

## INTERVIEW OF JOHN S. DEL ROSARIO

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

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- Willens: John Del Rosario has a distinguished history in politics, journalism, and the arts. John, we explained off the record what we're doing, and I know you have some familiarity with our work here in the Commonwealth. We appreciate your being available to be interviewed. Could we begin by asking you when and where you were born.
- Rosario: I was born on Saipan on April 20, 1949.
- Willens: Who were your parents?
- Rosario: My father was Juan Rosario; he is deceased. My mother is still alive Magdalena M. Sablan, now Manahane.
- Willens: Were each of your parents also born in the Northern Marianas?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: How far back do those families go?
- Rosario: Way back, Howard.
- Willens: Back into the 19th century?
- Rosario: Sure.
- Siemer: On Saipan?
- Rosario: Yes. My great-great-grandmother is from Truk. Otherwise, all my other ancestors are Chamorro.
- Willens: Came over from Truk during the Spanish time?
- Rosario: Spanish time, yes.
- Willens: Could you tell us where you received your education. Where did you begin?
- Rosario: I went to Chalan Kanoa Elementary School, now WSR, for elementary school. Then I went to Hopwood when it was a high school Hopwood High School, now a junior high school. Then I attended one year at the University of Guam.
- Willens: When did you graduate from high school?
- Rosario: 1968.
- Willens: And then you went to Guam the following year?
- Rosario: No. I was in the Jesuit Seminary.
- Willens: How many years did you spend there?
- Rosario: One. While going to school at the University of Guam for one year. I got trained education in journalism at the Department of Defense School of Journalism, Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Willens: You went into the service then after the one year in Guam?
- Rosario: No, it was a special arrangement.

- Siemer: How did it work?
- Rosario: It was arranged by the Department of Interior through the Trust Territory. Finishing a three-month program of journalism courses is equivalent to about two semesters. Everything is crammed in. You spend one whole week writing leads, one whole week writing bridge; you learn how to take pictures, develop them, print them.
- Siemer: How did you get into journalism to begin with?
- Rosario: It was an accident really. It was not something that I dreamed of when I was in high school. In fact, I really wanted to be a lawyer. But I started out as a deejay at the old Garapan Radio Station KJQR. And above me as a deejay was Ben Fitial, who was the news director. When he left, I became news director, and that's how I started.
- Siemer: What year was that?
- Rosario: 1969, 1970, 1971. When Ben moved, he went to the Micronesia News Service. I worked with Jon Anderson. That's how I started out.
- Willens: That was a full-time job?
- Rosario: That's right.
- Willens: Was it part of MNS?
- Rosario: Micronesian News Service, MNS, yes. This provided coverage of the entire Trust Territory.
- Siemer: What kind of news programming did the station have back then?
- Rosario: Voice of America, AP, UPI. We had to drive all the way to Kagman to get it, and we'd rush down about 4:00 p.m., prepare it and then go on the air.
- Willens: You were doing primarily the air portion? Were you involved in the writing and publication of the Micronesian Reporter? There were numerous publications, weren't there, put out by the TTPI?
- Rosario: Yes. I never donated anything to the Micronesian Reporter. There was a Trust Territory publication, a newsletter. I forget what the name was. But that's where most of the issues that we'd write about went in subsequent weeks.
- Willens: How long did you stay with the TTPI in that capacity?
- Rosario: About two or three years. Then I moved to the Congress of Micronesia.
- Willens: When was that approximately?
- Rosario: About 1971.
- Willens: What was your job there?
- Rosario: Public information intern.
- Willens: How long did you stay there?
- Rosario: I think I stayed there for about three years, until the Trust Territory moved to Pohnpei. I would have moved, but I didn't want to go. I much preferred staying here and watching the curtain come down.
- Willens: Did they move before the Covenant was signed? It was after separate administration came into place, wasn't it?
- Rosario: After, yes.

- Willens: So that would have been probably sometime late in 1976 or 1977.
- Rosario: 1977.
- Willens: Something like that.
- Rosario: Yes. In 1977 I moved on to the Marianas District Legislature as a public information officer.
- Willens: How long did you stay there, just to get this complete?
- Rosario: Until 1983, 1984.
- Willens: Then what?
- Rosario: I became editor of the Commonwealth Examiner. After about three months they never paid me, so I went back to the Legislature.
- Willens: What was the Commonwealth Examiner?
- Rosario: It was a weekly paper, just like the Variety. It used to be a weekly paper. You can find it I think in the Archives. It was put out by Oscar Rasa.
- Willens: Oh, I see. But it was unable to succeed commercially?
- Rosario: No, it was actually doing well until they sold it to Luis Benavente, the former Vice Speaker. It would have flown, have made it, but politics and business do not mix at all. So it never made it. Finally folded I think several years ago.
- Willens: Where did you go next then in terms of your employment?
- Rosario: I went back to the Senate and worked with Pete P. Tenorio, who was President of the Senate.
- Willens: With Pete P. Tenorio?
- Rosario: Yes. The late Oly Borja and Julian Calvo were subsequent Presidents.
- Willens: That would have been what? The Second or Third Commonwealth Legislature?
- Rosario: Second, Third, Fourth.
- Willens: Second, Third and Fourth?
- Rosario: Yes, around that area.
- Willens: And that was a full-time job, wasn't it?
- Rosario: Sure.
- Willens: What were your specific responsibilities?
- Rosario: Just coverage of the activities of the Legislature, like sessions, bills that go through, resolutions. I made sure that these things got to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations.
- Willens: So your role was to serve as sort of a public information officer for the Legislature?
- Rosario: Yes. In 1975, I was with the Micronesian Constitutional Convention. I worked with Fred Kluge before the Marianas Convention. In fact, as the thing was closing down, then the first Marianas Constitutional Convention started. I was offered a job there but it became anticlimactic. I was far more interested in the big one than the small one.
- Willens: What kind of work did you do for this 1975 Micronesian Constitutional Convention?

- Rosario: Same thing. We covered everything that happened on the Convention floor and in the committee meetings. That's where we found out what Palau wanted, what the Marianas wanted. The Marianas were saying adios at the time. Of course, the Covenant was approved in 1975, right?
- Willens: Yes.
- Rosario: The late Joe Dela Cruz was the last one who said thank you, we're leaving. Then we watched the power play between Palau, Pohnpei, the eastern Carolines and the Marshalls, Truk. If anything divided them, it was money. Palau had more revenue, more so than Truk. The Marshalls had more money, and they weren't willing to come in either. They wanted to keep everything for themselves, just like us. So you find the three areas with the most revenue saying no, we don't want to be with you.
- Willens: Just to bring the employment up to the present, John, did there come a time then when you left the Commonwealth Legislature? Did you stop working there at some point in the 1980s?
- Rosario: Yes. I went to work for the Administration.
- Willens: Governor Pete P. Tenorio's Administration?
- Rosario: Yes. I stayed there about two years. Then I worked for Larry Guerrero for one more year. Then I went back to the Legislature, the Eighth Legislature, as staff director for the Legislature. Then I retired.
- Willens: But you're not. You're still working, as I understand it, in many different capacities.
- Rosario: Yes, still working.
- Willens: You're still writing for the *Marianas Variety*.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: How long have you written for the *Variety*?
- Rosario: Since 1972, I think.
- Willens: Since the very beginning?
- Rosario: Yes. Then Mike Malone and I started our own paper, the Pacific Star, Marianas Star, something like that. And you know how it is when it is under-funded. Then it folded. I went back to the *Variety*. And I've stayed since then.
- Willens: And now you have some employment in private business?
- Rosario: I now work for Tan Holdings.
- Willens: What are your responsibilities there?
- Rosario: Public affairs, really. Strange thing, we're in charge of the *Tribune* now, and I still write for the *Variety*. Eventually I will move if they decide that they want to go on with the newspaper.
- Siemer: So you'll move to the *Tribune* if they decide to continue?
- Rosario: If they decide to do so. If not, I'm going to stay with the paper. I've been there for a long time.
- Willens: The *Variety*?
- Rosario: Yes. It means a lot to me.

