

INTERVIEW OF JESUS C. BORJA

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

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- Willens: Jesus C. Borja, the Lt. Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, is an old colleague and friend of ours, and he has very graciously agreed to participate in this effort to record history. Let me begin by asking you when and where you were born.
- Borja: I was born here on Saipan on September 14, 1948.
- Willens: Who were your parents?
- Borja: Ricardo Tudela Borja and Antonia Sablan Camacho.
- Willens: Were your father and your mother born on Saipan also?
- Borja: That is correct.
- Willens: How far back did your father's family go here in the Northern Marianas?
- Borja: I don't know, Howard. The As Teo area is somehow connected to our family name. That's been in the family for years going back. I have been told that the Borja clan came from Guam, that there were three brothers. One stayed on Guam; one came to Saipan; and the other one went to Palau.
- Willens: During which administration would that have been?
- Borja: That would have been in the Spanish time.
- Willens: Did the family then acquire land on Saipan via a homestead system?
- Borja: During the Spanish time, yes. Like I said, the As Teo land came to the family. Come to think of it, Howard, the As Teo land is not really the Borja land, it's Diaz, from my grandmother, great-grandmother who married a Borja. She brought her family lands into the Borja clan, which is that land down in As Teo.
- Willens: What did your father do during the Japanese Administration?
- Borja: Well, my father was fortunate. He became a teacher. My family told me that there were certain people on the island who got additional education. Most of the people, in fact, received only a third grade education under the Japanese system. A few were lucky enough to get a fifth grade education, and my father was one of those. My recollection is that he also taught toward the end of the regime here of the Japanese Administration and again taught during the American Administration here.
- Willens: Was he sent to Japan for any further academic training?
- Borja: No, it was limited to the education he received here.
- Willens: Did he teach in a school that was limited to local citizens?
- Borja: I don't recall that, Howard, but I think that's the case. I'm not sure.
- Willens: How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- Borja: Two sisters and one brother.
- Willens: And what are their names?

- Borja: The oldest is Guadalupe, then me, then the third would be Victoria, and the last would be Estevan.
- Willens: Are your three siblings currently living and on the island?
- Borja: The oldest one is.
- Willens: Where is each of them and what are they doing?
- Borja: The third child is in Marco Polo Island, Florida, and the fourth is in Pennsylvania living close to my dad.
- Willens: Your father then did move to the mainland?
- Borja: Since the latter part of the 1950s.
- Willens: What prompted him to do that?
- Borja: Education. He went to get his bachelor's at Michigan State.
- Willens: And then did he remain employed there?
- Borja: Yes. He stayed over there.
- Willens: What did he get his degree in?
- Borja: Business administration.
- Willens: And what kind of positions has he had over the years?
- Borja: Well, you know I don't know. Right after he graduated from Michigan State my parents separated and divorced, and I followed my mother over here, and the two youngest stayed with him. My oldest sister stayed with him for a year or two and then came back. After a few years, he moved to Pennsylvania, and in Pennsylvania he was a counselor for the state prison system.
- Willens: And he served there for many years?
- Borja: He retired from there.
- Willens: As I understand you, then, you did leave with your family to go to Michigan at some point in your early years?
- Borja: That's right. I attended Haslett Elementary School in I think third and fourth grade—two years.
- Borja: I'd say 1958, 1959.
- Willens: It was in Michigan.
- Borja: That's correct.
- Willens: It was in East Lansing where your dad was getting a degree.
- Borja: Yes.
- Willens: And how long did you stay in East Lansing?
- Borja: Two years. Third and fourth grade I was there.
- Willens: Then you came back to Saipan?
- Borja: Then I came back with my mother and stayed here ever since.
- Willens: Where did you complete your education then in elementary school and high school?

