

## EMMAUS HOUSE—PEOPLESTOWN DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

**Interview with:** Tom and Debbie Shields Erdmanczyk  
**Interviewed by:** LeeAnn Lands  
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LEEANN LANDS: We'll start by having you introduce yourself, and then you can right into your history with Emmaus House.

DEBBIE ERDMANCZYK: My name is Debbie [Shields] Erdmanczyk. I first became involved with Emmaus House when I was sixteen years old. Sister Marie [Bodell] and Gene Ferguson came to talk to the youth at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church and I got involved in the summer program. I believe that first summer I was a group leader—that is what we were called—and I had a group of about eight kids that I followed through daily with the summer program. Then, for several summers after that, I worked with the summer program, primarily because I was still in school and I was working part time at a job. So, then, I just went to Emmaus House mostly during the summer time.

TOM ERDMANCZYK: I'm Tom Erdmanczyk. I came to Emmaus House first in the, would've been the fall of 1972, for a visit. I was a conscientious objector. I was the last conscientious objector on staff at Emmaus House. (I believe Dennis Goldstein was the first.) If you were a CO, then there was an approved list of potential places of employment. If you were drafted, you then did alternate service rather than military service. So I applied to every place in the book that was not a hospital, and that was maybe 40 or 50 places. The one positive response came from Emmaus House. I felt very lucky to be able to have a positive response. I had friends who had told me of the horrors of working in hospitals. I was very young, was in my first year of college. It was after college deferments no longer existed. So, since my lottery number was 10, I knew that I would be doing something. And I came to Emmaus House to take a look at it. I was given the trip down by my parents, and so consequently, for some reason, was housed in the main house upstairs during my visit. Which, at that time—of course I didn't know it—was kind of off limits to staff. And, so, I met the staff there and I think they didn't know quite what to

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<sup>1</sup> The Emmaus House-Peoplestown oral histories are edited to provide reading clarity while preserving the interview's conversational tone and the speakers' speech patterns.

think of me, and why I was upstairs. But after I decided to come and I became a staff member in May of 1973, quickly all illusions were dispelled and I was housed in staff quarters and certainly no more important than anyone else.

One of my first memories, being a kid from a fairly small town in Minnesota, was not being able to understand anyone. Not only was it difficult to understand the teenagers—I had responsibility for the senior teenage program—but their parents and the other volunteers. We practically spoke different languages, and I think that's something that has really disappeared over time, pretty much. And I'm not skilled at language so that was a pretty rough transition.

In the early 1970s there was a very clear delineation of staff and management at Emmaus House. Father [Austin] Ford was a very stern staff task master with very high standards which we scrambled around and tried to achieve. Those were interpreted by Sister Marie, who was, kind of, second in command. And the work was hard.

One of the main parts of my work was picking up and delivering surplus food. And the surplus commodities program was a historically difficult program which preceded the food stamp program (which was so much easier). But people, particularly on welfare and I think some that qualified different ways, got a card and that enabled them to go to a warehouse on Murphy Avenue and pick up their food for the month. And if you didn't have transportation it was impossible to pick up your food because it couldn't be accomplished on public transportation—the boxes were too big, too heavy, and the people were too feeble to get the food home. So one of the benefits of joining the Welfare Rights Organization was that your food would be picked up. So the Emmaus House van picked up the food every week of every month of every year. And so, it didn't matter if it was raining, it didn't matter if it was over 100 degrees, it was delivered to families. Some of our main delivery points were the public housing projects and the Peopletown area, which were individual homes. Housing projects were easier because you could group them together and get more food delivered. I remember particularly, it was not smiled upon to ever stop anywhere but the warehouse and the delivery points. And one time the van broke down at the Zesto's in Lakewood and the other unnamed volunteer and I who were enjoying our strawberry milkshakes came out and found that it wouldn't start. So we physically pushed it out of the Zesto's parking lot and luckily down a hill so that we were six blocks from Zesto's when we stopped it again and called for help.

It was also fun to be a staff member, and we played a lot. But I think the staff members at that time had a real bond in that we knew we were changing things. We knew we were making things better and really believed in that. And so, while we might, at times, appear negative towards some of the things we were told to do, we knew that it was in all a good thing, and part of what needed to be done in order to effect change. So we were seeing ourselves as change agents.

At that time, Emmaus House was very politically involved. We supported candidates for City Council, for State House and Senate, for the School Board, and worked actively in their campaigns. It was a lot of fun. I remember Shirley Chisholm coming to speak from the porch of Emmaus House when she was running for President. It was a very huge historical moment for the community. We also had the infamous Emmaus House Christmas party, which seemed like an all night long affair, Christmas Eve. It may not have been Christmas Eve, but near Christmas Eve. And I remember having great fun at the party and then being part of the clean up detail and going to bed about the time the sun came up. So there were a few memories.

LANDS: You are starting in the early 1970s, and you talk about being change agents—what was Peoplestown like then?

ERDMANCZYK, D: Was that before or after the stadium was built?

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was after.

ERDMANCZYK, D: It was after the stadium was built. So, first, urban renewal programs tore down a lot of houses. And then the [Atlanta Fulton County] stadium came and destroyed more houses.

ERDMANCZYK, T: So what had happened was the housing that was left—and there were, I remember very few empty lots at that point in [Summerhill] because [urban renewal programs] really concentrated on clearing the land for the stadium. So, many of the people who were displaced moved into houses that were made into even more apartments or rented rooms in the houses that were left because it didn't appear that there was a very effective relocation program, or maybe that was thought to be effective. There was thought to be a need for people to work in places like the stadium.

