

INTERVIEW OF HERBERT S. DEL ROSARIO

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

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- Willens: Herbert S. Del Rosario, Director of the Commonwealth Archives, has helped us considerably over the years in connection with our project. He has graciously agreed to be interviewed today regarding his background in the Northern Marianas, and his views with respect to various aspects of its political and social history. Herbert, thank very much for being available today. It would be helpful for us if you could begin by telling us about your personal background, specifically where you were born and who were the members of your family.
- Rosario: Okay. I was born here on October 1st, 1953. I come from a big family. My oldest brother John as you know has continued to write for the *Marianas Variety*. My other brother is Frank, who is a public information officer. My father passed away in 1954 and my mother remarried. Aside from the four of us, I have 11 other brothers and sisters.
- Willens: Were your mother and father both Chamorros?
- Rosario: My mother is three-fourths Carolinian and my father is pure Chamorro.
- Willens: What were their experiences during the Japanese Administration?
- Rosario: My mother came from a political family. I call it a political family because of the fact that her father, my grandfather, was sort of the head of the Chamorros here in the Northern Marianas. He has been a leader for the island way back during the Japanese Administration. And even after the war he was officially appointed [by the Americans] in 1944.
- Willens: Was that Elias Sablan?
- Rosario: Yes, Elias Sablan.
- Willens: So your mother was a Sablan.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: What was her full name?
- Rosario: Magdalena Sablan Manahane now. She is married to a Manahane.
- Siemer: And what is your father's full name?
- Rosario: My father's full name is Juan Del Rosario.
- Willens: What was their political affiliation, if any, during the 1950s and the 1960s as you grew up?
- Rosario: My grandfather was one of the founding fathers of the Saipan Democratic Party before there was a so-called Democratic Party and Popular Party. As I go back through the history of the NMI and some of the Naval Administration and TT Administration annual reports, I found out that he was one of the founding fathers. Mr. Elias Sablan was one of the founding fathers of the Saipan Democratic Party.
- Willens: There was a Saipan Democratic Party before there was a Popular Party?
- Rosario: Yes, right. Now the Saipan Democratic Party is the Commonwealth Republican Party, and the Popular Party turned out to be the Democratic Party of today.

- Willens: So your grandfather was part of a group that ultimately became a part of the Territorial Party?
- Rosario: Yes, he was one of the founding fathers. He represented Saipan and the CNMI in many conferences. He was once a representative for Micronesia under the United Nations Leadership Grant. He was sent to represent Micronesia back in the 1960s. He was also very active in the political party in Saipan.
- Willens: Did he have any views as to what kind of future political status the Northern Marianas should strive for?
- Rosario: Yes. When he was appointed, he was sent to Puerto Rico back in the 1960s. At one point in time he was reading an old military paper called *The Stars and Stripes*. And I was wondering how in the world he was subscribing to papers. The thing that amazes me the most is that he's fluent in English, German and other languages. And at one point in time he was telling us that he would very much like to be alive when Saipan decides or started negotiating for its political status. I remember back in 1969 when the plebiscite was held, that he was very much for commonwealth. And going back to the records of the TT archives, I was doing research one time and there was only one vote for commonwealth, while the rest was for reunification with Guam.
- Willens: And so he was the one who took the view that there should be direct affiliation with the United States and not reunification with Guam?
- Rosario: Yes, right. He was very much opposed, as well as the Carolinian community, to the deal unifying with Guam.
- Willens: Why was that?
- Rosario: Well, being part Carolinian, I guess he wanted to remain with the rest of Micronesia. And he and the party at that time were against the idea and the concept of breaking up from the rest of Micronesia.
- Siemer: Was your grandfather born here on Saipan?
- Rosario: That's a good question, because I never did ask him. I know his grandfather's name, but we never did talk about it.
- Siemer: How about your mother? Was she born here on Saipan?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: And your dad too?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: When did your grandfather die?
- Rosario: 1969. Sometime in August 1969.
- Willens: I wondered if he lived to the point where the Guamanian voters turned down the reunification proposals.
- Rosario: Right. In fact, at one point in time the members and the leaders of the Territorial Party (which is now the Republican Party in the Commonwealth) were coming to him on many occasions for his advice. I remember earlier I mentioned to you that he was sent to Puerto Rico on the Leadership Grant to look at the political system of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. I guess that was what prompted him to support commonwealth as a political status for the Northern Marianas. And I remember that he mentioned about the fact that no matter what happens, Guam will never accept us to become part of them.

- Willens: It was in 1969 when the Congress of Micronesia Commission on Future Political Status issued a report advocating a relationship known as “free association” or, as an alternative, independence for the entire Trust Territory. Do you think that your grandfather believed that all of Micronesia should stay together and also affiliate with the United States?
- Rosario: You know, going back to 1969 and probably earlier than that, he used to have a Blue Beach Motel right across from his house in San Jose, across the street, next to the beach. And most of the leaders in Micronesia who traveled from Truk, like the late Chief Petrus Mailo from Truk, were staying there. Most of the other Senators and Congressmen from the rest of Micronesia were staying there. In the evenings they would come to the house, or he would go down to the beach and talk to them about the future of Micronesia. And he and Joeten were very strong supporters of maintaining Micronesia. In fact, I remember when I was working for the Congress of Micronesia that Joeten voluntarily rebuilt the burned down Congress of Micronesia building where they used to hold the sessions up on Capitol Hill. The housing up here that Joeten built next to the shopping center here in Dandan was dedicated to those members of the Congress of Micronesia and staff.
- Willens: So you remember meetings of the Micronesian leaders sort of informally with your grandfather in the 1960s to discuss the future political status in Micronesia?
- Rosario: Yes. In fact, I was once involved in a benefit concert to gather funds to support the unification of Micronesia, and my group was once asked to perform at civic centers. This was sponsored by the Republican Party, supporting the unification of Micronesia. At that time, most of the people that came to the concert were Carolinians. The late Mr. Felix Rabauliman, who once served in Marianas Political Status Commission, also served in the Congress of Micronesia. Joeten and his kids were there. And Ben Fitial was also a very strong supporter of maintaining ties with Micronesia.
- Willens: Where were you educated?
- Rosario: I graduated here in Saipan from the Marianas High School. Went to the University of Guam, and for financial reasons I came back and I continued my education here at the Northern Marianas College.
- Willens: What years did you spend in Guam at the University there?
- Rosario: 1973.
- Willens: So you were in Guam in 1973 and you returned shortly thereafter?
- Rosario: Yes. In 1974.
- Willens: And you remained on Saipan since?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Where were you employed after you came back to Saipan?
- Rosario: Before I went to the University of Guam, after graduating in 1972 I was working part-time for the Congress of Micronesia. Not knowing that I was already on board as a full-time staff, I thought that it was only on temporary basis. After the special session here in Saipan in 1972, I left Saipan and went to the University of Guam. When I returned in 1973 I worked temporarily at the Bank of Saipan as a teller while waiting for my employment papers. Hopefully I was a candidate at that time to work for the Marianas District Legislature, where I was employed in May of 1974.
- Willens: I didn't realize that you had worked then part-time for the Congress of Micronesia for more than a year?

Rosario: About a year. I was very impressed. I learned a lot at the Congress of Micronesia. In fact, most of my knowledge that I learned from the Congress of Micronesia was used to improve the system down at the Mariana Islands District Legislature.

Willens: You have any recollection of political status discussions at the Congress of Micronesia during the time that you worked there?

Rosario: Not really. I was the status table clerk.

Willens: What is that?

Rosario: Compiling all the bills and resolutions, assigning them numbers, and referring them to the committees, typing up a status sheet showing which bills were sent to which committees and who introduced them, when they were introduced, and coming up with the latest information statistics on the actions of the Congress of Micronesia on a weekly basis—you know, what has been passed, what has been referred to committees, what has been sent to the High Commissioner.

Willens: Do you remember some of the members of the Congress who were on the Joint Committee on Future Status like Lazarus Salii and Andon Amaraich?