- Borja: Mt. Carmel School, both.
- Willens: Then you went on to college?
- Borja: That's correct, in Kansas City, Missouri.
- Willens: When did you go to Kansas City?
- Borja: 1967.
- Willens: You graduated from high school and went directly to college?
- Borja: That's correct. I attended a small Jesuit school called Rockhurst College in Kansas City, Missouri. I went there because the nuns who were teaching at Mt. Carmel had a home there and gave it high grades as a very good school. So I said all right, I'll go along with your recommendation, and I went there.
- Willens: Did other students from Mt. Carmel go at the same time you did?
- Borja: No, not at the same time, but the deceased Steve Pangelinan, I don't know if you recall him, he used to work for the Legislature some time back, went to school and graduated from there. And Manuel Sablan went there and graduated from there also. Joaquin Torres also went there. I don't know if he graduated, but he went there. He was two years above me. And some of the students from Micronesia—Mariano Carlos, for example, and Kasio Mida I had the honor of meeting him there and going to school at the same time he was going there, just like Joaquin Torres. But the others—Estevan, Steve Pangelinan, Manny Sablan, Mariano Carlos—they had graduated already when I came.
- Willens: And was that a four year program?
- Borja: That is correct.
- Willens: What did you study?
- Borja: Political science.
- Willens: Did you graduate in 1971?
- Borja: That is correct. In January of 1971.
- Willens: Did you come home during the summers while you were in college?
- Borja: Well, we had a Trust Territory scholarship program during those days, and you were only allowed to come back home once every two years. So I came back in the summer of 1969. That was it.
- Willens: You came back just one summer?
- Borja: That's correct.
- Willens: Did you work during that summer?
- Borja: Yes.
- Willens: What kind of job did you have?
- Borja: My recollection, Howard, is I was a sergeant at arms for the Congress of Micronesia.
- Willens: Do you remember anything from that brief experience with the Congress of Micronesia during 1969?
- Borja: Yes. I met a lot of distinguished people. What impressed me most in my short experience with them is that when you get a lot of people with different backgrounds together, it takes a lot of patience and understanding to try to communicate with one another.

- Willens: That was good training for your current position.
- Borja: Right.
- Willens: After graduating from college, what did you do next?
- Borja: Well, I graduated in January. I came home early, and I looked around for a job and found one with Micronesian Legal Services at that time. Ted Mitchell was here already. He hired me.
- Willens: In what capacity?
- Borja: Well, he created a position for me. He called it a law associate position. He agreed to hire me while I was waiting for the results from my applications to law school. He was very helpful in getting me into the law school that I did enter ultimately. I had received word that I'd been accepted by Catholic University Law School, and I needed to give a response right away or else they would drop me from their list and give it to somebody else. But I had not heard from any of the other schools that I had applied to. As it turned out, Ted Mitchell knew Clinton Bamberger at that time, who was the Dean of the law school at Catholic, so he called him up I think and asked him to wait. As a result, I got a notification from Georgetown that I was accepted there, so I accepted it.
- Willens: So did you go to Georgetown in the fall of 1971?
- Borja: That's correct.
- Willens: And did you spend the next three years there?
- Borja: That's right. But every summer during my law school days I came home. Legal Services would pay for my fare, and I'd work for Legal Services.
- Willens: So you came back then during the summers of I guess 1972 and 1973?
- Borja: That's correct.
- Willens: What did you do upon graduation from law school?
- Borja: Well, I was hired by Legal Services right away. So I worked for Legal Services. First me and then Joe Dela Cruz, we were both hired as staff attorneys. We stayed in that position with Dave Allen as the Directing Attorney at that time. After two years, Dave left and I became the Directing Attorney. I stayed for another two years. Then I was promoted to be the Associate Director of Legal Services. I stayed in that position for about another two years.
- Willens: That's approximately 1978 to 1980 or thereabouts?
- Borja: That's right.
- Willens: You were then the manager of the Northern Marianas office?
- Borja: Directing Attorney for two years, 1976-78. In 1978 I became the Associate Director of the whole program, Micronesia-wide. Then after that two-year period, I became the Deputy Director. Then that's when I went into private practice, in 1983.
- Siemer: During that period when you were with Micronesian Legal Services, what other Marianas lawyers worked there other than Joe Dela Cruz?
- Borja: In the Marianas office?
- Siemer: Yes.

