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Danelle Simonelli
February 1, 2002

Interview conducted by Mark Schoepfle
Transcribed by Lesa K. Hagel
Edited by Lesa K. Hagel
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NPS History Collection
Harpers Ferry Center
PO Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

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

INTERVIEWEE: Danelle Simonelli
Park Ranger (Interpretation)
Statue of Liberty National Monument
(Interview No. 33)

INTERVIEWED BY: Mark Schoepfle, Ph.D.
Ethnographer
Archaeology and Ethnography Program
Washington, D.C.

INTERVIEW DATE: February 1, 2002

PLACE: Ellis Island
Statue of Liberty National Monument

PROJECT COORDINATOR: Chuck Smythe, Ph.D.
Senior Cultural Anthropologist
Boston Support Office
National Park Service
15 State Street
Boston, MA 02109

START OF TAPE

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. This is an interview between Danelle Simonelli and Mark Schoepfle on February the 1st, 2002 for the World Trade Center.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Danelle, the first question I have is from the moment you were aware that something had happened, what went on?

Danelle Simonelli: Well, I had just come off a few days' vacation and was back at my job as a park ranger in the interpretation division at Ellis Island. I was walking down the hall getting ready to help set the building up for the arrival of the first visitors that day. And another staff member came into the hall and said she'd heard a report that one of the World Trade Center towers was on fire. We did not know why at that point.

Danelle Simonelli: And I went up to the big windows in the Historic Great Hall at Ellis Island. I and a couple other employees were there, seeing the smoke billowing out of one of the towers and thinking at that point how horrible it was. And I think I said a little prayer for the people in the tower at that point. But we thought at that stage that it wouldn't directly affect us on Ellis Island. So, I figured I should probably get back to work and I started straightening benches in the Great Hall.

Danelle Simonelli: And I'm not sure exactly how I wound up back at the windows, but I did with those same two employees. And we're very used, at Ellis, to hearing the sounds of aircraft around the harbor, sightseeing helicopters, and commercial aircraft and so on. But we heard the sound of an aircraft that was just way too loud and felt like it was way too low over our building, and it seemed to kind of make the building vibrate a little bit.

Danelle Simonelli: And then this big silver plane came into view that had flown almost over our heads, almost over the building at Ellis, the main building. And I wondered, you know, what is this plane doing flying in an unusual pattern, coming from the south and heading toward the World Trade Center? Is it going to fight the fire? Is it going to drop water on it? You know, what is it doing? And it just kept on flying.

Danelle Simonelli: And I have this kind of still shot in my mind of that silver plane just before it went into the tower. And then it just disappeared. It was swallowed by the tower, leaving a hole. And we're about a mile and a half away from the World Trade Center with a clear view across the harbor. And it was very surreal to see this happen at that distance. And there was a second or two or three for us to all kind of process what we'd seen.

- Danelle Simonelli: And then things started to click into place that this was not an accident. We heard some radio transmissions over the park radio that made us realize there were two planes that had hit the two towers. And our immediate thought was, was there going to be a third.
- Danelle Simonelli: We're all aware from minor incidents in the past that the Statue of Liberty is a potential target for terrorists or other malcontents. And so, our immediate concern then was to evacuate most of the staff from Liberty Island especially, and also from Ellis Island. Luckily for us there were no visitors in the park as yet. It apparently was not very lucky for those visitors who were on the first boat in Battery Park about to leave Lower Manhattan when all of this started occurring. But we only had to worry about the staff.
- Danelle Simonelli: And I at Ellis — we were called to our closing posts. Meaning several of us went to the top floor of the building to then sweep the building to make sure all the people who were on the island were accounted for. So, we were walking the sweep throughout the whole building. And eventually, they had us gather at the canopy in front of the main building, and from that point you cannot see Manhattan directly. You're looking out toward the statue.
- Danelle Simonelli: As all this was going on, we kept hearing the radio reports and things like one of the park police officers who was in the pedestal of the statue seeing another plane approaching and not knowing if it was friend or foe and being ordered to get out of the statue as fast as he could, and eventually everyone realizing it was a U.S. military plane. So, there was kind of a tinge of panic in the air, I think.
- Danelle Simonelli: And apparently there was the 9 o'clock staff boat that was taking NPS and concession employees from Battery Park to Ellis and then to the statue was en route during all of this and eventually then got sent back. So, this was another thing we were hearing. The employees who'd left the tip of Manhattan on that boat never actually set foot on Liberty Island. They just went back and then had to get home through Manhattan as all of this was going on.
- Danelle Simonelli: There was a little confusion on Ellis about, where we should be, you know, should we get our belongings or not to be ready to evacuate ourselves? Eventually they had us all gather in front of the canopy. I remember a second staff boat run. It was that same boat but making another run to evacuate more personnel off of Liberty Island so that only protection personnel would've stayed at Liberty Island at that point.

Danelle Simonelli: I remember some of my colleagues getting off — having come from Liberty Island, other people in the interpretation division getting off at Ellis Island. You know, one of them who lives on Liberty Island had brought her dog along evacuating.

Danelle Simonelli: And then that boat went on. It picked up some of the employees who live in New York and work at Ellis and was taking them back to Manhattan. And there were, I don't know, 30 or so — I'm not sure the number — NPS and concession and foundation employees gathered in front of Ellis. A few of them were out at the end of the dock where they could see Manhattan and some of them started to scream. And those of us who were at the canopy kind of ran over to the end of the dock to see what they were screaming about, and it was that the first tower had fallen.

Danelle Simonelli: Nobody I think expected the towers to start to fall at that point, so it came as quite a shock. I did not see the tower itself fall. By the time I got there it was already gone. But there was this huge brown cloud of billowing smoke and debris just spreading out over all of Lower Manhattan and up into the air, and the bizarre picture of just one of those towers standing there when of course this had been a major part of our skyline, you know, for the five years I've worked there.