Of course, Atlanta was evolving at that point. In 1972, the tallest building downtown was the Hyatt Regency Hotel, so many more hotels were being built. Somebody needed to clean the hotel rooms. So having a community that was close to downtown was important because that's

where many of the service workers came from. So there may have even been some thought of, “we don’t want these people to move too far away.” Transportation wasn’t what it is now. There was no rapid rail; it was Atlanta Transit, it was pre Marta. I believe the bus fare was 15 cents. So, the community was very dense and very impoverished. I couldn’t guess at median income but it was low. A lot of single parent families existing on AFDC, which was impossible at the time because it was based on a standard of need that was ridiculous. So, if someone really could exist on AFDC they had budgetary talents of a CFO in order to run a family that way, which is why the food was so important. As far as housing, the housing was probably substandard, but there was also very beautiful architectural detail in a lot of the houses. And people did a really good job of making a small space livable. And you know, by a worldwide standard it probably was adequate space, but it was not as much space as a lot of middle class Americans were used to, unless they happened to be staff at Emmaus House.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And there were some apartments interspersed in Primrose Circle, the duplexes.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Uh huh, cement block.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Cement block duplexes, and the apartment buildings were all brick on Washington Street.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Probably cement block on the inside.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Well, probably.

LANDS: So the Washington Street Apartments and the Primrose Circle Apartments, those are two of the sets that Dennis Goldstein worked on, I think, when he went worked at Atlanta Legal Aid. Does that sound familiar?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Could be. I know Primrose Circle was.

LANDS: So tell me about the, the after school programs and the summer programs. What did you guys do? What was a typical day with the kids programs?

ERDMANCZYK, D: In the summer program you worked with art.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Well the first, the first summer I had a group which was, the morning was academic and the afternoon was recreational.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Swimming, usually, and field trips.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Usually swimming at a city pool, and the kids were transported. Different schools were used different years to house the program, Atlanta Public Schools. And the program. . .

ERDMANCZYK, D: I'm pretty sure when I was involved it was at St. Bartholomew's. I drove to Emmaus House and then rode the bus out to St. Bartholomew's everyday so I could be with my group, so they wouldn't be out of control by the time we got to St. Bart's. Then the afternoons weren't so structured. And then there were field trips. And at the end of the summer everybody went to Camp Mikell for a week.

ERDMANCZYK, T: The morning focused on academics, particularly reading, writing, composition. And it's my memory that the two summers that I was involved there were Atlanta Public School teachers hired to be the lead teachers in those academic sessions. Mrs. Slade was a memorable APS teacher who lived on Pryor Street right across the freeway from the stadium. And those people, too, felt like they were a part of the Emmaus House community. While they were getting paid for it, it was their volunteer work, in a way, in the summer. I'm sure they weren't paid full salary. So, then group leaders followed a group of kids through their classes. We were responsible to know the kids—know what the problem was, be able to take them for one-on-one remediation. And then we stuck with them during the afternoon; went swimming with them, went to camp with them at the end of the summer, were their cabin counselors at camp.

ERDMANCZYK, D: But I remember a lot of home visits too. So we must have gone and visited with the parents and let the parents know how the kids were doing. And before they went to camp—that involved a big trip to the store, K-Mart or whatever. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: Richway.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Richway, yes, Richway. And Delta donated these little duffle bags. They had a whole new set of clothing for camp. And so all this clothing had to be purchased, labeled, packed in the duffle bags, and then taken in a bus or a truck up to camp so the kids would have something to wear when they were there. And that was all done at the convent. . . the Immaculate Heart of, no not. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: St. Thomas More.

ERDMANCZYK, D: St. Thomas More. There was one summer when the summer program was at Immaculate Heart of Mary, after it was at St. Bartholomew's.

LANDS: And tell me about Camp Mikell at that point.

ERDMANCZYK, D: That was a very contentious place for the Emmaus House staff and the Camp Mikell staff to kind of come together, because we as Emmaus House people were “right” in the Camp Mikell people were “right”. So it was just a little, you know. . . we probably. . . looking at it from a perspective of many years, we probably could’ve been kinder to each other than we were.

ERDMANCZYK, T: We were all kids.

ERDMANCZYK, D: We were young, we were teenagers.

ERDMANCZYK, T: The orientation, though, of the Camp Mikell staff seemed to be that they expected the Emmaus House campers to be like every other camper that had been there all summer. And this was the end of the summer and I guess it was reasonable that they’d have that expectation, because that’s what they’d experienced. But we felt like they didn’t understand the kids that we had spent all summer getting to know. So, there was some understandable tensions that flared up from time to time.

LANDS: I heard a story about the bus being seized at some point?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Oh, the Camp Mikell van.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Their pickup truck, their prized pickup truck—their red, white, and blue pickup truck— [laughs].

ERDMANCZYK, T: . . . was appropriated and painted overnight.

ERDMANCZYK, D: “Liberated,” I believe, was the word we used.

LANDS: Liberated and painted.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Yes, red, green, and black. Yes. I don’t think that was a very nice thing.

LANDS: The colors of Africa.

ERDMANCZYK, D and ERDMANCZYK, T: Yes.

LANDS: That was an intentional choice?

ERDMANCZYK, D: That was very intentional.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Oh yes. Well, red, white, and blue meant something somewhat different at that time then it does now.

LANDS: I see.

ERDMANCZYK, D: I mean, even the kids were afraid that the Klan would come to Camp Mikell.

LANDS: Really?

ERDMANCZYK, D: They'd, I mean some of them had never really been out of the city at that point. So you know there were lights, there were city noises. You go to Camp Mikell and it's the Camp Mikell bugs and. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: It's dark.

ERDMANCZYK, D: It's dark and the kids were just like really afraid of being in such a, you know, out of. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: Foreign environment.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Yeah, it was totally different for them. Totally.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Some of them probably slept in their own bed by themselves for the first time, because of how compacted families were into small spaces [back home].

