

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Earnest J. Bohn and Cleveland Metropolitan
Housing Authority Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1558

ROBERT J. FITZGERALD

Interviewed

by

Dr. William D. Jenkins

on

January 4, 1993

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT J. FITZGERALD
INTERVIEWER: Dr. William D. Jenkins
SUBJECT: Earnest J. Bohn, Cleveland Housing Authority
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J: This is an interview with Robert J. Fitzgerald for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Ernest J. Bohn and Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority project, by William D. Jenkins, at the home of Robert J. Fitzgerald, 9175 Cherokee [Street, Macedonia, Ohio], on the afternoon of January 4, 1993.

Bob, could you give us a little bit of your history, your background: when you were born and your education?

F: I was born on April 25, 1922. I went to school in Massillon, Ohio, at the University of John Carroll and also Detroit University. After school, I worked pretty much in a construction sense of doing field construction, estimating, and supervising construction. I was a project engineer on Nike sites in Cleveland, two of them. One [was] in Eastlake, and one [was] at Harvard and in Warrensville center. After that, I went to work for the Public Housing Administration, the Federal Housing Administration, and I supervised the construction of public housing in the state of Ohio.

J: Now, you went from being a surveyor, professional engineer, et cetera, into public housing. How did that happen? What led you into public housing?

F: Well, public housing actually has two branches. One is development, and one is management. Both the federal government and the local government have that type

of offset, so I was actually working in the development phase of the public housing; and I did not do management until I became the director.

J: When was that? What year did you start working for public housing?

F: Well, in 1958, I started working for the C.M.H.A., and in 1960, I started working for the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority as Chief of Construction. At that time, I worked with Mr. Bohn until 1968. And at that time, he resigned, and a person by the name of Irving Kriegsfeld became the director. I worked for Irving Kriegsfeld from 1968 to 1971. I was the Director of Development under Mr. Kriegsfeld. He rearranged the titles of the Housing Authority, so I was the Director of Development; and after Mr. Kriegsfeld was discharged from the Board of the Housing Authority, I was appointed the Director on January 5, 1971. So, I had worked from 1960 to 1971 before being the Director, and then after 1971 till January of 1983, I was the Director of the Housing Authority.

J: Did you know Ernest Bohn before starting to work for the Metropolitan Housing Authority, or was that the first time you met him?

F: Well, I met him when I was working for the federal government. He was the Director of the Housing Authority. They had a program at that time to develop the Kingsbury Run called Garden Valley. That's actually where I met Mr. Bohn. Then, I went to work for him, when we started the construction of Wade Apartments, and then, Springbrook Apartments over on the East Side at Ansel and Wade Park and Ansel and Hough.

J: What was your impression of the Housing Authority and its management, as you started to work there?

F: Well, Mr. Bohn, he and Mr. Stinchcomb, who was the head of the Metropolitan Park System. . . .

J: That's William Stinchcomb?

F: Yeah. They were probably the last of the so-called dictators in a sense that he more or less managed and also pretty much kept his hands on situations. There were not any staff operations. It was Mr Bohn who made the decisions, and the so-called staff carried them out. He had various hand picked people. Of course, we didn't have very many estates at that time. In Cleveland, projects have been called Estates from the beginning, so each project--there was probably maybe eight estates at the time that I became associated with and so, we had eight managers.

J: What was the reputation of public housing at that point?

F: Well, at the point, of course public housing had gone through a so-called "heyday," and it was coming into the time when the social aspect was changing; and the Housing Authority was in flux. So, there up until that time, there wasn't any so-called integration, as such. People sort of lived in Cleveland where other people lived. In other words, Cleveland. . . . They had communities that were German in a certain area; and Irish in a certain area. The black community was in a certain area, and the Jewish were in a certain area; and that was all sort of coming together now and sort of integrating in to one another. The Housing Authority went through a problem over integration, because in my opinion, in the lower aspects of economics, people at that time did not always want to live with people that were of different cultures than they were. So, all of that sort of came into being. And also, up until that time, actually the Estates in Cleveland were constructed to eliminate certain problems that the city had according to either housing or crime. For instance, the Cedar Apartments were constructed on the old Hay Market site, where probably the year before it was torn down, there were eighteen murders. Woodhill Homes, on 93rd Street, was the old Luna Park. The area that was over by Lakeview Terrace, which is northwest of West 25th Street, was an area where there was awful lot of crime and an awful lot of disruption, because the docks were there and that type of thing. Then, Garden Valley, Kingsbury Run was constructed. The Kingsbury Run was where a lot of torso murders occurred. Valleyview was partially constructed for workers who worked in the steel mills that were right down the hill. Riverside was constructed actually for war construction for people that worked in the war plant, worked on the tank plant. Carver Park and Outhwaite were constructed during the war, during the early years of the war. They brought black people, who worked in iron mills down in Alabama, up to Cleveland to work in the foundries, and they lived at Carver Park, [which] was a war housing. Then later on, Mr. Bohn developed most of the housing where the city fathers wanted it constructed.

J: In other words, it was to eliminate slum areas, crime areas, to rehabilitate those areas, hopefully?

F: [Yes], that type of housing. The thinking was that they should replace the housing that was out-used for housing that would last for forty years. Now, that was another thing. When housing started in the 1930's, they never realized that public housing was going to last more than forty years. It was supposed to be a sort of a place for people to get a start in life and save a

little money. Up until 1966, the Housing Authority received the mortgage payments from the federal government to pay off the construction, but we had to charge the rent that it would cost to operate. So, whatever it cost us to operate, that was the rent that we charged. Then in 1966, the federal government changed when they said the people don't have to pay 25 percent of their income and the federal government would give us the money. Well that--actually, that never happened. The greatest amount they ever gave us was 85 percent of the federal government payment.

J: The amount that they should have?

F: And I think that newspaper article that I gave you explained that performance funding, the fallacy of it.

J: So, are you saying that your feeling is that, up until around 1966, public housing was managing fairly well; but then, after that it deteriorated because of the federal government's inability or lack of willingness to adequately fund?

F: Well, actually, when you got into 1966, many of the housing projects in Cleveland were thirty years old and they needed maintenance. Actually, I believe [that] when I started in 1971, there was a need for about \$20 million [worth] of rehabilitation. And because of the lack of funding when I left in 1983, there was about \$90 million worth of rehabilitation to bring it up to the standards of the city. So, it wasn't only in Cleveland. I think every large housing authority had a problem with the lack of money for rehabilitation of housing.

J: Because of the federal stance on federal funding?

F: And also, you had to realize that there's a lot of things that changed in the federal government on what the Housing Authority should do; and of course, they didn't always give them money to fund those new things. And actually up until--I would say until 1966, the people that worked for the Housing Authority were "housers." Then after that, their social work had to be brought in.

J: Could you distinguish what you mean by those terms? When you say a "houser," what do you mean by that?

F: Well, a person that is a "houser," in my opinion, is a person who knows how to manage rental housing; and then, when you get into the social work is an entirely different thing. [For] a "houser," the biggest thing is to protect the property from the renter and collect the rent. Then, when you get into social work, you have to

have people that will help people that have problems with social life. To do that, they [social workers] have to be able to, not only to distinguish what the problems are but to help them with the problems. And in some instances, it's not only money, it's getting to the right agency to get them [social workers] to help residents solve their own personal problems.

J: Did that reflect a change in the type of people who were in public housing?

F: Yes.

J: Were the rules different?

F: After that time, you not only had to hire some people who were able to do the so-called management of rental housing, you had to have people who were on the staff that could do the social work. In a lot of instances, it was two different functions that people had to do. One of the things that also came into play was that a lot of people. . . . In about 1971, a court order came out, after the busing order by Judge Batistti, that public housing in Cleveland could not construct any public housing where there was already a large majority of people of the black race living. So, they tried to spread it out; and that, again, caused an influx that caused problems in the community. It made a lot of the so-called politicians angry, because people were not accepting integration the way that the so-called court order required.