Danelle Simonelli: And then there was our staff boat that had almost gotten back to Lower Manhattan when the tower fell. And there was a horrible minute or so that seemed like forever when we didn't know if that staff boat was safe or not. It just kind of got enveloped by the cloud. And then eventually the captain came on the radio and said, we can't land. We're coming back. And so there wound up being some of my colleagues who would have tried to go home through New York who wound up stranded at Ellis Island for much of the day because it was not judged safe to try to let them off in Manhattan.

Danelle Simonelli: One of the park police — the senior sergeants — took charge at the canopy and I guess of park operations as a whole, until some of the higher-ups got on scene. And I'm very grateful to him for staying calm and getting us organized, and you know, telling who to go where and who to do something useful. Some of the people who had EMT training started collecting — sending people to collect medical supplies for the triage that would eventually happen on the island, on Ellis. And some of them went back to Liberty to collect medical supplies from Liberty as well.

Danelle Simonelli: And other employees were still very dazed and frazzled, and a few of them were really distraught. I guess I was in the dazed and frazzled category myself. I was told at one point for example to look for a certain medical supply and, you know, put those kinds of things together, but I couldn't find them. And I was just kind of in a daze looking back and forth not quite having my act together.

Danelle Simonelli: I remember a couple of my colleagues really crying and screaming and concerned about friends or relatives who were either on the staff boat before it came back or who were working in Lower Manhattan. And you know, they were sure that they had been killed, which thankfully turned out not to be the case. But it was pretty confused initially and then started to organize itself out.

Danelle Simonelli: I have training as a first responder, to deal with sort of basic first-aid kinds of things. But because of a quirk of having had my certification expire, I was told that I was not officially certified, so I should not consider myself in the category of people who should stay and try to deal with whatever triage was going to come, which I at the time felt very relieved about because I really didn't want to deal with this horrible situation. You know, I just wanted to get home and get away myself, although I later would have kind of feelings of guilt about, you know, whether I could have stayed to do more. But it turned out there wasn't too much I could've done because we — unfortunately there weren't that many people to triage.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

Danelle Simonelli: I understand there were a few hundred evacuees that came through Ellis Island and some of them needed medical treatment, but you know, all the ambulance personnel and everyone who were ready to receive casualties basically didn't have very much to do.

Danelle Simonelli: At some point in all of this I had been — those of us who were parked on Ellis Island, which included me, were told to get our cars out of the regular parking lot so that the ambulances and such could come over. And so, at around 10:30 — I guess all of this started for me at around 9 a.m., and then at around 10:30 they told those of us who were not either in protection or who were, you know, currently certified medical personnel to go home. Those of us who live in New Jersey who could get — start to get home.

Danelle Simonelli: They told us to leave, and my car at that point was in the parking lot by the baggage and dormitory building which is facing Manhattan. So, I had spent much of this time not looking at Manhattan because the main building was between me and it.

Danelle Simonelli: But then I went out to my car and, you know, once again was dealing with this image of only one of the towers there. And as I was loading stuff in my trunk about to leave, I heard somebody, you know, yell that the second tower was starting to go. And I looked up and, you know, there it was starting to crumble. And I particularly remember the big antenna on top, you know, going off at an angle and then starting to come down.

Danelle Simonelli: I guess I have three big images from this day that are sort of like snapshots in my mind. And one was the plane about to hit the second tower. And the other was the big, huge billowing cloud coming out when the first tower fell. And then that image of the second tower with the antenna starting to fall as the building just went straight down.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh, yeah.

Danelle Simonelli: So, there was all of this carnage across the harbor from me but still at a distance and very surreal. And another thing throughout the day that I kept focusing on I guess was the sound. Because we were at that distance, there was a second or two delay before we heard anything. And that made it even more surreal, because when I saw the plane crash at first and then when I saw the second tower fall it was in silence.

Mark Schoepfle: Right.

Danelle Simonelli: And then there was a second or two before you heard the sound that came with it. So that added to this — the disconnection and the difficulty of dealing with it. But eventually I did leave the island then.

Mark Schoepfle: About what time?

Danelle Simonelli: It was somewhere around 10:30, a little after 10:30. And at that point, my trip home was like every science fiction movie's version of a mass urban evacuation from some catastrophe. They had closed all the highways and so I and a whole lot of other people were trying to drive home through New Jersey on local streets. And it was basically one big parking lot.

Danelle Simonelli: I live about 28 miles away northwest of the park in New Jersey. And normally it would've taken like half an hour for me to drive home at that time of day. But it took me three hours, and most of that was spent in bumper-to-bumper traffic, driving through local streets in Jersey City and Newark that were often in neighborhoods that I would normally have avoided.

Mark Schoepfle: Right.

Danelle Simonelli: You know, and just these streams of people, their cars inching along. Lots of police directing people. Lots of pedestrians, you know, just hanging out in their neighborhoods. It was all orderly and polite. Everybody was following the instructions of police. And you know, normally if you drive in this area, you know, everybody gets aggravated and everybody tries to cut into each other — in front of each other and honk at each other and so forth. And there was really none of that. I think everybody was very subdued and following instructions and listening to the radio and polite to each other.

Danelle Simonelli: And eventually I stopped off after most of those three hours and stopped at a shopping mall and tried to call my brother to leave a message for him that I was okay. Left a message on his answering machine. Had a bite to eat, because by that time —

Mark Schoepfle: I'm sorry. I forgot. Did you manage to call him or did you —

Danelle Simonelli: I only reached his machine.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh, that's right. Okay. Go ahead.