ERDMANCZYK, D: And I don't, I don't think families were so transient then as they are now. I don't think that they moved around from place to place as much; there just weren't the means. Once you got someplace, you stayed there. And so they weren't used to going any place else.

ERDMANCZYK, T: It's actually Debbie's story, but I'll steal it. One of the favorite things about being at camp with the kids was there was a wake up bell in the morning that probably rang at maybe 7, 7:30. And the kids would be either so scared or so excited at the beginning of the week that they would be up well before that bell. In fact they'd be on their way to the dining hall for breakfast. Breakfasts were wonderful in the old dining hall at Camp Mikell. The food was wonderful, and the possibilities of the day were just limitless at breakfast. Nobody had cried yet, nobody had gotten hurt. The first few days they were up before the bell. The middle of the week they woke up when the bell rang. By the last day they'd be saying, "No, you can't tell me the bell rang. Let me sleep some more. It hasn't rung yet." So we really did manage to tire them out over the course of the week and they tired us out. It was a physically exhausting week.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And then it was over. I mean for me. You were still there.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Well, and the kids went back to school. [Camp Mikell] was usually the week before schools start. So, it was a big transition for them, and their camp clothes were their school clothes. I feel like the summer program was very effective in increasing academic achievement for the kids, because they didn't have that summer regression from academics. It was also fun. It also kept them safe because they had a place to go during the day during the

summer. It seemed like a very effective program, probably one of the more effective things we did.

As far as afterschool programs, I really don't remember being involved with them. They may not have started yet at that point. We did, Father Ford did have the idea of having a residential program for a brief time and so we had. . .

LANDS: Residential for the kids?

ERDMANCZYK, T: For kids. We, for a short time, had a couple of neighborhood teenage boys living at the house who were the "pilot program." And that program was not continued beyond the pilot program.

LANDS: So the afterschool program probably hasn't started at that point. You've got the summer program and surplus food. What other programs were going at the time y'all were there?

ERDMANCZYK, D: Poverty Rights Office.

ERDMANCZYK, T: The Poverty Rights Office was going. The house staff really was quite separate from Poverty Rights Office staff, which was largely adult volunteers, mostly female—very effective, some very strong people. Buzz Jacobs was the only male I remember being involved. He was the husband of a DFACS case worker. Nancy Leslie was one of the women volunteers, and Muriel Lokey, of course.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Dee Weems.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Dee Weems.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Nancy Beishline and Ted Beishline.

ERDMANCZYK, T: There was some overlap. Dee also worked with the kids. Some of them did. We ended up being involved with Poverty Rights because, while out on surplus food deliveries, we would find out people needed help, and then take those cases to Poverty Rights Office for attention. So there was give and take, but [Emmaus House] staff did not work in the Poverty Rights Office. That was really, seemed to be more academic, cognitive kind of work and our work was very physical. So, although there were surplus food drivers who were from that same demographic, and Nancy Leslie was one who did both, the surplus food driver volunteers would have the same families month in and month out. The Emmaus House staff would pick up for the families who didn't have a volunteer driver, which was the majority. And in that way, these folks who we really looked at as "suburban women" came to know families in

the inner city from delivering the food and some of them got quite close. But it was the long time participants who ended up with the volunteers. And the rest of them had to put up with being delivered to by college kids or people who would've been college kids if they hadn't been drafted.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Well and then there were the Reidsville bus trips. There were monthly trips to Reidsville [State Prison] for family members of . . . whose loved ones were incarcerated.

LANDS: And that was handled by the Emmaus House staff?

ERDMANCZYK, D: The Emmaus House bus.

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was the Emmaus House bus, and usually Father Ford drove the bus to Reidsville. I drove it several times when he couldn't do it. And I think there were other volunteers who also drove Reidsville trips but, again, it was a transportation issue. It was very hard to get to Reidsville if you lived in Peoplestown and you had a son or husband who was incarcerated.

ERDMANCZYK, D: It's a long way to Reidsville.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Another major emphasis while I was there was the metro school desegregation suit. And Dennis Goldstein was very involved in that, but Dennis didn't drive and I did so. . . and it was really nice to be able to drive out to some school system office in the metro area and spend a day there, particularly a summer day, because Dennis did a lot of his work in the summer rather than delivering surplus food. So I drove, and also had a car during my time at Emmaus House and most of the staff didn't have cars, so that was a blessing and a curse. But that led to my involvement in the metro desegregation suit. And what we were doing, largely, was looking for evidence that black students were segregated across district lines. We also worked the Atlanta school desegregation which was taking place at that time. Atlanta had adopted somewhat of a modified minority to majority program but my understanding was that there had to be enough kids to fill a bus at any one pick up point or in an area before transportation would be granted. And so that effectively disenfranchised a lot of parents who would like for their child to transfer because they didn't have the organizational capacity to get up a bus load of kids, so Emmaus House filled that gap. And particularly in the public housing projects it was rather easy to fill a bus with kids, so we had buses going from Thomasville to McKlatchy Elementary from Leila Valley and Inglewood projects to Morris Brandon. The kids in the Emmaus House area went to Bernie Elementary.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And we also had buses going to Sutton Middle, school and Emmaus House would take buses for PTA meetings, too—buses of parents to encourage parent involvement.

LANDS: So were you involved in the nitty gritty of organizing parents, too?

ERDMANCZYK, T: I was involved in that, yes.