- Borja: Well, Dave Allen was there. Briefly Bill Mann was also in the beginning. But Dave was there to train Joe and me. After that, when he left, I became the Directing Attorney. Joe was the staff attorney. And it just remained a two-attorney plus two trial counselor office. Then when I became an Associate Director, Joe became the Directing Attorney, and I forget now who the lawyer was who was hired to replace him.
- Willens: How many years did you stay in private practice?
- Borja: Since 1983-89, about six years.
- Siemer: Who were you in practice with?
- Borja: Originally I was by myself. I opened it up myself, and then Joe Dela Cruz joined for a period of about I think two years, when he became an Associate Judge of the Superior Court. At that time, the Commonwealth Trial Court was its name. For about a period of three months, Ted Mitchell joined us. And then, Ted left, Joe left, and Ben Salas joined, and we worked together until I was appointed to the judiciary.
- Willens: What court were you appointed to?
- Borja: The Supreme Court as an Associate Justice.
- Willens: And would that have been after the Court was formed?
- Borja: 1989. That's correct.
- Willens: And who were the other two Justices at the time?
- Borja: Joe Dela Cruz had been appointed as Chief Justice, and Ramon Villagomez as an Associate Justice in May, and I made the third in October 1989.
- Willens: Just to complete the professional history, when did you leave the Court?
- Borja: February 1993.
- Willens: What prompted that decision?
- Borja: My decision to seek public office. We have a law that says six months prior to the election, you have to have resigned from your position as a judge.
- Willens: And then you ran successfully for your current position.
- Borja: That's correct.
- Willens: In 1969, the Congress of Micronesia had a Commission on Future Status that issued a report that recommended free association or, in the alternative, independence. Do you have any recollection of reading that report or hearing about it at the time?
- Borja: I remember hearing about it, people discussing it. In fact, there was an incident that happened that is still in my mind, because I was afraid that I might be asked to do something as the sergeant at arms. It involved the Marianas delegation. At that time it was Olympio Borja and Joe Cruz. My recollection of that event is it was an evening session, a heated argument, and I recall Joe Cruz standing up looking at my uncle and saying "Oly, they're not going to listen to us; let's leave." And he opened the drawer of his desk, and then slammed it, and then turned around and walked out. My recollection is that it had something to do with the political status.
- Willens: And did Senator Borja follow him?
- Borja: No.
- Siemer: How are you related to Senator Borja?

- Borja: He's my father's brother. My father's the oldest in their family.
- Siemer: Back in those days, were your father and mother associated with the Popular Party?
- Borja: Yes. My father was.
- Willens: And so was Senator Borja at the time, is that correct?
- Borja: No. Senator Borja was originally in the Territorial Party.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection of how that commission report on status was received here in the Marianas?
- Borja: Is that the report that would have the entire Micronesian entity negotiate for a political status?
- Willens: Yes.
- Borja: My recollection is that initially it was looked upon favorably. There were a few factions, perhaps the biggest one I think the biggest one would be Joe R. Cruz, that wanted something different. But initially I'd say that the majority were in favor of it in the sense that it was better than the current status that we were in, and we wanted to look at something else. Later on, of course, Senator Cruz was becoming very successful in getting the people to agree that going with the rest of Micronesia was not the thing for us.
- Willens: Do you recall any discussions that you had with Senator Borja about his views regarding political status?
- Borja: I was still considered a child, Howard, at that time, and they did not discuss those things with me.
- Siemer: What were your own views back in those days about whether it was a good idea for the Marianas to stay with the other districts in Micronesia?
- Borja: Well, I'll tell you, during those days my feeling was that we should have stayed with them. I saw the Marianas as playing a critical leadership role in guiding this area into an era where we were no longer dominated by somebody else. But unfortunately, my feeling at that time was that the people already had a taste of Western life and liked it and wanted it as fast as they could get it.
- Willens: I think you said earlier that a branch of the family may have stayed on Guam, going a generation or two back.
- Borja: Yes, that's right.
- Willens: There was some considerable sentiment among the Popular Party leadership at the time that the goal ought to be reunification of Guam. Did you have any reaction to that position as you were growing up and going through college?
- Borja: I was very young at that time. Reunification was in the mid 1960s or early 1960s, wasn't it?
- Willens: It was throughout the 1960s actually. In the fall of 1969 there was a plebiscite both here and in Guam.
- Borja: Right. But it was being discussed before then.
- Willens: Yes, indeed.
- Borja: I remember the two parties then were more distinctive in terms of what they wanted than now. The Popular Party wanted reunification with Guam; the Territorial Party wanted

