Step Three: Paperwork

After completion of steps one and two, the chances are you have a couple of good potential tenant prospects that are interested in your rental, and who you believe fit your tenant qualifications. When you get to this point you are ready for step three, which is where you accumulate all the tenant prospect's information on the required paperwork. This paperwork will be used to double-check and verify all the information you collected over the phone. Should the tenant prospect actually become your tenant, the paperwork will become a part of their file for future reference or problem solving for the duration of the lease. Even though this information may seem mundane, read it completely, as I'm sure you will find valuable information within.

CHAPTER 8

The Rental Application

Congratulations! If you are using this system and things are going correctly, you should have completed step one (prepare) and step two (prequalify) and now have at least one very qualified person to show your rental to. In step three, you will actually meet with your tenant prospects, show them the rental unit, and fill out all the required paperwork. Before I explain the details of step three (paperwork) to you, I would like to tell you a story.

The year 1971 was a very pivotal year for me in terms of growing up and viewing the world differently. I was 10 years old and was getting a look at life around me without rose-colored glasses. For starters, that was the first year I experienced death in my short life—well, at least a death I could remember. My first grandfather passed away when I was three or four years old, leaving me with very faint memories of him. In 1971, when my second grandfather passed away, I was old enough to be affected by his death, and even though I wasn't extremely close to him, I had enough memories and understood how his passing would impact me.

It was also during this year that I was introduced to Archie Bunker. My newly widowed grandmother suddenly had a lot of extra time on her hands, and to occupy that time, she began watching more television. *All in the Family* was introduced in 1971 and it quickly became one of her favorite shows. Since she lived almost directly across the street from us as I grew up, and because kids love to go to Grandma's house, it only made sense that I was at her place quite a bit. So consequently, I was exposed to Archie Bunker and his views on life.

For those of you who don't know Archie Bunker, let me describe him for you: Archie believed himself to be America's most patriotic and vocal citizen. He had an opinion or explanation about anything and everything. Unfortunately, he couldn't communicate those thoughts without yelling, arguing, labeling, discriminating, or showing his true ignorance and lack of education on whatever topic was at hand. Of course, to make matters worse, he never saw these faults in himself and didn't want them acknowledged by anybody else.

All in the Family was a great show because it covered topics that had never been previously addressed on primetime TV. By touching on these issues, the cast helped to show all of America something we didn't really want to admit: There may be a little of Archie Bunker in all of us.

This brings me to the point of the story and why I am beginning this chapter with it. Perhaps we all possess some of Archie Bunker's negative character traits but just don't want to fess up to it. Some traits are worse than others and some can land you in trouble if you're not careful, which is why the main traits I want you to be aware of are prejudice and discrimination.

I believe prejudice and discrimination are born of a combination of things. They often begin in the home environment and/or the area and time in which we each live. They continue to thrive through ignorance and lack of education, resulting in an unfounded fear that often deadens one's sensitivity to the human connection. As stated previously, prejudice and discrimination are against the Fair Housing Act, and the reason I bring them up again is because every being on earth has things they are prejudiced about. It may not be race, color, religion, or creed, but it could be height, hair color, weight, clothing, or a number of other things. If you're like most people, you probably aren't aware that you have prejudice in your psyche. But you do. We all do.

Step three covers the topic of having all the necessary paperwork filled out by your tenant prospect, and it is in this step that you will actually meet the applicant. Therefore, I want you to realize something of importance, which is this: Sight is typically the first of the five senses used when making a prejudiced judgment. Since you are meeting a prospect at your rental unit to see them for the first time, I want you to remember not to

label or pass judgment on your tenant applicant when you first lay eyes on them. I guarantee that often what you expect to see and what you actually do see are not the same thing. Even though your prospect was polite, courteous, and passed all qualifications with flying colors on the phone, it doesn't mean when he or she shows up at the rental this person won't have green spiked hair or body piercings or numerous tattoos—or drive a beat-up Chevy when you like BMWs. He or she might wear thick glasses or sloppy clothes, or be fighting a weight problem. None of this matters. Keep in mind that this person initially passed your qualifications over the phone, so treat him or her as if they were a picture-perfect, Ivy league college grad dressed for a modeling spot in *GQ* magazine.

Do not discriminate based on sight; discriminate based on qualifications.

Late Applicants

When you show up for an appointment, try to be early. Five minutes is more than enough time. Most people will be on time but a few will show up 5 to 15 minutes late. By arriving just a few minutes ahead of schedule, your wait time will be kept to a minimum for the latecomers.

If you remember some advice from the last chapter, you should have given the prospect your cell phone number and asked him or her to call you if they are running late or can't show up at all. This is good advice, but it doesn't always work, so as an added measure of security, I will often place a call to the prospect a couple hours before the showing to remind them of our appointment. If they are not at the showing within 15 minutes of the appointed time, I don't wait around any longer. I have waited in the past, and I have learned that almost without exception, when the terribly late did show up, they were not worth the wait.