LANDS: Can you talk about that? How did you have the organizational capacity to put this together?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Well, just because we knew a lot of parents in these projects—because of the surplus food delivery, and we knew how many kids were in the family because the number was on the card. It just occurred, I'm sure, to Father Ford that this was a way to make this work, and to integrate those schools on the north side. And we all believed that that was very appropriate. There was clearly a double standard in the schools, and we had seen it because we had worked in schools in the summer on the south side of town. And when we saw schools on the north side of town, there was no comparison. And we felt like these kids deserved an equal education, and that meant they had to ride across town. So, I don't remember specifically meetings with parents, but I know there were group meetings with parents to encourage them to sign up, to facilitate that paper work, because they would have had to have gone into an area school office, and I'm sure they did it at the community centers and the housing projects for them—just encourage them to risk their children to a cross town bus ride in order to achieve an adequate education. The thing that I do remember vividly is the first week of school riding those buses to make sure that the kids were well received and it just. . . the logistics of having a volunteer on every bus, and having the volunteer be welcomed by the bus driver and allowed to ride the bus, and then trying to make sure things went smoothly at the school. From my perspective, things did go smoothly. I think that the staff of those schools was prepared. I don't think they were happy about having an integrated school, and the staff certainly were not integrated. Or, if they were, it was, it was in a token way because we were seeing more white people in the schools that were adults than we had ever seen.

LANDS: And you must've used your Emmaus House bus to take the parents to the PTA meetings, right?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Right, right.

ERDMANCZYK, D: The bus or the van depending on how many people went.

ERDMANCZYK, T: So that was another chapter. Another area of transportation was to and from Welfare Rights Organization meetings. And we, again, we knew a lot of these people through delivering the surplus food. But, if someone wanted to come to Welfare Rights meetings and called in, they would be picked up. They would get there on time; they would stay as long as they wanted; and they would be taken home. And to mess up on any of that was to incur the wrath of [Welfare Rights Organization President] Ethel Mae Matthews, which was not pretty.

LANDS: So you guys were sent out on the bus or the van?

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was usually one or another of the vans, or cars to supplement. We'd have van loads at several complexes, but then there'd be one person at Techwood, one person in East Atlanta.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Out on Glenwood Road.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Out on Glenwood Road—Mrs. Goodman. And so those of us who happened to have cars would use our cars to pick up people and it made for interesting associations. There was one lady who was affectionately known as refrigerator lady who was very difficult to get into a van, and it took physical assistance to heft her up into the van. But she got there on time.

LANDS: So there's one Welfare Rights Organization, Ethel Mae Matthews's organization that's meeting at Emmaus House, right?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Right.

LANDS: There's no other Welfare Rights Organizations spread throughout the city?

ERDMANCZYK, T: If there were, we were not aware. There were other organizations but they usually were tenant's organizations in the various complexes. Like Eva Davis at East Lake. And I believe there may have been a DeKalb branch of the Welfare Rights Organization.

LANDS: Oh, interesting.

ERDMANCZYK, T: A favorite story was, there was a party out at East Lake given by Ms. Davis to commemorate some event. And I had a date that night, and it wouldn't have done to not show up at the party first. So I drove to the party. The staff, the rest of the staff had driven the van with neighborhood residents out to the party and everyone was ready to go but Mrs. Matthews. So a staff member told Mrs. Matthews that everybody else was leaving, the van was going, but I would take her home. And I had to tell her that nobody had asked me and I wasn't

going home and that I'd find a ride for her. That was an incident of incurring the wrath of Ethel Mae Matthews. She also, though, was very protective of us and a very strong person and I think nobody messed with the Emmaus House staff in part because of Ethel Mae Matthews. So, while at times she appeared fierce to us, she also fiercely defended us. It was kind of like a family. You might fight among yourselves in the family, but outside of that group, if anybody's motives were questioned, she was very quick to defend us.

There were just many interesting nights, welfare rights nights. The meetings often would last quite late. So then we'd be on the road quite late, and we'd be thinking that Mrs. Matthews walked up the street and went to bed, and here we still are out trying to get the refrigerator lady home.

LANDS: And the whole staff went to these meetings? It was like an Emmaus House event, basically?

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was, I think it was, I just felt like it was expected that I be there. The staff was not large. Maybe at the most during the year between summers, five people. And frequently two people. So if we were all there it wasn't a huge impact.

LANDS: You weren't filling the room [laughter].

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was certainly a community function, and there was a welfare rights room at the Emmaus House in the house next door to the main house where the chapel also was during that time. Not much else went on in the welfare rights room but the welfare rights meetings. It was dedicated to that organization. And, like I said, a lot of late nights and a lot of organizing. My impression of the mission now is somewhat more tame as far as political involvement. It certainly was not at that time.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And people don't live there anymore. It's a day kind of job. I mean, I'm sure it's not a 9 to 5 but it's not like. . . it's not their home.

LANDS: Right. I think it is sort of the 9 to 5. Actually, the interns that are there in the summer live in what they call the Lokey Center now, which is the rebuilt Poverty Rights Office. But I don't know that anyone lives there during the rest of the year.

ERDMANCZYK, T: And that was shocking to us to realize that the summer staff didn't live there for several summers, because that was so much a part of the experience. And staff did live there. And, of course, we dealt with the house being broken into and just not necessarily feeling

very safe all the time, but I don't remember feeling physically threatened. If there were break-ins, it was people who, you know, wanted to steal a television.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Somebody pulled a gun on [Tom] once.

ERDMANCZYK, T: . . . wanting to steal the van. And the van was stolen.

ERDMANCZYK, D: I think multiple times.

ERDMANCZYK, T: The other interesting thing was, since we lived there the phone was answered until 10:00 at night. And so there was a rotation of front desk duty, and you pulled your time sitting at the front desk and answering the phone.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Cooking meals, doing the laundry was also done as part of the responsibilities.

LANDS: Now, literally, the front door is unlocked and it's an open house until 10, as well?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Right, right.