Rosario: Yes. I remember working with them. During the sessions we were very busy also sometimes assisting in the xeroxing because the Congress of Micronesia believed in productivity, not the number of staff. I mean when you go to the Commonwealth Legislature there are over 100 employees. I don't believe in that number; I believe in a small amount of staff with a professional job being done. I remember the late Lazarus Salii was, I think, the Chairman of the Joint Committee on Future Status.

Willens: What was your impression of him?

Rosario: Very intelligent individual. It's very sad to find out that most of the people who worked and very bright members of the Congress of Micronesia from the other districts went back home and passed away. Like Kaleb Udui, who was the legislative counsel, a very bright individual who established many of the rules and regulations. He came up with so many recommendations to improve the operations of the Congress of Micronesia. Now Bailey Olter is very ill, and the late Amata Kabua recently passed away. These were the leaders in Micronesia who were very dedicated, very bright in setting up their respective governments back home.

Willens: It was during this period in 1972 and 1973 that there were some issues within the Congress of Micronesia that revealed differences between the districts on certain subjects. For example, the sharing of revenues collected by the Congress of Micronesia among the districts prompted some controversy among the districts. What is your recollection of how the Congress tried to deal with those differences among the districts?

Rosario: I think that was one of the main reasons why Micronesia was separated—why the Northern Marianas decided to go on its own. Much of the development is the capital improvement projects. And the revenues that were generated in the Northern Marianas and the Marshalls were sent to the other districts to improve their infrastructure. And that was one of the main arguments that contributed to Micronesia's falling apart, the fact that many of our people were complaining that our revenues are being sent to Yap, Chuuk and other districts in Micronesia that are either barely generating revenues or not making any revenues to build schools, roads and other infrastructure.

Willens: What were some of the other factors that, in your opinion, led to the fragmentation of Micronesia?

- Rosario: First, the Northern Marianas would like to be closer to the United States. I think being here in Saipan, the people have seen the advantage of working closely with the United States government in the revenues, you know. And it is just an advantage to be close to the United States government for many reasons.
- Willens: Is it principally financial?
- Rosario: Not only financial, but that was one of the main points raised in the political education of the First Constitutional Convention. I remember Delegate King who was telling the members of the Constitutional Convention that we were offered a lot of money if we become part of the United States.
- Siemer: Do you think that the leaders like Amata Kabua and Bailey Olter and others back in those days understood the depth of the disaffection that was being created in Saipan when they were sending revenues to the other districts disproportionately?
- Rosario: For the Marshalls and the Northern Marianas, I think they do understand the problem of remaining together with the rest of Micronesia. They were thinking that by holding on to their own revenues that they generated from their respective governments that they can better develop themselves economically. If you are having problems with your financial resources, it is very hard for you to bargain if you are not economically independent or sufficient. It puts you on the back burner. You cannot bargain for whatever needs and other things that you wanted. For the CNMI, it is not only the revenue; strategically speaking it is very important for the United States, because at that time Vietnam was very hot. The Vietnam War was at its peak, and the Northern Marianas, as well as Guam, were very important strategically for the United States. So maybe the Northern Marianas was also gambling on that to use this area for the United States. And you know this was one of their bargaining tools to use.
- Willens: During 1972 and 1973 there developed in the Congress of Micronesia something called the Independence Coalition.
- Rosario: Right.
- Willens: It seems to have more support in the district of Chuuk than in other districts. What is your recollection of the strength of the independence advocates in the Congress of Micronesia?
- Rosario: It is okay to bargain or to use the word independent, if you're economically sufficient. This has been the biggest problem that we in Micronesia were faced with. We don't export anything. We import about 95 percent or 90 percent of our resources, I mean our food from Japan and the United States. We don't have the money. At that time the main export was copra, which means nothing. We cannot rely on industry. Going back to the Japanese Administration, thank God that the Northern Marianas had the sugarcane. The Northern Marianas has a lot of revenues nowadays, but look at where we are now. I mean are we really running our own government, or are we being run, you know?
- Willens: Do you think the independence advocates were just using independence as a bargaining tactic in dealing with the United States?
- Rosario: Yes. I remember the late Cisco Uludong, who was a very staunch supporter of independence for Micronesia, who then turned around and supported commonwealth, and was even pursuing commonwealth for the Republic of Palau. Like I said earlier, it's okay to bargain if you have something. And we worked hard. Micronesia and the Northern Marianas worked hard and stayed when we had nothing, barely nothing to use except our lands and our seas. I remember there were several leaders in Micronesia at that time who were very

strong supporters of independence for Micronesia. Like I said, at that time we were not ready for those, and even up to now.

Willens: In April 1972 the United States agreed to conduct separate negotiations with the Northern Marianas. What was your reaction to the decision to embark on separate negotiations?

Rosario: Well, that was a majority decision, a decision that was widely supported by our leaders before. And the people in the Northern Marianas, they have petitioned the United Nations and the United States to grant us that negotiation. I think it was the right idea. My question is are we ready for self-government?

Willens: That was your question then?

Rosario: Yes.

Willens: Were you affiliated with either of the two major parties at the time?

Rosario: At that time my grandfather, being the founding father of the now Republican Party, I was very much supporting that, but very cautiously. I mean although I was supporting the commonwealth status and the Northern Marianas negotiating separately from the rest of Micronesia, I was still being very cautious as to what actions to take, because it is not easy.

Willens: Did you follow the negotiations over the two-year period that they took place?

Rosario: When I was in high school, I was very active in politics. During the sixties there was this so-called Young Democrat and Young Territorial Parties. And I remember that there were lots of youths who were very active. At that time I remember joining a speech contest back in 1971 against independence. My topic was against independence for the Northern Marianas.

Willens: Who was on the other side?

Rosario: I remember Max Athol who was for commonwealth. In fact the winner of the speech contest was the man who recently retired as director of the Department of Corrections. We used the topic of commonwealth for the Northern Marianas. I came in third.

Willens: Did you think that the Marianas Political Status Commission was representative of the different views in the community?

Rosario: I think so, although I was surprised that the Carolinians came up with a different idea at a later stage during the negotiation.

Willens: What are you referring to?

Rosario: Well, remember the late Mr. Rabauliman and Oscar Rasa did not sign the Covenant? I was surprised at their views. They came in late in the negotiations to challenge the signing of the Covenant. Although I do respect their views. Like I said earlier, being Carolinian and still very much against the concept of separating from the rest of Micronesia, I guess they want to be together with the rest of Micronesia.

Willens: Taking Mr. Rabauliman separately for the moment, he told me that the Carolinian community after much discussion left it up to him to vote his conscience. Do you remember any discussions in the Carolinian community before the final vote on the Covenant as to whether Mr. Rabauliman ought to support it or oppose it?

Rosario: That is very interesting because during the negotiation for commonwealth status, the Carolinians formed the so-called Aghurubw Society headed by Dr. Kaipat and former Senator Herman R. Guerrero. The beginning of this organization was for traditional

purposes and to help the Carolinian community in many of their cultural celebrations. Whatever the Carolinian community would like to do, they were supporting. It ended up that they went to support the Democratic Party who were supporting commonwealth status. However, some of the members removed themselves and, like I said, I was surprised when all of a sudden Mr. Rabauliman decided not to sign the Covenant and to totally oppose the Covenant. But there were some very close ties among the Carolinians. And I guess one of the reasons why they continued to oppose the commonwealth status is the fact that most of them came from the other districts.

Willens: Was your mother active at all politically at that time?

Rosario: My grandfather was, but not my mother. Being a housewife and having fourteen kids, I guess she was more into family life. But the family was supporting my grandfather very much for commonwealth status.

Willens: So most of your family then who participated in the vote supported the Covenant?

Rosario: Yes.

Willens: Mr. Rasa was elected to the Congress of Micronesia in November of 1974. He and Pete A. Tenorio replaced Herman Q. Guerrero and Ed Pangelinan who were both members of the Marianas Political Status Commission. Do you have any recollection as to whether political status was an issue in that campaign that may have contributed to the defeat of Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero?