Danelle Simonelli: And by this time, it was like one o'clock or after one, and so I had a bite to eat at Burger King at the mall. And instead of going home — my mother's in a nursing home, and I went to visit her to let her know I was okay directly because she can't really talk on the phone. And that was the first of many visits to her over the following week. And each time I would come to visit her she would say, "oh, you're still alive. I thought you'd died in the explosion or the disaster." And because her cognitive functions are not quite what they used to be, for several visits after that she would greet me with this same greeting.

Mark Schoepfle: Wow.

Danelle Simonelli: Oh, you're still alive. I thought this had happened. And apparently throughout the nursing home there were all sorts of, you know, similar incidents of one kind or another, of patients seeing these horrible things on the TV and then going on from there in their own minds, you know. Veterans who wanted to get out of bed and get their gun and go fight. And eventually I spent, you know, an hour or so with mother and then finally get home — got home.

Mark Schoepfle: About what time did you get home?

- Danelle Simonelli: Oh, this must have been 3-ish maybe, 2:30 or 3. And then basically just settled in for a week in front of the television most of the time, you know, trying to find out what was happening. It was kind of like being sick at home for a week that I hardly went out at all. I just kind of curled up with my cats and watched the TV, and eventually started to try to watch other things like videotapes to try and get away from it. But for a while, you know, I just wanted to know what was going on and process it all.
- Danelle Simonelli: And that's basically the initial story. I can go on about coming back to work too if you want to at this point.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Well, the second question is very much what happened in the days and weeks following that, following the events of — back to work I think would be included in that.
- Danelle Simonelli: Yeah, yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: So, go ahead.
- Danelle Simonelli: Okay. Well, it was good to be home for a week to process this in my mind. I think a big help for me was going to several events at my church. Normally since I work on Sundays, I'm not normally at church services on Sunday mornings, although I do other activities with my church. So, for the three and a half months the park was closed to the public, they had us on a Monday through Friday schedule for all the interpretive rangers. And one of the results of this is that I spent a lot more time at church than I normally do, which was very therapeutic. So, I did some of those activities during that week when only essential employees were at STLI.
- Mark Schoepfle: Which church do you go to?
- Danelle Simonelli: I go to Morristown Unitarian Fellowship in Morristown.
- Danelle Simonelli: And you know, just being able to talk about the experience with other people, and I guess I had a more direct experience of it than most of the people in my community. I don't know anyone personally who, you know, was in the towers or in Lower Manhattan as the events occurred. So, I was sort of giving information to a lot of other people. And that was part of the therapeutic process.
- Danelle Simonelli: One of the things I was dealing a lot within my mind was fear. I've been lucky enough to have a life where I'm not usually concerned about my personal safety. But those kinds of thoughts were very much in my mind as we talked about going back to work and then especially once I did get back to work.

- Danelle Simonelli: I think by the time the week at home was over and we'd been informed, you know, we should report back to work on Tuesday a week after, the media were starting to talk about, you know, people going back to work and going back into their normal routines and starting to get back to normal. And I sort of blithely assumed that I would be able to do the same and was starting to think about, you know, how would I give my first tours to the public when I came back, what would I change, how would I or would I address what had happened.
- Danelle Simonelli: But I basically thought, okay, you know, the park will be closed maybe for a few more days to the public but pretty soon I'll be back in my normal routine and that in turn will help me get more and more back to normal myself. So, coming back here to Ellis was really a shock because absolutely nothing about my job was normal. Since I normally work with the public and the public was not here, I could not do my normal job. All the interpretive staff from both Liberty and Ellis Islands were crammed into one little office on Ellis that was suddenly very crowded.
- Mark Schoepfle: Run this by me again.
- Danelle Simonelli: About all the interpretive staff?
- Mark Schoepfle: Why?
- Danelle Simonelli: I mean, normally we're spread out over seven days, different shifts, and on two different islands.
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh, I see.
- Danelle Simonelli: And so, the office space where I normally work at Ellis, the office itself would be pretty empty and people who work on Ellis would drift in and out, but you know, there wouldn't be a huge amount of contact with all my fellow employees. And all of a sudden there were — I don't know how many of us — a couple dozen of us sharing this one confined space and not doing our normal jobs. So, my own desk was not my own desk anymore. I was sharing it with a couple other people.
- Danelle Simonelli: And you know, then of course there was seeing in person Lower Manhattan for the first time. And that started actually on the drive in because the World Trade Towers were a major geographic landmark in the area that everyone kind of would glance at to know where they were, whether they were driving in New Jersey or walking around Manhattan or whatever. And I've heard lots of other people describe the same feeling I had that, you know, you're just driving along, and you glance over there expecting to see them and they're not there.

Danelle Simonelli: And then you're literally disoriented because this landmark is gone. And you know, you're not sure what to do at this point. And your mind starts imagining them there. So, this — the reaction started on my drive in as we got closer and closer.

Danelle Simonelli: And then getting into Liberty State Park, I'd heard in the media people talking about the smell of the fires that were still going on at that point and then, you know, smelled it for the first time as I was driving through Liberty State Park to go onto Ellis, you know, this electrical fire smell. And at that point there was still a fair amount of smoke, visible smoke coming out, and just coming through Liberty State Park and seeing the absence of the towers there.

Danelle Simonelli: And everything around the harbor was really eerily quiet. As I said, we're used to lots of background noise, whether it's aircraft or highway traffic or, you know, the sounds of all the visitors talking or whatever. The harbor on Ellis Island — from Ellis Island is usually a pretty noisy place. And it seemed like deathly quiet, eerily quiet because, you know, they had — there was no aircraft traffic to speak of. They had grounded all the planes, all commercial and general aviation. And there was a no-fly zone around the statue in particular and around Lower Manhattan. And they had the highways closed too for a long time, which made my commute easier actually but added to the eeriness of the silence.