ERDMANCZYK, D: It's really 11. Wasn't it 11?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Maybe it was 11.

LANDS: So who would come by that late? I guess, why keep it open that late?

ERDMANCZYK, T: A lot of times it was teenagers and you know it depended on who was on duty who came by. If Gene Ferguson was on duty it might be a different group than if I was on duty.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Or Mr. Cole.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Well he was never there at night. There were a couple of octogenarian volunteers who did desk duty during the day. But I was a sponsor of the senior teenage club so a lot of the teenagers would come and hang out while I was there. And then, if someone had been evicted they might turn up and need help. Father Ford may or may not be in his apartment upstairs to call on for help, but a lot of times if someone was in dire straits they were there to see Father Ford and we were the intermediary— "do you really want to interrupt your evening for this?" Probably as kids resented that somewhat. But the fact of the matter was, he was living there a lot longer than we were. Our duration was two years if we were CO's; it was his career, and it was his house. And so that's really a remarkable thing thinking back on it. It wasn't really understood by us at the time I don't think. But taking duty until 10 or 11:00 and then being back on maybe at 8:00 in the morning. . . there was no such thing as a forty hour week.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Well if you were driving kids to school to Galloway or riding the buses, that was a very early morning, because there were kids who had scholarships to Galloway School that had to be driven every day.

ERDMANCZYK, T: And the van did that as well. We wore out a lot of vans. We were kids, so we weren't good with maintenance. You know, of course, there wasn't a maintenance schedule for anything, but if you were the one who drove the van without oil in it, you would be in big trouble with Father Ford. Although, how would you know, because the oil gage didn't work!

ERDMANCZYK, D: The van was really hard. I mean it didn't have any springs or shock absorbers or whatever those were.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Well they all did originally, but. . .

ERDMANCZYK, D: We used to drive people to the polls too. I remember one time I was in some housing project and Andrew Young was running for. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: Mayor.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Mayor, and so he stopped, he had this group of boys that were following him around. And so, somehow he got that whole group of boys in the van and I was then responsible for them. Because he was ready to move on to his next area and he needed them to go somewhere else.

ERDMANCZYK, T: —to be relieved from the group of boys. [Laughter.]

ERDMANCZYK, D: I guess I must've taken them all home.

LANDS: We skipped over your point about doing this investigating the evidence for the school borders. Tell me about that. What were. . . ?

ERDMANCZYK, T: That'd really be a better question for Dennis because he was the investigator and I was the chauffer. But, you know, I do remember looking back at historic board meeting records, looking for cases of busing across district lines to support segregation. And I know that ultimately, the metro school desegregation suit didn't go forward. I'm not sure how much evidence was or wasn't found. But it was interesting, particularly from my current perspective as a retired educator in a metro school system, which was one of the ones I remember visiting several years before I became employed there. I think we told them that we were graduate students at Georgia State researching school systems but no more specifics than that. And we were just welcomed and went into the archives.

LANDS: So you guys talking about Emmaus House, and the meetings, and breaking down vans. . . I get this image of. . . of chaos. Did it feel like that?

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was very well organized. There were a lot of chaotic moments but then it was just everybody's job to pitch in and make it right. For instance, one afternoon Father Ford was driving the kids home from Galloway and had a wreck right at the state capitol. Then I got a call to go pick them all up and take them home, and it wasn't said, "make sure they're all okay and talk to all their parents" and whatever. I think one parent wasn't home when I dropped a kid off, so later I heard about not tracking down that parent. But you just filled in and you did what was needed. And there was a schedule. I mean, Welfare Rights meetings were scheduled. There were times when the van was busy taking kids to Galloway School, and then in between dropping the kids off and picking them up it would serve as the surplus food van. Sometimes we had two vans when—we did actually did get a new van—and were able to take the seats out of the old one, and then it was much better suited to surplus food. But it was, it was chaotic at times just because of being immersed in the community. The community was a chaotic place, and so there were some things you couldn't schedule. You don't know who will be evicted when, who will need help, who might be arrested. Then political campaigns took a lot of time but they weren't constants. So you just, in a way, reacted to whatever happened but then you also had an ongoing schedule of food pick ups and deliveries, and the structure of taking the kids up to Galloway. And it depended on again how many staff were there, whether you did both, everything in a day or whether there was somebody else to take some of the duties. I never felt that it was chaotic and I think that was largely a tribute to Father Ford and Sister Marie.

Another stellar character was Mrs. Magby, who was Father Ford's cleaning lady and cook and I believe had been with him when he was at St. Bartholomew's. I don't think Mrs. Magby thought his move to Emmaus House was a really good idea, and she certainly didn't think it was a very safe place. But she had a lot of wisdom, she shared it with the staff. She was pretty much the surrogate mother for the staff. She cooked killer fried chicken which was a delight of Sister Marie's. And so, Sister's nickname among the staff became "chicken," because she would be so excited when it was chicken.

LANDS: So what did y'all gain personally from Emmaus House?

ERDMANCZYK, T: A whole lot of satisfaction. I think that we felt a responsibility to give something back. It was a very different time, and there was a real social consciousness, I think,

with our generation. And so we were able to fulfill that responsibility in part by this work. And, selfishly, I also took away an appropriate site for my alternative service and the completion of that at Emmaus House. So, that was certainly primary. There was no monetary gain by being on staff. Our salaries were incredibly low and we, of course, received room and board, so we didn't need that much money. But I really think it was the feeling of having done something well that was a tangible source of support for the people that we worked with. And you could see the results. People would stay in their house, or they would eat, or they would, you know, go to school because we were there, and if we weren't there they wouldn't have.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And we got to know people we wouldn't have gotten to know otherwise. We wouldn't have gotten to know people that lived across town from where we lived at that time, or I lived at that time.

