

INTERVIEW OF CARLOS S. CAMACHO

by Deanne C. Siemer and Howard P. Willens

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- Siemer: Dr. Carlos S. Camacho, the former Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, has kindly agreed to an interview with respect to our oral history project. Dr. Camacho, for this record could you state your full name and then tell us a little bit about your family and educational background.
- Camacho: My name is Carlos Sablan Camacho. I am one of four males in our family of 11. My father is Luis Taimanao Camacho, which will give you an idea that I have connections with Rota because of the Taimanao name. My mother is Ramona Reyes Sablan. The Camacho and Sablan families here in the Northern Marianas, you can safely say, will constitute probably about 40% of the population. One way or the other, if you look at the family tree you will come across everybody that is related one way or the other either from my mother's side or my father's side. But it is misleading, because the families are not closely united anymore. They are all separated either for political reasons, or personal reasons.
- Siemer: How far back did the Camacho and Sablan families go in the Northern Marianas?
- Camacho: History noted that the Camacho was one of the three families that came to Saipan in the mid or late 16th century. You know the history of the Northern Marianas. There were people here and then the Spanish came and colonized the islands. Apparently they killed a lot of the males and the remaining ones were the elderly, the females, and the small kids. We were all taken to Guam with exception of a few apparently that hid out in Rota. And while we were gone, this was the time when the Carolinians drifted for some reason from some of the northern part of the Truk atolls or islands and landed here in Saipan and began to reside here. There were three families that they say came over here; and we were described as the adventurers. I guess when the Spanish felt that it was no longer a threat to their administration, or whatever their belief was religion-wise or that we were already dominated, they decided to let people go and my family, the Camachos, was one of them. We have a family tree. In fact, we had a reunion in 1988 of the Camachos. It was the largest reunion on the island that has taken place.
- Willens: How many people came?
- Camacho: We don't really know, but it was estimated that there were over 2,000 people that came for the reunion. We know that there were more that didn't show up. This was organized, of course, by the family with the help of the current Bishop, who is also a Camacho. The first Mayor, an appointed Mayor by the German Administration, is a Camacho. And then the first elected Governor is a Camacho, and then the first Bishop is a Camacho. There are other people who have come in like Sablan, the father of the late Mayor Sablan. He came in during the Japanese time. But the first Camacho that was appointed as the leader by the government was during the German Administration. In fact, it is the Bishop's great-grandfather. And if you look at the possessions that the Camachos have here in terms of land. They say that we own—you know where the Transitional Office was for the current administration, from there all the way down to the end of this—all the frontal property belongs to the Camachos. Unfortunately a lot of them are either playboys or drunkards or they just don't care. Therefore, as the years go by they lose a lot of the property. You know, they go out with a lady and they like her and she says I need land, they say "Okay, you just

take all this many acres, this is yours.” Or somebody needs money and they just give them \$50.00. They went to that extent where I know we are now very much localized, actually from Gualo Rai all the way to Sadog Tasi. But there are areas in between that have already have been penetrated by outsiders. We are a large family. My immediate family is large. There were 11 of us. Since then I have lost my father, I lost my brother, and I have lost my sister. Now the rest are all scattered. One is in Minnesota. One is in Ohio. One is Hawaii, and the rest are here. The surviving family members are three boys now and five girls. They all have their own families, and they are all living separate from us. They all have their inheritance, so they build up on whatever they got. My father was a farmer.

Siemer: Where was his farm located?

Camacho: During the German times he went to mainland China. He went to Tsintao in mainland China. He was sent there by the Germans, one of the few you might say who was a very good prospect to be a leader and all that. So he went with leaders from the other Districts. They picked up all the leaders from the Marshalls, Pohnpei, Truk, Yap, Palau and they sent them off to study. He went to study shoemaking, and he stayed there for several years. Then he came back and he was doing all the shoes, sandals and what not that the German Administration needed then. But he got tired of sitting. He didn't find it exciting or productive to be working on shoes and he decided he was going to throw all that and go into farming.

Siemer: The Germans decided he should look at shoes?

Camacho: Yes, the Germans decided that he should, but he didn't want that. He came back and worked for awhile.

Willens: Why did the Germans send people to China?

Camacho: I don't know. I guess at the time there's a portion of China that was administered by Germany. I really don't know where are the areas that Germany colonized at the time. But we were under Germany from 1898 until 1914. And during that period we were also administered here by Germany among other places. My father was also educated with some of the rebels from American Samoa and Western Samoa. Because they were also under Germany at the time. In fact, they were bringing them here to exile them because they are suppose to be rebels in their islands. They have taken them away to come over here. My father knows a lot of these people. In fact, when he got back from China, one of the marquess from Pohnpei made an agreement with him. You send down your eldest son to Pohnpei. So when that message came, you send your eldest son, so my late brother went down to Pohnpei. And I tell you, they groom him like mad. They wanted him to really get married and settle in Pohnpei. But I guess his heart is not there, so he stayed there for awhile and then he came back. I was educated here.

Siemer: In Saipan?

Camacho: I went to elementary school here. I was one of the first students that actually went through the complete nine year education, formal education here. The rest either went in on second grade or third grade depending on their ability. But I was one of the few that started from first grade and went on to the sixth grade. I graduated and then I went on to the high school then, which was a junior high school. It is only two years. And then when I finished that here in Saipan, they were just again selecting people who were considered to be you might say the “cream of the crop” to go to a high school in Truk. The government had a high school in Truk called PICS and they were bringing in students from the other districts to this high school. This has nothing to do with Xavier High School by the way,

that's a Catholic High School. It was there then at the time. So I went there and I stayed there for two years. I did quite well I guess. I was editor of the first yearbook that we decided to make, to record all the things that are happening in the school. There was a lot of fighting among the districts, you know, disagreements, jealousy, things like that. And in most cases, the Northern Marianas was involved.

Siemer: Who were some of the other students from the Northern Marianas there, when you were there?

Camacho: Daniel Muna, you may know him, he was in the Covenant; Juan Cruz, he's in Guam right now; there's a lady, a part German lady by the name of Schmeckenbecker. I don't know whether you heard the family name. They went to Germany after the Japanese took over the islands, and then they came back. The mother is Chamorro and the father is German. He is supposed to be one of the best artists—not only island-wide but nationally. He's got a daughter by the name of Bridget Schmeckenbecker who was sent also to this same school with me, so we were together and all that. When we got back, they left for the United States. They emigrated to the United States. Since then we have just lost contact. He was a good artist, so he may have still a lot of his paintings here on the island. He painted murals on old walls like that. When I came back after two years in Truk, I graduated then. They changed the number of years from two to three, and they asked me to go back for that third year.

Willens: What year was that?

Camacho: This was 1954 to '56.

Willens: And you were about how old?