J: What was Ernie Bohn's attitude towards integration? Obviously, a lot of this housing did go to help and assist black people. What were his feelings?

F: I don't believe Ernie Bohn had any particular feelings. He wanted to help people. And, of course, in a number of instances, particularly back in the early 1960's, shall we say, there was a predominance of Caucasian people living [in public housing areas]; and they would move out of the areas because of integration. Then, it would be hard to get people to move into the housing areas. So, from that standpoint, Mr. Bohn did not, in my opinion, have any feeling either for or against integration, except that he wanted to fill the units with people.

J: So, he was kind of accepting the reality that it would be very difficult to have the housing, unless you built it in certain areas.

F: Well, you see now, for instance, at Garden Valley, when we constructed Garden Valley, there, we had three hundred units; and the first families that moved in

there were Caucasian families. There were about fifty Caucasian families [that] moved into Garden Valley; and then, there was an influx of black families moved in, and the white families moved out; and this concerned Mr. Bohn. In some instances, some of the social workers locally were sort of put out with him that he tried to keep Caucasian families in areas where the majority of people moving in were black families. And there wasn't a whole lot that, in my opinion, he could do.

Now, during that period of time, I was in the development part of housing, so I did not have any responsibilities to management. During those times, the way public housing was built and bid, et cetera, the federal government was cutting down on the amount of money that you could spend, and [what on] in some instances. For instance, in my opinion, King Kennedy should not have been built the way it was built. We were forced to build it. It was at a time when President Johnson was just elected. Mayor Stokes was just elected, and they had a campaign of "Cleveland Now." The federal government, more or less, gave us the design to build that. There were two of the buildings that we had five bedroom units. Twelve of those units had one entrance, and, when there was a rainy day or something, you had 185 children from the age of eighteen to one playing in one hall, which caused a lot of deterioration. Now, the King Kennedy was constructed in an area where there had been a brewery. Also a couple of black children were killed there, and Cleveland wanted to clean it up. The school system built two new schools, and the city was supposed to put money into developing along 55th Street. The school system built a new library there. And they built at East Tech. They built a place where they could have a The city was supposed to furnish the help to run an after school program; and that program never was developed. So, after King Kennedy was built, the Housing Authority had to build a social center there, in a very small way, to take care of the people that lived in King Kennedy. And also, the people that moved into King Kennedy, we tried to have a program where we tried to train them for living in an environment of a lot of people together. There was just so many people living together.

Now, one thing that in Cleveland we never did [was] we never put families in high rises, which in other cities caused a lot of problems. Also, Mr. Bohn, back in 1958, developed a so-called senior housing. That had to be all revamped from the legal sense, because they had to have a family--to live in public housing you had to be a family. We put two people of the same sex in a unit where they would have their separate bedrooms, and they would use a common kitchen. And then, the law was

changed, so that there could be one person as a family when they were sixty-two years old. So, Mr. Bohn did make that.

And at Ansel and Hough, he created a hospital in Springbrook. [It] was never used because the city felt that Mt. Sinai was too close to bring people to a hospital there who was living in the unit. They [the city] said they had to go there [Mt. Sinai]. So, that was built; it was a twelve bed hospital that never was utilized, because the city would not sanction it when it was all done.

So, up until probably after Ernie Bohn left and Irv Kriegsfeld came in, when they tried to spread the public housing in different areas, is when the city and the politicians went against the housing authority. I think--one of the biggest places where this took place was out near Kamm's Corners, out at 165th and Lorain. Jim Stanton, who was then the President of Council, was actually bitterly opposed to it. And later on, after the people got in, he was very much for the housing for the elderly; but it wasn't easy in the beginning. It was just the people didn't, you know--I think, a lot of the problem was in Public Housing. Particularly when I was the director, it was not--it was integration in a sense of money and that type of integration, more than with the races.

J: In other words, one's economic class?

F: Economic integration.

J: People didn't really want these poor people living next to them or near them.

F: Well, it was a thing like--they felt that they had climbed the so-called social ladder. Now we're going to bring in people who had not done that and did not care to do it. There's been a lot of belief that people who were on welfare had no desire to do anything except stay on welfare. So actually, I think, it shows all over Cleveland where the different races are living together because, economically, they're able to do that. In Cleveland Heights, it took seven years to get a unit constructed with all of the so-called fear of integration. Finally, when the unit was built, there were no problems.

J: Now, is the unit for the elderly?

F: Yeah. That was the unit for the elderly.

J: And that was an integrated unit?

F: Yeah. And now out in Oakwood here, that was the only city where the federal government permitted the city to let their residents have access first. In other words, if there was anybody that lived in Oakwood [that] wanted the housing, they got first choice.

J: They got first access? Now, why did Oakwood accept public housing--it's pretty far out of the city--before other areas?

F: Well, they accepted it because the federal government held a carrot over [it]. They gave them a grant to put all the storm sewers in the whole city, if they would construct public housing. So, that was the situation. We went into Berea. We did not have a whole lot of problems there. Berea accepted [it], [and] again, it was elderly public housing. They had a hospital that had been moved, and it was a deteriorating building; so we took that area and built public housing there. So, that was the situation. So, East Cleveland was the first to accept public housing outside of the city. There was an elderly unit, and then, there was thirty-three family units built in East Cleveland.

J: Were there any other places that accepted family housing at all?

F: Well, they did in Oakwood. But, Oakwood we never could get an agreement with where to put it. After I left, there was, I think, twenty-five units [for] which they had the cooperation agreement already. Then, when the federal government decided on having leased housing, where they call it the Section Eight housing, when that went in, public housing went all over the whole county. Because again, the stigma wasn't on a group of people. You see, actually, when public housing was invented, one of the things, why they put a group of people together, was that they thought that, first of all, the people would be, let's say, in need of housing and [that] they would all sort of cooperate together. And then later, it was that they could do more socially for them if they were all together. But again, you know, that didn't work either. Actually, I think, the best program that we ever had in Cleveland for families was the so-called home ownership where a person could buy--well, it wasn't really buy; it was sort of a lease buying program. If a person would live in the house and do the ordinary maintenance for twenty-one years, the federal government would give them the mortgage on the house free. And there again, people, when they had to live in the community and they had the so-called community pressures, would fold into the community much quicker. Where you put all of the people together, there wasn't any so-called community pressures on the people to do things.

J: This was much more accepted then? These kinds of programs?

F: Yes.

J: Did that Section Eight [program] and similar programs lead to the housing of significant number of people? Larger number than say in public housing? Or the old style public housing?

F: Statistically, we had, when I left, over five thousand units in the county, and that developed in three or four years. Where before that, you know, to get a thousand units was very impractical, particularly in the county. At one time, Mayor Pretruska and I were on a panel together out in Parma. Before I went to the meeting, I saw there was 18 percent of the people in Parma who were on welfare. One of the people got up and said, "Fitzgerald, we don't know why you come out here to talk. We don't have any poor people in Parma." I said, "Well, according to the county records, there's 18 percent of the people in Parma." The fellow said, "They ain't poor." So, you see, the economic integration was a big thing on the people's mind. That everything would go wrong.

J: If they admitted these people, they would deteriorate somehow or lose their status--

F: The schools would deteriorate. One of the big things was [that], at that time, there wasn't forced busing. They felt each of their schools was very good, and if they brought people in, it would lower the standards in their schools. So, those were the things. During the whole situation, of Ernie Bohn and public housing in the beginning, the school board in Cleveland, actually, did everything that was necessary. Whenever we built a new project, at that time, they built a new school.