Rosario: That was one of the reasons. They were blamed for rushing the negotiation. That was one of the key issues that was used by the Republican Party—that they rushed the political status negotiation. Then remember Oscar Rasa bringing up sixteen points for challenging the Covenant?

Willens: Was this during the campaign?

Rosario: Yes. During and later on in the political education of the Covenant.

Willens: So was there a widespread feeling that the negotiations had progressed too rapidly?

Rosario: Not really. It was only the Carolinians and Oscar. I remember now Justice Villagomez writing about the Covenant negotiation, that it should be taken at a slower pace and carefully studied for its impact on the Marianas.

Willens: Some people have suggested that the Carolinian community was concerned also by how they would be treated in a future commonwealth with a Chamorro majority. Was that something that you considered to a real issue at the time?

Rosario: Being part Carolinian, that happened.

Willens: What happened?

Rosario: I remember when the Marianas District Legislature passed a first constitutional convention bill back in 1976. And one of the intentions of the act at that time drafted by the Legislature was to accommodate the Carolinian community in case nobody wins from the Carolinian community because of the fact that they were and today are still the minority in the Northern Marianas. They tried to accommodate the Carolinian community in the act and the late Erwin Canham, after vetoing an earlier proposal, signed the act calling for the First Constitutional Convention. We were very surprised when (I think) six Carolinians were voted into the Constitutional Convention—a total delegation of 39. Six Carolinians were voted in. But all along they were very much afraid that because of being the minority no one would make it to the Constitutional Convention. Back in the First

Legislature, of a total of 12 members of the House, five were pure Carolinians. So I would say that they have been very successful. Of course, when you are a minority you are always suspicious that the majority is going to run their own show.

Willens: During the political status negotiations, there was a lot of debate about what commonwealth meant and what terms like sovereignty meant. Did you have the sense at the time that the people at large understood what these issues were all about?

Rosario: I think not at that time. Most of the people were only looking at the advantages of becoming separated from Micronesia. People were thinking that we're going to run our own government by ourselves. We'll have Chamorros and Carolinians running the government. Not like during the TT when we have so many Micronesians here holding key positions at the former Trust Territory headquarters. Several issues like that were used by the members of the Political Status Commission during the public education that was coming out. There was a newspaper coming out educating the people about what was happening in the negotiations, and money was one of them. All the revenues that were generated here are going to stay here in Saipan. Being closer to the United States, we're going to get whatever help we needed from defense, monetary, financial support, economic development, whatever, and others. But a lot of people didn't understand the effect that will come later on when the Covenant is being implemented. Like the fight back in the 1980s about sovereignty, self-government. I remember because I have a copy of the video here and every once in a while I will sit down and turn it on and watch our delegation fight, or go before the United Nations claiming that the United States was not honest in their promise under the Covenant dealing with sovereignty.

Willens: What led to that development in the 1980s?

Rosario: Well, the Marianas started progressing in the early 1980s after the second Governor, Pete Tenorio, did away with the foreign investment law and opened up the Commonwealth. The seven-year financial arrangement, the 702 funding under the Covenant was not guaranteed. A lot of our leaders—in fact, several members of the former Marianas Political Status Commission—were saying that after the seven years there was going to be continued funding, the same amount and maybe more. But that didn't happen. That's the beginning of all of that is the opening of the foreign investment law—doing away with the TT foreign investment and inviting investors to the CNMI. And that was the beginning of the economic development for the Northern Marianas. Then it was blown out of proportion and now they can hardly control it.

Siemer: Going back to the time when the Covenant was being considered for approval here in the Commonwealth, Oscar Rasa and Joe Mafnas put together a newspaper. Do you remember that?

Rosario: Yes. We have copies of those.

Siemer: What did people think of that effort to publicize reasons why the Covenant should not be approved?

Rosario: There were lots of people who were angry because they were saying that this is the opportunity to become a part of the United States, and why are these people trying to delay or why are the minorities at that time trying to block it. Oscar and Mr. Mafnas went to court to block it. I remember I was at the Legislature when they were trying to rush that case, to hold back the signing of the Covenant ceremony at the Mt. Carmel Auditorium. I learned a lot working for the Legislature. I was very much up to date on the happenings at the negotiations of the Covenant for the mere fact that I was the one dropping Mr.

Santos—the Vice-chairman of the Marianas Political Status Commission—every morning at the second floor of the Municipal Building. A lot of people were angry that they tried to hold back the signing, because I think they went for a temporary restraining order not to have the Covenant signing ceremony.

Siemer: Did you go to the argument?

Rosario: I didn't. I was at the Legislature at that time, and working for Mr. Santos, who was the Vice-chairman. I would get fired if I go to the court to support Oscar Rasa.

Willens: The lawsuit was filed by Mr. Mafnas. Did you hear anything about the argument or the final result?

Rosario: I heard that they were turned down by the court, for the reason that it is too late and the people have made up their mind to become a part of the U.S. and for them to hold back the majority decision was not a wise thing to do.

Siemer: What did you think of the argument that Rasa and Mafnas advanced later on during the period before the plebiscite that they just wanted to go back and have the Covenant renegotiated to improve a few points?

Rosario: Some are affecting the Commonwealth today, but to go back and renegotiate wouldn't work. Let me be honest. The Covenant is a document that was signed between the United States and the Northern Marianas. And the thing that surprises me the most is the U.S. Congress passed the Covenant denying Americans the right to own land out here and allowing CNMI residents to buy land in the United States. So you cannot expect a perfect document. Look at the U.S. Constitution for example. It is just that Oscar was using that as a tool to delay or to take away the rights of the people. When I say the rights of the people, you know, having their own government, the Commonwealth government.

Siemer: What reaction did you see in the District Legislature when the Congress of Micronesia gave Rasa \$10,000 for his campaign against the Covenant?

Rosario: They were very disturbed, because they needed all the money to use in the public education, in the education for self-government, and there goes the Congress of Micronesia giving in to the Carolinians. I mean, they gave money to Oscar's brother, and Darlene Nakamura, who then later became very active in the Commonwealth government. I think that was the money that was used in the concert that we played. I think we were paid part of that \$10,000. That was the political education [money] that they used. I think they lied and they used that money to challenge the Covenant instead of supporting the Covenant. But that was the money that was given by the Congress of Micronesia, if I'm not mistaken.

Siemer: What do you recall about the discussion of the language on the ballot for the plebiscite?

Rosario: Well, I think the plebiscite ballot was done in three languages—Chamorro, Carolinian, and English.

Siemer: There was some concern in the Carolinian community that the way the "no" vote was phrased suggested to people that they would be forced back to reunite with the rest of Micronesia and there would be no further choices. Do you remember discussion about that?

Rosario: Yes. There were several discussions that I heard about that. I remember that was one of the reasons why the Carolinians were very strong in their opposition to the Covenant.

Siemer: Within the Chamorro community at that time before the plebiscite, was there any substantial concern that the Covenant might be turned down?

- Rosario: No, a lot of people were in favor of the Covenant. Like I said, I educated myself much more about the Covenant when the records of the negotiation were transferred to the Legislature because they were given to the Marianas District Legislature before they voted. Later on, they were driven away by the [typhoon] waves that came back in 1986.
- Siemer: Were you there when the presentation was made to the Legislature asking for its approval of the Covenant?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: What do you recall about the discussion in the Legislature at that time?
- Rosario: The members were very much in support except for a few members, who were opposed.
- Willens: Who do you remember being opposed within the Legislature to the approval of the Covenant?
- Rosario: There were letters that were sent in by the respective Carolinian leaders, and at that time I think there was only one Republican that was there. It was, if I'm not mistaken Luis Limes, or I think Larry Guerrero came in later on.
- Willens: No, Larry Guerrero, subsequently Governor, was a member of the Legislature at the time. He recalls asking a series of very pointed questions of me and the Commission members who appeared before the Legislature. There was some discussion as to whether the Legislature had been adequately briefed during the negotiations. And Mr. Santos and Mr. Pangelinan of course believed the Legislature had been fully briefed throughout this period. What do you think is the case there?
- Rosario: For Mr. Santos, who was representing the District Legislature at the Covenant negotiation, he had no problem. Being the Vice-chairman he had all the communications and all the negotiation papers. He was present in most of the negotiations; he had no problem. He's very well-versed. But for members of the Legislature, I understand that they needed to move slowly on the draft at that time. They wanted to move it slowly, and for them to actually meet with you and to make sure that the intent of several sections of the Covenant was well explained to them. We Chamorros are very suspicious when you don't explain something.
- Siemer: The Legislature worked part-time back in those days, didn't it?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: Was it in session at the time that the Covenant was signed?
- Rosario: I think the signing was February 15. Yes, they were in session.
- Siemer: How did the sessions work back in those days?
- Rosario: They went for 30 days and they go on break and they come back to public hearings in between breaks. Most of the members of the Legislature were very excited at that time. I know they were sent to go to lobby before the United States Congress. They were very excited.
- Siemer: Once the plebiscite vote occurred and was so overwhelmingly favorable, then how did people organize to persuade the U.S. Congress to okay it?
- Rosario: Well, I remember that there were several organizations, like the Chamber of Commerce. In fact the Legislature was asking for a lot of support from the community, from the business community, and members of the other legislative bodies like the Municipal Council to support them.