- Willens: You certainly covered a lot of ground since the late 1960s.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Let's go back then to the period in the late 1960s and the early 1970s when you working for the TTPI in these capacities. Were you active politically with respect to one of the two Marianas parties?
- Rosario: I was born into a political family, my grandfather being Elias P. Sablan. But I know that my family has gone into what I call a hierarchical burnout, you know, it peaks, then it drops down. Some of my cousins have become doctors. I became a writer.
- Siemer: Non-political.
- Rosario: Non-political.
- Willens: Your grandfather was then strongly aligned with the Territorial Party.
- Rosario: Right. In fact, he was the one who started out this commonwealth idea.
- Willens: Did you know him? Do you have any recollections of your conversations with him about the Marianas and commonwealth as a possible status?
- Rosario: He mentioned that thing a lot, because I was already in high school. He said rather than be reintegrated (because he opposed reintegration) we would rather do annexation, which is commonwealth. Why should we stop by Guam? Let's go take it further. Let's go right to the horse's mouth and ask them if we could join.
- Willens: As you finished your education and began working at the TTPI, did you personally have views as to whether the Marianas should proceed independently from the rest of Micronesia?
- Rosario: I was pro-Micronesia unity.
- Willens: Did that put you at odds with many of your colleagues in the community?
- Rosario: Yes. Not necessarily the Party, but with a lot of my peers. Because I was dreaming a big dream, you know, the task for nation-building. I was more nationalistic than provincial. I fully believed it could be made to work on a theoretical basis.
- Siemer: Did you think it would work on an economic basis?
- Rosario: No. That's where we got stuck, because it really boiled down to dividing the pie. And we weren't willing to do that. Later on I appreciated why this thing happened it as happened. Because we've always been very different from the rest of Micronesia.
- Willens: Well, could you elaborate a little bit on that? Different in what respects?
- Rosario: We have been exposed far more than anybody in Micronesia to the West, the United States. The military was here, they built these roads, they gave scholarships. People who are older than I were going to Guam, going to the College of Guam, all that. So exposure to the West, as I said, we had greater exposure. And it was difficult backtracking to the traditional system.
- Willens: Was anyone urging that there be a backtracking to a traditional system?
- Rosario: No, but I know that our people are very adaptable. When the Navy came in and started teaching us how to use typewriters, that was a top job here; if you're a clerk, you're number one. During intermediate school, at Saipan Intermediate High School, if you learn how to type and then get a job as a clerk in the office, you're considered very successful. Then things changed as computers come, everything else changed.

- Siemer: But the Chamorros did seem to adapt more quickly than, for example, people in Pohnpei or Truk. They seemed to quickly understand what was coming next and how to adapt and seemed to be more accepting of change than some of the other areas. What do you think?
- Rosario: Sure. That's because we don't have the royal system.
- Siemer: Oh, you think that's the reason?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: You mean the lack of a strong clan or royal system?
- Rosario: Clan system. Unlike Pohnpei, where you find education clashing with tradition. For example, this kid went to California, came back, and said, "Wait a minute, this land is my land. There's no longer communal land. I want my own land." These are the kinds of conflicts that you find between us and them.
- Siemer: So there was not a communal land holding system here like there was there?
- Rosario: No, it's more family land. As we become more educated and individualistic, we're saying no, no, give me my land. But then there are a lot of occasions where we come back and share everything with the family. Like killing a cow, for instance, brings a whole family together. A pig, you know, barbeque. So this is where I've been finding myself often in personal conflict, where I look back at these things and I said it worked then, how would it work now.
- Willens: You mean the family traditions or... .
- Rosario: Communal system. That's right, the family system.
- Willens: Well, when you were assisting the Congress in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, would you attend the sessions regularly?
- Rosario: Sure. I did that with the Micronesian News Service, until I moved.
- Willens: We happen to have spent a considerable amount of time last week reviewing the journals of the Congress of Micronesia in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. It was fascinating reading, but one could see there some of the economic and other issues that divided the representatives. Did you have a sense as you listened to those debates that your idea of nation-building had some very serious obstacles?
- Rosario: No, not until later on. At that time, in the 1960s, I had just started high school.
- Willens: In the early 1970s then.
- Rosario: Yes, I had a feeling, because I had heard it at the local level, that we wanted to go alone. I was fighting that, you know, because John Sablan and some of the older leaders were saying: "I think it's best that we stay in the union versus pulling out." But like you said, economics just divided everybody.
- Willens: Did you think that there were steps that the Micronesian leaders might have taken at that time to placate the Northern Marianas leadership and persuade them to stay?
- Rosario: No. But one thing they did approve that really infuriated the entire Marianas community was the one percent tax.
- Siemer: I read the debate about that. Every Marianas representative told them that was a mistake.
- Rosario: Sure.

- Siemer: But it seemed like, particularly in the House, Lazarus Salii was determined he was going to do it regardless of the Marianas dissent.
- Rosario: He became very violent then.
- Siemer: Why did the rest of the Micronesian leaders think it was such a good idea to go ahead when there was such strong opposition here?
- Rosario: I can't answer that question, because when those issues started popping out, I was a reporter for the radio station, so I didn't have a full grasp of what was coming down the pike. But then later on, it manifested itself in the Micronesian Constitutional Convention that money is the key.
- Siemer: Then you could see it clearly.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: Even between them you could see it.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Was that one percent tax one of the legislative issues that precipitated the burning?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: It was passed just before the burning of the Legislature.
- Willens: Do you know in fact who engaged in that act of arson? You don't have to name a name, but do you know the person or persons?
- Rosario: Yes. This guy died in an accident, a young guy, paid by somebody, some of the politicians here.
- Siemer: What happened at the time that the Legislature was burned down? Did that have a significant impact on the leaders from the rest of Micronesia?
- Rosario: I would think so, yes. They were beginning to feel that they were not wanted here. Such action speaks clearly that, "We didn't approve of what you did." The NTTU was here, the Navy was here, Interior eventually came in. There was no tax. The minimum wage was very low. A lot of it is subsistence living. "And you want to tax us one percent?"
- Siemer: Well, actually a very high percentage of all the wage earners in the Trust Territory were in Saipan.
- Rosario: Yes. That was the cream of the crop.
- Siemer: There were relatively few people anywhere else who would have been affected by this tax is that right?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: The other thing that came up at that session was a demand for a tax on tourists, particularly hotel occupancy. The Marianas representatives seemed to think that was also directed only at the Marianas. What was your view?
- Rosario: This is the only place that had any form of tourism, however undeveloped at the time.
- Willens: Was there some difference among the districts about economic development?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Did the other districts not favor economic development, or was it simply a question of pace?