J: You had a cooperative agreement?

F: But, that did not help the school board when it went to that Battisti situation, because most of the new schools that they built were built in areas where public housing was not integrated. So, that situation. . . .

J: So, their efforts to help in one area led to a problem for them in other areas.

F: Now, the city of Cleveland, it never cooperated. One of the things [was] that, before any city gets public housing, they have to agree that they will do the police work, the security work, and that they will also

pick up the rubbish. The city of Cleveland did not do either.

J: Now you are talking throughout Bohn and yourself, and all the years both of you were in charge?

F: Yes. Now, one of the things is that the Board, the C.M.H.A. Board, did not want to take on the City in a legal sense to fight that. Now, actually, when we had to furnish a police force, now that was during my administration. It was costing us \$400,000 a year. Rubbish was costing about \$500,000 a year, which was money taken away from maintenance. In fact, the funny thing was, Dennis Kucinich--there was a street called Unwin in Carver Park. It was a city street. We had a snow storm, a big snow storm. I believe it was right after Dennis was elected--it could have been 1974 or 1975--and the city was shut down. The city couldn't plow. And so, Unwin was not plowed. It was never plowed. Back in the middle of Unwin, was a garbage disposal. It was overloaded and Dennis had the Health Department cite me personally for not picking up the garbage. It cost the Housing Authority about \$5,000 in legal fees to get us out of that, and it wasn't even our responsibility. But that was the situation. How it was felt.

J: So, the city government, in your mind, threw the burden back on you, in terms of things that actually they had originally agreed to provide.

F: Yeah. But, and as I say, up until today's date, they are not picking up the rubbish, but I'm sure that the Housing Authority is doing that.

Now in Oakwood, they are doing both, and [in] Cleveland Heights and Berea. Of course, at the time we built Oakwood, that was the only street that we built, and where the housing is [located] was the only paved street at that end of town. So, the police, to patrol that end of town, would very easily want to come down the paved street. So, there was never any problems with Oakwood, with the security, when I was the director; and I don't think there is yet. Actually, in Oakwood, was the only elderly housing, where the elderly utilize the outdoors as much as they did in Oakwood. The rest of the places, they more or less were afraid. They stayed inside and all of that type of thing. So, they did in Oakwood.

You know, one of things, which it's very hard for a lot of people to understand, is that it got so that the federal government really, even up to date, really doesn't want public housing. But, there's no way that they can get away from it. I would say that Mary Rose

Okar and Lou Stokes probably helped Cleveland get more money than some of the other cities did, but it's very hard for, let's say, a congressman in Kansas to vote for money for public housing when they want a corn subsidy and a wheat subsidy. Actually, there were times, Bill, when I don't think anybody wanted it. The tenants didn't like public housing, not only in Cleveland, but all over. The tenants didn't like public housing. The federal government didn't like it. The local politicians didn't like it. I would have to say that there was one year--in fact, the last year that I was director--the federal government held up \$20 million. We went from January till the end of August before we got any performance funding check. We owed the C.E.I. \$13 million and the gas company about \$7 million. So, it was one of those things. They would just not release the money. That was, I think, the first year. . . .

J: It was by way of making you appear worse, do you think?

F: Yeah, sure. The thing is it, apparently, it was helping the Reagan administration show that it was not only us and every large housing authority had the same thing. It wasn't us solely.

J: Well, I didn't mean you personally. I meant the administration and public housing and its efforts to make public housing look bad by holding back funding.

F: Actually, I would say [that] neither the Republicans nor the Democrats were very helpful during my administration. In fact, when Jimmy Carter brought his finance people from the South and some of the large housing authorities, we met with them. They told us right out that our people don't vote. There's no reason for them to get excited [about] what we wanted, because our people, they didn't vote. And then, we went back and tried to get people to register and to vote, but it wasn't only in Cleveland. All housing authorities had the same problem. In New York City, the State Government owned quite a bit of their housing, so they had a little more money than some of the rest.

Now, Chicago was in bad shape like we were. And some of the others: Baltimore, Newark, St. Louis. . . . They had families living in high rises, and the families in those had not experienced living in high rises. Before the high rises were constructed, they had the four and five story walk ups; so the elevators were quite a play thing for the kids, and they put a lot of them together where the high density. . . .

J: From what I've read of them earlier, when it first,

started--Ernie Bohn and the people that he associated with, one of whom was Sir Raymond Unwin, after whom that street is named, were very much in favor of public housing that was low density, that had land and parks and playgrounds. People would have room, light, air, a place to play. It seems like in the 1950s they went to those high rises, which we didn't do here, but in other areas just seemed to totally violate what the earlier ideas had been.

F: You see again, in my opinion, one of the problems was, when I worked for the federal government, I had to make some reports on some of these things. Pruitt-Igloe was one. Pruitt-Igloe was constructed in a railroad yard. At that time, it was designed to go four stories high. Well, they ran into a problem with integration in the rest of the city, so instead of making it four stories high, they made it eight stories high.

J: Now Pruitt-Igloe was located in [which city]?

F: St. Louis. That's the one they tore down.

J: They tore it down?

F: Right. The big thing [was that] I went down and made a big report on what the problems were. Actually, the biggest problem was that the people were not equipped to live in high rise buildings. They had three and four families on a[n] open floor, where all things went on, on the floor, and there was just too many people. That was one of the reasons. . . .

J: So, the environment in which they were thrust was not very good?

F: No. You see, the planners that they had during the Ernie Bohn situation--money wasn't exactly a problem. The federal government would give you the money to construct. Well, there wasn't the, shall we say, the constraints on the local authorities about land, about the things that weren't housing people. And then, it was about 1955, when HUD combined [the] FHA [Federal Housing Authority] and Public Housing together. Then, the people who were used to designing FHA when money was a situation then, they wanted the same program with the public housing, which reduced the size of the units, reduced a lot of things.

J: So, they looked at the economics of it more than the philosophy.

F: Yeah. Now, one of the things with the FHA is that they required the people to put money away for capital improvements, and that was not done with the

public housing. You see, you had to operate on the money that you put in. Actually, the state of Ohio, during that period, controlled what the rent would be. We had to go down, and they had a housing board.

J: The Ohio Housing Board?

F: Yeah. They still have it, but it's just a function thing. That doesn't mean anything, because HUD sets the rents. But, you had to go down to get the rent approved for each development, and then, once a year, you had to go back if you wanted a raise. You had to prove that you needed a raise.

And actually, another thing that caused some problems was when the federal government--now, this was probably back about the time that I became the director--the federal government said that you had to put disabled people into the elderly buildings. There again, you were putting in different lifestyles, and that caused a lot of problems. Actually in Cleveland, it made some of the social agencies that worked with elderly disheartened. They did not want to do much with our high rise, because there was a mixture of people there; and they couldn't work with one without affecting the other.

J: How would that lead to a problem? Could you give me an example of that? In other words, with disabled--well I assume they were also elderly.

F: No.

J: They weren't? Okay. So, you had elderly people and people that were just disabled?

F: Anybody that was disabled by the state of Ohio. You would have young people. I can remember one woman who was a very pretty woman. She had a brain tumor. She looked just like you and I looked, and she was admitted. She had boyfriends, and the elderly just detested the whole thing. She played loud music, a different type of music. Her lifestyle was entirely different.

Then, the federal government added another thing that put a breach between the two. They had the food program. Where the elderly, if they were sixty-two years old, could get meals free., and the other people, you couldn't get any. For awhile, the things that the elderly didn't eat, we would, then, have a second serving for the disabled people. Well then, the federal government stopped us doing that. We had to throw the stuff away that the elderly didn't eat. We had to throw it away rather than giving it to people.