- Siemer: Asking for resolutions of support?
- Rosario: Yes, to send to the United States, supporting or endorsing the Covenant that was signed at the time.
- Siemer: Then how were the people chosen who actually went to the U.S. to present the case to Congress?
- Rosario: Members of the Legislature and members of the Status Commission, I think they came in first priority. Most of the members that went to the signing were members of the Political Status Commission.
- Siemer: What do you recall about that time when the Covenant was pending before the U.S. Congress?
- Rosario: A lot of people were afraid that it might not go through.
- Siemer: Did people get discouraged as the time dragged on?
- Rosario: No, our leaders in the Status Commission continued to tell them that it needs to be properly scrutinized by the U.S. Congress and it has to go through over 100 members of the House of Representatives, the committees and then on to the U.S. President after the two houses.
- Siemer: During that period when the Covenant was before the U.S. Congress for its approval, there was a Micronesian Constitutional Convention. Do you remember that?
- Rosario: Yes. Held at the presently Pacific Islands Club, former White Sands Hotel.
- Siemer: And there was some discussion about whether the Marianas should send delegates to that Constitutional Convention because the Congress had not yet approved the Covenant and people didn't know whether they would or not.
- Rosario: Yes, it was very interesting. I remember some of the delegates that were elected to represent the Northern Marianas at the Micronesian Constitutional Convention didn't attend for the reason that they were saying it's useless, the Marianas people have already decided on its future political status. I remember Luis Limes was elected to that. There were several members who were elected to represent the Northern Marianas. But the people really didn't care at that time because the majority of the people, a vote of 78.8 percent, something like that, favored the Covenant.
- Siemer: Was there anything that happened at that Micronesian Constitutional Convention in 1975 that affected the Marianas Constitutional Convention the next year?
- Rosario: Number one, it is very sad to hold a constitutional convention in a place that you're not involved with, you're not part of. I feel sad that our colleagues or friends from Micronesia were having their constitutional convention in Saipan when Saipan was on its way to being separated from them. It is sad, because up to now you can still see a large community of Micronesians in the Northern Marianas. A lot of Palauans, Chuukese, and Yapese who are here. They've been here from the time they were employed by the Trust Territory Government up to now—until some of them were being offered salaries to return home to work in the government. I remember it being very sad that we have our visitors who are having their own constitutional convention here. And the Northern Marianas was not really serious in the participation.
- Siemer: Why did they decide to do it here?

- Rosario: You know being the capital of Micronesia, I guess. I think it was funded by the Congress of Micronesia. And a lot of Micronesians enjoyed flying off to Saipan. I don't think they had the facilities at that time back home in their respective governments.
- Siemer: Were you still working for the District Legislature when the constitutional convention bills started to be introduced?
- Rosario: In 1976 it was vetoed I think twice, three times.
- Siemer: Do you remember the discussion of whether there should be election district-by-district or island-wide on Saipan?
- Rosario: Yes. Number one, there were a lot of debates on accommodating the Carolinian community, other organizations, and district-by-district, village-to-village, whatever. It was discussed very much. Finally I think after sending it back and forth to the former Resident Commissioner on several occasions, they were informed that we cannot give privileges to other nationalities or certain groups of people.
- Siemer: What was the reaction in the District Legislature when Canham came to present those veto messages?
- Rosario: Number one, they tried to accommodate his concern because that's the only way it can go through. Number two, they were very serious in addressing those concerns. I remember the late Santiago Magofna and Larry Guerrero, who were very strong in protecting the interests of the Carolinians. We were saying that we must make sure that they are represented in the constitutional convention. And a number of delegates were also concerned because of the cost of running a convention and the facts that they need to address.
- Siemer: How about issues with respect to the ground rules for the convention itself, aside from the election rules and how the election would be held? Were there concerns at that time about what this convention might do and whether the Legislature needed to impose some ground-rules for it?
- Rosario: Bear in mind that the Covenant was already there. All they needed to do is to make sure that what's in the Covenant is being addressed in the Constitution. If you're talking about the concern of the Legislature, they were trying to address the concerns raised by the Resident Commissioner, making sure that it was done in a very political or rather a democratic manner.
- Siemer: Do you recall representatives from Rota and Tinian worrying about quorum requirements or super-majority requirements so that their votes would be important in the Convention?
- Rosario: That is a very interesting discussion, because up to now in any organization that they're involved in, they have a representative of Rota needs and of Tinian needs in the organization in order for the organization to be officially conducted. Yes, you are right. Having only one member of the Legislature from each island, Tinian and Rota, they really try to make sure that they are there in all meetings of the convention, they serve on all committees, and that their interests are protected.
- Siemer: How did the Saipanese react at that time with respect to the protections for Rota and Tinian?
- Rosario: You know, that's very interesting, because as I look at things that are happening and problems being encountered by the Commonwealth Legislature, those things didn't happen back during the District Legislature. I guess for reasons that Rota and Tinian had

good members of the Legislature. Joe Cruz knew his way around. Benjamin Manglona was very aggressive too, and I think they had good representation. I mean they were represented by people who were very intelligent, who knew their way around.

Siemer: You don't remember them holding out for particular things or walking out?

Rosario: No, I remember both of them walking out at the Convention but not at the Legislature.

Siemer: How about discussion with respect to the majority that it would take to approve the Constitution once it was written by the Convention? Was there a concern in the Legislature about big a majority there ought to be to approve it?

Rosario: There was some concern with regards to that. Both Tinian and Rota, like I said earlier, are trying to protect their interests. So they were trying to make sure that they are protected in the Constitution, too. Those are some of the discussions that were touched on, including the Carolinian community's representation. But it didn't really last long. Members of the Legislature at that time were very accommodating to the needs of the different respective islands.

Siemer: Was there anybody in your family who ran in the special election for delegate to the Constitutional Convention?

Rosario: One of my cousins, Pete Igitol, got nominated. He was one of the Carolinians who was elected.

Siemer: Did you participate in the election campaign?

Rosario: I was helping, being a staff for the Legislature. I helped in the political education, and I used to take Mr. Santos around to meetings that he was been invited to appear at. I did not participate, but I helped.

Siemer: What do you remember of the campaign for delegate to the Constitution Convention? What kind of a campaign was it? What was it like?

Rosario: It was very interesting, because the law at that time said that there should be no political parties involved. However, the two parties came up with delegates, you know, each party came up with their own candidate. They never mentioned that in the campaign because it's against the law. But the Republican or Territorial at that time got the majority. It is very funny because they continued to go around the law, even in the Convention. I was very impressed as the Convention went on, later on, the delegates from the two parties were very close. The Territorials or Republicans nowadays were the majority; the Democrats got good candidates, too.

Siemer: Was there any difference in the way this supposedly non-partisan election was held as compared for example to the elections to the District Legislature? Any difference in the campaigning or the way people went about it?