Camacho: I was 15 or 16 years old. And when I came back for vacation, they were then just recruiting or advertising that you could go to medical school in Fiji. The last doctor that graduated from Fiji returned to Saipan in 1964. And then they just didn't send any more students from Micronesia to that school. So in 1956 they were going around, the education people were looking for the brightest students again to go to this medical school. And I was already notified that I was going back to PICS to continue that last year. So I was talking to my father and I said there is this opportunity to go to Fiji to study medicine. And of course my father jumped up and he said, "that is what I would like you to do, I want you to be a doctor". You know in the yearbook, because we also made a yearbook here in Saipan and we made one in Truk also, there are all sort of crazy notations in the yearbook. I still have my yearbook, you know—the most likely to succeed, the handsomest, the ugliest, whatever it is. And in intermediate school somebody wrote that you would make a good doctor, you know about me, you see. So I went to Fiji. We sat by the way, the examination was in English. All the math was in English and you know how it is—the British, pounds, pence and things like that. And we had been using cents, dimes, nickels and all that. We sat for the examinations for the first time, and everybody failed, especially in math. Because we just couldn't add, you know, 13 shillings and 10 pence minus 5 shillings and things like that. We just don't know how to work on that thing, you see. So everybody failed on the math. There were five of us. If I am correct, I think Benjamin [Manglona] was one of those that sat [for the exam]. There was another guy by the name of Manuel Cruz; there was another one, former Mayor Diaz, you may have heard of him. We all sat for this exam and we all failed the first one, so that the Education Department decided that we are going to have to have an orientation on math alone because how we can we go down to Fiji and be able to add and subtract. So we did. Somebody came in that knows about all of this.

Siemer: So there was a special course?

Camacho: Yes, a special course for us. And then after that, we had another examination. And from there they selected three; Manuel Cruz, Mayor Diaz, and myself. We were the three and Roman—either Roman or Benjamin, I am not sure, I think it was Roman—went to Fiji with us from Rota. There was nobody from Tinian.

Willens: Roman?

Camacho: Roman Manglona. It was difficult. We were blended in with those students, especially the Fiji graduates, who are supposed to be senior Cambridge students. They had to pass with the highest grade to be admitted to the medical school. And here we were, only from high school. We were criticized of course because of the way we behaved, the way we dressed, the way we talked, you know, as purely Americans. So we had to learn how to pronounce “water” and all sorts of words. After a few months you begin to just pick it up as you go along. In the beginning we had a problem understanding even our professors in their instruction and all that. And it was hard. It was a totally different system. The British system of examination is all essay-type.

Siemer: Were most of the professors British?

Camacho: Yes, most of them are from England or Australia or New Zealand. They are good people. They are educated people. They are mostly doctors.

Siemer: How big were your classes?

Camacho: We started with 45 of us because there were students from New Guinea, there were students from all the Pacific really. In fact, in my last few years there were even students from British Honduras and there were students from the United States who were applying to go in, but the British Government would not allow it. Because this is strictly for students that were selected by their government to be educated to be doctors. And we were trained not only to be physicians, but we were trained also to do basic dentistry work.

Siemer: Dentistry?

Camacho: Oh, yes. We are required to extract one complete set before we sit for the exam and also we have to observe so many kinds of dental procedures, surgical procedures.

Siemer: How long was the academic program?

Camacho: The normal course that everybody takes except us from the islands is five years, I think, but we have to sit for an additional year—like its a preparatory to go into the first year. Just to show you how hard it is, there were only 11 of us that graduated out of 45 and out of that there were only four islanders. And when I say islanders, I am talking about the group of islands outside of Fiji. One from American Samoa, one from Noumeia, one from the Trust Territory, and one from New Guinea. And the New Guinean was a drop-student. You know, if you fail so many courses you are out. If you fail one, they will give you something like three months or six months to prepare for that exam, and if you pass, you graduate. Whether you graduate already with the former students or graduate with the incoming students, but you finish with your course. But if you fail more than two, especially if you fail three, you are required to repeat the whole year. So this New Guinean was a drop-student actually. So out of the whole 45, there were only three of us from islands. And it really became a joke with everybody because there is gold medal that was involved for getting the highest grade. So the three of us would always go out to get that. We feel kind of friends and brothers because we are all separated from the students from Fiji and all that. Its not that we don't make friends. We make friends with everybody. In

fact, some of the students, by the time they get out of all the six years, they speak Fijian very fluently. So we mixed in. I was even thinner then; I was only 115 pounds when I was in school. We really worked hard. And not only that, we participated also in sports and all that. We played hockey, soccer, tennis and those that are bigger will play the British football, which is very rugged game. You can get hurt at that. I stayed there for six years with the exception of 1960. I was asking my government if they could bring me back for vacation. I was already on my last two years before graduation, and I talked to my professor and he said: "Where you are going you could do better but I think you will pass." So I asked my government if I could go back for vacation. "Sorry we cannot; we don't have the money." They were afraid, I think, that when we come back [to Saipan] that we might not go back [to Fiji].

Willens: Was there any promise that you had to make to come back to the Trust Territory to practice medicine?

Camacho: Yes, that's one of the commitments you had to make—that you have to come back. Anyway, we aren't licensed to practice anywhere else except where we come from. I guess I could practice in American Samoa or Western Samoa or Noumea or the Solomons or New Guinea, because I am a graduate of the same school that the rest are graduated from. But I cannot go to Guam and practice without sitting for the ECFMG, what we call the Foreign Medical Examination that they have. What I did in 1963 was I paid for my trip up to Honolulu. I was able to save enough. My father here was very successful. He was very affluent in the financial world. And all from farming alone. And not only that, but he owned a store also. So income-wise there is no problem. And that was the incentive. Every time he noticed that I am falling back in my grades, he just kind of tightened up the allowance.

Siemer: A time –honored method for parents.

Camacho: I mean we were getting an allowance from the Government, but you are talking about something like ten dollars a month. Of course, we are getting food, we get lodging free, and we get uniforms, so really all you need the allowance for is if you want to go downtown and go to the movies or drink beer or buy cigarettes to smoke or take out a date or something like that. But ten dollars a month was what we were getting at the time. But my father was subsidizing me. Every month a check would come in for \$35, which is even more than what I was getting from the Government. And, you know, I learned how to keep my money, save my money. I opened an account and I keep it. In fact, they think I was a banker there in school. They would come in whenever they wanted go out. "Boy, I am really short. Can you help me out? Where are you going? I am going to the movies. Okay, here's ten shillings. That should be enough for you to go to the movies with your girlfriend and go by bus down and come back after the movies." Whenever we have something—an occasion—I would invite the guys, let's go down and have a few beers in the bar. We were allowed to drink because we are from American territory. But the other students from Fiji, they were not allowed. It is supposed to be only for the privileged in Fiji at the time. But we smuggled ourselves in by saying we are from American territory and all this. And every once in awhile, you know, they will send some American cigarettes and, of course, some will send cash and we try and put that on the table so they can see that we are smoking American cigarettes. These are some of the gimmicks that we did when we were in our young days. Anyway I got to Hawaii on the tourist boat. I don't know whether you've heard of the tourist boat called "Arcadia". It is a big boat. It carries about 1,500 tourists and about 800 crew. But you know with the money I got, I was way at the bottom with about ten other guys with me and that was the cheapest that I can afford at the time.

So I went to Hawaii on that. It was a five day trip. It was very interesting, you know, we have access to everything on board. The only thing, like I say, that you may spend your money on is liquor and cigarettes, but other than that food is included in the cost of the trip. And then when I got to Hawaii, that was when the Navy picked me up and they say, "Well, you know, we felt bad about you having to spend your money to come all the way to Hawaii. What we will do is we will send you on one of those military flights out of Honolulu." I don't know whether you remember Commander Low. Commander Low was one of the commanders here, an administrator here in Saipan.

Siemer: He was involved in the transfer of the Naval Administration to the Trust Territory.