A lot of the problems in public housing was brought about by the regulations of the federal government. And of course, one of the things is that HUD, though they are as close a partner as anybody with public housing, they want to, if there's any problems, they want the housing authority board [to take care of it]. There was one time, [when] about thirteen large housing authorities all agreed to let the federal government take all of the units. And they absolutely didn't want to, because then they would have all the [problems].

J: They didn't want to run them?

F: No. They had no . . . the only place where they ran a project was for a little bit in Toledo. [Then], somebody sued the Toledo Housing Authority. And then, the federal government come in and took over the Toledo Housing Authority, and the lawsuit was dropped; because you couldn't sue the federal government. You have to get permission from the federal government. . . .

J: To sue it. [Laughter]

F: So anyway, [it was] just like one of the things that they did here in Cleveland. The federal government--this was back in 1971--when they made the Housing Authority give \$50,000 to the tenant group. The rest of the state, the Housing Authorities, were up in arms that we were giving them money. Actually, one of those situations, the auditor at that time cited Ann Kretchner and I for \$5,000, because we let the tenants have a Christmas party at various places. It cost \$5,000. We were using money that wasn't state money, but the state felt that any money that came to the Housing Authority had to be audited by the state. I would have to say that John Corrigan wouldn't press charges in Cleveland, so therefore, it was dropped. But, we were cited for the \$5,000 that we let the tenants party with.

J: Getting back a little bit to Ernie Bohn, in terms of, from what I can gather from the research I've done so far, the only family he had around here was his father who died in the early sixties. Did he have any other family?

F: He had a cousin, a woman cousin, that lived out in Geauga County. That was the only person that he had, yeah. So, he didn't have a family. His family was the Housing Authority.

J: So, he associated for the most part with the people with whom he worked. Those were his friends and his social companions.

- F: That was the whole situation. He had no other interests other than the Housing Authority.
- J: In terms of his--and this is kind of a difficult word for people probably to define--his philosophy, in essence, how did he, or why was he involved in public housing? What did he express as the reason why he made this his life?
- F: Well, he was a councilman in Cleveland. Mr. Bohn was a councilman in Cleveland over in the area of Wade Park. And he was [a] friend. He was quite a religious man in his own sense. He was a bachelor, and a lot of his friends were priests. Monsignor Naven, he made a study of the Hay Market area. Ernie Bohn got quite involved with him and the plight of that area. At the same time, there was a movement around the United States that the housing in the cities, the cities should do more for housing. There was a lot of bad housing for whatever reasons, and there was a depression. Ernie became involved with Monsignor Naven, and with that, he went to bat to get some money for Cleveland to do something. Then, when the federal government more or less said, "Well, we're not going to create this housing. You people that want the housing, you make an authority," Ernie Bohn was a big pusher of that, so he became the director. He got more involved. And this was his life.
- J: Now, he was a Roman Catholic. And are you kind of saying that it was this religious influence or background that impelled him to help people?
- F: Well, I won't say that it was training on that part. But he was, let's say, friends with Monsieur Naven, and because of that, he got drawn into this so-called situation. "How can we do something in Cleveland and get money into Cleveland?" And then, there were other people in other cities that he heard about and became associated with. And then, they got NAHRO together, and it just sort of came out of that. In other words, theoretically, Ernie Bohn was sort of a master politician. He knew how to play the political game. Probably much more than any other directors, not only in Cleveland, but anywhere. In other words, he knew how to get laws changed. He was a lawyer. Who the people [were] to help him get laws changed and this type of thing. And all of that molded sort of together into him being very much a leader in housing for the poor.
- J: So, you would describe him as being more of the politician who enables public housing, rather than, say the philosopher or the thinker about public housing?
- F: No. I think the thinking pushed along with it. In

other words, I always felt that Ernie Bohn had a very brilliant legal mind. Now, social mind, I don't think. Though he knew that people needed help and this type of thing. It was the same thing when we went to elderly housing. At that time, there were a lot of people who were elderly who did not have a place to live. And he couldn't give them a place to live, because they were not a family.

J: He figured out how to do that, right? How to get that accepted, and how to get the regulations changed?

F: Yeah. And what regulations had to be changed. And also, in the beginning, because he was a politician, he got a lot of, let's say, people who were somewhat of his friends, appointed to positions in HUD that somewhat owed him favors. He could go to them to get certain things, so from that, he was a master politician. The thing is that he was, probably in a sense--he studied city planning, I think, in the beginning, more than he studied, shall we say, public housing, per se. And the two sort of merged together. Now the thing is that, all the time that he was director, he was also the head of the Planning Commission of the city of Cleveland.

J: From 1943 through 1968.

F: Yeah. And those two, that's one of the things that I said. He sort of put public housing where the city wanted it put during those periods of time, for a reason. I'm not saying that they didn't have a reason. There was reason for all of it. And during that period of time, I think that the mayors cooperated with Ernie as much as they could.

Actually, we probably didn't have a big problem with so-called refuse until the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] stopped us [from] using the incinerators. We had incinerators at all the old sites, which the residue was relatively little compared to the residue in a dumpster. So, that was really not a problem, and the city did pick up that type of refuse. So, it wasn't--it was actually after the end of his leadership, when we had to get rid of the incinerators.

J: Now, in terms of the city planning, which you mentioned and from reading his papers, obviously he was very strongly into promoting that as well. Matter of fact, he got the Regional Planning Association going. I guess the question would be what is the connection, or how did he see city planning? How did public housing fit into that notion of city planning?

F: Well you see, this, in the beginning, was a vehicle for

let's say the elimination of slums in different areas. So, that was the vehicle. Now, I think, that everybody that thinks about it has to realize that, when you're getting rid of slums, you're going to help people. So, those two sort of came together. In fact, I don't think there's been a city plan since Ernie Bohn left. I mean, a complete city plan.

J: The one in 1949, you are talking about?

F: Yeah.

J: It's been downtown development.

F: And the other thing is that Ernie sort of looked to where the residents lived as much as he did downtown. In other words, after Ernie left and after much of the planning and much of the development that is downtown now came into being--he felt like at a 105th and Kamm's Corners. Those were places. And he was quite for the airport and that type of thing.

J: So, he wanted neighborhood development more so than downtown?

F: Well, he wanted, let's say, where the people lived and that type of thing where he wanted. . . . Ernie, he was not in favor of Bohn Tower. Ernie, even though his name. . . . He did not think that the elderly should live downtown.

J: What was his thinking in regard to that.

F: Well, he felt that the elderly, you know, shouldn't have been downtown in Ernie's thinking, that it is a commercial area.

J: Zoned commercial?

F: Right. And the thing is that elderly people don't have a place in that type of environment. I mean that.

J: That's a classic city planner idea of different areas zoned for different purposes. He ran for council, also for state legislature as a Republican, and from what I can tell, stayed as a Republican all of his life. Yet, on the other hand, he espoused a lot of social causes, which we ordinarily tend to associate with the Democrats. How did he feel, do you know how he felt about being a Republican in later years?

F: Ernie Bohn was a Republican, but I would have to say, he was a master politician. I would have to say--one of the things that Ernie Bohn always wanted

was somebody to be an audience for his performances. So, I would have to say, there were times I was the person that was there while he was performing on a telephone or even performing for some dignitary. But, that was the only time that I ever heard anyone call a governor a son-of-a-bitch. He called Governor Rhodes on the phone a son-of-a-bitch. Ernie Bohn had set up before the throughways, along with the plan, and it went through Valleyview. Ernie Bohn sort of felt that he was going to leave, and he wanted the state to buy the right of way through. So, it wouldn't be changed. In other words, if they bought that, that established that right of way, more or less. And Rhodes wanted to wait, not spend the money then, and after Ernie left, that caused the Housing Authority a lot of problems. But, that's another thing. Because Rhodes wouldn't go along with it [because] one time he called him a "son-of-a-bitch" on the telephone. So, but Ernie. . . .