Mark Schoepfle: Sure.

Danelle Simonelli: So that was very strange. And that silence was one of the things incidentally that bugged me while I was home, especially while all the air traffic was grounded. It was eerily quiet around my house too. And when anything — when any aircraft did fly over, I would jump. And that lasted for a couple weeks. The sound of an aircraft, you know, would make me look frantically around to see what was making the noise. There was also a couple nights after the 11th, there was a thunderstorm overnight. And you know, lots of people including me were awakened in the middle of the night by that and —

Mark Schoepfle: Sure.

Danelle Simonelli: — you know, couldn't get back to sleep just from all the rumblings. So sound was a big factor.

Danelle Simonelli: So, I'm trying to deal with all of this on my first day back of the — you know, of the sight and sound and all the senses of what had happened to Lower Manhattan while I could not get back to my job. And you know, we had the first of many briefings that focused on security matters that often kind of terrified us, I think.

- Danelle Simonelli: You know, about what the prospects were for any other attacks and all the security measures and, you know, all the things we should be aware of when we do reopen to watch out for further incidents. So, I was really getting kind of stressed out on my first day, and what I was given to do added to the stress.
- Danelle Simonelli: In my former life before the Park Service, I was an editor. And I finally — I had left editing very consciously because of the stress involved in that career. And really still had a lot of leftover baggage that made me not want to do much in the way of writing and editing. And so, it was declared to be, by one of my supervisors, that on my first day back, okay, you are going to do a staff newsletter and you're going to come out with the first issue by the end of the day, which was to my mind a totally unreasonable time scale. And it was a job that I initially absolutely did not want to do because here I was dealing with all of this other trauma and suddenly, I was being plunged back into my former career that I had come to strongly dislike.
- Mark Schoepfle: — if you'd have loved it so much, you'd have stayed there?
- Danelle Simonelli: Yes. So, I was a very stressed-out person by the end of the first day, and that carried over — that extreme stress carried over for the first few days. And eventually things settled down.
- Danelle Simonelli: We had counseling sessions, debriefings that were very helpful. I think the counseling we did have made me come out of this in a lot better shape than other people I know outside the park. And I found myself often in the coming weeks passing along the sort of counseling tips that I had gotten here about, you know, what is and isn't a normal reaction to these abnormal events and advice about how to behave to try to help yourself and so forth. So I was, you know, very pleased with what the Park Service did along those lines. I think it helped me out quite a bit.
- Danelle Simonelli: And eventually the newsletter got on to a more workable schedule. And I put out seven issues of the newsletter during the three months and some that we were closed. And by the end of that time, I had come to think of that as a very therapeutic thing for me to do because I was doing something useful. I was, you know, processing all of — all that had happened as I typed out and designed the newsletter. I was kept very well informed because I was doing it, and I had feedback from some of my fellow employees that they were very happy it was coming out, particularly a lot of the protection staff on Liberty Island who didn't have much to do other than be on guard. And so, they — people were saying they were happy to have something to read to let them know what was going on.

- Danelle Simonelli: So, I think this — in many ways I came out of all this experience after the initial trauma in better shape than I was before September 11th. And one of the ways I was in better shape is that I think doing this newsletter let me finally put to bed all of the baggage I had from my previous editorial career. And that I think now I'm back to a point where I can use my editorial gifts in writing and design and so forth, you know, in a way that makes me feel happy about it, rather than it being something I just don't want to do, I don't want to deal with this. So that's been helpful.
- Danelle Simonelli: I think the other way that I've come out better is that I was dealing with a lot of issues in my personal life before 9-11, particularly the process of dealing with my mother's medical condition. She had just gone into a nursing home at the end of June and I've spent the last three or four years dealing with an increasingly bad medical situation there, you know, moving her from place to place. Having my own life disrupted by this. Having financial problems with it. You know, having one of my cats die earlier in the year. So, I was not quite a happy camper going into this. And I think I had been in a fairly depressed state, worrying about my own problems and thinking that — having a kind of a pessimistic view of how things in the world were working. That, you know, every little incident of somebody cutting me on the highway would say, oh, you know, this is the way life is. Everybody's out for themselves, and you know, nothing good is going to happen and so forth.
- Danelle Simonelli: And obviously 9-11 was a horrible event that eclipsed all of this, but I think it did two things for me. It made me forget about all my little problems at least for two or three months. Those all really faded into the background as I was dealing with this major national trauma. Plus, I think I was really impressed by all the heroism and charity that came out of 9-11 that I was seeing on the TV and that I heard people describe, little stories about everyone rushing to donate blood and merchants handing out water and shoes to people who were, you know, fleeing Lower Manhattan, and you know obviously all the rescue workers who went in to the World Trade Center.
- Danelle Simonelli: And you know, just ordinary people in my circle at home, I think everybody for a quite a long time went out of their way to be nice to everybody else. You know, everybody called up all their friends and relations to let them know they were all right and to find out if their friends were all right. And there was just a lot of reconnecting and, you know, politeness and caring among total strangers that left a big impression on me.