Rosario: The only difference is that in the District Legislature elections they go by party, and they tried to accommodate the Carolinians, the different villages on the island. They go by families. Of course, the bigger the family you come from, the more chances of you being elected. It was very interesting. The political life in the Northern Marianas is one of the most exciting parts in our history.

Siemer: There were quite a lot of newcomers elected to the First Constitutional Convention.

Rosario: Yes.

Siemer: How did you become connected with the staff of the Convention?

Rosario: In the district law that was signed back in 1976, one of the requirements is for the CNMI Government or the Marianas District Government to support the Convention. In the case of the Legislature, all of us [on the staff] were sent to help at the Convention. So that's how I became a part of the Convention.

Siemer: What was your title at the Convention?

Rosario: At that time I was recording the proceedings of the Convention. I don't know what my title was. Assistant public information officer, I guess.

Siemer: Whom did you work for?

Rosario: I worked for my uncle, Rudy M. Sablan. We were both recording the Convention.

Siemer: Who else was on the staff with you back then?

Rosario: Pete Atalig was in charge. He was a delegate himself, and was also in charge of the staff. Most of the staff from the Office of Transition, [who worked under] Pete A. Tenorio; almost all the staff of the Legislature, Ben Taitano, Niki Borja was still with the Commonwealth Legislature. Alicia Gurerreo was in charge of the typing pool. Stacy Pounds was the general clerk, and there was another lady working with her. Of course the legal counsel was provided by the well-known law firm of Willens and Siemer.

Siemer: When the sessions were recorded, what happened to the tapes?

Rosario: That is the most interesting question that I hear today, for the reason that the people who work in the Convention, who were in charge of running the Convention, continue to lie. They say today that they sent the tapes to Archives, when the Archives did not exist at that time. Just today I received a phone call for the AG's office that they found 15 tapes that belong to the Second Constitutional Convention that were taken by the court, and they were asking as to who is in charge. My first question was, did you find any tapes for the First Constitutional Convention? You know, I hate to put this individual on the spot, but he told me that he had some of the tapes, and that's my uncle, Rudy M. Sablan. He took them home and tried to transcribe them, but a typhoon came and destroyed his house in Chalan Kanoa in 1986. And prior to that he leased the house out; he came back and the tapes were gone. But I continue to hear every day at the court that the tapes were given to the Northern Marianas College Archives. I have been here, I started the Archives here, and those tapes never reached the Archives. I hope whoever is responsible will turn those tapes in so we can record our history, we can publish something, because that's a very important part of the history of the Commonwealth. That was the formulation, that was the document that got us to where we are today.

Siemer: The tapes for the plenary sessions were transcribed by Stacy Pounds and the typing pool, right?

Rosario: Yes.

Siemer: And so it's the tapes for the Committees of the Whole that are missing?

Rosario: Yes.

Siemer: Were all the Committee of the Whole sessions taped?

Rosario: I don't think so. On many occasions the tape was turned off during the Committee of the Whole. A lot of them didn't know that the Committee of the Whole discussion was very important and that's where the ingredients are, you know, that's where the main discussion of whatever sections or parts of the committee reports were discussed.

- Siemer: Who decided when the tapes were on and when they were off?
- Rosario: Rudy Sablan. The problem was they were not actually agreed on when to turn the tape on and turn the tape off. I remember one time giving the microphone to the late Dr. Palacios, and he took the microphone and he threw it away, because he doesn't want to be put on the spot. I think that was the discussion of the salaries of the legislators. Would you believe \$8,000 per annum? And being in charge of the recording, recording the proceedings of the Convention, I gave him the microphone, because we didn't have high-tech equipment at that time. We were using most of the microphones from the District Legislature, and he just didn't want to be recorded.
- Siemer: What were the instructions to the staff at the beginning of the Convention?
- Rosario: For us, who were doing the recording, the instructions were just to record the sessions. I don't think the committees were recorded. I remember several of the committees were holding their meetings in some of the rooms upstairs on the second floor. I don't think they were recorded.
- Siemer: Was that basically that the same procedure that the District Legislature followed—that its main sessions were recorded but its committee meetings were not?
- Rosario: The District Legislature was being broadcast on a daily basis. It was also recorded on a reel-to-reel. I remember that, because I was recording the sessions. Later on we changed to the cassette tapes. Every day after the session I would take the cassette or the reel and give it to the general clerk. But the saddest part about it is the journal is the backbone of the Legislature, and most of them were not transcribed completely.
- Siemer: Before the Convention started, was there some consideration given to broadcasting the Convention proceedings?
- Rosario: They did discuss that. At that time I think we only had KASI. And I don't know what happened.
- Siemer: You were present at all the Convention sessions?
- Rosario: Yes, I was there in all the sessions.
- Siemer: What do you recall about how the Territorial Party and Popular Party divisions worked within the Convention?
- Rosario: It was very interesting. One of the subjects that I remember was trying to maneuver the districting, you know, coming up with how to go around to gather so that the Republicans can win the election by combining all the precincts or villages that are strong, that were supporting them. While on the other side the Democrats were also trying to see to it that the districting of the island of Saipan be done in a manner that they would garner the majority.
- Siemer: That went on during the whole Convention as I recall. It didn't get resolved until the very end.
- Rosario: Right.
- Siemer: Do you recall a struggle at the very beginning over who was going to be the chair and the vice-chair of the committees and the Popular Party's concern that they didn't get the officers that they wanted?
- Rosario: Yes, I remember the first Governor who was a delegate in the First Constitutional Convention who was very much trying to protect the party's interest. He is a very die-

hard Democrat during the Convention. I guess he was interested at that time knowing that he later on would run for Governor. I think he was trying to use the Convention to take advantage, you know, and make sure his interest is protected, including at that time the Popular Party.

Siemer: Do you remember the discussion at the Convention about the land alienation question?

Rosario: Very little.

Siemer: That was really not a division along party lines as much as along business versus non-business lines, was it?

Rosario: Right. The discussion I remember the most is the salaries of the legislators and the part when the Tinian and Rota delegations walked out.

Siemer: Tell me what you recall about that.

Rosario: There was I think a proposal trying to make sure that Rota and Tinian have lieutenant governors on their islands so that they're represented in the administration, at the governor level. The Villagomez brothers were very much concerned about how big the government is and how much money it's going to cost to run the government. I remember the discussion on the number of legislators—the 12-1-1, the 14-2-1, the 16-3-1 or 16-2-1, something like that? Remember that this was taken up in the last few days of the Convention because they don't want to prolong it. Everybody wanted a Convention that is completed, you know, to accomplish their mission. But since 1976 we disagreed with having Rota and Tinian [get special concessions for] being the minority. They're very careful in their negotiations.

Siemer: Did you know ahead of time that the Rota and Tinian delegates would walk out?

Rosario: No, I was surprised when they walked out that morning, but then later on the next day, some of them returned. For the rest, they never come back, never signed the Constitution. Then twenty years later they don't sign again.

Willens: Were you surprised that Joe Cruz left, given his political service on the Commission and so forth?

Rosario: Yes, I was very surprised, knowing that he even cried at the signing of the Covenant, that he would come in and lobby for something that is not, how I look at it at that time, very controversial. I mean, they should concentrate more in other areas I think at the Convention rather than first bargaining their demands, you know?

Siemer: What was your view of the role that Oscar Rasa and Joe Mafnas played during the Convention?

Rosario: Well, number one, Joe Mafnas, I kind of laughed during many of the committee reports when if I'm not mistaken Joe Mafnas was the chairman of one of the committees.

Siemer: Governmental Institutions.

Rosario: Yes. On several occasions, Felipe Atalig would report the committee's findings out to the floor to the Convention. You know that at the beginning you can tell who belonged to which parties, because they were very much on party lines. But then later on the delegates from Saipan were working together. Most of the delegates were working together to accomplish their mission.

Siemer: Were you surprised that the Villagomez brothers became leaders in the Convention?