J: So, you're saying that he worked with Republicans and Democrats. And he didn't keep to that party designation so much, perhaps?

F: No. I would have to say that he probably had as much influence in Washington with the Democrats as he did with the Republicans. He was sort of, at that time, in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the head person of public housing. In other words, he was sort of the guru of public housing.

J: On a national level?

F: On a national level. And so, I would have to say that he spent an awful lot of time, in that sense, on keeping himself involved nationally. And again, as I say, he had people here who could function without him.

J: They could run the show?

F: They could run the show. He would enjoy calling up in the morning and giving you some assignments for the day, and then the next day, he'd call up and ask if you'd done them. And so, I don't know. As a social worker, per se, I would not class Ernie Bohn as a social worker. Now, Irv Kriegsfeld, I think, was a social worker, not Ernie Bohn. Ernie Bohn was a politician.

J: Lawyer-politician?

F: Lawyer-politician.

J: On the national level, what types of things did you

see him do or find out about? What types of activities?

F: Well, he got the elderly all the way through. He was one that felt--he held it back some--that public housing should be bid out and not the so-called turn-key. Now, that came after. Actually, probably, the turn-key was better for the federal government, because they knew how much money to spend. The public housing authority would buy the land, and it'd take two or three years to develop the plans. Then, the budget would go up higher and the federal government would have to throw more money in. There was always that argument. But, he got people appointed, and he did a lot on this housing board business. Actually, politically, there was Nunn in Toledo, Paul Straight in Youngstown, and a fellow in Columbus. Well, those three got things through the state of Ohio.

Politically they were, I think, all different. I think Nunn was a Black man in Toledo. He was a Democrat. I think Paul Straight was a Republican, and the guy down in Columbus was a Democrat. And on a national level, there were people who he would get as a group that would go down there. As [I] say, he knew how to manipulate the political situation. And as far as the people in HUD, they would not buck him too much, because, as I say, many of them he had got them jobs.

J: He had referred them and so forth? Did they employ him at all as a consultant of sorts or no?

F: No. One of the things that he used to say after he retired [was] that anybody that was a consultant was a prostitute.

J: So, he wouldn't do that? [Laughter]

F: Other than giving some advice, he never did anything after he quit. In other words, he would give some advice if people would call him and that type of thing.

J: Now, you've mentioned that he was a master politician. He also was able to put on a show, so to speak, for people and charm them and get them on his side. I've heard from a few people, though, that he could be cantankerous at times.

F: Well, in other words, now, particularly in the planning commission, he was death on signs. In other words, commercials.

J: Billboards and things of that sort.

F: That type of thing. At the planning commission, as I

say, he was a dictator. He was dictator there, and he was dictator at the Public Housing Authority.

J: Now, did that create discontent in C.M.H.A., or did people just see him as being a good leader?

F: He didn't have that many people. He had no staff operations. In other words, he was the "hands on" type of manager. So, the things that was going on in development, he did not talk to any of the managers about it. He had Leyton Washburn was sort of his planner, and Leyton Washburn was the planner for the Planning Commission.

J: A lot of cross-overs?

F: That type of thing. And the thing is, up until Stokes became the mayor, the mayors were sort of hands off of the Planning Commission.

J: He was in charge?

F: And that was it.

J: He seemed to have gotten a lot of backing from the Cleveland Press, in particular, and Louis Seltzer.

F: Well, I would have to say that he knew the Press. In other words, the Press knew him. And one of the things, that I would have to say, that, particularly when I was the director [and] when Ernie Bohn was the director, master writers talked to Ernie Bohn. When I became the director and probably when Irving Kriegsfeld was director, they let every kid in the block come down, and they all had their own ideas.

J: He got the attention of the headline writers or the better writers.

F: The better writers came to Ernie Bohn. In other words, the ones that were in the bylines; the ones that meant something to the bylines.

J: Yeah. In 1945, 1947, that time period, he was touted to run for Mayor of Cleveland and turned it down. Did he ever talk about why he [refused to run]? He obviously had the opportunity but. . . .

F: No. It was the same thing at HUD. There was a number of times, when he could have been the head of HUD. I think, again, being a politician, Ernie knew that he could not do the things in [the] national [level] or with being the mayor, that he did at the Housing Authority. He couldn't be a dictator.

J: So, this was kind of an area where he could have control of what he wanted to do and how he wanted it to come out. Whereas, when you function as a politician, you've got to. . . .

F: And the thing is, in my opinion, if he'd run for mayor, he would have had to be a Republican, and that probably would have hurt him.

J: He probably would have lost, you think?

F: He was a Republican, but very few people probably knew he was a Republican, per se. He was just there. It was his show. Actually HUD, for the longest [time], until after I became the director, they went into talking on a staff situation. Before that, I think, HUD liked to have their director talk just to the [housing authority] director, and they could get it one way or the other right up quick. Whereas, when you're dealing with staff, you might not be able to get everybody to agree. So, HUD had a fellow by the name of Mr. Wagner working in Ohio. He was sort of the master HUD man, and he did all of the dealings with the directors. When I worked with HUD--and there was something wrong with the construction at one of the housing authorities--I would have to go through Mr. Wagner. In other words, I couldn't go in. But, Mr. Wagner left about the same time that Ernie did, and after that, it was entirely different. It started entirely different. But, that was just the method that they. . . .

J: The way they ran things?

F: Yeah.

J: In 1968, he resigned/retired? Is that an accurate description at that point? I have some sense of the Stokes administration not being [satisfied].

F: Well you see, Stokes, he had some people who were politicians that were on the board. Up until that time, Ernie, more or less, ran the board. A board meeting would last about fifteen minutes, and they were all notable people. Well, there was some politicians who Stokes got to resign, and then, he appointed Tom Westropp and Howard Metzenbaum. Howard Metzenbaum--it was sort of funny to me, but not to Ernie. When Howard wanted the staff people to attend the board meetings, Ernie didn't. And then, he would want to interrogate. In other words, if we were going to put in a boiler in over at Cedar, why did it need the boiler? [Why does] it need [to be] this big? Ernie got sort of fed up with that, and Ernie resigned.

At the same time, there was a fellow named DeMaioribus,

who was the head of the Republican Party. He resigned. He got mad and resigned, and the board begged him to come back. And I think, Ernie felt that way. Ernie resigned, and then, the board accepted it; and Ernie was very put out. A couple of times, when we went to Chicago, coming back and up there, he talked about it, that the staff wanted him to resign. I said, "Oh Mr. Bohn, you resigned? You know, when you resign, you're laying down the mallet." And the board accepted that resignation. So, I said, "Don't say anything about the staff. The staff didn't have anything to do with it." But the thing is, the board was changing where they were taking. . . .

J: Did that reflect a policy difference, do you think, on the part of the newer board members?

F: I don't think the board members knew anything. I mean, I can't say. They didn't want to necessarily change the policy, but they got more involved. In other words, they started asking questions.

J: They were more detailed? They wanted to do some management, in other words?

F: Yeah. In other words, they wanted to get into the game, and Ernie wasn't used to that. Because he went and saw what DiMaioribus did--and again, this is my opinion. [He saw] that DiMaioribus quit, and they asked him back.

J: Now, on the other tape we were just talking about Ernie's resignation and his, in your mind, expectation that they might ask him back. And they didn't.

F: No. No. Well, in leading up to this, Bill, some things happened, too. Now, out at Springbrook, they had, I believe, thirty apartments per family. Ernie worked with the people at Western Reserve. And between they and him, and whoever else in the city, they felt the Hough area was changing. The people from West Virginia were moving up. There was a lot of turmoil. They felt that, if they would put in students in these units, they could help smooth out the area. So, Ernie did that.