- Danelle Simonelli: And I think I went from previously, you know, thinking most people are basically not that great to thinking that, wow, there is all of this good in the world, that even in the face of this horrible incident the vast majority of people are doing good things and caring things.
- Mark Schoepfle: So, you sort of bounced back from this with a lot more of a positive attitude than you went into it with?
- Danelle Simonelli: Yeah, yeah. I think after a month or two, you know, I was really left in pretty good shape. By maybe mid- to late October, I was in the optimistic phase of things.
- Mark Schoepfle: Well, so up to mid- to late October things got a little bit better. What then went on?
- Danelle Simonelli: Well, I think starting in like early to mid-October, you know, things — I had come out of the initial trauma and I was in good shape. Up — I guess that all of that lasted — there was some lingering aftereffects of all of that, you know, good feelings. I think maybe by the holidays, maybe — I mean, we reopened — the park reopened to the public on December 20th, and the holidays were coming up. And I guess the rest of my real life was starting to come back at me by then too, you know, dealing with the holidays with my mother and her situation, and you know, dealing with just all the problems of everyday life.
- Danelle Simonelli: The one lingering negative impact of 9-11 for me has been financial. My finances were not in great shape beforehand. But because I'm in interpretation, normally I work Sundays and holidays and the fall is a prime season for overtime for evening special events. I lost more than a thousand dollars' worth of income through those three and a half months. And I'm still losing some now to the extent that we still don't have any special events in the park. So that financial burden — there was also a lag before that hit me, and by the holidays the loss of those thousand dollars were really hitting me too. So that has definitely contributed to some pessimism or some —
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- Danelle Simonelli: — some, you know, disgruntlement and concerns about how do I deal with all of this? So — but I think now my — we've been back at work for, you know, what are we now, five, six weeks. And I think now things are fairly normal at work. This is the slow season and it's probably a little slower than normal.
- Mark Schoepfle: I'm sorry. When you say you've been at work for five or six weeks, you mean after the park reopened?

- Danelle Simonelli: With the public, yes. So, December 20th or thereabouts we went back on what our normal work schedules would be. Mine is either Friday or Saturday through Tuesday. And so, schedule-wise my life, you know, has been back on a more normal keel.
- Mark Schoepfle: You mean because of the work or —
- Danelle Simonelli: Because of the timing. I mean, all of us in Interp [Interpretation] kind of have our lives revolve around our normal days off. My normal days off would be Wednesday, Thursday, and sometimes Friday, depending if I'm working 8 or 10 hours a day.
- Danelle Simonelli: So, the good side of working Monday through Friday for three and a half months was being involved in church. But all the other things I would normally do on Wednesday, Thursday kind of got thrown off. Dealing with my mother's situation, for example, when the doctors are all there and, you know, when business offices are open to deal with paperwork and bureaucracy issues or, you know, doing my banking or all the things I'm used to doing on Wednesdays and Thursdays. So those kinds of little scheduling things eventually got resolved when we got back on a normal schedule. I'm still dealing with the financial impact.
- Mark Schoepfle: Still trying to catch up?
- Danelle Simonelli: Yeah. Yeah. I still have bills that have not yet been caught up that should have been paid before this and have not been paid.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. Well, a thousand dollars is nothing to sneeze at.
- Mark Schoepfle: So, have there been any changes overall? I mean, you've mentioned the way in which you've bounced back and on the one hand on the positive side, on the negative side the finances and this kind of thing. Are there ways in which you — in which the park has changed as a result of all of this?
- Danelle Simonelli: I think so. Obviously, we're much more concerned with security. We've got new operations in Battery Park and Liberty State Park to screen visitors before they get on the boat. A lot of the security changes that have been done or are in the planning addressed problems we were all aware of in the normal operations for many years, you know, for example, how many people you squeeze onto Liberty Island at one time. You know, should you simply pack as many people on the island as can fit and then deal with visitors packed like sardines in line on 22 flights of stairs going up to the crown with only, you know, one exit route.
- Mark Schoepfle: So old problems are being addressed finally? At least they should be anyway.

- Danelle Simonelli: Yes, yes. Exactly. Some — there was not before the political will to address some of these hard questions of carrying capacity, of whether you should screen visitors as they're entering the monument which had been the previous system, or should you move the security to when they first get on the boats before they ever get to the islands, which is what we're doing now. So, I think most of us are pleased that all of these are being addressed.
- Danelle Simonelli: There's — it's an ongoing process. I think there's some concern that, you know, is security now going to start lapsing, you know, when certainly there are still a lot of evildoers out there who could try to test that security.
- Danelle Simonelli: So that's a work in progress. Of course, the statue itself is not open at this point.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- Danelle Simonelli: And we're used in this park to dealing with unhappy visitors. And in the past, it's been they've been unhappy because they've been waiting on line for three hours to get into the monument or they didn't realize they'd gotten to Liberty Island so late in the day that they wouldn't have time to wait on line and get to the crown, those kinds of things. Now those concerns have been moved to Battery Park and somewhat to Liberty State Park because they're now waiting [in] line to get on the boats.
- Danelle Simonelli: And the — as I said, this January is the slow season, but it's been even slower than normal. And in part I think that's due to reduced tourism, but it's also in part due to how many people the screening process can process in Battery Park in particular. So, it's been — after the Christmas holidays it's been very empty on Ellis because more people always go to Liberty Island than Ellis Island even though only the grounds are open on Liberty. So, since the first week of January, it's been very empty at Ellis.
- Mark Schoepfle: I'll bet.
- Danelle Simonelli: I guess, you know, by going back into my routine I'm less fearful. I mean, I'm not constantly worried about my personal safety. And I guess we're waiting to see how the rest of the reopening will eventually shake down.
- Mark Schoepfle: Rest of the reopening?
- Danelle Simonelli: Yes. Well, presumably they're going to open at least the pedestal at some point and probably the statue as a whole after that, but you know, maybe on a reservation system, maybe with only on tours with park rangers like me. You know, there's a lot of questions still to be answered, but we're still trying to get the phase one of the reopening shaken down so it's working smoothly.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. Well, if you — if we're looking ahead a year to September 11, 2002, here's a question that came up actually — it wasn't one so much that I thought of, but came up as a result of interviewing other people because they've brought it up.

Mark Schoepfle: How would you commemorate what happened a year from now? What might be stressed?