LANDS: Which neighborhood were you in then? When you say you got to know people who lived across town. . .

ERDMANCZYK, D: Oh, because I lived in Sagamore Hills, and that's when I was still in high school and college.

LANDS: So were you familiar with downtown Atlanta at all before you started working at Emmaus House?

ERDMANCZYK, D: We'd gone to Rich's, to the Magnolia Room. But not really.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Another whole aspect that we haven't talked about at all was the church services, the Chapel, which was a wonderful rich, lovely, loud worship service.

LANDS: And you're in the old chapel at that point?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Right, right.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Yes. And the fact—oh that was later that we taught Sunday school, because the children had to be picked up for Sunday school, and then we cooked them breakfast. We cooked the breakfast, we fed them breakfast, then we taught them Sunday school. Then we went to church, then we took them home. But that was later.

LANDS: It was a long day.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Yes.

LANDS: So what did the old chapel look like?

ERDMANCZYK, D: You painted it. What color was it?

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was off white.

ERDMANCZYK, D: You painted it before our wedding.

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was like antique white.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Yeah. It was just a room in that other house.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Well it was two rooms together. It was the southeast corner of the house next to the main house.

LANDS: And no one was living in that house at the time? Wasn't it. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: I was.

LANDS: You were?

ERDMANCZYK, T: There was one staff room in that house, sometimes two. I think one became an office. Rooms were kind of transitory.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And it had folding chairs in it, metal folding chairs. We could probably find a picture because that's where we got married. And there was a stained glass window over the altar.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Hanging stained glass.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Yeah, it was very simple.

LANDS: It wasn't built as a chapel?

ERDMANCZYK, T: No—air conditioner in the wall—but it was a very appropriate chapel. And the service was very formal in a very spiritual kind of way because Father Ford was a very formal person in an informal setting.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And that was before the new prayer book—

ERDMANCZYK, T: I don't remember that it was before the new prayer book, I think it was after.

ERDMANCZYK, D: I think. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: The Emmaus House hymn book was its own creation. It was a compilation of a lot of spirituals, and so the music was very rich. And I remember a really interesting congregation because many—probably half the congregation was from the neighborhood and half was volunteers or staff—and so a lot of different backgrounds. Some of the staff and volunteers were Episcopalian, some were not. So, it was a great melting pot.

LANDS: So how many people would be in chapel on Sundays you think?

ERDMANCZYK, D: 35 to 50.

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was full.

LANDS: Instruments? piano?

ERDMANCZYK, D: Piano. Johnnie Brown played the piano.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Piano and Mabie Settlage played the guitar, and they were a real strong duo musically.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Still friends to this day.

LANDS: So is it Jeanne Brown who's playing the piano or her mother?

ERDMANCZYK, D: Her mother, Johnnie Brown. Jeanne would sing.

ERDMANCZYK, T: The Brown family was very integrally involved. Dr. Brown was our. . .if we did happen to get sick. . .

ERDMANCZYK, D: First you got in trouble. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: First you got in trouble for being sick, but then you got sent to Dr. Brown and I think he probably didn't charge us for our medical visits. And then Johnnie was in charge of the choir, and may have had some other involvements, I'm not sure.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Later Sunday school. She was in charge of Sunday school.

ERDMANCZYK, T: But we continued at Emmaus House for my two years, and then we became volunteers and taught Sunday school and went to church there for years after. We were married there in 1976.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And we were there until 1979.

ERDMANCZYK, T: So the 1970s were kind of our involvement.

LANDS: So did Emmaus House change much in the 1970s? Was it pretty much the same kind of institution throughout those years?

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was very much the same. You know there were some differences like the end of conscientious objectors on the staff, which, I think, changed staff continuity. But there were still staff people who lived at the house, maybe for a shorter period of time, and fewer. I think probably when I got there, it may have been the heyday, with of plenty of staff to go around. And then, you know, staff diminished, and so it probably moved to more volunteers coming in and doing their task and leaving rather than living there. And even during that time I think that change had started, but there was still live-in staff. The programs were pretty much the same. Some changed I think. The Senior Teenagers grew up and that group dissolved but there were small changes.

LANDS: And programs really don't diminish over that period. They may change some but they stay pretty strong?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Right. I think so. And I think Welfare Rights were still going, Mrs. Matthews was still a major presence all the way through the 1970s, and a great voice in Chapel.

LANDS: So what have we missed about Emmaus House that you think I should know about?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Just that we all felt a real responsibility to it, and we were there to do what was needed. And I think Debbie may have mentioned the painting. My father was a house painter so it seemed like I was always painting something. My first weeks there I painted the kitchen. It was like, "oh somebody knows how to do this." The house was always falling in, but I think it was really in better shape in the 1970s than it is now. And Father Ford's area upstairs was really beautiful—beautifully furnished, well maintained—and then the public rooms got harder use, so they needed to be painted more often. I don't remember having to paint upstairs.

If anything that we've missed, it would be that we all really did feel a responsibility, and we probably didn't know that Father Ford realized that. He was not an affectionate person, he was not demonstrative; he was usually critical. Of course, there was a lot to be critical of. He's trying to manage this staff of twenty year olds and, you know, probably felt he deserved better. [Laughter.]

ERDMANCZYK, D: He might have!

ERDMANCZYK, T: He was really there for the people in the community and he was not there for us, and that was pretty evident. But I think we signed on knowing that, so the staff was playful. I think it was more playful before I got there. There were historic stories of famous water fights and Father Ford being involved in that, and that certainly didn't happen by the 1970s. So, I think, there was a very good spirit.