Well, one of the student's wives was a Japanese girl. She felt--and she went sort of newswise--that it was a crime that these students who were relatives. . . . They weren't destitute. They were living in these apartments, and Black people were underhoused; and they should be living here. And she fought Ernie Bohn.

Well, then SASS [School of Applied Social Sciences] out at Western Reserve, out at Garden Valley. . . . There

was this conflict with Caucasian moving out and this type of thing. The manager out there was a guy named Andy Tomko. And Andy Tomko was trying to, keep the Caucasian. . . . You know, keep a mixture, [and Ernie was also]. Andy wasn't showing the apartments rapidly to Black families. He was trying to. . . . And SASS was out there. It was sort of funny to me. We were building another section of Kingsbury Run. And the thing is, they would come out after school and parade around with signs, sort of funny signs. This also bothered Ernie to no end, that this type of thing was happening. The social. . . .

J: He didn't like the demonstration kind of thing of the 1960s?

F: Yeah. And these people would come down and have meetings with him about Springbrook, and he'd do this by himself. They'd sit around him and ask him questions and sort of wear him out. You know what I mean. He was getting old, and this bothered him.

J: But was it because he felt he was trying to help?

F: Yeah. The reason these people were put out there was somebody at Western Reserve and him felt that these would sort of help stabilize the area. And that's why they were. . . .

J: How about in regard to Tomko? He wasn't in favor of what Tomko was doing?

F: No. No. He wasn't in favor of what Tomko was doing. They wanted Tomko replaced. Because Tomko was not showing the units to the Black people as fast as they thought he should. I'm not sure that either Tomko or Bohn could have changed anything, because I think the Caucasians were just going to move.

J: So, basically, Ernie and Tomko were acting slowly in showing the Blacks, because they didn't want the so-called White flight. They wanted it to remain somewhat integrated, and they were fearful that it would not be.

F: So, there was this turmoil going on. As I say, on the board, they wanted to play the game a little bit more. Before that time, Ernie would have the board meeting all by himself. There wasn't any staff people there. No people at all--just Ernie. And Ernie would write the minutes. Well, Metzenbaum wanted somebody to come in and write the minutes. That was the first thing. And Ernie said, "That son-of-a-bitch won't trust me. He won't trust me." Well, you know, I heard a lot of these things, but I always told him, "Well, you know, that's what a board is supposed to do." But, he wasn't

used to that and all this thing. And I would have to say, Bill, maybe his age was. . . .

J: Well, it does represent a big difference in style, from what you've described, in the sense of how he ran it. I think he was very much used to, from what I can see in the papers, people trusting him, particularly very important people. I mean, he seemed to have a tie into some of the leaders of the city, both economically, politically, and socially.

F: King Kennedy, the guy up at HUD in Chicago, was a friend of Ernie's. He had been a long time friend, and the word come down from him that we had to build it a certain way. He finally says, "Goddamn you Ernie, [either] you're going to build it, or we're going to build it. Now, what do you want to do?" And that hurt Ernie to no end. So, the whole climate, Bill, was changing then. Then, after he did it, he was sorry. I personally think it was good that he didn't get caught up in all of the things that was going on up there.

J: Well, he would have been 67 in 1968.

F: Yeah.

J: So, he was at a point in time, certainly, when most people are considering being retired.

F: Retired. One of the things he. . . . He felt very bad about the Kennedy assassination. That broke him up, I believe.

J: John Kennedy.

F: John Kennedy. So, all of these things together sort of . . . , and he wouldn't let anybody help him. That wasn't his style. And we were at a meeting down at the city with Stokes, and there was something about a budget and the guy says, "I want to see the budget." And Ernie says, "Why? Don't you trust me?" You know, he didn't want to, but that was just Mr. Bohn. He did a lot. I would have to say that when he left, relatively speaking, the units were not in too bad a shape. In other words, where people broke windows and things like that. . . .

J: Was there a reason for that. In other words, was it management, was it lack of money, [or] was it the clientele?

F: Well, maybe a little of all three. First of all, the clientele after 1966. . . . We could not go to any home inspections. We could not ask any questions. In other words, when they got to the top of the list they

were. . . .

J: So, people were simply on the list.

F: That's right.

J: And rose regardless of. . . .

F: Whatever their temperaments. We had people in there that were convicted of murder, and there were prostitutes in there and everything else. There wasn't anything that could be done. If you'd go to put them out, they'd have [a] legal aide [that] would want a jury trial. One time, Sal Calandro [was] a judge. I guess he still is a judge. He and I were good friends. He called me up, and he said, "We got to have lunch." I said, "Okay." So, he come down, and he said, "You know, the Housing Authority is taking up a lot of court time for foolishness." I says, "Well, what do you mean?" "Well," he said, "today or yesterday, I had a case where a woman was behind on her rent six months." "Oh," I said, "she didn't pay." [He said,] "Do you realize it was only \$24 that she owed?" The people, again, you got away from where there were fathers in the home. There weren't any fathers in the home, and the women couldn't control the children. Now, when I was there, we didn't have the drugs that they have apparently today.

J: You mean when you were the director in the early 1980s?

F: Yeah. But, you know, a kid would throw a stone at a window, or they'd get mad at one another. Another thing, they'd airmail the garbage out the window instead of taking it down to the dumpster, or at King Kennedy, they'd throw it out into the hall. See, when Ernie Bohn was there in the high rises and also in the low rises, each tenant would take a day of cleaning the stairs. That was part of the. . . .

J: Part of their responsibility?

F: Yeah. And then, they would do that, you see. So, the whole picture of public housing was. . . .

J: So, that before, say 1966, if you had a troublesome tenant, you could remove them, or you might even have reduced that; because you've screened them.

F: Now, with the HUD regulations, it would take ninety days to get a tenant out, even if they didn't pay rent. Now, they've changed that. But, you know, where the regular rental housing, a couple [or] three days, you can get somebody out, then. So, I would have to say, between December and April, the judges wouldn't put

anybody out of public housing.

J: Because of the winter conditions?

F: So, we had, you know, these problems. Well, when Ernie was there, most of the high-rises were on coal; and we went to gas, and there were problems with gas. It wasn't with coal and those things. We didn't have people on duty all the time. You see, with gas, you didn't have to have stand-by engineers. So, when something broke, it would take a period of time to get somebody there to do something. So those were the problems.

Apparently, in the early 1970s, the tenant was sort of on the rise. They wanted to have an organization, and you couldn't get them to agree who was going to be the boss and all these things. And then, you get a splinter group. [In] about 1978 or 1979, HUD made us have a meeting with the tenants about building a new [building]. Well, the thing is, we would have the meeting, and we would agree on certain things. Then, by the time we made the plans and come back, the tenant group would change, and the new group would not agree.

So, you had a lot of problems. In fact, over at one of the modernization programs, after they saw it wouldn't work with us, they cut it out. They made us put in \$50,000 to give to the tenant group. But they had to agree on a manager. For a year and a half, Bill, they couldn't agree.

J: So, you didn't have a manager?

F: So, they didn't get the money.

J: They didn't get the money either.

F: Of course, I had to write an essay on why they couldn't. But, you know, it's just that they felt that turning the responsibility over to the tenants would help, but it never helped.

J: Kind of interesting thing, here. One of the things that you've noted as a problem is the federal government, its regulations, and as time went along also, perhaps its lack of interest culminating, maybe, in the Reagan administration. So, one side of this would be the fact that public housing hasn't been strongly supported, certainly to its fullest in the country. Then, the other side, which you've just been talking about, would be somewhat the--I guess you might label them, maybe, more liberal attitudes of the 1960s--that said anybody should be able to get into public housing, and [that] they should have their full rights. And you

feel that those two things didn't help either, and perhaps I caused them problems?