- Rosario: Yes, knowing that Oscar is a graduate of political science, a very bright individual. I really respect Oscar, to be honest with you. He is very bright. He just fell into wrong hands and got on the wrong side, I guess. Today I cannot find a brighter individual in the Northern Marianas in the area of politics than Oscar Rasa.
- Siemer: Once the Covenant plebiscite occurred, Oscar seemed to come to the Convention with a very constructive attitude that he was going to try to get it done.
- Rosario: Yes. That's a complete turnaround. Going back again, I was very impressed with the Villagomez brothers because all of a sudden they became very powerful.
- Siemer: Why do you think that was?
- Rosario: I don't know. One is an attorney. The other one recently at that time graduated with his master's degree in accounting.
- Siemer: They were both very young, though.
- Rosario: Very young, yes.
- Siemer: And they had not been in politics before.
- Rosario: Yes, but remember that Justice Villagomez was writing about the Covenant negotiation proceedings [in the newspaper]. I think he was keeping himself up to date, and when he came to the Convention, I guess he was prepared. He was very active. He was a very close friend of the late O. T. Borja. He was supporting O.T. Borja all long. He was a Democrat before.
- Willens: Who was?
- Rosario: Justice Villagomez. And when the late O.T. Borja lost to Carlos Camacho, the first Governor, in the Popular Party's primary in 1977, they both went and joined Joeten. Since then, I don't know what his political party affiliation is, because he's a justice and I know he should keep away from politics. But he's still been very active in many of the activities of the Commonwealth government.
- Willens: Senator Borja was a member of the Marianas Political Status Commission and had served in the Congress of Micronesia, and as you just said ran to be Lieutenant Governor in the very first election. What was your assessment of Senator Borja's views on political status?
- Rosario: Well, Senator Borja was very much for the Covenant. He supported the Covenant very much. In fact, I remember him going against Oscar Rasa in the Congress of Micronesia elections. He was very active in the negotiations and in the political education. He did a lot for the Commonwealth.
- Willens: And what do you remember in particular as being his accomplishments?
- Rosario: Well, this library's been named after him—the Olympia T. Borja Memorial Library. He was very much a strong supporter of education. He supported the Marianas government negotiating separately from the rest of Micronesia. I remember him switching parties because he didn't agree with most of the Carolinian views.
- Willens: He was originally a Territorial Party member.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: And then he saw that various Territorial Party members in the Congress of Micronesia were losing because of their views on status, so he became a member of the Popular Party.
- Rosario: He was elected.

- Willens: He served as a member of the Congress as a Popular Party member, and then as you say he became a Territorial Party member or Republican in his campaign for election as Lieutenant Governor.
- Rosario: It is very interesting to find out that after the primaries, both runners-up switched parties. That is going to remain in our history. And since 1984 the Legislature started having problems with people who were elected to the Legislature and switching parties, supporting somebody from the other party to be the speaker and be the majority. It started in 1984.
- Willens: Another name that you mentioned is Dr. Palacios. He served in the Congress of Micronesia and as a member of the Future Status Commission that the Congress of Micronesia established in the late 1960s. He seemed to advocate free association.
- Rosario: Right.
- Willens: He became a supporter of commonwealth only later on. What is your recollection of Dr. Palacios's role on the political status issue?
- Rosario: He was very active in the political education work of the government. He was a former member of the Congress of Micronesia and was involved in the political status negotiations. A lot of people don't know that Dr. Palacios is part Carolinian.
- Willens: He portrayed himself as being the leader of the Carolinian community for many years in the 1970s. Is that true?
- Rosario: He used that in the 1977 primary, that he is a candidate for the Carolinians. But a lot of people didn't buy that, especially the Carolinian community. His middle name is Taimanao, which is Carolinian, and he tried to use that.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection of the former Mayor of Tinian, Felipe Mendiola, who was an opponent of the status negotiations in the early 1970s?
- Rosario: I remember Tinian being very controversial. They tried to replace their members to the Commission every once in a while. God knows what they wanted. I remember that the military government offered to give them schools and other things during the negotiations at the third round.
- Willens: Well, there was a division of view as to whether relocation of the San Jose Village was a good thing or a bad thing. What is your recollection of the attitudes here in the Northern Marianas about the fact that the United States military wanted to lease, if not purchase, most of the island of Tinian and build a base? Was that something that was viewed as a positive step toward the future commonwealth?
- Rosario: Having seen war, most of our parents were afraid that having a big base in Tinian was going to affect Saipan also. Not looking at the economic view, but strategically speaking, having a military base, Saipan would ultimately be affected if there was a war.
- Willens: But even with that fear, people supported it because they thought it was a concession that they had to make in order to achieve commonwealth status?
- Rosario: Yes. They felt that in order for them to achieve commonwealth, they had to give in on Tinian. But a lot were concerned about the fact that the base will be built in Tinian, something that never happened.
- Willens: So in your opinion, people were generally pleased that in fact the base was never built?
- Rosario: Yes.

- Siemer: Did some people at the time think that might happen—that the base might never be built?
- Rosario: No. Most of them thought that as soon as the Covenant was signed, in a few months the United States military would come in and start clearing the old atomic bomb airfield in Tinian.
- Willens: It was in the very late stages of the negotiations in December of 1974 that Ambassador Williams told the Marianas Political Status Commission that the Defense Department had deferred, until some time in the future, the construction of a base. Do you remember that fact being widely known?
- Rosario: A little. I remember that they were told not to worry about the base being built in Tinian and to go ahead and approve the Covenant, support the Covenant, because of the fact that the United States, Guam being there and Hawaii and the Philippines being there, not to worry about the base on Tinian.
- Willens: What was your assessment of the way in which Ambassador Williams represented the United States and negotiated with the Commission?
- Rosario: Knowing that he represented the United States, I questioned some of the decisions that he made. Like how in the world did the U.S. Congress approve the Covenant, which is not very favorable in some areas to the United States. For example, the buying of land out here. How in the world did the American government, who are very straightforward on democracy, making sure that slavery and racism are not practiced, approve a Covenant that does not allow U.S. citizens to own land out here? That was my only concern, and thank God the U.S. Congress, I guess, didn't scrutinize the Covenant very much, or else we wouldn't have commonwealth today.
- Willens: Was the land alienation protection something that the people here wanted?
- Rosario: Yes, but looking back, even during the Japanese Administration, selling and leasing of lands is nothing new. This was happening back during the Japanese Administration. A lot of our people were leasing and later on sold their lands. So, while I agree that we should protect, where is protection today?
- Siemer: Did your grandfather own land back in pre-war times?
- Rosario: His father did.
- Siemer: Where were the family lands located?
- Rosario: San Antonio. It was taken away by the government later on.
- Siemer: By the Japanese or by the U.S.?
- Rosario: The U.S. Those who owned land and can justify it by showing documentations, they can take back their land. Being the head of the land management office for the Marianas District government, I'm surprised that he didn't take advantage of it. He's being accused of taking away lands from people, and a lot of people that come in today [to the Archives] don't know that he is my grandfather. When they talk about him, I get hurt, but I understand their situation. He didn't own lands like Joeten and other people in Saipan, who owned a lot of land in Saipan.
- Willens: Do you think the people in the Northern Marianas who owned a lot of land and ran the businesses were afraid that under commonwealth they would find too much competition coming here from the United States or Japan?