Camacho: Right. He was in Hawaii at the time, so he was the one that picked me out. At the time, Hawaii was even more, you know, friendly and all that. You see all the Hawaiian girls dancing where we get off, you know, they put leis on you and all that. They don't do that anymore. If they do it, they put a shell lei on you and that's about it. But you have to make arrangements. But then they were doing it on everybody on board. Because this tourist boat came from Australia and New Zealand. Its on a cruise. So it goes like that in the Pacific. So I got that treatment even though I was at the bottom deck of the vessel. And then I flew from there to Kwajalein. And from Kwajalein back to Saipan. I stayed here for about six weeks in Saipan. One of the reasons I came back was I was already getting very attached with a lady from down there and I thought it would be best if I come here and see how things are, and you know, whether it might change my perspective of her or whatever it is and all that. I came back, and I had a great time here. I worked in the hospital for awhile. Most of the time I was just loafing around, having a real vacation you might say.

Willens: Did you take the whole year off?

Camacho: No, after six weeks I went back. Going back was no problem because then I am coming out from here. And you know our culture when you leave it, even if you are just going to Guam, people will just come in and say, "here is \$50.00, here is \$20.00, here is \$10.00," like that. In fact, on my farewell party one of the priests gave me a silver dollar that I still have with me. That was dated somewhere in the early 18th century when it was minted. So there was no problem finding money to return to medical school. I flew all the way back to Fiji. And I stayed of course for the remaining two years.

Siemer: When did you graduate?

Camacho: 1962. You know, the climate is different. When we are having our winter, they are having their summer down there. The school year is also different. They start from January until December. And then they break in December until January and go back to school again. Here, of course, we go and break at June and all that. So I went, I graduated and came back. I came back with wife and a small child. Then I worked in the hospital until 1971.

Willens: This is the old Dr. Torres Hospital.

Camacho: Dr. Torres Hospital.

Siemer: You started there right after you got out of medical school?

Camacho: Yes. I started there. I had my internship there. They brought in physicians from Guam to give me my final intern examination before I am put out to the pasture to do my own thing. I stayed with the Public Health Service until 1971; no, I am sorry, until 1973. Then I went to Hawaii for a Masters Degree. I had some problems when I was at work here. Most of it was recognition and compensation. You know, when I started I was getting \$49 every ten days and I was working almost seven days a week. And I have some problems,

because I guess they thought I was a superman who would be able to work seven days a week. Whenever there was an emergency, they would call me.

Siemer: Who was staffing the hospital in those days?

Camacho: At the time Dr. Chong. Dr. Chong has been in there for ... Dr. Palacios was there also. Dr. Palacios and I became the rebels of the CHC because we are the controversial individuals.

Siemer: Had Dr. Palacios trained in Fiji as well?

Camacho: No. He was trained in Hawaii, I mean in Guam. He and Dr. Chong were trained in Guam. Dr. Cabrera and Dr. Kaipat went to Guam but they didn't finish the course there, the prescribed course, and they stopped the training in Guam. So they went to Fiji. There were other people that went to Fiji. Some of them failed, and didn't finish, so they came back. In fact, when I went back, when I went down in 1954, two from Truk came with us that were former students of Guam and also former students of Fiji, but returned with the whole batch when they stopped sending students down. So when they went down to Fiji, they went into their fourth year instead of starting from the beginning because they already had all that before then. And I went for my Masters Degree in Hawaii. Again I had some problems, basically because of my age. Every time an opportunity came they would pick somebody, you know, and somebody from the District would scream. "Hey, how come you are sending that guy? He is still too young. How about us here?" "All right," they tell me, "You wait; we will send somebody else." And it kept on like that year after year. Finally I got so frustrated that I began to write directly to the institutions. I wrote to some mainland institutions and I also wrote to Hawaii. And I got accepted in several of them, but the money was the problem. So I started again writing to institutions for financial assistance. Finally the East-West Center sent an offer, because I was already threatening to resign from the Health Service. In fact, during my 16 years of work with the Health Service I did resign one time because I was so frustrated. Even when I graduated with a masters degree nobody would accept that its a specialty degree. In fact, I was told that it was just equivalent to an undergraduate degree. And it went so bad at one time that I tried to get a lawyer involved. What happened was that I wrote a formal complaint to the Health Department that I was being mistreated and all that. So they decided that they were going to have a hearing. So we went to the library of the medical facility there and before we started, I took a tape recorder and I put in front. And the guy that was representing Personnel in headquarters, he looked at it and he just clammed up. Finally when he spoke he said, "What is that?" I said, "It is a tape recorder, sir." "Why is it here?" "Well, you know I must be frank with you. English is my second language and sometimes I just can't follow up the words or the train of the conversation and I would like to record so I can go home and play it and listen to it." "No tape recorder is allowed in this meeting. It has to be just verbal between us." So I said, "I am sorry sir, but I would like to tape it. I hope you will reconsider." The guy stood up and walked out. So I took my tape recorder and went home. And then they rescheduled the meeting. So I went over to the current Lieutenant Governor who was then working for Micronesian Legal Service. I said, "I would like you to sit down with me in this meeting." I explained to him that they will not accept the tape recorder, but maybe they would accept a lawyer. Man, that even was worse. They just flipped. So we argued for awhile back and forth. Finally the meeting just stopped. There was no meeting because they will not allow Micronesian Legal Service [to be there]. Micronesian Legal Service at the time was already defending some of the cases against the Trust Territory Government, so the Trust Territory Government employee doesn't want to get involved with them in any way. So the meeting just fell out.

While I was in Hawaii, I was selected by the School of Public Health to represent the Pacific at the Colorado Medical Center for a seminar. They brought in also all the doctors that are in the United States from foreign countries—from Argentina, from Brazil, from Paraguay, from Indonesia, from Burma, from England, from France—that were in the States studying then. I guess they're post-graduate or advanced courses. And we were put together—there were about 40 some of us—into the Denver Medical Center. The college was closed because they were on vacation. So we had the whole facility to ourselves. And everything went smoothly, except when we went out at night. You know, they look at me and they say “This guy is a Chicano.” This was the white Americans in Denver, “This guy is a Chicano.” There's some problem at the time with the Chicanos apparently in Colorado. So you know we went. We go out also at night; we are not supposed to stay in the compound. We are grown-up people and all that. So we went out. One incident, I stood up and I asked a lady, “Can I have a dance with you?” She looked at me and said, “I am sorry I don't dance with a Chicano”. I told her, “I am not a Chicano. I am from the islands.” “I am sorry.” In the group that was with me there were two ladies, one was from Indonesia and one was from Jamaica. She looked at us, and she saw all this, you might say interchange, going on between the lady and me. So finally she stood up and said, “Come on doctor, I will dance with you,” the lady from Jamaica. She stood there and said, “Come on, I will dance with you. Don't worry about them.” And she is dark, in fact she is part Indian, you know. That was an experience in Colorado. I haven't forgotten it. And every time I meet somebody, even our own people because there is a lot of people, our people that are in Denver, you know, we talk about that incident, where apparently there was some friction between the Chicanos and the white Americans in Denver.

Siemer: What year was it?