F: Well, you see, I think that it runs true, you get the condominiums that are being built around. After about the first year, the condominiums want to do away with the manager. They're paying a manager about \$30,000, \$40,000 a year. [They felt,] "We'll do this ourselves. We're able to do this." Then, they go in, and they can't handle it. So, this is the same type of thing. You're asking people, who have no training, to undertake these things. This is the thing with turning public housing over to the tenants. You know, you read it in the paper about Lakeview all the time. There's all kinds of problems. Either they spend the money wrong, [or] they take vacations and things like that. Well, they're just not trained for that type of thing. This was the problem, and probably it isn't only in Cleveland; it's all over. And now, down in Akron, they're in the process of hiring a new director. One of the things is that Akron is getting into some problems that Cleveland was in before.

I don't know whose idea it was to have the people do the management. In other words, without any training or anything else. Now, most of these people are in public housing because they couldn't manage their own affairs, for whatever reason. In other words, you could probably take one person or another person, and now you want to put them in charge of three hundred people. So, it's a social problem, and I don't know what. . . . Now, actually, there's a lot of bureaucracy at HUD, who actually do the running of things that come down from the so-called administration. Now, those people are very knowledgeable people. And, you know, if they say, "Okay. We're going to cut 80 percent off of this." Those people cut the 80 percent. They have no feeling for what is going to happen to anybody. And then if you complain, they say, "Well, talk to your Congressman." So, I don't know, Bill. I sort of feel, particularly in the suburbs, where public housing is working--probably the section eight has proved it--if you don't put a big group of people, poor people in the community will accept the people--just like out here in Macedonia. You and I don't know what the people next door are making or anything else. Apparently, they're paying their taxes, et cetera. Well, it's the same way that the houses in the section eight. People don't know that they're from public housing. And they have to sort of conform to the area or the people. Neighbors will say, "What the hell! You haven't cut the grass. Why in the hell don't you cut the grass," those type of things. And it's the same thing.

J: So, [it's] social control or peer control in a certain sense?

F: Yes. And there's a lot of it. And it's the same thing in public housing. They wouldn't care whether the kid goes to school or not. Well, out in the suburban areas, somebody's after them, "Why don't your kids go to school?" The kid next door might be a good student, and they're playing with him. They say, "Well, you're a dummy!" The kid then gets excited. So, there's a lot of peer pressure that goes with it. That would make things go, in my opinion.

J: I don't have any knowledge basis for this at all, but you raised the question for me. In terms of the section eight and the availability of rental property, et cetera through the federal government--I don't know that you could answer how many people--how significant in numbers are people who are poor living outside of Cleveland and in the suburbs, as a result of those kind of programs?

F: Well, one of the things that you have to realize [is] that there's an awful lot of people living in the suburbs, regardless of Cleveland. So those people are being helped. Now, let's say, about the people living in Cleveland, there's very few people, in my experience, that want to be a pioneer. In other words, if they're living in Cleveland and they've got a house, they normally don't want to come to Macedonia. They don't know anybody. [There is a] different environment. So, that sort of stops them. There would probably be some statistics on how many people moved from Cleveland. Now, there probably is some, in other words some people whose children lived in Cleveland and their father and mother lived out in the suburbs, and they got them. There were houses out there they could rent, and the federal government would pay part of the rent. I'd think you'd get that.

But, just people automatically moving out. . . . It took us an awfully long time to get people to move out to Riverside out near the airport; particularly the Black people. They just don't feel comfortable out there. They move out, and they move back in; and then, we have to make a report on why they moved. In other words, it wasn't any pressures that the Housing Authority put on them. They just felt more comfortable in their own community and churches; particularly with the Black elderly. You know, church is a big thing with them, and out in Lorain square, they don't have any Black churches. And another thing is [that] I noticed over in the inner city and downtown, a lot of Black people will pick up the elderly to take them to church. They don't have that out in the suburbs. So, the

environment of the area has something to do with it.

J: So, it's not always prejudice; it's sometimes the decision to be with family, friends that you grew up with [and] associated with.

F: Another thing is, that out at Riverside, there's no hospitals that are very close like St. Vincent's Charity [is]. There's Fairview, but there were times when people would come in to us and complain that the people over at Fairview weren't friendly. You know, it's hard to say how friendly they were. So, you've got all of those factors, and a lot of people think that all the Black people would want to move out to Riverside. And that wasn't the case.

It's the same thing with rental. Again, with the rental, you get a certificate. We give you a certificate. Then you go and get a place to live. The housing authority doesn't do anything. Now, when you get a place, we come out and inspect it. You know, the funny thing, Bill, when section eight started, there was one sheet of paper with the regulations. When I left, there were two thick books, as thick as this. So, that's how things grow. The bureaucracy just seems to pile on things. And in some instances--I know this for a fact--if you were a landlord in the Black area and you were renting to people--they were supposed to pay you \$6 a month, and the federal government was supposed to pay you 300 [\$300]--if you paid them the six [\$6], they were never going to mention it to you. They'll do it with the \$300 they get from the federal government. So, that's one of the bad features of Section Eight. We ask, "Did you get your money?" And they say, "Yes," because they don't want you to throw those people out. But, that program seems to [be] working as well as the public.

J: And there's less controversy over it?

F: Actually, there's controversy over where are you going to put the things.

J: Now, what's interesting about Bohn, from what I've looked at so far, is that early on, he really wasn't in favor of that kind of program, because he believed in the environmental approach, the Garden City approach of Sir Raymond Unwin. He believed that this would enable these people within this community to have a community center and whatever. They would, then, be able to lift themselves up, so to speak, as opposed to just residing somewhere else.

F: It was the same on the staff, Ernie probably was [head of] one of the first bureaucracies in Cleveland that

employed Black people. Ernie had no feeling about the race, but sometimes you get forced into positions where you want to, as you say, save the white flight. To stop things, you have to put something. . . .

J: So, [it is] a very big dilemma for someone who wants to provide housing and yet alleviate racism at the same time.

F: Well, really you can't do it. One of the things that one of the administrations said [was] that we had to get some Polish people into Carver Park, so they made us put an ad for six months into the Polish paper. It cost us \$300 a month to put that ad in there, and we never got one person. But then, you showed the federal government that you were trying to get somebody. But, you know, people are people. They aren't going to. . . .

J: No. You can't force people to do things. You can try to lead them there, but it doesn't necessarily work.

F: It's the same on the other way. In the beginning, out at Riverside, we would get a Black person that would want to move out there. They'd stay a month, and then, they'd leave; because there was no Black community out there to sustain them. The social workers they had before were, let's say, social workers that were assigned downtown. The new social workers, they were loaded. And well, all of those things.

But, actually, in the beginning, the units were placed where the city fathers wanted them placed. I think everybody felt that when you built these units and they were going to be rented for so much, you'd have no problem getting people to rent them, which is true. That they, more or less, served the people that were living in that community.

J: In terms of the Catholicism question I'd asked you earlier, I did run across a speech that he gave the National Catholic Social Welfare Conference back in the 1930s, in which he talked about the encyclicals and how they, like Rerum Novarum, for example, encouraged Catholics to have a social conscience. Did he ever talk about that?

F: When you were talking [about] that, I would say possibly in 1966 or maybe in 1964, he was honored, I think, in the state of Ohio as a Knights of Columbus Man of the Year. I had more people call me [who] said, "What the hell is a Jewish fellow getting. . . ." so they had no idea of what faith he was. Never. Never. The only thing that I was involved with him [was], on Good Friday, he would want me to go with him to John Carroll.