- a direct relationship with the United States. And it got to be heated at times. I would say that at that time it was probably 50-50 in terms of those that wanted reunification. At that time, the Popular Party was stronger than the Territorial Party, because they associated themselves with the poor people, and there were more poor people than businessmen. So in terms of just membership, the Popular Party had more, so that's why I think the reunification issue won out here in the Commonwealth. But as you know, it was voted down overwhelmingly on Guam.
- Willens: What kind of work did you do for the Micronesian Legal Services program when you began work there as a law associate?
- Borja: Well, we did a lot of work in the sense of trying to collate, I suppose, information on Micronesia in terms of the laws, customs, for each particular district so that we could put it together in a binder for the expatriate attorneys that the program would be hiring. I did a lot of that. I did a lot of work also in translating documents that we had here.
- Siemer: Into Chamorro?
- Borja: No. Some of the documents that we had would be translated into the English language. I'm trying to remember now exactly what. They had to do with the judiciary, and I can't pinpoint it right now. Judge Benavente comes to mind; I don't know whether it's something that he may have written, Court decisions in the local vernacular that maybe had to be translated also. And of course I oftentimes also acted as an interpreter for the attorneys who were in the office.
- Willens: What kind of cases was the Micronesian Legal Services program engaged in?
- Borja: Civil cases only. We weren't allowed to be involved in criminal cases. We had financial guidelines to meet, but 99% of the people at that time were eligible for the legal services. So we had a lot of people coming to us. Most of the people coming in had land problems, here in the Marianas at least, land problems and domestic problems.
- Willens: Did some of the cases involve your representing individuals in disputes with the Trust Territory government?
- Borja: Yes. Our biggest case at the time was the Cruz case, which was a case we brought to force the High Commissioner to issue deeds to those homesteaders who had complied with the law already and still had not received their deeds.
- Willens: What do you recall the High Commissioner's position was as to why those deeds hadn't been issued in a timely fashion?
- Borja: Lack of proper surveys, but we forced them then to do the surveys and then issue the deeds.
- Willens: Did you have any opinion at the time as to whether the TTPI Administration was inclined one way or another toward the homestead program?
- Borja: Well, my whole idea of the whole TT government, Howard, was that they were here really as caretakers. The United States government wasn't really sure how it wanted to deal with us here, and somebody had to be looking over the area. They gave it to the Interior Department ultimately, then established the Trust Territory government to do the caretaking, and the Trust Territory government would do whatever the United States wanted it to do. If the United States government said, for example, continue the restrictions of people going into there, they'd continue doing that. Programs in between for the people, they could care less as to whether they were going to implement them or not. They'd make a half-hearted attempt and say that they were trying to do that so they

could write in their reports that yes, it's been done, but we're encountering these problems, we need money for example for the surveys. The money doesn't come, well, we've got a good excuse then not to do it because there's no money to do it. So that's the kind of attitude or mentality that I got the impression of during those periods.

Willens: Did they get the funds then to do the surveys that were required?

Borja: They must have, because they did start issuing them.

Willens: When you came back in the summers of 1972 and 1973, did you continue then doing essentially the same kind of work?

Borja: That's correct.

Willens: Were there also Peace Corps lawyers who were active in the Northern Marianas at the time?

Borja: Briefly only, Howard, is my recollection. When I was away, yes they were here. I was told that in fact one of our lawyers who was stationed on Yap and then Kosrae by the name of Al Snyder had been a Peace Corps lawyer here first. So they were here, and I was told that they were assigned to the municipalities. But I did not have any direct contact with them when they were here. The direct contact with the Peace Corps that I had was with regard to their teaching at Mt. Carmel. My recollection is that I had two teachers, one in American History, and the other was in English Literature.

Willens: Did you have any opinion at the time as to the effectiveness of the Peace Corps Program in the Northern Marianas?

Borja: You know, at that time I didn't know why they were here, but I saw it as good because they were good teachers. They certainly knew the subject areas that they were teaching. I mean at least as to me. Here's this guy who has only had priests and nuns as teachers, all of a sudden to find out that there are other people who also have high education and do have the ability to teach also certain subject areas. It was a surprise to me. It was a nice difference.

Willens: Do you have any recollection now as to when you first became aware that the United States had agreed to separate negotiations with the Marianas?

Borja: I believe I was in school when I read about that.

Willens: When you came back in the summer of 1972 or the summer of 1973, did you have any awareness that these negotiations were either beginning or ongoing?

Borja: I remember that something was happening. I don't exactly know whether that was during the summer of 1972 or 1973.

Willens: Do you remember whether the Micronesian Legal Services program had any policy position as to staying apart from the status negotiations here in the Northern Marianas?

Borja: No. I don't have any recollection at all of the Board of Directors or Ted Mitchell and Bob Hanna (Bob Hanna was the first Deputy Director) giving a position of what should or should not be done with respect to the political status. I don't recall that at all.