Camacho: 1972. And then I had to do field work while I was in the School of Public Health. So I wrote myself a sweetheart proposal where I can travel to the South Pacific to look up all my old places that I have been to. So I wrote a proposal and I went and traveled for six weeks. I went to Fiji first. I look up all my friends—both good and bad. And then I went on to Tonga. I worked there for about two weeks, and again I have classmates in Tonga. This is all arranged between the School of Public Health and the various governments and their health facilities where I can go in and do research and work and all that. And then I went on to Western Samoa. I did some work there also. Then I went on to New Zealand and I did some work both at Auckland and Christchurch. And then in between, I stopped over in Tahiti. I said I might as well stop over in Tahiti and have a short break before I go home. I had a hell of a time on that trip. But the good thing about that trip was that I dropped smoking, because I smoked so much during the six weeks that I just felt sick of the smell of tobacco and all that. So when I got back while I was writing my report from my trip, I quit. I went cold turkey on smoking.

Siemer: Did it work?

Camacho: Oh, yes. It worked. Thereafter I sometimes carry cigarettes to see whether I will get tempted, but you know they say there is nothing worse than a reformed smoker. So I quit since 1973. Every once in a while I will puff, but I developed an allergy to it. I get nauseated; I get a stuffy nose; and that is why whenever people are smoking I try to stay as far away as possible. I can tolerate it if I have to, but if I can avoid it I stay away from those people. Maybe that's why Delegate Mendiola doesn't want to sit next to me because whenever he puts a cigarette in his mouth I keep wondering—is he going to light it or he is just putting it in to get accustomed to the cigarette tangling from his mouth. That kind of answers the whole thing, right?

- Siemer: How long did you stay in Hawaii?
- Camacho: I had a grant for two years, and I finished it in 11 months. In fact, I had an additional four credits beyond on what I needed. I needed 30 credits to graduate with a masters degree and in 11 months I had 34, so the staff at the University was trying to convince me to utilize that full credit and add more for a Ph.D. degree. But I told them I wanted to go home. I just had about enough of Hawaii, too. The same thing happened in Hawaii. There were all those students, you know. I was on salary and then I was on stipend from the East-West Center so I was really well off in Hawaii. I bought a car and the car was used almost exclusively by the students. They would come in, "I want to go downtown, can we use your car? Can you help us? Can you drive me around to shop? Okay."
- Siemer: So in Fiji you were a banker and in Honolulu you were a transportation center.
- Camacho: I was a chauffeur, you know. And then when I left, I was about to leave, I was asking some of my classmates whether they would like to pick up the car. I was giving [it to] them free. Unfortunately the insurance expired, and the one that I was giving [it to] didn't want to spend the money to buy insurance for the car. So what I did, I give to one of the local boys who was working in the liaison office, with the understanding that if he should come across any Micronesian or Northern Marianas students there to please give them a ride. Three months after he picked up the car, he sold it. I have nothing to say; I gave it to him already. I signed it over for one dollar—the ownership.
- Siemer: Where did you work when you came back from Hawaii?
- Camacho: I was working in Public Health before I left. And therefore when I got back, I just went back and picked up my position.
- Siemer: Was the Public Health Department located at the hospital?
- Camacho: No, we were located in Chalan Kanoa. I was the overall administrator. That is another problem that I had with Dr. Chong. Because when I got back, I was writing a lot of proposals to various institutions in the United States including the the U.S. Public Health Service. That is where the money is. I can get money to hire staff; I can get money to buy vehicles; I can do everything really so long as I can justify it. And when the money comes through, Dr. Chong would hold it. And every once in awhile, he would use the money to buy equipment and put it at the hospital. Then when its getting old, he will dump it on Public Health. And it went on like that. We would hire staff to work in Public Health. He will take and put them in the hospital. He went so bad that finally I threatened the guy; I said, "Look, if you keep this up I am going to write to the federal government and tell them that the money that is being sent over here for public health is being used for clinical medicine instead of preventive medicine."
- Willens: Was that the difference? The hospital was in charge of treatment and you were worrying about prevention?
- Camacho: No. We were doing a lot of treatment. I was doing outreach work. I developed a system whereby we asked the feds, for example, to build a dispensary in various villages and we manned that. When a patient comes in and the nurse cannot handle it, they will call in and I will pick up the phone and we will talk. And if I can just give instructions on what to do, the nurse will go ahead. They were provided with basic medical supplies to do this. If our consultations show there is need for further review, I will go to the house, or I will go to the dispensary. Or I will say, "Bring the patient to the hospital; I am up there." And I will take the patient myself. It was okay. I had a fairly good-sized staff. We worked quite

well. In fact, the hospital was having a problem with their staffs and they wanted to take all our staff. I said "If it's an emergency, okay."

Willens: Let me ask you a few questions that go back to some of the things that you mentioned. Your father developed a successful farming practice and had a small store. Did you have any sense in the 1950's and the early 1960's that the United States government was transferring the authority from the Naval Administration to the Department of Interior? Were you and your family aware of this transfer of authority?

Camacho: This is not something I was told. This is just my impression, that the Trust Territory at the time was basically training us simply to do menial local matters.

Willens: Was that your basic view?

Camacho: We were not being trained, for example, to compete in the outside world. I had no idea that they were going to transfer it. I went to school and I came back and the Navy was still here when I left and the Navy was here when I returned. So I had no idea that they going to transfer to the Trust Territory. At the time I was here, there was this training facility here in Marpi. All of what I know about it is just what I heard from people, and I also had conflicting information. But I had no idea that it would be transferred to the Trust Territory.

Willens: You worked for the Trust Territory for many years. What was your general assessment of the High Commissioner and the U.S. Administration of the Trust Territory during the 1960's?

Camacho: I felt at the time that we should begin to administer our own affairs. Unfortunately, an administrator without the authority is another matter. We had to do what we had to do at the time. The Navy was very—even though it is military government—generous you might say. Their resources are unlimited. The Defense Department is something. In fact, they were so wasteful. I remember my brother whenever he needed something, all he needed to do was just make friends with somebody and he will get what he wants—lumber, tools things like that—because there was just so much on the island, I guess left over from the preparation to invade Japan and thereafter.

Willens: When did you first get involved with politics?

Camacho: I actually got involved even before I went to school, but only as an observer.

Willens: Was your father active?

Camacho: No, my father is a very non-political individual. But the way I look at it, even at that time there was a little bit of division between those who have money that earn it because they work for it, and those who have who either steal or lie to get it. And then there are also those who are really just kind of going in a way to serve their own purposes. And I got into the group that you might say are the people who are just looking at those others who are just getting, you might say, well-off doing nothing. While on the other side were people that have to get up early in the morning and work their butts off to try to see if they can earn a subsistence living. So I got involved, you might say, with the working class from the beginning. My first involvement in politics is actually just cheering for our candidates. You are talking about in the early 1950s even before I went to school. There was fighting between Carolinians and Chamorros. There were Chamorro leaders that were fighting also with a mixture of Carolinian and Chamorro together. The first elected position that I had was in 1967, or 1966 actually, when I ran for the Congress of Micronesia.

Willens: And you were successful?

