresh carving. That it was — you know, the tree started to grow around it.

Alfred Farrugio: And it turns out it was done about a year and a half ago. They actually had a case incident report of the person that did it. And again, to me I think it means something because there are a lot of trees on Liberty Island. Why that one? And the park police, I don't know what they did, whether they investigated it or not. I don't think they picked up on anything about it. They just considered it normal. It doesn't seem normal to me, but —

Mark Schoepfle: Not one of their high priority items in other words

Alfred Farrugio: Well, they kind of thought it was just a coincidence.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. So, you got onto Liberty Island within about three weeks to start work there with the tree pruning and that kind of thing. What else was going on? How did you — was there — things, I gather from what you're describing, have become slowly more normal. Am I correct on that?

Alfred Farrugio: Right, right. Now I'm kind of pretty much in the same routine. And I think a lot of it was getting out of that feeling that it was. I mean, that definitely that feeling that, well, you know, tomorrow this may happen again or — you know, and what we do is not important. And I don't feel that way anymore.

- Alfred Farrugio: And you know, it was funny because after about five weeks like I said that it affected me, it was sort of like a cloud lifted and then I was back to my — to pretty much my regular self. I smile a lot. I laugh a lot. I kid around a lot. And it just kind of happens, you know, overnight like a cloud lifted. And so now I'm pretty much looking at work the same way the way I used to, you know. I have an important resource that I'm here to protect and to take care of and get work done. And I'm pretty much doing you know a hundred things like I used to do.
- Mark Schoepfle: But that was within about five weeks after things just kind of — the cloud lifted —
- Alfred Farrugio: I know it was, yeah. I know it was —
- Mark Schoepfle: — and things just sort of switched back to normal?
- Alfred Farrugio: Yeah, yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: Are they completely normal, or are there still some things changed?
- Alfred Farrugio: I don't think I could say it's completely normal. But I think what's different is I feel more optimistic about the outcome. I'm still kind of having trouble getting on a plane. And I am trying to make plans to go away in late February, but I just can't do it. And I'm not understanding why. I mean, I don't think I'm afraid. I just don't think that — I don't know. Maybe I just want to be in New York and be here and stimulate the economy. I just don't know, but I'm trying to get away.
- Mark Schoepfle: What — I could see that. I think a lot of us still feel the same way. What about that fifth-week period, you know, the cloud lifted. Could you tell me more what happened when that cloud lifted?
- Alfred Farrugio: Yeah, it was — I think, and this might've helped it a lot for that cloud to lift, even though I was a little bit sad, but a friend of mine from Italy came and visited. And it was the week the New York marathon was going on. And he came and had no problems. You know, he was just saying, well, you know, this happened and that doesn't mean I'm not going to come visit New York. And he came and spent a few days and his cousin was in the New York marathon, and we had gone to see his cousin in the marathon. And I saw all these people from different parts of the world and different parts of the United States. And I was — I felt so good again being more optimistic. Well, people are coming back to the city and being so happy about that. And the fact that he came, my friend came and was, you know, coming to New York. It just — that did it for me. That did it for me. And then —
- Mark Schoepfle: That's great.

Alfred Farrugio: — going out and showing them the city. In fact, I did — I took them to Ground Zero. That was the second time that I had been there and that did it. I started being my old self again.

Mark Schoepfle: Great.

Mark Schoepfle: Where do you see things going from here?

Alfred Farrugio: It's — I think things — and I don't know if it's just the optimistic part of me — I think things are going to be very much brighter for New York. I think we'll probably have a period where it's going to be a little bit tough. I think there will be unfortunately more things that we're not used to as much as I think there might possibly be more crime, more homeless people, people needing help, people struggling. And I think that's something we're going to need to — you know, the city's going to have to do something, we're all going to have to do something to help and try and prevent those things from happening.

Alfred Farrugio: But I always believed that — and I know because I had written something about this when this was all happening — that so many seeds have been planted. I don't know, maybe it's just because I'm a horticulturist that I look at it in terms like that, but so many seeds were planted because of September 11th. So many hands were held. So many people came together. So many expressions of love that wouldn't have happened but — and I put this all together as so many seeds were planted, and we will have the spring when all those seeds start to germinate. So, I think because of all the activity, the expressions of love, the pouring out to help each other, that the city can only be so much better because of this. And I truly believe that —

Mark Schoepfle: Well, good.

Alfred Farrugio: — that when all those seeds start germinating, the city will be so much better.

Mark Schoepfle: Very good. Well, those are pretty much the questions I have to ask. I guess my — so how many years had you mentioned you'd been here at the park?

Alfred Farrugio: I hadn't mentioned it, but I've been here about 11 — 10, 11 years.

Mark Schoepfle: 10 or 11 years. Yeah. You start here as a horticulturist?

Alfred Farrugio: Yeah.

Mark Schoepfle: And you're a native New Yorker?

Alfred Farrugio: I'm a native New Yorker.

Mark Schoepfle: Which neighborhood were you from?

- Alfred Farrugio: I'm from Brooklyn. I lived in Brooklyn, Queens, and then Long Island.
- Mark Schoepfle: So, you're a New Yorker.
- Alfred Farrugio: I'm a native New Yorker. And then came back and lived in the city. I did — you know, I did one of the things that, you know, my parents were always looking to move out of the city and kept moving and moving, farther and farther away from the city. You know, they went from Brooklyn to Queens to Long Island and still are out on Long Island. And now my generation wants to come back and be in the city and enjoy the city and that's who I am.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- Alfred Farrugio: But I know, and I've lived out of the city for about five and a half years. I lived in Italy, so I lived away from it. And I think that's one of the reasons why I appreciate it so much, because I've been to a lot of places and lived away from New York and know why I love it so much.
- Mark Schoepfle: You visited Italy, the part where your ancestors came from or where?
- Alfred Farrugio: Well, I lived and worked in Italy.
- Mark Schoepfle: You lived and worked in Italy.
- Alfred Farrugio: So, I was five and a half years there, so I was away.
- Mark Schoepfle: What part?
- Alfred Farrugio: In Sardinia. Yeah, so I was working for the Navy. And so, I knew when it was time to come back even though I was in a beautiful — living in a beautiful fishing village. But I've seen my culture and, you know, from a distance and so I can appreciate it and know what I miss and what I love about it.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. Are there any questions that I've asked or what we've been talking about, is there anything that I've failed to ask that I should've asked about?
- Alfred Farrugio: Nope. I can't think of anything.
- Mark Schoepfle: Anything you'd like to know about what we're doing that I haven't told you, even if I don't know?
- Alfred Farrugio: Nope. We had discussed this a little bit before the interview, and I think pretty much I understand somewhat what you're trying to accomplish.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Well, if you've got any questions, you know, as time goes on, or comments or additions you want to make, please don't hesitate to call.

Alfred Farrugio: Okay.

Mark Schoepfle: And I'll keep you in touch as to what we're up to.

Alfred Farrugio: Fine. Thanks a lot.

Mark Schoepfle: Well, thank you very much.

END OF TAPE