- Rosario: No, I would think it was the clan system, the old land tenure system, that held them back. You go to Truk today, you must have seen it. I bet you it's the same thing that I saw in 1982 tin shacks, the only thing that changed was the paved road. Because it is very hard to give collateral on land that belongs to an entire clan, about 100-some people. Here it's divided up into families, then it's further divided among children.
- Willens: Senator Borja seemed to be a very outspoken advocate of economic development in the years that he was in the Congress. Was that your impression at the time?
- Rosario: Yes. He was the only one who had worked as an economic development officer.
- Willens: Is that where he began in the Trust Territory?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Was that at the district level?
- Rosario: District level.
- Willens: And he also was in business at the time?
- Rosario: Yes. Small store Carmen Safeway.
- Willens: Some of the other leaders from other districts seemed to think that economic development carried with it a serious threat to their local patterns.
- Rosario: In my view, everything is a serious threat to the FSM where there's the royal system the fact that they're sending their kids to the United States to go to school.
- Willens: Are they coming back?
- Rosario: They're coming back, and those who come back make it to the top. Then you begin asking yourself: "This is the value system that I learned going to four years of college, which conflicts with the communal system. How do we resolve that?" You have to bribe the kings there to get anything done.
- Willens: Reportedly that's being done.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Well, some of the speeches by the members of the Congress in the late 1960s and the early 1970s were very eloquent in the sense that they wanted to be Micronesians. They did not want to be Americans. They wanted to build their own nation, they wanted to be free of colonial rule, and they spoke with great passion.
- Rosario: Sure. That was the beginning too when the Peace Corps got here. For the first time we had lawyers. For the first time we had journalists, which the high commissioners did not necessarily enjoy. They even asked that they be eliminated in future recruitment. So that was the first exposure to being quoted, in sound-bites, for example.
- Willens: They liked that?
- Rosario: Yes. So they have to deliver speeches. It's good at the idealistic level, but when he goes home, it's back to square one. It's hard getting a nation, you know, off the ground. It's good for scholarly stuff.
- Willens: Who were some of the lawyers or consultants you remember playing an active role in the Congress when you were there in the early 1970s?
- Rosario: Mike White was there. Fred something.
- Willens: Not Fred Kluge?



- Rosario: Fred Kluge was.
- Willens: What's your understanding of Fred Kluge, whom we just met by coincidence last week? He's written extensively about this area, and quite critically I think, in some respects.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: You worked with him for a while?
- Rosario: I was with him in the Micronesian Constitutional Convention. He started the Micronesian News Service.
- Willens: He did?
- Rosario: Yes. He and one other guy, Dave, who's now in Ohio I think.
- Willens: Did he have political views at the time as to what ought to be built out of the Trust Territory?
- Rosario: I don't know. But for the first time this was a creature that he and Dave Alcho created, which gave the Micronesians the forum to say their piece. So I think he worked it between the administration and the Micronesian leaders.
- Willens: Well they could always say their piece in the Congress of Micronesia. But your point is the MNS gave them a public vehicle in which their speeches could be disseminated.
- Rosario: Yes, that's right. And it goes to all the radio stations in Micronesia, read in English as we wrote it, then translated into their native tongue. That was a big thing for us, the Micronesians, then, you know. This was the first experience with the media, what it can do.
- Willens: I was commenting about some of the speeches that were made in the Congress in terms of nation-building, whereas the Marianas representatives were speaking with equal eloquence about the values of the United States, the appeal of U.S. citizenship. What was the interest in U.S. citizenship back in those days, as you understood it? Why did people here value that?
- Rosario: I think it was economics more than anything else. I take that back a little. It's the opportunity that abounds by being with the strongest nation in the world. I think a lot of it too came from our parents being grateful that the United States came here during the War and saved us from becoming slaves of the Japanese. A lot of these old people that I've talked to, while they say that those were the good days, the golden days, at the same time they strongly resent how the Japanese treated them. They said that had they stayed, we would have become their slaves, just like they treated the Okinawans and Koreans and everybody else.
- Siemer: They actually brought the Okinawans and Koreans here so they didn't have to deal with the Chamorros. They didn't have to employ them. They didn't have to treat them with any respect at all.
- Rosario: That's right. We wanted to reintegrate with Guam because of the dollar. We were making 33 cents or 20 cents an hour; they were making a dollar an hour. That was \$8 a day, and that's a lot of money. We were more attuned to something that is American Coke, you know, things like that.
- Willens: It's amazing. And now you see that going on all over the world, I mean Coca Cola.
- Rosario: That's right. Coke was in China first.

- Willens: When you were at the Congress, I guess it was during that period of time that the Micronesian negotiations with the United States began and then the United States agreed to separate negotiations with the Northern Marianas in 1972. Do you remember having any personal reaction to those negotiations?
- Rosario: Yes. I was infuriated, because I was convinced then that it was best that we stayed within the six Micronesian districts.
- Willens: Did you write about that at the time? Did you publish any editorials or articles in the *Variety* at the time?
- Rosario: No, it was the Saipan Star or Marianas Star. Mike Malone and I were both anti-Covenant. But it was difficult, believe me, on a scale of 1 to 10, maybe 10% of 1%.
- Willens: What do you mean by that?
- Rosario: I mean on a scale of ten, you take number 1 and divide it up into ten, the tenth is ours. Everything else belongs to the other side.
- Willens: In terms of opposition to the Covenant?
- Rosario: Yes. It was difficult at the time.
- Siemer: Did you have any of the Peace Corps or other lawyers help you analyze the Covenant?
- Rosario: Yes, some of my Peace Corps friends. I've talked to Fred Kluge a lot.
- Siemer: He was still working here at the time?
- Rosario: I think so. Yes, he came back frequently.
- Siemer: Where else would you turn for help with respect to the Covenant and its likely outcomes?
- Rosario: Nowhere else, other than we would read it and try to interpret it. Our concern at the time was mostly information, balancing it out. The explanation of the Covenant, that's what we were concerned about. Not that we were anti-Covenant per se. We just wanted a balanced view. You know, look at it both ways. But it was hard. We didn't have the money. Ambassador Williams had \$50,000. We had \$10. It was difficult trying to balance things out.
- Siemer: During the time that the negotiations were going on, when the U.S. team would come here, how did you go about getting information about what was going on in those negotiations?
- Rosario: Well, when the negotiations started out, I was an administrative assistant. I recorded a lot of those meetings.
- Siemer: You recorded it on tape?
- Rosario: Yes. I don't know who the Commission later gave the tapes to. I think it's with the Archives or somebody. When it was done, I never used any of the information that I heard inside. I take that back. Only one thing that I took Steve Pangelinan and I found a note between the negotiators.
- Willens: What was it?
- Rosario: It's a note about Tinian land. It says our land is in this property, signed Oly Borja. Between him and Eddie Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero.
- Siemer: Our land is not in that property is what they said, or is?