- Camacho: I ran against John Sablan, the former Trust Territory District Administrator for Truk and also the Deputy High Commissioner here in Saipan. He was the first elected Congressman for Garapan-San Jose, and he was already labeled as the Territorial Party candidate.
- Willens: And you ran in the Popular Party?
- Camacho: So I went in under the Popular Party and I challenged him. And I beat him for that seat.
- Willens: Were there any particular issues in that election that you remember?
- Camacho: Mostly that, you know, here are these people who are utilizing their position and their know-how to get what they want without working for it. And there are those people who, you might say, are the working class, who are really working their butts off and are not getting ahead anywhere. That was basically the platform at the time.
- Willens: You served in the Congress of Micronesia for two years, as I recall. Could you give us your recollection of your service in the Congress of Micronesia? What was your general assessment of the Congress of Micronesia during the two years you were there?
- Camacho: I ran in 1966. I ran against John Sablan, John Atalig Sablan. I won; I got in. I was in Congress for two years. I was the Vice-Chairman for Ways and Means and [served on] the Committee on Health, Education and Welfare. I was very young then. I got out of medical school when I was 25, and this was in 1962. So you are talking about 29 years old, and I was very green. Then we went to Honolulu. We had the same thing that you are talking about in ConCon right now—about sending all the young inexperienced legislators. They sent us to Hawaii.
- Siemer: Was this before the Congress of Micronesia convened that year?
- Camacho: Yes. Before the Congress of Micronesia convened, we were sent to Hawaii—about a dozen or more of us. And we were honored by the House in Hawaii where we would sit in front and listen to all the things that are going on. In fact, every once in awhile—the Speaker then in Hawaii was Speaker Cuevalho, a Portuguese guy from Maui, and I guess he looked at who are the youngest ones and put them out on the chair—so every once in awhile you would see me sitting up there in the Speaker's chair. Phil Burton did the same thing when I was Governor also. Whenever we had a meeting in Washington he will make me sit—he will tell Won Pat, do you remember Won Pat, to step down and let me sit up there in his chair—and say, “All right Governor, conduct the meeting.” Anyway, it was a rough two years in the Congress of Micronesia, even with all my experience and exposure with the people from the other districts. Don't forget I was educated in Truk, and so I was exposed to all the Micronesian islands and the people. I felt throughout the two years that even though we were coughing up a lot of the money here, I felt that the Congress people from the other districts are actually looking at us and are saying; “You guys are fortunate; you guys are lucky so let us have all the money so we can develop ourselves in the other districts.” You know how they talk about our roads, they talk about all the buildings that we have, buildings, for example, that were put up by the military, roads that were put up by the military which we had nothing to do with. I mean the Trust Territory just came and got in 1962 really. I felt I was very frustrated. Then I had another problem, more personal. And that is, the Congress hired John Sablan.
- Siemer: Your opponent?
- Camacho: My opponent, as the administrative officer for the House. Every once in awhile, whenever possible, he would try to show, to expose me as being inexperienced. So we traveled to the districts and here he is jumping all over the place and making everybody feel he was so important. And here I am a Congressman, you know, kind of being slighted and all that.

- Siemer: Where did the Congress meet at that time?
- Camacho: Up here at headquarters; do you know where Tapitapi used to be? The road going up to Tapochau is on the left side as you are going up.
- Willens: You served in the House of Representatives with Manuel Muna?
- Camacho: No.
- Willens: Benjamin Manglona?
- Camacho: Benjamin Manglona, yes. I think Manuel was there, too.
- Willens: Maybe he was just there for one term. And then Dr. Palacios and Senator Borja were in the Senate?
- Camacho: Right. Manuel was in the first Congress. I was in the second Congress. So he was with John Sablan. Here in the Northern Marianas, Olympio [Borja] and Dr. Palacios were in the Senate. Benjamin was in the House. I don't know who was in from Tinian, but I was from Saipan.
- Willens: At that time, the records I have indicate that Benjamin Manglona represented Tinian, Rota and Southern Saipan. That seems to be the way they were divided at the time.
- Camacho: Oh yes, that's right.
- Willens: Could you give us your recollection of Dr. Palacios at that stage of his career? How do you remember him as a political leader and as a person?
- Camacho: Dr. Palacios is known to be a very controversial individual. I observed him as an individual who says his piece. And if you continue to aggravate him, he can challenge, stand up and challenge you—do you want to fight and let's go out and fight—that kind of attitude. But I noticed that his work is all geared towards actually trying to help the people in his movement, even though a lot of the time it is very controversial. In fact, we were known as the two troublemakers in the Health Department because whenever there was a staff meeting, he and I would end up on one side and the rest on the other side. He is an educated individual. He was handicapped by his back problems. He is very outspoken and he speaks with intelligence, you might say he thinks before he talks. Although sometimes he plays games also—you know, throw out something and be a devil's advocate and see what you say. But he is like that.
- Willens: I noticed that some of the representatives from the Marianas were from the different political parties. Were there important political differences between those of you from the Popular Party at the time in the Congress of Micronesia and those from the Territorial Party?
- Camacho: Most from the Territorial Party were actually administration carry-overs. They considered themselves as educated. They considered themselves as experienced. They considered themselves, you might say, as affluent financially. The Democrats are actually representing the people. That is why the District Legislature has always been controlled by the Democrat or the Popular Party at the time. So we were, you might say, kind of labeled with the working class. We cannot get jobs with the Administration because the Administration thinks of us as very controversial and non-obedient or something like that. But we can get the people to vote for us because we are always trying to represent them. They [the Territorial Party] affiliated themselves with Joeten who has a lot of financial influence. They affiliated themselves with the late Elias Sablan, who is considered to be a Carolinian or you might say a carryover of the dynasty, even though he is not totally a Carolinian.

His wife is Carolinian. Those people band together and they dish out favors to people who are close to them. In fact, a lot of the land problems that we have right now are because of this political issue. They were just giving out land to those they like or that would support them. Whereas we on the side of the Legislature, you might say, tried to fight it to stop all these things. But like everywhere else, when there are fringe benefits, people tend to go after that rather than just a lot of empty promises which is what they labeled us. But the people wanted to stop this also, because it's not a majority of the people that are benefiting from these things. Only a few people are really benefiting from all these land transactions and job opportunities higher up. The lower working class people are really not benefiting from all this. That is basically the difference between the Democrats and the Republicans or the Territorial vs. the Popular Party.

Willens: You mentioned that during your two years in the Congress of Micronesia you encountered some differences between the Marianas on the one hand and the other Districts. Some historians have commented that the Congress of Micronesia was an effort to engender some sense of Micronesian unity in an effort to keep all the Districts together. Others have said that the Congress of Micronesia highlighted the differences among the Districts. What is your assessment of the Congress of Micronesia as a vehicle for bringing people together?

Camacho: It's both really. It brings people together; at the same time it exposes the differences between them. I guess to us it would be a little bit demeaning because then we are lowering ourselves to the level that they are. They may think of it as something else because then they are, you might say, side-by-side with us here in the Northern Marianas. But you can feel the most controversial issue is when money is involved. Okay, everything is now controversial.

Siemer: Allocation of money.

Camacho: Right, allocation of money. Whenever you talk about money—appropriation of money—in the Congress of Micronesia they can come up and they are going to say: “Look, you guys are lucky; you guys have had it all good and dandy; we are at that stage where we have nothing of those things and we want it now and therefore the money should go to us,” even though most of the money is coming from the Northern Marianas. You know, over the years this kind of created a little bit of not ill feeling but frustration at the fact that they won't share whatever is available. If you talk about, for example, we will give you what you put in, I tell you they scream. They scream because they think it is unfair. And yet when we ask them to raise your tax and all that, they don't want to do that also because it is not politically good for them. But we are taxing our people here and we are getting a lot of income and we are throwing it all into the Congress of Micronesia. But when the money is split out, we get a very small percentage of that. That is probably one of the reasons, among others, that forced the CNMI to gradually start looking for a different association or political association rather than the system as it is. I went through that in two years. I mean, I traveled all through the districts either under my position as the Vice-Chairman of these two major committees or as a medical man. So I am fully aware of what is happening in that regard.