Willens: Do you remember representing a group of Tinian land owners and filing a petition on their behalf I think to the United Nations?

Borja: Oh, no. I don't recall that.

Willens: Do you have any recollection of representing Tinian land owners and complaining on

their behalf about the fact that the U.S. military wanted to take two-thirds of the island of Tinian for military purposes?

Borja: I don't recall that.

Willens: It was a very eloquent letter. I wish I had it here to show you, but I don't.

Borja: What year?

Willens: I think it was 1974. It might have been earlier, but I think it was probably 1974, maybe 1975.

Borja: Interesting. The reason I say that, I'm surprised because when I worked for Legal Services, I was assigned to Tinian, and Joe was assigned to Rota. So every month I'd go down to Tinian and assist them in their legal needs. I established a good working relationship with the Municipal Council down there. Harry Cruz, Sylvester Cruz, Leonardo Diaz—those were the people who were in the Municipal Council then that I helped. Of course, also the good mayor, the deceased Felipe Mendiola.

Willens: Do you have any recollections of discussions with Mayor Mendiola about the demands that were being made by the United States with respect to land on Tinian?

Borja: No, I don't.

Willens: Do you recall any discussions with people on Tinian about that issue and whether making the land available to the United States was in the interest of the community?

Borja: In fact you just jarred my memory on this. I represented the people of Tinian in two major land cases, and I succeeded. One of them was with regard to homesteads also, that they had paid their homestead permit fees, they had been farming the area, and still had not received their deeds. My recollection now is that one of the reasons that they were really pushing for it, that they were asking Legal Services for assistance, was because of the military's eventual coming in, and they wanted to make sure that that land was in their name before the military got in.

Willens: Were the proposed homesteads in the area that the U.S. had designated for the military lease?

Borja: Yes. That is correct.

Willens: There came a time in 1973 when the United States, I guess through the Trust Territory Administration, imposed a moratorium on homesteads on Tinian. Do you have any recollection of that moratorium and whether that might have precipitated some of your representation of the Tinian residents?

Borja: Howard, now that you've mentioned it, it does ring a bell, but I can't remember anything more about it. I do seem to recall a moratorium on homesteads.

Willens: Were you aware of any land transactions on Tinian that involved members of the Marianas Political Status Commission?

Borja: Yes. I remember some rumors going around also. Facts, I don't know them. Only what I heard. The members of the Political Status Commission using more or less inside information to acquire lands there.

Willens: Do you have any recollection today as to your general feeling about the negotiations that resulted in the Covenant? Did you try to keep yourself informed as to what was being negotiated?

- Borja: Yes. I read the accounts that were coming out. There was this education program also that came out prior to the actual vote, and I was reading that material. My recollection is that I was suspicious. I wasn't sure whether that was really the right course to take.
- Willens: What alternatives did you think might have been more attractive at that time?
- Borja: For me, my recollection is that it seemed still staying with the rest of Micronesia probably would have been a viable alternative. It would not probably have brought on the fast buck, so to speak, that the people were clamoring for at that time. My feeling is that most of the people on the island wanted direct association because they saw that that's where the good life was going to be.
- Siemer: Was your view shared by other college-educated people here?
- Borja: I think so, and I think we were in the minority. Very much so in the minority.
- Siemer: Do you remember after the Covenant was approved a question about the ballot form for the plebiscite being raised by the Carolinians who came to Micronesian Legal Services for some help in that regard?
- Borja: Deanne, again now that you mention it, I seem to recall that, but I've forgotten everything about it.
- Siemer: Let me see if I can refresh your recollection a little bit. The Carolinians were concerned because the "no" option on the ballot referred to remaining with the rest of Micronesia and seemed to suggest that there was not an option to renegotiate the Covenant deal. And they were very concerned about that. They wanted a simple yes or no. Yes, we approve the Covenant; no, we don't approve the Covenant.
- Borja: Again, Deanne, I don't know more than that.
- Siemer: That kind of matter would have fallen outside the Micronesian Legal Services purview?
- Borja: No, I don't think so, and it's something that would be in line with the philosophy of Ted Mitchell, that he'd help if he saw that there was a valid concern by a large group of people.
- Siemer: Had the Carolinians used the Micronesian Legal Services during this time in the early 1970s for other purposes?
- Borja: For other legal matters, yes, I'd say so. Keep in mind that one of the founding fathers of the Board of Directors of the Legal Services is Herman R. Guerrero; he's half Carolinian. So I'm sure that he spread the word to the Carolinian community that if you need legal assistance come to us. One of our law associates was a Carolinian, a good friend of mine, Felix Fital.
- Siemer: Were there any Carolinian lawyers back in those days?
- Borja: No. Ed Pangelinan in the Marianas was the first lawyer. The second would be Joe [Dela Cruz] and me. Then after us, the next I think would be Ramon [Villagomez] and Pete Atalig.
- Siemer: And Ray went to the Defenders Office, right?
- Borja: I believe so.
- Siemer: And Pete went to the Prosecutors Office?
- Borja: That is correct.