- Rosario: Is.
- Willens: Who on the Marianas Political Status Commission did you know well? You remember some of the people? Ed Pangelinan, Ben Santos, Oly Borja, Joeten. After a year on the Commission, Joeten ...
- Rosario: Quit.
- Siemer: Were there people on the Commission with whom you were particularly friendly?
- Rosario: No. Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero were my bosses. We were still with the Congress of Micronesia.
- Siemer: Was anybody who was on the Commission a relative of yours?
- Rosario: Everybody there was my relative.
- Siemer: Well, close relative.
- Rosario: I would think somebody like the late Felix Rabauliman. Who else? That's it.
- Willens: Was there anyone on the Commission or the staff that kept you informed as to what was going on during the negotiations?
- Rosario: No. But I remember you [Willens] brought in a pile of legal materials in hard-bound folders or something like that. Then I will never forget this, Howard. Normally when you open a book you start from the front. That's the way we have been taught.
- Willens: From the front of the book.
- Rosario: Yes. You look at the table of contents, you know. But when you came in and started explaining how this thing is going to work, all the legal stuff, you went I think to Chapter Three or one of the chapters way in the back, and Dr. Palacios was pissed. He said: "Why are we starting from the back?"
- Willens: Did I have an explanation for that? I don't remember.
- Rosario: Yes, you did. They were ready to walk out. I said no, no, no. Maybe this lawyer is trying to screw us. No, no, no. In fact, it was Palacios who asked, "Mr. Willens, how come we are starting from the back?" I was just watching it and said: "Gee, wait for him to explain. Why are you pissed off already." And then you explained it and said this one is this, and this one relates to that, and went on. You said: "This is the way it's going to be." And he said: "Oh, okay, okay."
- Willens: Actually Dr. Palacios told me at one time that he had argued that the Commission should hire a lawyer who was not from the United States.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: To hire a lawyer from, if not the Soviet Union, maybe New Zealand, Australia or someplace else. Do you remember ever hearing any discussion about whether an American lawyer was appropriate?
- Rosario: Yes. They were suspicious of the CIA. You see, we didn't know about professional ethics at that time. That was a foreign subject for us. And so the fact that you come from the United States, they're thinking that you were passing information. And I know that I've heard this in some of the barbeques: "You know, we've got to be careful with Howard and Jay Lapin. Don't talk to them when you're drinking. Tonight before we go to sleep he's going to be calling Ambassador Williams." All these things. So those were the kinds of discussions that I heard among these guys when their tongues were loose from alcohol.

- Willens: Well, I had the sense, maybe I was naive, that their views changed on that over time.
- Rosario: That's right, that's right.
- Willens: That they came to have somewhat more confidence. I think what helped in that regard is that the United States delegation ...
- Rosario: You started asking questions to Ambassador Williams across the table because they kept referring to the Puerto Rico experience. You snapped right back and said: "Okay, tell us what are these Puerto Rico experiences that are applicable here or not applicable here." And I remember the Ambassador had diarrhea for three days. He couldn't talk to the Commission any more. He was at the Hafa Adai, cross-checking with Washington. You were very sharp, and you know I think in terms of baseball league, you were in the major league, and the Ambassador may be in the—what's the next league down?
- Siemer: Did people come to think that the sides were at least evenly matched so that the Marianas could present what it wanted and insist on that?
- Rosario: No. I didn't think they had that view that it was evenly matched. A lot of it was riding on his [Willens] shoulders and who's the economist?
- Willens: Jim Leonard.
- Rosario: Jim Leonard. See, they found out how sharp Howard Willens was in all those things, about negotiations. Because we didn't even know how to negotiate. The first time that anybody did anything on our side of our table was when you asked the Ambassador about his Puerto Rico position. So they started poking and saying: "Hey, see, I told you he's a super lawyer." So I don't know whether you knew that the entire delegation came to rely on you. Everything was on your shoulders.
- Siemer: What did they think of the quality of the people who were across the table with Ambassador Williams? What was their impression of them?
- Rosario: I wouldn't think they would know. None of us had ever tried to size up people. We took it as it comes.
- Siemer: Back then when you were looking at what was going on, what did you think about Ambassador Williams?
- Rosario: The only thing I found out was he was head of the Asia Foundation, an arm of the CIA. I don't know whether it's true or not. And I became very suspicious.
- Siemer: Suspicious that the CIA was somehow involved in the negotiations?
- Rosario: Yes. The CIA was a bad name here, even among Micronesians.
- Willens: Was that because of the NTTU facility or for some other reason?
- Rosario: I think for some other reason.
- Willens: I know later on in 1976 there were the allegations of CIA bugging of the Micronesian negotiations, and that really had an impact.
- Rosario: I remember I wrote that story, and it appeared on the front page of the *Washington Post*. From there on, anything about the CIA was no good out here. It was bad news.
- Willens: Some people we've talked to say that they were promised by the U.S. officials that they would be given the names of the people who actually did the bugging. But they tell us that those promises were not carried out. Did you ever hear more about what actually was done and who the people were?

- Rosario: No. That was it. It was beautiful the way they did it. It looked like an ABC crew coming in, with cameras and the whole works. We didn't know they were putting in bugging devices. Honest to God, if you look at that, if you were there to see how they did it, it was just like Ted Koppel coming in and saying: "Mr. Salii, I'd like to interview you on these things." And that camera was there rolling and the whole works. So everybody was convinced this was the ABC team. Nobody knew it was the CIA. From there on, that was the time that Mr. Salii said: "I don't want to see Mike Malone, I don't want to see Brian Farley. If you have anything to ask me about or anything newsworthy," and he told them straight, "I want John, I don't want to talk to any of you."
- Siemer: Because he was afraid that they might have CIA affiliations?
- Rosario: Yes. He became very cynical. I think, in the first place, Salii was just very suspicious.
- Siemer: With respect to all Americans?
- Rosario: Yes, except for Fred Kluge. They were good buddies.
- Willens: Who, Kluge and Salii?
- Rosario: Salii and Kluge were good buddies.
- Willens: Did Kluge have any official responsibility with respect to the Joint Committee on Future Status that Chairman Salii headed?
- Rosario: No.
- Willens: I didn't think so.
- Rosario: But he would come back here now and then and they would argue about a lot of things.
- Willens: At some point during the Micronesian negotiations, something called the Independence Coalition was developed, and Andon Amaraich and Tosiwo Nakayama, I guess, were among the people identified with it. Do you have any recollection as to what prompted the development of an independence group within the Congress of Micronesia as distinct from those who were advocating free association?
- Rosario: I think I can attribute that to the sense of nation-building. A lot of it was pride. They refused to allow change to come in. They wanted to keep everything to themselves. Because a freely associated state is one more step closer to the United States than an independent country.
- Siemer: Was the sense that independence would preserve the status quo better?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: And that free association might have some U.S. influences?
- Rosario: That's right, a lot of influence, outside influence.
- Willens: One gets the sense from some of the materials that the ordinary people in the Trust Territory might have been happy enough to stay in the Trust Territory for another decade or so. Is that wrong?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: What's your sense of that?
- Rosario: Staying as a Trust Territory?
- Willens: Yes. I mean not with respect to the Marianas, but with respect to the other districts, one gets the sense that they might have liked that.