Willens: Did you find much interest in the other districts about their future political status?

Camacho: That's one thing that we really discussed. You mean about joining the U.S. family? From the beginning I felt that they want to be by themselves.

Willens: Who did?

- Camacho: The other districts, Palau, Yap, Ponape, Truk.
- Willens: They wanted to be separate from the other districts?
- Camacho: No. I felt at the time that they wanted to control their own destiny and they are afraid of outsiders coming in and taking over in a sense.
- Siemer: If they had such a different level of economic development than Saipan back then, did their representatives think they could have an economy that would satisfy their people if they went their own way?
- Camacho: They talked about it, but when it comes to implementing the laws and regulations that would enhance that, they balked at that. Especially at the prospect of being overrun, or controlled, by outsiders.
- Willens: During the two years that you were in the Congress of Micronesia, the Congress created the Future Political Status Commission on which Dr. Palacios served in 1967. It filed an interim report in 1968. And it then had itself extended for a year until 1969, when it issued a report recommending a free association status for all Micronesia together or, as a fall-back position, independence. Dr. Palacios appears to have been an advocate of Micronesia staying together in a free association relationship with the United States. Do you recall any reactions you had to the work of that Commission back then?
- Camacho: No, not really. But Dr. Palacios, if you look at his family background, he is part Carolinian. I guess in a way he feels a little bit closer to the other Micronesians in a sense. He has spoken about the possibility of a compact also here in the Northern Marianas; and also even independence. In fact, he throws in independence whenever he cannot get what he wants, you know, that's basically what he is using. He is using it as a club actually in a sense. But Frank and I, we don't really go out together or drink together or, you know, because he is much older than I am and he's got a large family so he has to work even harder to try and support his family. My observation of the guy basically is that he would go with the people that help him, irrespective of party affiliation, and you can tell that by the fact that he switches back and forth between the Popular and Territorial. He runs as a Popular and then he won and then the next thing you know he is running for the Territorial, you know, like that. He is a little bit controversial in that respect. I am a one-party individual where I stay with what I believe in and I fight for what I believe in. Whether it is good or bad, only history will tell. Because my feeling is, and I was brought up in this respect, that you have to be honest, you have to be reliable, you have to work hard, and that is what I do.
- Willens: What is your recollection of Senator Borja during the years that you served with him in the Congress of Micronesia?
- Camacho: Senator Borja is another flip-flop—worse than Dr. Palacios, I am afraid. My recollection of the guy is that he can outspoke anybody. He can stand up for hours and just keep talking. It is almost like a tape recorder one after the other just tying in everything as he goes along. I noticed about Senator Borja that he is concerned about his own well-being more than he is interested in actually helping people. His brother is my brother-in-law so its not something new that I making it up. We had association in the past and I noticed through our Congress even though he doesn't come out all right, he will tell people what is for me in a way. He is a hard working man. He does a lot of things. He was liked by the people and basically the reason is because, you see, whatever you tell him, it is okay with him. It is almost like Governor Tenorio. Not the current Governor, the second elected Governor. Whatever you say is okay with him.

- Siemer: When you say that, do you mean that he didn't have particular political issues that were critical to him and that he had fixed positions on?
- Camacho: No. He looked at you and he says: "Which one is more beneficial to me and will you vote for me next time." So if you come over to me now and you say: "This wall is white paint." I say "Yes" and then tomorrow you come over and you say: "This wall is beige" and I say, "Yes, it is beige," you know. Just make sure you two don't come at the same time, because then it will expose me. Which one is correct—is it beige or is it white? That's what it is. He's just not going to tell you. I am a little bit different in this respect. If you come over to me and you say "This is white"; I say, "No, it's not white, it is beige." And if you come over and say "It's beige," I say "Yes, it's beige." But Senator Borja and the second elected Governor are like that. That is why they are liked by the people, because they don't tell you their reasons. They look at you and they say: "What does this guy want?" I guess even before they allow you to ask them anything. They made up their mind whatever you say is okay with them. Its just that every once in awhile they get caught. Two people come in or they will go out and say what the hell is happening. I went and I told him that my car is black and he say, no it is white. And then another guy come in and says the opposite thing, and he says the opposite thing to him just to pacify people. But I guess that is how you are when you are a politician. See, I was trained to work hard, I was trained to be honest, I was trained as a physician to be preventive and control. So my training was basically to make sure if I see that door behind you and I know you are blind and you are going to bump into it, before you get there I'll open it. But to them its a different feeling. If you are going to bump into it, bump into it. That's where we are different in our philosophy.
- Willens: Did you run for re-election after your first term?
- Camacho: I ran. The Popular Party was having problems with candidates so I was convinced to run for the Senate. And, of course, Senator Borja beat me. He was well-known and I went out and back to practicing medicine.
- Siemer: Who took your seat in the House?
- Camacho: Gee, its has been so long I am not sure who did. Who replaced me? I don't know. Maybe you might know from history.
- Willens: I am looking it up, it is here somewhere.
- Camacho: I didn't pay too much attention to who ran for my seat because I was running for the Senate. I am not even sure whether we won any seat that year after I got out. I lost, and I don't know about the House.
- Siemer: How much of your time did the Congress of Micronesia activities take?
- Camacho: Not much really, unless we traveled. We were part-time politicians, I think, at the time, so I still go back and work and then we go back to session and all that.
- Siemer: Were you carrying a full load at the Public Health Service?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Siemer: How long did the sessions run back in those days?
- Camacho: Gee, I cannot tell you.
- Siemer: But it wasn't several months at a time?
- Camacho: No.
- Willens: Here are two names that are come to me from the records, Nicholas Palacios and Felix

Rabauliman served in the House for the term of 1969 to 1970. That would have been the term right after you.

Camacho: Yes, right after me.

Willens: So, Benjamin Manglona was still there; he ran and he was re-elected.

Camacho: Benjamin, you know, had consistently been in the Legislature because you see he was powerful in a way because his brother was the administrator in Rota also. The interesting thing about Rota is when I ran in 1966 I had nothing to do with Rota. I am strictly here in Garapan and San Jose. But when I ran for the Senate, I had to go to Rota because Rota and Tinian would vote for me. And prior to running for the Senate, I was working in the Health Service. And periodically I would go to Rota and work there, one week, two weeks, a month, sometimes even as long as three months. But when I ran for the Senate, I was just astonished at the influence Benjamin and the Mayor had in Rota. Because even those people, Rotanese, who are a family members or who have stayed in my quarters and drink my beer and eat my food and all that, when we pass on the road, they will look straight and they will say, "I am sorry doc, I cannot talk to you right now because everybody is watching me" and just walk straight on. I say: "My God, something is wrong with this place for them to be afraid even to talk to me." And we spend hours, we go swimming, we go fishing, we go hunting, they sleep in my quarters, we drink beer together, you know, and then when this came about they look at me and they just pass me on the road. But they do speak: "I am sorry; I cannot talk to you right now; I am being watched." You know, that kind of feeling really gave me the goose bumps you might say to find out that there's these people with that much power in Rota and you know they are in the Administration; they are in charge. So they dish out jobs. I think they own a store also where they give out credit. So its really an interesting thing. After that, I never did want to go back again and be involved in that kind of politicking, you might say.