One of my favorite stories that I haven't told was, Margaret Mead was a friend of Father Ford and I was probably twenty years old when I met Margaret Mead. And I met her when she came down the stairs in the main house and I was doing morning duty, and she was wearing her bathrobe and she said, "Where the hell is the coffee?" And in one of her visits she told Father Ford that his staff appeared glum. So, we had a called staff meeting and we were told to appear happy, and we coined a song which was titled, "Jesus Wants Me for a Rain Cloud" after that staff meeting—in fun.

The work was hard, sometimes we probably did appear glum because if you got finished delivering surplus food, it was just like laundry—there was going to be more tomorrow. And a lot of it wasn't exciting work. It was just hard, physical, hot work, and I can remember being overjoyed at being soaked in an afternoon thunderstorm because it meant you'd be cooled off.

ERDMANCZYK, D: There was no air conditioning in the vans or in the cars. None.

ERDMANCZYK, T: So we sweated all day long. And it was cold in the winter. So, you know, it was physically hard to be on that staff. But we did feel good about living up to expectations from Father Ford. I think Sister Marie was often caught in the middle. And we didn't feel too bad about not doing what she said, as I remember. But it was her trial. So just like any work place, all that work camaraderie went on, but it was unique in probably the strongest sense of purpose of anywhere I've ever worked. One of the hardest bosses, but very strong sense of purpose. And so that's another thing I took away was I knew I could work hard and I wasn't afraid of hard work, and I knew I could work for a difficult boss. And so that served me well later on.

You know, I think too, another thing that we both took away was an understanding that we were no more important than anybody else, and that the people who lived in the neighborhood were every bit as important as we were—just had different circumstances. So that was probably, thinking back on it, another lesson.

ERDMANCZYK, D: We have lots of good memories. We do.

LANDS: Do you think people came in with that kind of openness to recognize that people in Peoplestown are as important as the, in some cases extremely well educated, people who are coming into staff?

ERDMANCZYK, D: The ones that were there when we were there that didn't, went right back to Winnetka.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Didn't last.

ERDMANCZYK, D: They were kind of, I think they were kind of told. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: . . .that this isn't the place for you. Or it'd just be too hard. You know, staff life, because it was just too hard. And we were always under the illusion that we could be fired as well. So somehow Father Ford maintained that illusion, but I don't know that anybody ever was fired. And you know, if you were a CO and you got fired, there were all kinds of ramifications. And you could see those bed pans coming. You know, there was a motivation

there to live up to expectations. Even though we did do things like sneak out and go to Six Flags when we weren't supposed to and things like that.

LANDS: But some staff did leave?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Uh huh. And particularly summer staff. But I remember one of the staff people, shortly after I came, left—went through changing alternate service jobs because it was just too hard.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And there was no internet then, so all the discovery about Emmaus House was type written letters, back and forth. So it wasn't like you could go online now and see the Emmaus House webpage and sort of scope it out and see if it was going to be a good fit. People that came from all over the country were just coming in hoping it would be the right place for them.

LANDS: So when they came and visited St. Bart's, how did they sort of sell you on coming down?

ERDMANCZYK, D: Sixteen years old, that was a long time ago.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Forty years.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Yeah that was forty years ago. I just remember I thought it sounded like a worthwhile program. It sounded like something I was interested in. And I like to work with kids, so I thought I'd give it a try.

LANDS: So now when they advertise on the internship websites, one of the ways they describe Emmaus House is that it is in inner-city Atlanta. Do you remember hearing such a description about Peoplestown?

ERDMANCZYK, D: Oh yeah, inner-city. Yeah, that was it.

LANDS: So you knew you were going into a highly impoverished neighborhood?

ERDMANCZYK, D: Uh huh.

ERDMANCZYK, T: I think that was probably part of the attraction. I think that people who are attracted there had a certain amount of pluck and were willing to challenge status quo and probably, for some of the volunteers and even staff people there, there was something that their parents would have rather they hadn't done. So there was that. It helped in that break away from family. Certainly one of the attractions for me was that it was more than a thousand miles from home, and some place where it was warm in the winter.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And a lot of people stayed in the general area after they were finished at Emmaus House, you know, stayed close by—Grant Park or somewhere in southwest Atlanta.

LANDS: Yeah, Ned Stone lives, I think, a mile away. Did your years there overlap with Ned's?

ERDMANCZYK, T: We knew Ned because we knew Gracie and Al.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Ned was just a baby.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Yeah. Ned was younger than we were by quite a bit. His mom, Gracie, was a PRO volunteer and surplus food driver, so we knew Gracie pretty well. And then, when we left Emmaus House, we lived in southwest Atlanta for years.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Off Stewart Avenue. We bought our first house there and lived there for over ten years. So, we stayed around for awhile.

LANDS: Which neighborhood is that?

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was Capitol View Manor where we lived.

LANDS: So that's before that neighborhood's revival?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Well we were the first wave, we thought. . .

LANDS: The shock troops.

ERDMANCZYK, T: We were years ahead of our time [laughs].

ERDMANCZYK, D: We loved our house. We loved our neighbors. We loved our neighborhood. But once we ventured out on Stewart Avenue. . . it was a hard life living there, because it took such effort just to keep things the status quo, just to keep things as nice as they were, just to keep people from Stewart Avenue from wandering into the neighborhood and knocking on our doors late at night.

LANDS: Were you guys still struggling for city services at the time that you move into that neighborhood?

ERDMANCZYK, T: We, you know, we felt like we were. We had a neighborhood organization that got going. . .

ERDMANCZYK, D: NPU X.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Well, the Capitol View Manor Community Group.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Yeah, we had that.

ERDMANCZYK, T: And we, you know, influenced the widening of I-75/85 to not take houses in our neighborhood. They took one house; they were supposed to take thirty.