Danelle Simonelli: Well, I mean, I'm looking toward some sort of World Trade Center national memorial, probably with the Park Service presence, not necessarily. It's going to be a long, involved process to come up with that.

Danelle Simonelli: And I don't think that's going to be close to final on September 11th, 2002. But the process is starting anyway.

Danelle Simonelli: I guess I would certainly like to stress all the heroism and charity that came out of that event, obviously memorialize those who were lost, whether they were just innocent victims or whether they were people trying to help. I myself would not want to see a replacement World Trade Center put up, at least as it was. Some people have talked about simply rebuilding what was there, or some other, you know, hundred-ish-floor skyscraper.

Danelle Simonelli: Personally I — even before September 11, I guess I kind of viewed hundred-story skyscrapers as an act of hubris. You know that you're building something that tall when you can't get fire personnel up above, you know, whatever it is, the 10th or 20th floor. I mean, that's asking for trouble when it comes to needing to evacuate people and fight fires. And now on top of that we have — you know, to rebuild them as they were or some other huge skyscraper, I think would not only be inviting that kind of hubris, you're also giving an outright challenge to the terrorists who attacked the first World Trade Center not once, but twice.

Danelle Simonelli: So, I guess in my mind's eye on some of those drives into — toward — through Jersey toward Manhattan, I guess I'm kind of picturing some smaller building. I guess I'm picturing something gold, shining in the sun, you know, that would be some variation of a World Trade Center but on a smaller scale and, you know, some sort of memorial plaza with monuments as yet to be determined.

Danelle Simonelli: I did go down to see Ground Zero about — I don't know — three weeks after the 11th in early October. I didn't want to do it initially, but I felt I needed to do it when I was ready just to have some sort of closure, that having seen that event from the distance that I felt I needed to go to the site and see it.

Danelle Simonelli: And just, you know, seeing those images of the facade that everyone has seen in the media but seeing it in person — of those pieces of building that had been very familiar to me, you know, where I had walked and dined and bought books. And you know, it was painful, but it was something I needed to do. And I would kind of like to see part of that facade in a memorial eventually myself.

Danelle Simonelli: I've kind of had a love-hate relationship with New York during my life and this has sort of carried over into my own thinking of whether I would want to be involved in some sort of memorial myself as a Park Service person. I grew up in the Bronx, but then realized when I left the Bronx to go to college that you didn't have to live in a city with all of these teeming masses of people and never being able to see the sky up there and litter and speed and claustrophobia. So, I'm happy now living in New Jersey and coming into New York occasionally for — usually to go to the museum or something like that.

Danelle Simonelli: But part of me is tempted to, you know, kind of see what happens with the memorialization process and to consider maybe getting involved in that as it approaches reality as a park ranger, you know, as someone at a memorial who could eventually talk to visitors there as someone who saw it. And I guess I feel like even though it was absolutely horrible for this to happen and for me to see it, in a way — you know, this may sound a little strange, but I guess in a way I feel privileged to have seen it.

Mark Schoepfle: You mean you were there at a historical event?

Danelle Simonelli: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I wasn't alive during Pearl Harbor. I was a little kid when President Kennedy was assassinated, although I remember where I was when I learned about that. And you know, this is the same kind of event where people will remember where they were or when it happened when they heard the news. You know, and I didn't hear about it in the news. I was there. You know, I wasn't — you know, I didn't have the trauma of being actually on the scene. You know, I would be much more of a basket case than I was if that had happened. You know, but this is something I will remember the rest of my life and I will tell people about for the rest of my life that I was there, and I saw it. So, you know, if it had to happen, I guess I — you know, it's on balance a good thing for me that I saw it.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. Or if I can rephrase it, good came out of it.

Danelle Simonelli: Yes, yes. Yeah, I certainly don't want to give the impression it was a good thing in any way.

Mark Schoepfle: — yeah, I was going to say, I'd recommend it for everybody?

Danelle Simonelli: No, no. But you know, being present at history is a sense that I definitely have and being an observer at all the things that came out of this horrible event but all the good things, you know, the heroism and charity. You know, the things like the, you know, artists and musicians who were trying to make sense of this through their craft. The whole process –

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

Danelle Simonelli: – has been amazing.

Mark Schoepfle: You've said you had a sort of a love-hate relationship with New York, but the Bronx also?

Danelle Simonelli: Well, New York.

Mark Schoepfle: New York. You grew up here?

Danelle Simonelli: I grew up here and then I realized when I left to go to school that you didn't quite have to live the way I grew up. You know, in terms of the dealing with the crime and the litter and the speed of the city that, you know, there's a slower pace to life that has much to commend itself.

Mark Schoepfle: Where'd you go to school?

Danelle Simonelli: Well, I went to — first I went to Vassar upstate in Poughkeepsie. But I think the culture shock, the culture difference really set in when I went to grad school at Georgetown in Washington, DC.

Mark Schoepfle: That would do it.

Danelle Simonelli: Even though Washington is not a small city but compared to New York it is.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh, yeah.

Danelle Simonelli: And you know, just –

Mark Schoepfle: Oh, hold on there. We're about to get a tape change.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. So — but anyway you were saying that getting out — you had been to Georgetown. Was it — Georgetown, right?

Danelle Simonelli: Uh-huh, Georgetown University, yes, in Washington.

Mark Schoepfle: For grad school.

Danelle Simonelli: And yeah. I realized you didn't have to live in a place that was all concrete where the sky was some tiny little rectangle way up in the skyscrapers and, you know, where people weren't jam-packed together and traveling at a hundred miles an hour and, you know, with litter and crime and

constantly watching your possessions as you commuted from place to place.