Siemer: Was there the same division among the families of two different camps back then or have those all switched over time?

Camacho: Well, the Popular were always much less because they don't have the fringe benefits to hand out. There were a few people that are really die-hard and they maintained their loyalty to the Popular Party, even up to the time I ran for Governor and thereafter. And it is almost very well, you might say, marked as to whose in there and whose in there and all that. I heard that Victor now has broken through that. Victor Hocog has broken through that because of his financial resources and his land dealings. And I think that is why they lost; Benjamin and his group lost in the last election for the first time in something like 18 years. So he went through. There was no problem about him. And its true Benjamin is a hard working man and he will fight for what Rota wants. Its just that not all Rotanese are beneficiaries of that. But I guess you have to understand that they have to work with what they have and who they dispense it to and all that.

Willens: During the late 1960's and the early 1970's the Popular Party continued to strive for some separate political status with the United States. Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero were active in the Congress of Micronesia. Then there came a time when the United States agreed to separate negotiations in 1972. Did you have any role in working with the Popular Party leadership during those years in furthering this effort?

Camacho: I had a little bit of involvement when we pushed for unity with Guam. Actually the Popular Party was looking at Guam as an opportunity, you might say, to enhance economic development and also to get out of this problem that we are having with the Congress of Micronesia where all our resources are being diverted to the other districts.

And then, of course, we have seen how our people were having problems entering Guam. You know, they are treated like second or third-class citizens in Guam; they are abused and all that and we wanted to stop that. So we thought that by uniting with Guam this would resolve this problem. Unfortunately Guam had a referendum and we were voted out. We voted here, approving the concept of unity with Guam, and then Guam voted and turned us down.

Siemer: At that time when they had that vote on Guam, did leaders from here, from Saipan, go to Guam to discuss this or to campaign?

Camacho: Not that I know of. I think the leaders from Guam and the leaders from Saipan just met. I don't know whether here or in Guam. But they met and they agreed to work together. Unfortunately, we do our part here but Guam's leaders didn't do their part. I guess they just left it and you know there is some ill feelings between the Guamanians and the Chamorros here in Saipan. It has to do with the war experience whereby the Japanese send a lot of our people there to do interpreting and whatever is needed in Guam. And some of them were abusive of the Guamanians. You know like they say: "If you don't do it, they will do it to you." So I guess they decided to do it. My brother, my oldest brother, my late brother, went to Guam also. He was sent by the Japanese and he worked under the Japanese Administration in Guam. But he was not abusive. In fact, immediately after the war he was repatriated to Saipan without any problem. In fact, they say that he was the one that was telling all the Guamanians—if they know they [the Japanese] are going over there and beat the hell out of those group of people—he sent word over: you guys better run away and hide somewhere. And that is what he was doing. At the same time, he was doing interpreting for the Japanese and all that. But he was still able to pass on all those information to the Chamorros in Guam: get out, ran away or do something, you know, because these guys [the Japanese] are going to come and beat the ass out of you. But some of them still didn't. My father-in-law also, my wife's father, he was also kept after the war because of allegations that he mistreated. But, for example, my godfather, he just totally disappeared in Guam. Nobody knows. They suspected he was killed by the Guamanians, you know, because he was one of the abusive men.

Siemer: And you think that the lingering sentiment was what caused . . . ?

Camacho: There is no question about that. That the Guamanians, not all of them, [felt that way]. But there was a very low turnout on this referendum. And I guess that makes the difference between success and failure in a sense.

Willens: After the Guamanians voted down that proposal, it seems that the principal difference here on Saipan between the Territorial Party on the one hand and the Popular Party on the other, was that the Territorial Party wanted to stay together as part of a unified Micronesia whereas the Popular Party leadership wanted to have the Marianas have its own relationship with the United States. Do you recall being involved in that debate?

Camacho: Well, the Territorial Party was actually pushing for a continued relationship with the other districts basically for political reasons. They looked at the Carolinian vote here as a very substantial support for them and because of that, that's why they went into that. But actually the Chamorros in the Territorial Party were not really for staying with the rest of them. That's why when the voting came, it got defeated. Their attempt to keep the Northern Marianas with the rest of the Trust Territory fell down because a lot of the Chamorros shifted their support and joined up with the Popular Party, you might say.

Willens: Are you thinking of one specific vote?

- Camacho: Well, first of all the referendum was an issue for unity with Guam. The Popular Party, of course, won that. And then, I think there was some vote also, thereafter, that indicated that a lot of the Chamorros shifted their votes together with the Popular Party as opposed to staying with the rest of Micronesia.
- Willens: After the United States agreed to separate negotiations, the Marianas Political Status Commission was created. Did you have any views at the time as to how those negotiations ought to be conducted or who should be involved?
- Camacho: No. When I got out from being a member of the Congress of Micronesia, I went back to work at the Health Service and I just tried to concentrate on that. I was, you might say, semi-retired at the time so I wasn't involved with the Covenant. I didn't even run for the position really to be a member of the Covenant negotiating team. And then after that I went back again for the Constitutional Convention, the First Constitutional Convention, so I am not really involved with the Covenant negotiations. I guess I did follow it to some extent and you know I actually campaigned for the approval of the Covenant. In fact, on the last day I went out and appeared, I appeared on the radio and I spoke to the people that somewhere, somehow we have to make a very big decision and now is the time. And I was urging the people to vote for the Covenant, for its approval.
- Willens: Did you think there was enough time for the people to be informed as to what the Covenant contemplated and meant to them?
- Camacho: I noted at the time that most of the Covenant proponents were actually using the issue of food stamps and social security and all the fringe benefits, you might say, to kind of swing people around. And while I disagree with that kind of approach, if it leads to moving out also I went ahead and supported the thing. I don't know if I was wrong or right.
- Willens: Was U.S. citizenship generally viewed as being one of the principal objectives of the people supporting the Covenant?
- Camacho: Yes. U.S. citizenship was one of them. But did you know that I did write to the U.S. Immigration Office and tell them I wanted to be a U.S. national?
- Willens: You opted for the national status?
- Camacho: I opted for the national. The only problem was that I did it a few years after the deadline. So the U.S. Immigration wrote me back and told me that you have lost your opportunity to be a U.S. national.
- Siemer: What made you decide to elect the national status?
- Camacho: Well, I was very disappointed with the U.S. government's behavior in this thing. I don't recall exactly what happened to it. I have to think about this thing because there were very important circumstances that made me decide that I don't want to be a U.S. citizen. And I don't want to be a U.S. passport carrier.
- Siemer: Approximately what year was it?
- Camacho: This was recent; this is recent. Gee, I can't even recall, but I think I still have the document I wrote the U.S. Immigration. I don't know whether it has to do with passport problems or some mistreatment that I went through in Guam or somewhere in Hawaii. And then, of course, I was very disillusioned with the U.S. in that, it seems that every time that somebody comes in, he has got a different interpretation of what's happening. And that is one of the reasons why I ran for this new ConCon. Because we are going to have to work out what a lot of these things are; if its not in the Constitution, then it should be at least in the supporting document that will explain exactly what is happening. You came in

with one Administration; they say yes, this is our interpretation. And then in another four years somebody else comes in and say no, this is not our interpretation. This is really very frustrating.