ERDMANCZYK, D: So, when you are going south on the [I-75/I-85] connector and you pass University Avenue and you go around that curve to the left, that's our little, that's. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: That's our curve, they were going to straighten it out and that would've been Capitol View Manor, because that's what's on the right in that curve.

LANDS: So what years would that have been?

ERDMANCZYK, T: 1980s.

ERDMANCZYK, D: That was the 1980s. Yeah we bought our house in 1978, 1977 or 1978.

LANDS: So, Young's in office then, is that right?

ERDMANCZYK, T: That seems right.

LANDS: I'm really interested in the neighborhood organizing against the infrastructure developments because that consumes so much housing. So it's your neighborhood group that lobbies against that?

ERDMANCZYK, T: Well, and we always had people at the NPU. We spoke up. And it was an interesting neighborhood because there were still original white residents in that neighborhood who were elderly. And, of course, we had no money, and had a really hard time getting a loan to buy a HUD house in Capitol View Manor because it was a "red lined" neighborhood. So it didn't matter really in our estimation what color you were. And I went through every lender in the phone book and finally found Charlie Smith, who was a member of St. Luke's who had a family loan company, and he loaned us our money. We borrowed our down payment from the father of a friend because my parents wouldn't lend it to us, and Debbie's mother didn't have it.

ERDMANCZYK, D: It was \$1300.

ERDMANCZYK, T: They thought it would mean more if we did it ourselves. So we paid \$13,500.00 for our house, and it needed everything. But it was, it was one of those wonderful brick bungalows with the arches, and the arch fireplace in the living room, and hardwood floors.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And the breakfast room, and the butler's pantry, and plaster walls.

ERDMANCZYK, T: So we loved it very well, but it had one bathroom so. . .

LANDS: So it's a 1920s house?

ERDMANCZYK, T: 1928, yeah. It was within sight of the fountain.

ERDMANCZYK, D: Well and the capitol. That's why it's called Capitol View Manor. You could see the capitol from the back bedroom.

LANDS: And it's only a few blocks right—it's a small neighborhood?

ERDMANCZYK, D: There's a hundred and . . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: Three hundred houses.

LANDS: Oh, that's big.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Maybe it was a hundred and something.

ERDMANCZYK, D: I think it was a hundred and fifty something. I think there was a hundred and fifty-something houses.

ERDMANCZYK, T: There were three main old streets and then four like newer, post World War II streets.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And a whole park in the back. It was really just for our neighborhood.

LANDS: So you're active in organizing against the interstate? You were leafleting?

ERDMANCZYK, T: And we had regular monthly meetings with the community group.

ERDMANCZYK, D: And newsletters.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Newsletters went out.

ERDMANCZYK, D: They had to be typed with our old typewriter.

ERDMANCZYK, T: So that area attracted people who, again, were active and involved, so we were not alone in that—some of whom still live in that neighborhood. The Mosley's, Keith and Kat Mosley, raised their kids there, still live there. He was president of a community organization for years. And then Steve and Lynn Brazen lived there, and they went on to be very involved in community reinvestment [i.e., activities related to the Community Reinvestment Act, of 1977].

LANDS: So who do you have to talk to to move an interstate? the planning board, was it. . . ?

ERDMANCZYK, T: It was everybody. It was the Department of Transportation, largely. And just to demand that there be options, and go to meeting after meeting after meeting. The Georgia DOT came to our community group meeting and presented. I remember after they gave in and said they would take some land from Joyland Apartments across the way as well as from our neighborhood, then the next fight that came—what would the sound wall look like? How much sound would it control? I remember going to a meeting in Hapeville and having one of the DOT guys say, “well Tom, if I'd known you're here I would have brought a piece of the sound wall.” So, they got to know us. And they didn't appear to be. . .

ERDMANCZYK, D: Tenacity helps a lot.

ERDMANCZYK, T: You know, we're just as stubborn as anything and they didn't appear to be bad people, they just wanted build a highway. That was their job. Our job was to save our neighborhood. So it wasn't as trendy as the Presidential Parkway protests and it wasn't, I mean, we didn't have to chain ourselves to trees or anything. We were able to do it through a process that probably evolved from that protest, because this was later.

LANDS: But I'm also wondering, too, if some of it doesn't come from your knowledge of the Welfare Rights Organization . . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: Oh, of course it does.

LANDS: I mean, you knew the template for organizing, it seems like.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Yeah, oh yeah. And we learned that there. We, you know, I was a campaign manager of a school board race up here (in Roswell) and we used tactics that we used at Emmaus House. And we were the first people in Roswell to show up at polling sites with candidate signs. You know, stay outside the 500 feet, but have somebody there. And we had somebody at every polling place in that school board district. So, now that's done here in Roswell, but it was a downtown thing.

LANDS: Very interesting. Thanks for sharing your housing story, too.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Sure. It's really interesting.

LANDS: And you are fighting the interstate in a period when, if I have my periodization right, Andrew Young is really gutting some of the NPU strength and cutting its staff. So he's attempting to undercut the power of these groups at precisely the time it sounds like you guys are clamoring to move the interstate.

ERDMANCZYK, D: We had an active NPU.

ERDMANCZYK, T: We did. We were NPU X. Met at Stewart-Lakewood Library. Jerry Corbin was the chair for years and years and years. I think it was—is still an interesting time to be in the city. And we still had some of that same righteousness. We certainly would never have thought about living outside the perimeter.

ERDMANCZYK, D: We were never going to do that. No, no. But houses were very, are very expensive inside the perimeter. . .

ERDMANCZYK, T: . . .when you're looking for more toilets. That's hard to find.

LANDS: Yeah, more than one! And space for a dog.

ERDMANCZYK, T: Right. And kids.

LANDS: Well thanks for your time today.