At the time, John Carrol would have a day of recollection on Good Friday, and I would go with him. That's the only thing on Catholicism. He never ever mentioned. . . .

J: [He] didn't really talk about whatever had influenced him or. . . .

F: No. And the same thing with the priest that he. . . . Now, one of things that Bishop Whalen--not Bishop Whalen. Who's the Cardinal in Washington, now? He was the Bishop here. It isn't Whalen.

J: Was it James McCarney?

F: No. Well anyway, when he became the Bishop here, one of the first things that Ernie did was to take him out to Saint Agnes and make him agree not to tear down the clock tower, and that's still out there. So, that's the only thing with the Catholic Church.

J: He had a lot of nationally prominent friends, a lot of correspondents that I've run across. Did he ever talk about Catherine Bauer?

F: No. Not to us. See, we were on a different level. Once in a while, if we would get into a discussion about building something, he would bring up a name to fortify his position, but that was all.

J: So, your relationship was very much on a professional level as opposed to a friend or--I mean, not that you weren't friendly.

F: I probably was as much a friend as anybody he had. I'm just saying he kept it in a different setting. In fact, before Colonel Long died, he had me take him and Colonel Long out to dinner once. He wanted to talk over some of the things that happened in the past with Colonel Long.

But, Christmas was a tough time for Ernie Bohn. The day before Christmas, he would have me take him around, and I would get home about six-thirty Christmas Eve. He'd keep me out till then. That was a tough time but, he. . . .

J: I'd say from his letters--and again the correspondence is extensive in there--he would get letters that many times were extremely friendly, sometimes from women. His response would usually be more on the professional level.

F: Maxine Haberman, one of the managers, was probably the closest woman to him. The rest of the women were all

in a professional situation. And as far as people in HUD, before he would have an audience or anything with them, they'd have to be of some stature. The so-called workers in the trenches, he would have nothing to do with them. So, his was always on a professional situation.

J: So, he never really talked about his personal life, about never having married, for example? Things of that sort.

F. No. Never. Nothing, other than his father was sick. You'd just ask him how his father was, and [he would say,] "Yes," or "No," or "Okay," or whatever. Everybody on his so-called staff was the same way, and most of the conversations with the staff people were on a one to one basis. They would not be [at] a staff meeting. Mine was probably more [about] he and Leyton Washburn, and what they were going to do, and should they do this or should they do that. You see, at King Kennedy, the design that we had came in four million dollars over the budget. That's when HUD made us change the whole thing.

Actually whatever personal life he had, he had it by himself. Now, as I say, he was friendly with some of the clergy, but that was. . . . It was on professional basis with the mayors and the governor and that type of thing. I don't ever remember him going to any political conventions and things like that.

J: The reason why we raise Catherine Bauer is that he knew her for about thirty years, and they had extensive correspondence. Of course, she was nationally recognized as a figure in the public housing area and wrote books on it and so forth. In the early sixties, she walked out into the desert and somehow died out there. It was interesting, because he had known her for thirty years, had corresponded with her; but there was no indication of his reaction to this. I assumed it would have been something that would not have crushed him certainly, but he would have felt very deeply about.

F: No. Not. The only person--I don't know the pastor out at St. Ignatius Church--when he died, Ernie felt very bad about that. Then, when his dad died, he felt very bad about that. Those are the only two deaths other than John Kennedy, [that] he felt bad about.

F: The thing is that, with that fellow, that priest out at St. Ignatius, he [Ernie Bohn] went to the funeral. He was really crushed about those things. Actually, the two, Monsignor Carney and Monsignor Blair from the chancellery downtown, were the ones that buried Bohn. [They] got the cousin out in Geauga County to come in

and take whatever stuff they wanted and that type of thing.

J: And Monsignor Carney was on the Board?

F: Yeah. He was on the Board.

J: And, of course, the Oakwood public housing was named after him.

F: Yeah.

J: Just that one in Portage.

F: [It's] the only public housing building that is named after Ernie. That's the only one there. None of the rest. There are some of the individual buildings and recreation centers, and some of them the names were put there by other agencies, not necessarily the housing authority. Ernie started one of the Golden Age Centers, actually, to have somebody to do recreation for the elderly. For a certain period of time, he was able to get money for them, and then it stopped; and they had to start getting it for themselves. So, that was another situation, that he felt . . . to get recreation. We're not necessarily talking a social situation, but he was talking about recreation.

J: In terms of Ernie Bohn, are there any other thoughts you have about him? Let me phrase a different question. Do you think he made a difference in terms of public housing in Cleveland?

F: Well, if it wasn't for Ernie Bohn, there probably wouldn't be a public housing [agency], per se, in Cleveland. Now, there may have been something else that would be similar to public housing, but through his initiative, he actually started the program in Cleveland. Well, the NAHRO group, the national housing group, he was one of the leaders of that, sort of started to push. Now, there were a number of cities, as I said, started. [They were] one or two units, sort of like the Habitat. Is that what Jimmy Carter is doing now? Well, they do. . . .

J: Refurbished housing.

F: A dozen or so or new housing. Well, there may have been that type of thing. But, what the thing is, it would have to take somebody like Ernie Bohn and some of the others that were there to get the federal government to put some money in. Actually, the public housing, per se, has not been really sold, because there are so many problems connected with it. I don't know how you could change the problems. You'd almost have

to have very much of a dictatorship of management to not have some of the problems that are there, and the news media hasn't helped. The news media hasn't helped spread it around. One of the reasons, in my opinion, that the Section Eight Program has done so well is the new media has left it alone.

J: [There are] not as many stories, or it's not a neat package?

F: When there's a story, it's sort of a story [such as] "Well, the housing authority got 500 Section Eight units, [and] nobody knows where they are. "But, you see, now, up in Cleveland Heights, until the federal government told them that they're not going to get any money, they kicked us around. I think there were four places zoned in Cleveland Heights for high rise apartments, and every one of them, they turned us down. The last one was at seven. They finally told them, "If you don't let them build, we're not going to give you your money." They finally let us build there. Actually, that's one of the nicer situations. I don't know what the problem was. In fact, the funny thing was, our lawyer was Walter Kelley, who at that time was the mayor of Shaker Heights. He was leading the fight there, and he blackened his eye up there, too.

J: Is that Walter Florie's son-in-law?

F: Walter who?

J: Florie's son-in-law? Was his wife Elizabeth Florie Kelley?

F: I don't know, but the situation in Oakwood, when the federal government went in and told them what the name of the game was, they passed it seven to nothing. So, we had no problem out at Berea, and there was no problem in East Cleveland either; but Cleveland Heights, it took seven years and probably two or three gray hairs of mine.

J: Now, Cleveland Heights, if I remember correctly, prided itself on being one of the more positive towards racial integration.

F: I don't know; I forget. I think there was 16 percent Blacks in Cleveland Heights at the time. So, they wanted 16 percent. [They said,] "Okay, we'll get 16 percent." So, they went out and surveyed all the Blacks living there. Well, none of those Blacks living there wanted to live in any public housing.

J: They were probably better off.

F: Well, yeah. They were upper middle class people. So, then, they didn't know what they wanted. They didn't want us to bring people from Cleveland there.

J: So, once again, as you said earlier, the economic differences seemed to have made a bigger to do [impact] than the racial differences.

F: Yeah. Even when you talked to the newspaper, [it] says that's it's really not an economic situation; they'd say it was a racial thing. But, since then, Macedonia is one of the places that you saw that. I haven't heard anybody complaining about any Blacks moving out here, but a lot of them have moved out.

J: We have several streets, over where we live, that are almost totally Black.

F: So, that it just really in my opinion--

J: It's the economic difference?

F: Yeah.

J: Okay, well, thank you very much.

F: Alright.

END OF INTERVIEW