Danelle Simonelli: So, I don't think I would want to live in the city again, but there are other things that I really value about New York City. I think one of them is the multiculturalism of the place. Washington is kind of international on a high diplomatic level, but I mean I grew up in a city with a neighborhood, with people of all different ethnicities, with ancestors from all over the world, all different religious faiths. And I really value that sort of grassroots diversity, and that I think is New York's biggest asset.

Danelle Simonelli: And you know, part of me would — thinks about taking a breather from all of this and getting another assignment in the Park Service out in the boondocks somewhere. And that might be wonderful for my peace of mind. But I have a feeling I would miss that multiculturalism, you know, that I value so much in New York. And that's one of the things that I also deal with at Ellis Island a lot, pre 9-11 and post 9-11, is helping people understand how the U.S. is a nation of immigrants. And getting people to relate immigration today to what their ancestors may have experienced a hundred years ago, including issues of prejudice.

Danelle Simonelli: And we spent some time while we were closed individually and collectively at the park talking about how we might address, you know, issues of prejudice against Muslims and Arabs, for example. You know, was — were we going to encounter this? Were negative feelings about immigration today that we've always had in a small percentage of visitors to Ellis Island, you know, was that percentage going to grow, and how would we deal with it? It hasn't in practice cropped up very much in the weeks we've been open. But it's certainly something that's helped — that I've been thinking about a lot.

Danelle Simonelli: I've always tried to end my public tours by getting people to think about immigration today and not just jump to some knee-jerk negative reaction that may be the same nasty thing that people used to say about your grandparents. And I still use variations on that line. I do tie in 9-11 in my tour, you know, not directly talking about the event but talking about a couple other catastrophes that have happened to Ellis Island in its history and how those events and 9-11 have had an impact on immigration policy in this country.

Danelle Simonelli: I think once we get more visitorship we may be dealing a little bit more with those kinds of issues. But so far it certainly hasn't been a problem, but it's part of what makes my job interesting.

Mark Schoepfle: How long have you been with the Park Service, by the way?

- Danelle Simonelli: Since '95
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh, okay.
- Danelle Simonelli: — or so. This was a midcareer change for me.
- Mark Schoepfle: I was going to say, where were you before?
- Danelle Simonelli: In the Park Service I was at Morristown briefly, but before then I was an editor for 15 years.
- Mark Schoepfle: I was going to say, an editor where?
- Danelle Simonelli: I worked for a couple different nonprofits, mostly in Washington, DC, publishing reports and brochures and that kind of thing. Briefly some educational publishing, which was the last straw that made me decide this is too crazy. I can't keep doing this editorial work.
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh, I'll bet.
- Danelle Simonelli: But —
- Mark Schoepfle: The turnover rate I've noticed is very high with those.
- Danelle Simonelli: But I'd been a volunteer at the Smithsonian for those 15 years and finally decided it would be a lot more fun to get paid for doing that kind of thing than it would be to continue being an editor. So I'm very happy with that.
- Mark Schoepfle: Well, great. Is there anything — this has been very, very helpful to me. Is there anything that you can think of that I have not asked but should ask?
- Danelle Simonelli: I'm pulling out a piece of paper here because I wrote up — as part of my therapy was to write out a diary for myself that is still sort of a work in progress. I'm just going to glance at it and see if there's anything else that I haven't really talked about that would be of interest.
- Danelle Simonelli: I think I touched on most of it. Oh, I guess one image that really struck me when I first came back that first day back at work and for a while thereafter was that, other than the smoke that eventually dissipated, if you hadn't known there were supposed to be two giant buildings there filling up the whole of your vista, the skyline would've looked very normal. And that's one of the things I'm still dealing with. I'm no longer constantly spending my mind recreating — spending my time recreating in my mind's eye what the towers looked like there. But without them, the New York skyline is really diminished.

- Danelle Simonelli: That doesn't quite jive with my desire not to rebuild them, I guess. But just mentally it now looks kind of just like any old generic skyline. When they had been, you know, such — not just a geographical landmark but the aesthetic center of the whole skyline. So that was one thing that really struck me that I was certainly noticing their absence, but somebody who had never been to New York before would say, oh, you know, that skyline, it just looks like a normal skyline.
- Danelle Simonelli: It kind of impressed me with — I don't know — the smallness of human endeavors if you will that, you know, we can build these huge things and then they're gone and it doesn't seem to make much difference on one level. So that was one of the big things I remember feeling.
- Danelle Simonelli: Let's see. I guess one other thing I'd say about our time back, during those months we were closed, is how the pendulum was swinging between boredom on the part of many of the staff and then terror. I was in much better shape than most people because I had this newsletter that took up the great majority of my time. But for most of the other Interps [Interpretation rangers], I think they were really kind of bouncing off the walls. If your normal job is talking to people and there's nobody to talk about, and most of my colleagues in interpretation were put to work dusting artifacts in the museum's collection or cataloging library books. To spend three months doing things like that when you'd normally be out and about with people all the time, you know, it's got to drive you a little batty. So, I was realizing I was in a much better situation than most of my peers.
- Danelle Simonelli: But that kind of boredom for many was interspersed with all of these training sessions about all of these security issues that would scare you to death at times; you know, how to recognize and respond to weapons of mass destruction, you know, recognizing bombs and evacuation procedures and learning about all the crazy people in the world. So even though I continued on an upward climb from the initial trauma, this — the training itself would periodically send me back into a momentary state of apprehension.
- Danelle Simonelli: I guess some of the concern now is that with all of this scary training that we had, there's some concern that the protection side of things is, you know — may now be getting a little lax when most of us believed what they were telling us about the need to be always vigilant even as we go about our business. So, we're waiting to see how all of that shakes down.
- Danelle Simonelli: Okay. I think that pretty much covers, you know, what I experienced.