- Rosario: Yes. And these are the educated Micronesians who have jobs with the government which is viewed by their people as making it to the top the American dream sort of. Moving here is an honor, to be selected among Micronesians. Just imagine Yap, Truk, all the districts, it is in the news. See, we ran stories about all these things people moving up here, so-and-so graduating from the University of Guam with a major in economics is now moving up to the Marianas, he's from Truk. So that got pretty well spread out.
- Siemer: There was a great siphoning off in those days of the educated Micronesians up here to Saipan to work in the TT Headquarters, wasn't there?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: So there were not many well-educated people with a broad perspective back home to sit in the villages and talk about what the options were.
- Rosario: No. You would find a lot of people like the late John Sablan, you know, self-made people. Who would we think about?
- Willens: There was Heine, Dwight Heine.
- Rosario: Heine. See, even those people finally were moved up here. I can't recall the names in Truk and Yap. But the best that they had were all up here, most of them.
- Siemer: Where they all fell under the influence of you Chamorros who were quickly moving ahead.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: But your sense is that some of the educated ones who worked here liked their jobs and might have been just as happy to let the political status negotiations go very slowly?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: One of the big issues here, of course, was how much of Tinian gets leased to the United States and on what terms. The PDN broke the story in May of 1973 with a headline about a foot high saying "Navy Seeks All of Tinian," and the Ambassador was very upset with that premature disclosure. Did you have any understanding of what exactly the U.S. was going to request for military purposes when that was unfolding?
- Rosario: No, not quite. But we started researching how much the United States was leasing from Spain, things like that. You want to find out if the value is anywhere near par. That is the only thing I remember.
- Willens: Did you have any opposition in principle to letting the land be used for that purpose?
- Rosario: No. I knew that one of the fringe benefits you have as part of the bigger government is the power of defense.
- Siemer: When you researched the value of the lease, what do you recall coming up with?
- Rosario: \$400 million for some air base in Italy or Spain, something like that. And I was saying \$33 million for Tinian? I didn't know much about real estate then, but we were comparing the size of land. We didn't know how important, you know, that land in Spain was versus Tinian next to the ocean, right in the middle of the ocean. How much is usable land.
- Siemer: Did you look at the bases in the Philippines?
- Rosario: We also heard of the Philippines, but I can't remember how much it was. \$300 million something.
- Siemer: So your sense at the time was that the Tinian deal was undervalued?

- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Joe Cruz was the member on the Commission from Tinian (one of the two members, but he was the most outspoken). What is your recollection of Joe Cruz as a politician?
- Rosario: Sharp. One of the sharpest. One of the most eloquent. I think his father was a mayor too at one time.
- Willens: There was a Cruz that came over from Yap.
- Rosario: Must be his father.
- Willens: Joe died before we could interview him. But I worked closely with him. That's why I'm asking specifically whether you have any recollections of Joe, either in the Congress of Micronesia or during the course of his service on the Commission.
- Rosario: I remember him in the Fifth District Legislature even before he was a member of the Status Commission. Joe Cruz was the first one to show the people of Tinian that we can get money from Saipan by way of appropriations. At the time, if you rated him versus everybody else who has occupied that seat, he outscored everybody. He would take thousands of dollars down to Tinian for certain projects that the people of Tinian wanted.
- Willens: Was he just effective in working out compromises with the Saipan leaders, or how exactly did he accomplish this?
- Rosario: Behind the scenes. I mean he was a very sharp tactician. If you still don't want to cave in to what he's asking for peacefully, he'll knock you out on the floor. He'll cuss you out on the floor. He could be very nasty, vulgar too.
- Willens: That too. Right.
- Siemer: Did the Cruz family come to Tinian from Yap, or were they already here?
- Rosario: I don't know. But his brother, the late Tony (the one that got killed in Guam) was one of the first college graduates that we had. Very sharp. He was our history teacher at Hopwood. Started the first free press on Saipan. That's when we vented our frustrations against the people on the Hill. He helped our understanding of what the newspaper business is all about.
- Willens: The people on Tinian seemed to be quite evenly divided during the negotiations as to whether they should agree to make the land available to the United States. Mayor Felipe Mendiola got elected and was a very strong opponent of the military lease, claiming that one-third was enough. Do you have any recollection of the politics on Tinian and how this got resolved?
- Rosario: On the smaller communities like Tinian and Rota, although you may be the mayor, people understand and know you very well inside out. So you may have power as the mayor, but on issues like that, we also want to put the brakes on you when we think it is required. People here are very accommodating. They were saying: "Well, if the United States wants this; let's give it to them for something else, in terms of reciprocity, like funding." You may be the leader on Tinian or Rota, but people know whether you brushed your teeth or you didn't brush your teeth. They'll let you be the mayor, but it doesn't necessarily mean that you have their support on all issues. I think they put the mayor in his place. I think he gained the reputation as a dictator of some sort.
- Willens: Who did?

- Rosario: Mendiola. Very dictatorial, autocratic.
- Siemer: He apparently was a very outspoken person.
- Rosario: Yes. People resented that, the power that he had. They resent the Manglonas now in Rota. They were getting to see that politics is no longer the way it used to be. But he took it for granted. Yes sir, things have changed.
- Siemer: Well there was an interesting situation on Tinian because, unlike Saipan where families had been here since the 1800s and had specific land claims that they had farmed for generations, on Tinian many people had come from Yap. Many families were evacuated by the Navy after the War from Yap to Tinian, and those people had been there a relatively short time on homesteads granted by the government. The Tinian island, so to speak, was not theirs. It had a different status it seemed than Saipan. Yet the Tinian people always talked about “their” land and what they were giving up for the Covenant.
- Rosario: Given the size of the population then, at the time, people would tell you: “What else do you want the land for.” You’re given 1500 square meters. What else do you need it for, other than maybe a small plot for agricultural purposes. Why are you being greedy, you know. And they have their saying in Chamorro: “You’re not going to take it with you to your grave when you die.
- Willens: There is a Chamorro saying to that effect?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Probably there’s a saying in every language to that effect.
- Rosario: “You’re going to pull that land down your grave? No.” They were different because of the fact that they came from Yap. It was a very small community. Everybody had land. So there was that sense of generosity, though split half-way. I think eventually when we started learning the value of land, that’s when everybody became greedy.
- Siemer: I remember Joe Cruz arguing to people: “What are you talking about? That’s not your momma’s land.”
- Rosario: Yes. And everybody knew that given the small land size of the Mariana Islands, pretty soon things are going to start to go up. I thought several years ago that if you were 13 years old, you won’t find any land any more. That’s why the Governor started these condo-type homesteads, beginning to address that.
- Willens: Do you think the homestead program makes sense?
- Rosario: It doesn’t. For \$50 the placement of the basic infrastructure is not factored in. The homesteader gets it for \$50. It’s never developed. Development comes years later. I think we should have done it the way it has been done in Guam and Hawaii, where the whole thing is in place water, sewer, power, roads, the whole works. Okay, you can have it, but for \$30,000. You have to pay for it. But see, this homestead program became very controversial because the lots were never developed. People who had land were given another homestead. If, for instance, you were my kids and of age or married, you could apply for homesteads. If they know that I have 60,000 hectares of land, they won’t give it to you because your father has land. “Why don’t you ask him for land?” It’s the mix of everything that you don’t want can’t even imagine. There’s a lot of scandal in it. I bet you we can go into the Division of Land now and find a lot of it.
- Willens: Going back to 1974, there was an election for the Congress of Micronesia where both Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero were defeated. They were defeated by Oscar Rasa