- Willens: During the campaign that preceded the plebiscite on the Covenant, did you take any public position with respect to the vote?
- Borja: No.
- Willens: Did you affiliate yourself with any of the opponents of the Covenant?
- Borja: No.
- Siemer: What did you think of Commissioner Canham and the way that he ran the plebiscite?
- Borja: Well, I don't know, Deanne, because like I said I've tried to stay away from politics early on when I came back from law school. I didn't want to be associated with one particular party or the other. With regard to the political status, I read the things that were coming out. I had my own opinions but kept them to myself. I didn't think it was proper for me to go out and voice my opinions publicly. Perhaps I should have, but I didn't. I remember that there were different views with regard to Resident Commissioner Canham's conduct of the plebiscite, but my recollection is that it was done fairly.
- Willens: After the Covenant was voted on favorably by the people, were you familiar with any of the lobbying activities that took place back in Washington with respect to getting the U.S. Congress to approve the Covenant?
- Borja: Only from what I read in the papers. You know at that time, we didn't have the *Marianas Variety*. We had the *Micronesian Star* or something like that that Mike Malone I think was the editor of.
- Willens: How about the first Constitutional Convention in 1976? Did you give any consideration to participating in the Constitutional Convention?
- Borja: Yes, I gave it a passing thought as to whether I should run, but I decided that no, it wasn't time for me to do that at that time. I think at that time I was more interested in learning more about the law and trying to hone my skills as an attorney.
- Willens: What kind of a caseload did you have in the 1976 period when you served in the Micronesian Legal Services program?
- Borja: I think it's a mixture. We went to court. We did a lot of advising also, drawing up of contracts, too many domestic problems. We overextended ourselves, I think, at least in the Marianas office, and I'm sure in the other districts also probably, but I can't say so for a fact. In the Marianas office, we kept on taking case after case until it got to a point where we couldn't handle them. We were nearing malpractice, so we had to stop, close the office, and deal with the cases that we had.
- Willens: Were there any private lawyers on the island at the time who were taking cases?
- Borja: No, not really. Bill Nabors was the only one in the beginning to have a private practice. The only other lawyer on the island who would help in civil cases for indigent people would be the Public Defenders Office, Roger St. Pierre and Joe Eleven (Tenorio).
- Siemer: Back in those days, there were a number of your family who were active in politics besides your Uncle Oly Borja. Who else was running for office that was in your close family back then?
- Borja: Well, the first gubernatorial election was Carlos Camacho, my mother's brother. In fact, I was thankful at that time that I had not associated with any one particular party, because at that time Olympio was running on the Republican side with Joeten, and Carlos Camacho and Frank Ada were on the Democratic Party ticket. Every time I'd go

to a family gathering with the Camachos, they'd say oh, this son of ours is with the Borja family, and if it was a Borja family gathering, they'd say oh, this son of ours is with the Camacho family. So it was, to say the least, an uncomfortable situation. I come from a big family. Sablan is big on Saipan, and Camacho is big on Saipan. So a lot of people that were running for office. Joe R. Cruz is my uncle. Under our custom he's also a second cousin to my mother from the Reyes side, because my grandmother is Reyes Sablan. So he's a relative.

Siemer: Was Antonio M. Camacho a relative of yours?

Borja: We're close. He's also my classmate. But we're closer on the Tudela side than on the Camacho side.

Siemer: How about Maggie Camacho's husband?

Borja: Fred? Yes, he's technically, under our custom, my uncle on the Camacho side.

Siemer: There was another Borja who ran for the Constitutional Convention, Jose S. Borja.

Borja: My first cousin, the son of my father's brother.

Siemer: So despite the fact that you were not involved personally, there were a large number of your family members who ran for various public offices?

Borja: That's right.