- Mark Schoepfle: Is it possible for us to — for me to keep a copy of the — I know it's a work in progress — but a copy of the journal on file, or is that sort of your own personal thing? Because either way, it doesn't matter.
- Danelle Simonelli: I guess the only thing I'd want to do is just make sure there's — I mean, there are people's names and stuff in here that — to see if there was anything —
- Mark Schoepfle: It's entirely your call.
- Danelle Simonelli: If it's something I can send to you after I look it over once, yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: That's what I mean. That's what I was thinking.
- Danelle Simonelli: Yeah, I'd be happy to do that.
- Mark Schoepfle: You have my card.
- Danelle Simonelli: Yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: So that would be good.
- Danelle Simonelli: I wrote in — there was another one I wrote that I didn't bring with me too. And this one I actually wrote this recently, this month. And I had been telling myself all along to write up my thoughts because writing, even though — even when it wasn't the most pleasant task for me it is therapeutic.
- Mark Schoepfle: For sure, for sure.
- Danelle Simonelli: I know for me. But I'd kind of been putting off doing it. So, this one actually came together this month in January. But I did write on the spot a couple pages when I first went down to Ground Zero about, you know, coming upon that scene for the first time. And those are — whereas this section, this on 9-11 itself is reminiscences. I mean, that is kind of a present tense, you know, this is what I'm doing, and this is what I'm seeing, and oh my.
- Mark Schoepfle: Sure.
- Danelle Simonelli: So, I've got that too.
- Mark Schoepfle: Sure.
- Danelle Simonelli: And I don't know whether you have our newsletter yet.
- Mark Schoepfle: No. I'd love copies of that too.
- Danelle Simonelli: But people — I've written a couple of things in the newsletter, and it's still going on. We've been trying to do a staff newsletter on an ongoing

basis for years in fits and starts. And I think this one now we're going to try and keep up on a monthly basis.

Mark Schoepfle: I'd be very grateful to be kept on your list if that's possible.

Danelle Simonelli: Okay. Sure. And there are a couple other articles in there that other people have written. Hopefully you've interviewed a lot of the people who were — who went to Ground Zero who were more directly involved in that aspect of it.

Mark Schoepfle: Who would some of these people be?

Danelle Simonelli: Well, I know lots and lots of park police officers went down and helped with the digging and helped with crowd control and so forth and with the logistics. It's my understanding that almost all the park police who were on duty in that period went down to Ground Zero. So, I would certainly want to talk with some of them.

Danelle Simonelli: In Interp [Interpretation], there's a woman named Katie Steger, who is a person who lives on Liberty with her dog, who came back. And then because she's got some spelunking experience and EMT experience she went down to Ground Zero too, and she wrote one of the articles about that, and at one point was crawling among debris, you know, looking for people.

Danelle Simonelli: Let's see. I would try to talk with some of the people who did triage, and the person I'm most aware of would be Gene Kuziw. Let's see. He's the main one I know there. So that's another aspect of it, dealing with the evacuees coming. I mean, Sergeant Ian Crane was the one who took charge on the dock there at Ellis. He's since left for Independence, but he was certainly deeply involved in everything on 9-11 and then in the whole reorganization of the park afterwards.

Danelle Simonelli: Let's see. Anybody else I've — I guess those are the ones that immediately come to mind.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Good.

Danelle Simonelli: You know, everybody has a different harrowing story, at least of their trip home. I mean, there were people who walked for 10 miles through New York City to get home from Lower Manhattan. So, I mean, I would think that, you know — I don't know if you wound up being able to talk to the captain, the boat captain today, I think you were supposed to do that.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

Danelle Simonelli: I mean, the people on that boat, that staff boat when the tower unexpectedly fell would have their own story.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

Danelle Simonelli: I've heard secondhand, you know, stories about what happened on the Circle Line. And you know, I don't know whether this is true or not. But the story I've heard is that at some point — I'm not sure if it's when the second plane hit or whether when the towers fell or whenever but, you know, there was this boatload of visitors in Battery Park, you know, getting ready to come to the islands. And the story I heard was that when one of these events happened, all the crewmembers except the captain deserted and, you know, dove into the water, and just left the visitors there on the ship with the captain. So, you know, I can't imagine — I mean, we were dealing with all of this knowing New York City, you know, knowing that, okay, if I get back to Lower Manhattan, I can get home if I walk in this direction, you know, and eventually I can do it. But you know, imagine being a tourist who had never been in the city before, being on that boat and not knowing where to go or how to get out, I mean.

Mark Schoepfle: This was a Park Service boat?

Danelle Simonelli: Well, it's our concession.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh, the Circle Line is a concession. That's right.

Danelle Simonelli: Yes. Circle Line is the concession that brings — that ferries visitors to our park. So that's kind of a story I'd like to know more about. But something else just occurred to me. Hopefully you are interviewing people you know at Manhattan sites, for example, at Castle Clinton.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh yeah.

Danelle Simonelli: At Federal Hall.

Mark Schoepfle: I'm not personally, but Chuck Smythe is doing that.

Danelle Simonelli: So obviously they have, you know, a different, very close involvement in the whole event.

Danelle Simonelli: I guess I would most encourage you to try and talk to some of the park police, and I don't have anybody in particular. They've sort of — I mean, in one sense they've been in their own little loop through all of this, you know, providing 24-hour protection to both islands. And we've had, you know contact with them certainly, but they're kind of in their own information realm. And I don't know, you know, how many of them have been encouraged to do these interviews. But they're the ones who actually went to Ground Zero in the succeeding days and to help with those efforts.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah, sure. Well, thank you very much for your help on this. I appreciate talking to you about it.

Danelle Simonelli: My pleasure.

END OF TAPE