- Rosario: Competition from Japan. Thank God, Joeten took advantage during the negotiations and started buying land in Tinian and even here in Saipan. Villagomez went out of business, and Joeten is the only local businessman that's left.
- Willens: Villagomez is no longer in active business?
- Rosario: No more. He's in real estate and building now.
- Willens: Could you begin at the beginning and tell us when the Archives was created and what the mission is.
- Rosario: Well, in 1984, President McPhetres wrote to the Governor, at that time Governor Pete Tenorio, asking that I be transferred here because of my dealing with records and files of the District Legislature, something that I learned from the Hawaii State Legislature, Guam Legislature, and the Congress of Micronesia. The filing system that I established with the District Legislature was very organized and a lot of the justices and the judges from the different courts in the CNMI were using the files of the Legislature to solve their cases. It so happened that Ruth Tighe, the former Director of the Library, knows me very well, and found out that I was working for the Governor's Office in 1984 and asked President [McPhetres] if she could write to the Governor to have me transferred here to be in charge of the Archives.
- Siemer: And did you switch over from the District Legislature?
- Rosario: Yes. In November 1983, when the Republicans lost the election, I decided to leave the Legislature. The top job, being the clerk, it's a political appointee. And when the Republicans lost, I was told to get ready to transfer to the Senate. But there was also controversy about the President of the Senate position between the late O.T. Borja and Oscar Rasa. I knew that at that time Rasa had the edge, so I knew my chances of being hired there were not very good. So I asked Ray Guerrero, who was the Special Assistant for Administration, if I could work for the Governor, and Ben Fitial was very instrumental in getting me hired at the Governor's office as Assistant Public Information Officer. But in May of 1984, I received a letter from the Governor, you know, it was coming from the college, asking if I wanted to transfer to the college to be in charge of the Archives. And when I came to the college, there was no such thing as an Archives.
- Siemer: When did you come?
- Rosario: May 14th of 1984 was my first date here. The Governor told me to come up and look if I'm interested to stay. If I don't like it, I can go back anytime. When I came up to the college, they hired my brother Frank to be the Governor's Public Information Officer. So I knew I cannot go back. Anyway, I decided that in the interests of the CNMI government that I should remain with the college, and at the same time try to continue my education.
- Siemer: Had the Archives been established by that time?
- Rosario: Not yet. Up until now, my biggest frustration is the fact that the Legislature continued to play with the legislation in creating a Commonwealth Archives. I was never invited to comment until the Archives bill was in its final form. However, when I came here, my first question was how to start organizing myself. I didn't know anything about the Archives, in fact the word "archives" was brand new to me at that time. First thing I did was go through the dictionary and look up the word "archives." And then in the following year, 1985, I was sent to Australia for three weeks of intensive training, six days a week, on archives. When I returned, that was the beginning of my being serious in the operations. I learned a lot about how to maintain, to preserve, and what materials needed to be

preserved. Not any document that you see anywhere. But my being with the Legislature for ten years continued my interest in the political history of the Northern Marianas. And the first thing that I requested was the Covenant papers, and the files of the Legislature. So I started writing letters to the former Speaker, Joe Lifoifoi, to send us the records of the District Legislature and Commonwealth Legislature to microfilm. At that time, I was going to use the TT archives to microfilm them. He never responded. Later on in 1986, the typhoon Jean came and destroyed the legislative building in Susupe, and all the records were destroyed, even the Covenant negotiation papers. I was very sad. I was saddened by the fact that those very important historical documents that created the Commonwealth Government were destroyed.

Willens: Many documents were destroyed in people's houses as well.

Rosario: Yes. The next thing that I started looking for was the 1976 Constitutional Convention records. To be honest with you, two attorneys donated their Constitutional Convention records to the Archives. The First Constitutional Convention Journal and publications were donated by Justice Villagomez, who was a delegate to the First Constitutional Convention. I thanked him very much for being very helpful. Then two years ago my friend Ted Mitchell donated seven volumes to us, duplicates of the Second Constitutional Convention materials. And I published those. I mean, I went out to the Xerox company and I ordered binders for them. I went to the publishing companies to make sure that they were done professionally. Although the materials were Xeroxed, I think they are better than nothing. If you go to any government office now I doubt it 100 percent if you could find any of the Second Constitutional Convention materials. I have seven volumes of those. I continue to lobby for the archives legislation, but after finding out that the Commonwealth government is not very much keen and knowledgeable in the area and the importance of having an archives, I am getting very frustrated. So this year, I am hoping to organize the Archives and thank God I got the room inside so that I can organize them by department. Any material that you are looking for under the Department of Labor and Immigration should be there. In 1985, upon returning from Australia, I went to Sam McPhetres about the TT archives. At the request of my colleagues from Micronesia, from Palau, and Kosrae, and Pohnpei, we met in Australia in 1985 and asked ourselves, "What are we going to do with the TT archives?" So it was our decision to request the High Commissioner and Sam McPhetres to request funding to duplicate the microfilm that belonged to the TT archives. At that time, the University of Hawaii provided the funding to film the records of the TT archives. So Sam and I sat down and talked about it, and then he sent a letter to the Department of Interior requesting \$100,000 to duplicate four sets for Micronesia: for the CNMI, for Palau, the Marshalls, and the FSM.

Siemer: How many microfilms were there?

Rosario: 2,200. And the Department of Interior gave us a grant of \$100,000 to duplicate the microfilm in Honolulu, provided that we work together closely with the Hamilton Library that was storing the originals of the TT archives microfilm. It is only safe if you store microfilm away from the originals. You should keep the originals away from the islands for protection purposes, preservation purposes, so that in case of natural disasters like typhoons and whatever, the films are protected, that your records are protected, all your films are protected. What we did in the original agreement was to send the originals to Honolulu to be maintained. However, if we need copies of the film we can get them for free. I think I've sent close to a 100 of our originals to Honolulu. We also film for the court land records and other records that belonged to the court—birth certificates, death

certificates, and other records. We've done microfilming for the Department of Labor and Immigration on all the entry permits for all the tourists and visitors that come to the CNMI.

Siemer: Back how far?

Rosario: Back to the 1970s. However, due to financial constraint, they cannot continue. We've been approached by CPA, Commonwealth Ports Authority, and other departments and agencies of the government to microfilm the records like the Marianas Housing Authority, former MIHA. We've done it for them. However, in the absence of a law, I cannot stop anybody from doing whatever they wanted with their files. So I went to the Governor and asked him if they could include in the language [of legislation] that copies of all meetings of committees, commissions, boards, whatever, and all publications funded by the CNMI government, that that they should be made available to me. The Governor, having the experience of working in Washington before, was very supportive, and he issued an order that everybody should cooperate and send copies of the minutes, three copies of each, to the Archives, as well as other publications. So, I'm getting copies of most of the publications. Every now and then I have to call them up. When I go around the island and I find out that this department published something for their department, I will remind them of the law. If they don't want to cooperate, I will tell them that under the law, I am entitled to get three copies. I don't really use that to my advantage. But if I have to, that's the law that I use. So now we have copies of the three constitutional conventions. I was also very instrumental in getting [an archive provision] into the public law that called for the Third Constitutional Convention, and now all the originals and the Xerox copies are here for the Third Constitutional Convention. The Covenant negotiation and the Covenant records were donated by some members of the community, as well as the law firm of Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering. Also, we continue to receive other materials and publications from the different departments and agencies of the CNMI Government. And the most interesting part is whenever somebody dies and that individual served at one point in time in the Legislature or the Municipal Council, as a Mayor, Village Commissioner, the government will first pull up the Archives to check if this individual truly served as an official. On several occasions, the government made an error and granted a state funeral to people who lost in the election. But that is the importance of an Archives—to maintain government records. And we are frequently requested for many records, like birth certificates, especially the Japanese land transactions. Through these records, I found out that Chamorros were selling lands back in the 1930s. So the issue of land alienation and selling of lands is nothing new. It started back in the 1930s.

Willens: I would like to conclude the interview by asking you some fairly general questions about how the Commonwealth has developed over the last 20 years. How do you think the Covenant has served as a mechanism for defining the relationship between the United States and the Commonwealth?

Rosario: Honestly speaking, the Covenant is a good document. It is not a perfect document. It is a document that has been negotiated between two governments—the Northern Marianas and the United States government. It is the people who implement the Covenant maybe that didn't implement it the way it should be, according to the intent of the Covenant. If there are problems, then it is the people who are responsible. In the case of the Northern Marianas, if they have deviated or they did not understand fully the intent and the ramifications of the Covenant, then they're not the ones who are being honest.

Willens: Are there some examples you have in mind of misunderstandings about the Covenant?