Willens: As you stood on the sidelines, or at least tried to stay on the sidelines in the 1977 election where you had relatives involved on both sides, what do you recall as being the issues on which the parties campaigned?

Borja: The pace of development is my recollection. I remember Carlos being conservative and saying we've got to be careful, we've got to be extra careful that we don't bring in all of the Western concepts wholesale and then our culture is lost, our lands are lost, and respect in the family as we know it would be lost. My recollection is that the Democratic Party wanted to go slowly. Olympio Borja and Joeten, of course, wanted to open everything wide open so that anything and anybody could come in, and let's start sharing in the benefits of this world.

Willens: During the Covenant negotiations, Joeten had expressed concern about opening up the Northern Marianas because of concern about competition from the mainland. But is it your recollection that by 1977 that the Republican leadership was anxious to expedite economic development?

Borja: Yes.

Willens: To what extent did the presence of alien laborers on the island at that time seem to be an issue for the local people?

Borja: My recollection, Howard, is that it wasn't an issue at that time. My recollection is that every time the Legislature would pass something that would be seen as the proper or the appropriate action to take in terms of economic development, the first thing that the Governor would do would be, wait a minute now, is this good for us or not. And then ultimately my recollection is he would say no, it's no good for us. So we didn't have the alien laborers, not to the extent we have them now, and I don't think we even had them to any extent that they were felt by the local community.

- Willens: Was it your sense at the time, as the Commonwealth began, that the leadership in the Commonwealth was ready and equipped to handle the responsibilities of self-government?
- Borja: Yes, I'd say that they were ready in terms of self-government. In terms of effects from the economic boom, though, I don't think we were ready.
- Willens: What are the years that you associate with the economic boom?
- Borja: My recollection is that it started with the Claims Commission.
- Willens: You're talking about the War Claims Commission?
- Borja: Yes. That's when I saw it, because I was an attorney then in practice. That's when I saw brother against brother, children against parents, fighting in court over the monies, how to divvy it up. I was so sad because the owners of that property that was damaged during the war, most of them were gone anyway. It was just the children fighting over it. But I thought our people were not prepared to deal with all that sudden wealth.
- Willens: In about 1984 (approximately), Governor Pete Tenorio and the Legislature changed the law with respect to foreign investment. Do you have any recollection of what impact that had on economic development?
- Borja: Well, there were two things I thought that changed the way things work here. That is one of the them—the removal of the foreign investment restrictions—and the other one is the tax law that was passed I think in the early 1980s. In fact it was my good friend and compatriot who authored that tax bill, Representative Ben Fitial. That's my recollection. That lured a lot of businesses to come here also.
- Willens: Well, why don't we just step back from it then, and ask you just if you can give us your reflections about the way in which the Commonwealth has operated under the terms of the Covenant and the Constitution. What do you think have been the successes, and what do you think have been the disappointments or failures?
- Borja: In general, I like the Covenant. I think it was a good document.
- Willens: Now I don't mean to focus on the Covenant so much as just your sense about the Commonwealth and how it has developed over this period of time from your various positions.
- Borja: Yes, but I don't think you can disassociate one from the other, Howard, because I think the development of the Commonwealth is basically because of the Covenant. If it weren't for our control of labor and immigration, we wouldn't have this non-resident "problem" that we now have. I'm tempted to say that we developed too fast, but then I don't know that there was anybody really in the early 1970s, middle 1970s, who would have seen the development that was going to come and adequately have prepared for it. I'm sure that a lot of people would agree that development came very fast. Whether we should have seen that and prepared for it, I don't know. I don't think we could have. There were just too many external factors. The economy in Japan, for example, booming, and the ability for the Japanese to come here and exploit the area. They saw it as an ideal place for hundreds of thousands of Japanese to come here, so they wanted to develop it for that kind of a market. I don't think anybody locally could have seen that.
- Siemer: Looking back now, and knowing what you know now, are there circumstances under which all of Micronesia could have stayed together and prospered together?

- Borja: No. In looking at what's happened, looking back now I'd have to say that it could have happened, but it would have been difficult, and we would have been in a very difficult and different situation now, I think.
- Siemer: The Marianas would be.
- Borja: Yes. And I suppose if the minority that I was in at that time, we felt that that should have been given a chance, we'd probably be condemned.
- Willens: We want to thank you very much for helping us, and for taking the time for this interview.
Thank you very much, sir.