and Pete A. Tenorio, who were running under the Territorial Party label. Some people remember that political status was an issue in that campaign and that the Territorial Party was arguing that the negotiations should be slowed down and that the Popular Party leadership was going too fast. Do you have any recollection of that campaign which brought Oscar Rasa into elected office for the first time?

Rosario: Oscar. I remember he ran. I think basically that is it the need to slow it down. But the Territorial Party had new and younger leadership who were far more broad minded, like Oscar. A lot of it too was personality. Pete has a stronger personality. He's better spoken in public.

Siemer: Pete A.?

Rosario: Yes. Oscar too.

Siemer: Oscar was a good speaker, wasn't he?

Rosario: Yes. And he knew the power of the press and used it a lot radio, electronic media, print media. He knew how to work the emotions of the voters.

Willens: You were still working for the TTPI, as I understand it.

Rosario: Yes.

Willens: You didn't go to the Commonwealth Legislature until 1977, so you were still working for the Trust Territory?

Rosario: Yes.

Willens: You spoke to me the other day about the fact that a lawsuit was filed by Congressman Mafnas the day before the Covenant was to be signed. Do you have any understanding as to why that lawsuit was filed and who funded it?

Rosario: I think it was funded by the Congress of Micronesia. It goes back to what they were saying: "Let's slow this thing down. Let's get to understand what it is." That was basically it, I think, to slow down the progress of the negotiations.

Willens: For the historical record, can you describe that Saturday morning event in court where Mike White and I had to argue before High Court Judge Burnett? Were you there?

Rosario: I was.

Willens: Was it crowded?

Rosario: Yes, it was crowded. I think 99.9% were your crowd.

Willens: How had people heard about the fact of the lawsuit?

Rosario: I think it was pretty well publicized.

Siemer: Was it on the radio?

Rosario: Yes. For those in the community, they wanted to see what a top-notch lawyer looked like versus a not-so-top-notch lawyer. Ted Mitchell told me that the top one percent lawyer was on the left side, the bottom one percent on the right side. You weren't even half-way done, when the Judge smacked the gavel and said this case is dismissed.

Willens: Do you have any recollection of how Congressman Mafnas behaved? Did he do anything during the hearing?

Rosario: He was furious. He knew he was an underdog the minute you started talking. He knew that you knew your stuff. Mike wasn't quite sure of his stuff, you know, the legal aspects of

this whole thing. Especially when you said he has as much right to oppose it as the people who are in favor of the Covenant. He has the right to contest it.

Willens: After the Covenant was signed then, did you affiliate yourself with Oscar Rasa and those who were opposing the Covenant?

Rosario: Yes. In fact, I attended the signing ceremony. What was the event at Susupe? Covenant Day or something?

Willens: There was. Well, the signing was on February 15 at Mt. Carmel, and Oscar Rasa and Felix Rabauliman did not show up for the signing. But then there was a period of about four months before the plebiscite, and Plebiscite Commissioner Canham was appointed to supervise it.

Rosario: I was with Oscar.

Siemer: Once the Covenant was ready for signing, do you recall talking with Oscar about whether he should sign or not?

Rosario: Oh, yes. I was with him that day. He was making fun of the importance of self-sufficiency, because he was planting some tomatoes outside the house. He said: "John, this is better because I can eat tomorrow, but signing that, I don't know whether I can eat tomorrow."

Siemer: Did Oscar consider signing the Covenant?

Rosario: I don't think so.

Siemer: He was always opposed?

Rosario: Yes.

Siemer: How about Felix Rabauliman? Did he consider signing?

Rosario: I think he just basically followed what Oscar said, because they were neighbors in San Jose. Oscar was very powerful in the Carolinian community, especially the leadership people like the late Dr. Kaipat, some of the key players then. He was very well-accepted.

Siemer: Once the Covenant was signed and there was now going to be some political education, what did you think ought to be done in the political education campaign?

Rosario: Now I believe even if you did what they wanted, nobody would pay attention. There was always this complaint about there's not enough explanation.

Siemer: This is a very common thread, yes.

Rosario: Sure. There's not enough explanation.

Siemer: Not enough time.

Rosario: But then you have to understand how Chamorros go to meetings, okay. We come to a meeting, only a few people are inside, most are on the louvers outside. Anybody want to ask a question? No, sir. Quiet. We say what we disagree with when the meeting is over. I gave up on those guys, even if I have to explain this Covenant one more time, no, no, no. They did what they did. It's sufficient for me.

Siemer: What was your impression at the time the Covenant was signed about popular support for it?

Rosario: I knew that it would be overwhelming.

Siemer: You knew that from the outset?

- Rosario: Yes. The old folks wanted it. A lot of the younger ones wanted it. The question was, if you don't want commonwealth, then what else do you want that has the same substance as contained in the Covenant. You don't have an alternative. So I kept my mouth shut after that. It was approved. I really think the Covenant negotiators did a very good job.
- Siemer: Why do you think Oscar spent so much time opposing it during the public education campaign?
- Rosario: Oscar too had some measure in his personality as a manipulator.
- Siemer: But Oscar must have known what you knew, which was that there was overwhelming public support. Oscar was a smart fellow.
- Rosario: Yes, that's true.
- Siemer: But if you knew that there was overwhelming public support so you decided to withdraw, why did Oscar decide to step up with very vigorous opposition?
- Rosario: I think he understood people's issues, for instance, war claims, minimum wage. He understood more so than anybody else did. Because he came back, I think, several years later and he compared notes. Minimum wage was one, war claims was another. I think there was a list of ten that he had.
- Siemer: You're right. He had a list of 14 things that he wanted renegotiated.
- Rosario: Some of which you just can't go through because the negotiations were done already. You would have done a lot of good if you'd formerly submitted these things.
- Siemer: My question is more about the politics of the time. Oscar was an excellent politician and understood how people could be appealed to. And here he is faced with overwhelming support for the Covenant, yet as a politician he went out and opposed it. Why did that make sense from a political standpoint?
- Rosario: Let's see if I understand the question. I think Oscar had visions of what he wanted later on. I think he was using it as sort of testing the water.
- Siemer: For his own popularity?
- Rosario: Yes. I think that was more. See, I think he had visions of running for Governor, and he would have been Governor if this thing on the casino gambling hadn't popped up. He would have made it. He would have literally walked in.
- Willens: That would have been when?
- Rosario: 1981. He had the entire community convinced. You know, as Speaker of the First Legislature. We basically spent 24 hours together, writing news releases where attributions were made by saying: "According to Speaker Rasa" or "Speaker Rasa said", and that dominated the print media.
- Willens: But let's speak of the House of Representatives, just leaping ahead in time for a moment. That changed in 1977. The Democrats I guess took over the House of Representatives.
- Siemer: In 1977?
- Willens: No, in 1979. Oscar was Speaker in the First Legislature, but then there was a turnaround at least in the lower house.
- Rosario: When the First Legislature overrode the veto of the casino gambling bill.
- Willens: What happened? Could you spell that out?