Siemer: Did you have any contact with Erwin Canham back in those days?

Camacho: Oh, he and I were good friends. In fact, I made him stay in the Governor's residence for something like six months after I was elected. For six months after I became Governor, I was still staying in my own house.

Siemer: Where did you first meet Canham?

Camacho: I met him before the election.

Willens: Do you recall, Dr. Camacho, the provision in the Covenant that provided that there would be a bicameral legislature in which Tinian and Rota would be equally represented with Saipan in the upper chamber? I know you came to deal with this when you were Governor. Did you have any sense at the time of the vote on the Covenant that this was a provision that would be a good idea in terms of bringing Rota and Tinian into the Commonwealth, or did you feel that it was an ill-advised provision?

Camacho: Well, I always felt that this is a political decision that had to be made if we are to become a separate entity, because Rota or Tinian could kill the whole deal if it doesn't work. There have been some rash remarks by saying, Rota can go to hell or Tinian can go to hell, but I thought that would be very sad for that thing to happen. So it's a political decision, and I agree that it has to be done. What effect will it have? Actually, during my Administration, there was very little effect that Rota and Tinian have, except when we come again to budget, because then you see the House comes up with a budget, and then the Senate will look at it. And when it comes to the Senate, then they can kill or they can do whatever they want. They have to go into conference. But it's a small issue actually to agree upon for the unity of the CNMI. And I thought that's more important. What actually bothers me was the 1985 Constitutional Convention where they came out with all these [amendments] and I'm saddened that I didn't pay much attention to what's happening then, about all these amendments they made. I had a problem with Rota during my administration, and basically it's because I'm a Democrat and Rota's political situation is controlled by the Republicans. And there is no such thing like local government then, no Amendment 25, so I appointed my Governor's representative in Rota and in Tinian also. I tried to talk to these people that, look, the campaign is finished; try to see if you can disseminate whatever benefits that should go to the islands equally among everybody irrespective of political affiliation. But, as I keep saying even now, how can we come up with something whereby if the Democrats come in, they don't kick the butts of the Republicans, and when the Republicans come in, they don't kick the Democrats' butts right through. When is this going to stop? So that was my only problem. Benjamin [Manglona] fought me right through. I think it was a calculated plan or maneuver to really discredit me when I was the Governor. And then of course they went in with Speaker Rasa, and then President Ponciano Rasa, and even Governor Larry Guerrero, who are the first people. What they were trying to do was just tie me up really completely so that I will never have anything done during my Administration. And if you read my speech, I have great hope in what I expected to do when I was Governor, even if it's only for one term. The only fortunate thing was that in Washington I've got very close friends. I'm almost like the son of Phil Burton in Washington. When we go there, he'll call me in. He'll say: "Tell everybody, you wait outside. Come in and sit with me." And we will sit while he drinks his what you will think is a glass of water, but actually it's either vodka or gin. And then we would talk.

And he'll tell me, "Tell me what you want." He'll ask me, "What do you want?" And you know, I feel kind of embarrassed. And this may go for as long as half an hour, 45 minutes, and then I'll say, "Congressman, can we please bring the rest of the team in here, because it's embarrassing keeping them out there while I'm in here." And he'll say, "Never mind, let's keep them out. I want to talk to you. You're the important one in here." And I'll tell him what [I need.] After the first two years, when they gave me all this harassment about the Legislature, I had no other choice but to go to him and say: "Look, I need money for Rota; I need money for this; I need money for that." And he said: "I'll take care of that. Don't worry about it."

Siemer: He was very generous.

Camacho: He was very generous to me and to the Northern Marianas, you might say. And in the later stages of my Administration, he told me, he said, "Let me advise you. You have to get along with the Legislature, because having them on your side is important." But in the back of my mind, I keep telling him, I said: "These people are just out to kill me, and I'm trying to survive, to try and do something." Because I made a pledge in my speech. I've got so many things that I wanted to do, and I cannot do it because my hands were tied.

Willens: What persuaded you to run for the Convention in 1976 after you'd had several years away from politics?

Camacho: The Constitution I felt was very important, the basic document that will oversee the CNMI. And based on that, I went in.

Siemer: How did the Popular Party go about selecting its candidates who would run in that election?

Camacho: What they did is they asked the membership, those who are interested. And then they screened them. At that time, the Central Executive Committee was quite powerful.

Siemer: Who was the head of it back then?

Camacho: Well, the Legislature, the Speaker actually, is the individual, and the Mayor is also a Democrat, Popular Party, at that time, so the two of them kind of lead the party, and they selected the candidates who would run. There were more candidates that were available than the number of slots. So they had to kind of weed out some and say okay, you other guys run.

Siemer: The Popular Party reached out to a number of newcomers to the Party—Ramon Villagomez, for example, Maggie Camacho, younger people who had not yet run before. I think Jesus Villagomez had not run for office either.

Camacho: That's right. They were not active in the Party, but they are identified with the Popular Party, either directly or through their family. I think most of them were identified with their family, you know. Even though they kind of play, you might say, the quiet side of the Popular Party support in a sense.

Siemer: How was the campaigning done back then, when you ran for the Constitutional Convention?

Camacho: Most of it is on the radio and directly, individually, talking to people.

Willens: It was supposed to be non-partisan, wasn't it?

Camacho: It's non-partisan.

Willens: Well, was it partisan, in fact?

- Camacho: Oh, yes, it was partisan. The Party was involved then. On this [1995] election, there was no Party involvement.
- Siemer: The one for the current Constitutional Convention?
- Camacho: Yes, for the current Constitutional Convention. In fact, there has been mumbling because I was the Chairman of the Democratic Party. But I didn't do anything to get the Party involved.
- Siemer: How much did it cost you to run for delegate back then in 1976, approximately?
- Camacho: Probably about \$200 - 300.
- Willens: Does it cost much more now?
- Camacho: Oh, yes, much, much more.
- Willens: Do you have any judgment about why it has turned out that people have to spend so much personal money to campaign these days?
- Camacho: I really don't know. There's some vested interests in this thing. I'll tell you, I spent \$400-some to run for this ConCon. But I didn't do much. I paid \$100 for filing fee. My wife served as my campaign chairman. She asked me, what are we going to do? And I said: "Well, let's put an ad in Friday's newspaper, *Marianas Variety*, only in the *Marianas Variety*, for three succeeding weeks. And that cost about \$70-some for three weeks." And then people kept coming over. They said: "Where are your posters? We want to put them up, we want to distribute them." And I said that this is all we're going to do. But when the pressure started mounting, my wife said: "I'm going to go over to *Marianas Variety* and make a business card with your picture on it. So I said, okay, go ahead. That cost another \$100-some. And that's it. I didn't appear on the TV. I didn't appear on the radio. In fact, I didn't expect to win. I told my wife, let's look at it this way. If the people don't know me, then they'll never know me. So let's just leave it at that. Let's not influence them. If they want to put me in, they'll put me in. We did do some personal contacts, though. Our small store, when people come in, we would tell them that I'm running and ask them for support, to transmit it to the family. And that's what they did.
- Willens: Thank you, Dr. Camacho, for your help on this project.