- Rosario: Our people are talking self-government. Our people are saying that United States has no business exercising control of immigration, minimum wage, and other stuff, you know. I hope they go back and read the Covenant. The United States can come in. There are certain sections within the Covenant where the United States has authority. Of course, there is the so-called mutual consent. But problems with immigration, for example—the United States is not crazy. Way back, during the Japanese Administration, we were the minority because of the fact that there were over 60,000 Japanese here versus 3,000 Chamorros. The intent of the Northern Marianas to run its own government is very noble, very intelligent. I think it should be respected because that was the decision of our people. But we are now the minority in our very own land. There are over 20,000 Filipinos versus 18,000 Chamorros. No wonder the United States government is concerned, because we don't know when to say no. Are we going to continue to import non-resident workers, are we going to continue to develop, and knowing that we don't have the resources, the people, are we going to continue to have problems with the federal government? I think that some of our leaders do not understand. While I do respect their decisions, the intent for the Marianas running its own government and becoming commonwealth is to see to it that the people themselves improve their lives.
- Siemer: Do you think their lives have been improved?
- Rosario: To a certain extent. But my question is, what will happen to those small kids who are growing up? We have given away the private sector.
- Siemer: In what respect?
- Rosario: If you go to every hotel on the island, I would like to ask this question: how many Chamorros and Carolinians are being employed? If you go to every village on the island, you don't see the mom and pop stores that you saw before. They're either run by Chinese or by Koreans. If you go to almost any business development on the island, it is the same. Look at the Koreans who are very aggressive. They've taken over all the local stores in Saipan—the small stores, the mom and pop stores that you used to see on the islands.
- Willens: Well, there's some suggestion that the local community is no longer interested in running small businesses and that they have achieved a degree of economic success that doesn't require them to engage in those businesses. Do you disagree with that point?
- Rosario: I disagree with that for the reason that our very own leaders betrayed their own people. I think that if the Marianas leaders were honest in controlling economic development, they would look at the people first, the local people first. I'm not saying the Northern Marianas is only for Chamorros and Carolinians. Free enterprise is very important in improving economic development, but to a certain extent you protect your people.
- Siemer: So is it your view that the economic development proceeded too aggressively?
- Rosario: Very aggressively, without proper control and proper planning.
- Willens: That's a political issue that was within the reach of the local community to address, was it not?
- Rosario: Yes, but, you know, we always talk about not following the footsteps of Honolulu and Guam, and look at where we are today. There should be control over the number of non-resident workers in the Northern Marianas. Here we are after the booming of the economic development in the early 1980s. A lot of people were leasing lands, a lot of people were selling lands. Thousands and thousands of dollars were donated to the Bishop to renovate the Cathedral. You go there on Sunday now and ninety-nine percent of the people attending church services are Filipinos. Where are the local people? They know that

those church services are mostly Filipinos, so they go to other churches. What protection were the local people given in the area of development when you invite Filipinos in who turn around and open up jobs, advertise job openings to bring in engineers, and bring in their very own families. I think that we should invite the United States to help us out, to be with us in planning how the CNMI government should address these concerns. But, you know, we have an attitude in the Northern Marianas that we don't want to be told. We don't want to seek professional advice. High school students are all of a sudden turned professional politicians. You know, we don't know the issues, we don't know the ramifications and the effects of these laws, and we just implement them for the sake of personal interests. It is very sad. I really admire John Babauta who is doing a great job in Washington. But because of personal conflict with the Governor, we have to hire lobbyists in Washington and pay them a million dollars to lobby for the CNMI Government, when we have our Washington rep in Washington. These are some of the problems that affect us.

Willens: How would you evaluate the way in which the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch have worked together over the last 15 years?

Rosario: It is very disgusting that people cannot work together.

Willens: To what do you attribute this?

Rosario: Well, I admired the Tenorio Administration in 1982 when he controlled the administration, and Ben Fitial, the Republican Party, controlled the Legislature. At the beginning the first Legislature was controlled by the Republicans, second Legislature by the Democrats. They never sit down and look at the issues confronting the Northern Marianas and work together. This was only done in 1982-83 when Ben Fitial, the late O.T.Borja, and the leaders of the Legislature would go to the Governor and ask him: "What are the goals or what did we promise in our platform?" You know: "What must we address in these two years?" If you look at 1982-1983, the Third Legislature, there were 107 laws signed. I am not saying that the more laws that are signed the better the Legislature is, but that is a good example of two branches working together, addressing the concerns and the needs of the CNMI. I am very saddened by what's happening now with the Legislature and the Governor. Of course it is only healthy that you have two parties each running a branch, balancing government by means of one party voting one branch and the other approving or vetoing, so that you can go through the complete process of passing laws and seeing that the concerns of the community are addressed. I look at it as personal interest comes first. In the last more than 10 years, people who were in control were afraid that if they pass this law, it would affect their relatives, it will affect their party, it will affect their business friends. They were not looking at general concerns that will be of advantage to the CNMI in the future.

Willens: Do you see any promising developments on the political front, for example the development of a younger, better-educated electorate that might bring about change?

Rosario: I hope it comes soon. I was very impressed with the delegates to the Third Constitutional Convention. I think we had the cream of the crop. I was very impressed with the election results. That was an outstanding group of people. But then what happened to the proposals that were put out? Part of our culture is not trusting one another, being jealous of who is in control.

Willens: You think that's what influenced the vote on the proposed amendments?

- Rosario: Yes. I couldn't believe that those people who did not serve in the Constitutional Convention would go out and destroy the work of the Constitutional Convention and throw away millions of dollars that was spent to put the Constitutional Convention together. I mean, what a disgrace. I am not saying that all of the proposals were addressed properly, but most of the problems that were affecting the government were addressed in the [proposed] amendments, so that the infighting between the local government and the central government would be stopped, something that will continue, and will never be solved, no matter who the governor is.
- Willens: You are referring to the political conflict between Tinian and Rota on the one hand as opposed to Saipan?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Do the people on Saipan realize that there is a misallocation of political authority that gives Tinian and Rota more power than they might have?
- Rosario: I guess they didn't realize that before. It is only now that they are seeing it happening, the minority islands who contribute barely nothing to the coffers of the CNMI government are controlling the government. I think Tinian and Rota are very powerful, and while I do respect whoever drafted the [original] provisions, the problems create this mess, I hope that this will be addressed in the future. Because like I said earlier, no matter who you put up there, Tinian and Rota are too powerful. No wonder they're for gambling. I hope they will succeed, something that has failed so far.
- Willens: Any other thoughts you have about the way in which the Commonwealth has developed?
- Rosario: Like I said earlier, the Covenant and the Constitution were well-prepared, well written out. Whoever is in control, like I said earlier, I guess did not follow the intent of the Constitution and the Covenant. I am very much disturbed knowing that my kids might not be able to own lands in the future because of the fact that lands are given out by the government, and there is no control in the development. No guarantee for our people to be placed in the private sector. To be honest with you, I hope that U.S. Immigration comes in. Because we failed. But if the U.S. Immigration is in control, I think that all these problem with the non-resident workers and problems with immigration will be solved. I have lost confidence in our government. When I was looking at the statistics, there were more than 200 Filipinos who come to Saipan every month, and that is very alarming, that is very disturbing. Because we are not addressing the problems, we are not preparing the Commonwealth for the future of the residents of the Northern Marianas. We have given away the private sector. That was not the intent of self-government, of Marianas pulling away from Micronesia. They are now laughing at us, because they were very careful in their negotiation, and I think that they learned a lot. I am not blaming the Status Commission; they did a wonderful job. But whoever is in control of the government destroyed the intent of our very own people. It is very sad. I talked to Ed Pangelinan, and he totally agreed with my comments. I remember coming to the Grand Hotel one night when my group was asked to entertain, and a Japanese came to me and was asking who are those people standing at the front of the hotel? They're all from Bangladesh. About ten of them have taxis. They have businesses. The Japanese were asking "Where are the Chamorros?" I am not being a racist here, or being prejudiced to outsiders, but I don't think we planned well. Planning has been the biggest problem in our government. We didn't prepare ourselves for the future.

Willens: We thank you for that very, very strong and heartfelt statement. You raised some very important issues that are widely shared throughout the community. We would like to thank you very much for being available. You have been very helpful and we appreciate it very much.