- Rosario: Then the FBI investigation came in (I think) after the override.
- Siemer: There was a bill favoring casino gambling?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: That the Governor vetoed.
- Rosario: Yes. Carlos Camacho vetoed. Then it was overridden.
- Willens: So the FBI investigation started during the First Legislature then?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: I see. So that might have been a partial explanation for the Democrats then gaining a majority in the Second Legislature in the Lower House?
- Rosario: Yes. And there was also that part of the media that was anti-Rasa, and they played it up real well.
- Willens: You mentioned earlier that you did attend the 1975 Micronesian Constitutional Convention. I've read that the Palauan Delegation came in at the beginning of the Convention with certain specified demands. What's your recollection of that?
- Rosario: I think it had to do with money and the location of the Micronesian headquarters.
- Willens: They wanted it in Palau?
- Rosario: In Palau. I'm not quite sure what else. Oh, they wanted free association. I can't recall all the items; it was ten non-negotiable demands. That just made it impossible for the rest to follow.
- Willens: Had your views changed by then in terms of trying to keep all the other districts together?
- Rosario: Yes, knowing that it's commonwealth coming up. I was basically there to do my job. I knew then that even the Marshalls really wanted out. But Palau started the move. They are like us. We were pretty similar in some ways. A lot of the people were educated in the States and all that.
- Siemer: The Palauans?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Siemer: They also had some interest in tourism at the time and probably had a better opportunity at that than the other areas in Micronesia, didn't they?
- Rosario: That's right. Both Palau and the Marianas are really fortunate geographically. Very close to Asia. The rest what else is there?
- Siemer: What do you recall the Marianas Delegates doing in that 1975 Micronesian Constitutional Convention?
- Rosario: I think we stuck around because we had not been separated legally. It was more a gesture of friendship because it was held here. But everybody knew the writing on the wall.
- Siemer: So politically it was not important?
- Rosario: No. The only reason why I stuck around was because of my job. Secondly, I wanted to find out more about the chiefs that were here, their role. Interesting how they tried to fit it in with a republican form of government. Those are the things that came to mind. I would spend several hours with Chief Mwiti.

- Willens: What's the name?
- Rosario: Mwiti. I think he died a long time ago already. In one of his speeches he was saying: "We are fighting here to create a constitution. I come from a village in Truk that had a constitution a long time ago." It's true. They had a constitution. They produced it. A clan system and a constitution? And it's almost disrespectful as a journalist, being Micronesian myself, trying to pry or probe how do you fit these things together.
- Siemer: What did you conclude about how they fit together?
- Rosario: It's hard to even envision how they would work. A royal system where everything is hail to the king versus my rights, you know. I have these rights and this royal system is blocking me. It's hard, frustrating really.
- Siemer: Did other of the royal chiefs show up for that Constitutional Convention?
- Rosario: Yes. From Pohnpei there was Iriarte. There was Chief Mwiti, there was the King from Palau, Truk, basically everywhere.
- Siemer: Truk had several royalty, didn't they, at the time?
- Rosario: Yes. But the last big one died, Petrus Mailo. That was the last of the kings. Everything also went downhill for Pohnpei when the last king died.
- Siemer: He was also in the Congress of Micronesia for many years, wasn't he?
- Rosario: Which one?
- Siemer: Petrus Mailo?
- Rosario: Yes. He was one of the original ones. He knew my grandfather. He used to come to the house.
- Siemer: Did your grandfather have any business interests in Pohnpei or Truk?
- Rosario: No.
- Siemer: He knew the people when they came here?
- Rosario: Yes. He was quite a linguist, too. He knew a lot of languages Trukese, Pohnpeian, a little German, Spanish.
- Willens: Probably Japanese, too?
- Rosario: Yes. He was in prison before the War. He was suspected as an American spy.
- Willens: The Japanese imprisoned him?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Here on Saipan?
- Rosario: He and my auntie.
- Siemer: What did he do that caused that?
- Rosario: One of his uncles was a whaler who would go off to Boston and come back with American books. He learned to read. The Japanese thought he was an American spy. A great uncle of mine brought in a small organ, and my aunt started learning and my mother started learning how to play it at the sisters' convent. Even that was confiscated.
- Siemer: By the Japanese?
- Rosario: They thought it was a Morse code thing.

- Willens: Your uncle who was the whaler, he was a brother of your grandfather?
- Rosario: No, an uncle.
- Willens: He was an uncle of your grandfather.
- Siemer: A generation before.
- Willens: I see. That's a great story. I had never heard that.
- Rosario: Ask my uncle Dave Sablan. He knows it; he can tell you about it.
- Willens: David?
- Rosario: Yes. That's one of the reasons why I have finally accepted what was coming down in terms of the Covenant. I said my grandfather went this far. He came close to being beheaded because he believed in going directly to the United States rather than making a pitstop in Guam. And he preached to me a lot in high school, but I vigorously disagreed with him. I said no, I don't want to be American. I want to stay Chamorro and half Carolinian. You know how it is when you're young and idealistic and all of that. You don't even know if you're going to fall off the cliff. You drive up the cliff until you fall and you say: "Hey, wait a minute."
- Willens: You mentioned that you had a chance to work with the 1976 Marianas Constitutional Convention, but you decided you'd already done one constitutional convention and that was enough.
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: In the election for the delegates, the Territorial Party did much better than the Popular Party. Were the political winds changing here at that time?
- Rosario: Yes. You see the Popular Party was dictated at the time, for quite some time, by what you call the Ladies Association. These were very powerful ladies. If you are a member and Howard is running as a candidate, you'd better be there literally 24 hours when they call you to make food or barbeque.
- Siemer: For political meetings?
- Rosario: Yes. And if they didn't like you, you were out.
- Siemer: At least you didn't get any barbeques, right?
- Rosario: Yes, nothing at all. And they made you know it in no uncertain terms that you were out.
- Siemer: Who were some of the ladies back in those days?
- Rosario: Elena Sablan, Dr. Sablan's mother. His sister Justa. A lot of them have died already. I mean they decided who ran in the Popular Party.
- Siemer: They were the ones who would put on the so-called pocket meetings, put on barbeques, make sure that all the food showed up. And if that didn't work, then you didn't have any campaign.
- Rosario: Nothing at all. But it worked against them. Some of the young ones coming back from school like Jack Torres, Ben Fitial Jack was Popular Party. His parents were Popular Party. They can't take that, you know.
- Siemer: Being dictated to by the old ladies?
- Rosario: Yes. "No, no, no, I went to school and you're trying to tell me better things about how politics works." So they started moving.