I also seldom give a no-call, no-show prospect a second chance at a showing unless there was an emergency or unforeseen circumstance that kept them from being able to contact me. You can allot as much time as you want, but my experience has shown me that latecomers or no-shows are generally not the quality tenants I'm seeking.

When You Arrive

Should you arrive before your scheduled appointment, use this extra time wisely. I suggest you keep a few plastic, recyclable shopping bags in the glove box of your car. That way, when you get to the dwelling, you can make a quick check of the property grounds and pick up any debris that is lying around. While you're at it, pull a few weeds and put them in the bag as well. Check the mailbox for any junk mail. Once you're done checking the property, all you do is tie the bag handles together and toss the bag out when you get back home. As you're policing the dwelling, take the time to make sure that all gutter extensions are in place and that there are no broken windows or anything else on the property vying for your attention before the prospect arrives.

There are two kinds of rental dwellings that you could be showing: occupied and unoccupied. Each is handled differently. Let's discuss occupied units first.

Occupied Rentals

If the current tenant still lives there, don't show the property unless you have an outstanding prospect who is *highly* interested. Before showing an occupied house, have the prospect drive by and take a good look at the property. Explain that there are still people living there and that you must protect their privacy, especially since they trust you enough to allow you to walk people through their home.

When I show an occupied unit, I ask that everyone stay together and not touch anything. I lead a quick tour of the dwelling, then after the tour, I will answer any questions. I always try to do the questions-and-answer session outside, weather permitting. If I can't do that, I suggest driving to a local restaurant or back to the prospect's home (you get to see how they live with this method) to continue our discussion and to fill out any necessary paperwork. Remember, the longer everyone stays at your current tenant's home (even though it is for rent, if they still live there, technically, it's still their home) the more likely the chance that something gets dirty, damaged, or stolen.

Showing an occupied dwelling can be bothersome and inconvenient to the current tenant so try to make these occasions rare.

Here are a few tips to help you decide when to show an occupied dwelling:

- Only show the dwelling to someone highly qualified who has driven by and who you believe will almost certainly rent the unit once he or she has seen the inside.
- Only show a dwelling that is clean and uncluttered. If the place will not make a good first impression, wait until the unit is empty, cleaned, and painted.
- Get permission from the current tenants and let them know what time you'll be at their home and assure them you'll only be there for a few minutes.

Unoccupied Rentals

Even though showing an occupied dwelling can save you money because the time between the old tenant leaving and the new tenant arriving can be greatly reduced, you'll probably find that many of your showings will be at empty rental units.

When you show an empty rental, the precautions change. You no longer have to worry about someone causing damage to anything your current tenant owns, but the issue of personal safety now enters the picture. If you are a female, use extra caution when showing a rental unit by yourself. I recommend the following safety rules:

- Let someone know where you are going, the names of who you are meeting, the time of the meeting, and the approximate time you'll be back.
- Try to take someone with you if possible.
- Carry a charged cell phone. By the time you read this, a large part of the country will have a satellite tracking system for cell phone emergencies. With this system sending an emergency callout, you can still be tracked down even if you are unable to give your location. You just have to leave the phone on.
- Carry a loud shrill whistle or an obnoxious noisemaker and can of mace with you, ready at all times, and know how to use it.
- Try to stay between the applicant and an unlocked exit so you don't find yourself trapped with nowhere to go.

- When you get to the house, ask for a photo ID. Then call your answering machine or a trusted friend and give this information. Give the name of person you are meeting, including ID number, address, birth date, and the time of the call. Do this outside in view of everyone before entering the rental.
- Above all, trust your instincts; these are your best natural source of survival. I highly recommend a book called *The Gift of Fear* by Gavin DeBecker. It is a book about listening to one's instincts when it comes to personal safety.

As long as you make safety a top priority, showing an empty unit can have many advantages.

The Showing

At this time, let's proceed with the showing. Once your prospects arrive, greet everyone with a handshake and ask for their names. This approach shows professionalism and will help establish a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere, which will yield a more productive showing. Open the door and as everyone steps in, ask them to remove their shoes or wipe their feet, whatever is your protocol. Then begin your tour. Lead everyone through the living and private quarters, one room at a time. Give them time to look things over and ask questions. This personal one-on-one time between you and the prospect is often crucial in addressing issues they might have. You want this walk-through to be leisurely and informational, but don't talk forever and don't use all the obvious amenities as a sales pitch.

> Just as you asked a lot of questions earlier in the process, be prepared to answer a lot of questions at the showing. These questions will cover topics about the dwelling itself, the neighborhood, your policies, what-if questions, and anything in between. Be patient. And be honest.