- Willens: To the other party?
- Rosario: Yes. Even today, with the exception of Carlos Camacho, who made it as the Governor, the Democrats today have a tough time even finding candidates for Precinct 3. I think it's going to take several years before it comes back together.
- Siemer: What did you think of the caliber of people who ran for the First Constitutional Convention back in 1976?
- Rosario: I liked it. I really thought it was a good group.
- Siemer: What did you think of the attempt at a non-partisan election?
- Rosario: Non-partisan election. It became partisan, believe me. There's nothing that is non-partisan here, Deanne. You see Jack Torres, Oscar, Mafnas, Larry—I mean this is a Republican site. And they're saying non-partisan. When a Republican says you're in, you're in.
- Siemer: Did you cover the Convention as a journalist?
- Rosario: No. As it started, it was ending on the other side of the island at PIC [Pacific Island Club]. There was a lot going on in the PIC, though. When the rain comes, the whole office on the bottom side flooded. There was a fight about Palau, the Marshalls. A lot went wrong. The power generator would turn off by itself.
- Willens: That was the Micronesian Convention?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: The place was called the White Sands?
- Rosario: White Sands Hotel.
- Willens: What's your recollection of the 1977 campaign for the first commonwealth government? Had you become active politically at that point?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: Who did you want to see run for Governor?
- Rosario: Initially I didn't have any choice. And I was looking what side to be for. I was leery of Camacho because I wasn't sure that his background as a doctor, you know, in science would work. At the same time, I was also leery of Joeten, being very powerful and trying perhaps to build his base even further, his business interests.
- Willens: How about the switching of parties that went on?
- Rosario: That took me by surprise. It really took me by surprise.
- Willens: Mr. Ada's move?
- Rosario: Yes. He's my uncle, and to this date I have not asked him why he did that. I really want an answer from him. By the way, he's my father's half-brother.
- Willens: How about Oly Borja's switch? Did that surprise you?
- Rosario: That's understood. Oly Borja was fishing for glory. He really wanted to be Governor. They made him even pay the bill for an expensive steak dinner in Washington, D.C. One of the expensive hotels there, restaurants.
- Willens: Who made him do what?
- Rosario: Pay for the steak dinner. Joe Cruz did.
- Willens: Joe Cruz made Oly Borja pick up the bill?

- Rosario: Pay for the entire delegation.
- Siemer: When was that?
- Rosario: I think that was for the signing of the Covenant.
- Willens: Could be.
- Rosario: You must have been there. It was an expensive steak dinner for everybody, and Joe Cruz has always been a very cheap man. So he went to the men's room. Then he came back, signaled Ed Pangelinan, and says: "Ed, can I see you?" In the restroom he told Ed to just nod your head like this when I say something. Ed said: "What are you going to say?" "Never mind, just nod your head, say yes." So they went back and he said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I want to have your attention please. The first Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas should be nobody else but Senator Borja." Then Senator Borja said: "Yes, give me the bill." He signed for it.
- Willens: And everybody shook their heads, like they were told to.
- Rosario: Then Eddie said: "Jesus Christ, Joe, we got to help pay the bill."
- Willens: Eddie felt guilty about it afterwards, right?
- Rosario: But Joe got around. He knew his stuff.
- Willens: Why was it that Dr. Camacho seemed to have risen within the Party to get the nomination?
- Rosario: One, he was educated. That appealed to a lot of people. Two, he was young. People were very suspicious of Joeten, being very rich. It was the natural thing. They were suspicious of rich people, especially when he hooked up with Oly Borja.
- Willens: We've heard that the Democrats turned it into sort of a class race, with the poor people's candidate being the Democratic side and the Republicans being the rich people.
- Rosario: And that really went out very clearly, well-heard and understood.
- Willens: That message?
- Rosario: Yes. It was common knowledge that Joeten was building his house up on the Hill. Everybody knew that too.
- Willens: What was wrong with that?
- Rosario: Success here, Howard, is seen with disdain. I don't like to see you successful. I'll help you, but when you're successful, I don't like it. That's the way.
- Willens: That's still the way it is?
- Rosario: Yes. To give you an example, a Carolinian kid becoming a doctor, educated in the States, is going to have a tough time making it here, because he still has to go back to his family with part of his earnings, and give it back.
- Siemer: Oh, he still has to share earnings with his overall family?
- Rosario: Yes. Family functions, especially. This is the kind of clash between personal interests and ethnic or family commitments that a lot of people here would be thinking about.
- Siemer: Is that why some people elect to stay in the States, so they don't have to face that family stuff back here?
- Rosario: We can say that, but I think a lot more. A lot of it really had to do with the fact that they



had money and land leases.

- Willens: What is your assessment of the land alienation provisions? Do you think those have served their objective of keeping the economic benefits of the land in the local community?
- Rosario: The intent is good. What happened subsequently the protective aspect of it is perfectly fine with us, with me. But see again, this is where we clash, where it runs in collision with my right to this property. Why can't I sell it, or why can't I rent it out? At the same time, I'm lucky that I can have it leased. Yet if the purpose, the intent, is to keep it within the indigenous people, then why are we leasing it out to large companies? But the intent and purpose of that provision, I have no problems with. I think it's saved us more than it did us bad things.
- Siemer: How about equal representation in the upper house? What did you think about that back in those days? Did you think about the problems that might cause in the Commonwealth?
- Rosario: Yes, but I can understand why that thing emerged. See, Rota has been a sub-district of Truk. They never had anything. They are part of the Marianas chain, yet they were not legally part of the Marianas district until 1962. They were under the Navy, then they were under the Interior. So nothing moved. You look at Guam, you look at Saipan both are commercialized. But Rota is basically untouched. It seems like the bastard kid. So when they had the opportunity to come in as part of us, they would grab anything. It was like a hungry kid. They didn't try to understand things like cost savings, like maybe a unicameral system would be better. You don't tell it to a Rotanese. For many years, they have been deprived. And they're saying we're the same. So when the Constitutional Convention came about, that's where you saw those frustrations expressed. And I think they were fearful of losing it. And I don't think they'll ever vote to change it.
- Willens: Did you think that the local people benefited from the economic development that took place here from the mid-1980s onward? We've heard some debate about that economic development and whether the people here shared in the profits from it.
- Rosario: Yes. The only problems with that I think and I think you cannot blame anybody else except those that benefited were, one, nothing in our culture taught us to save and invest. Investment is a strange word. There is always the propensity to spend more than save. That's the way islanders are. We spend, have a good time, never mind the rainy day. There are those who invested it well. There are those who moved to the States for the education of their children. That's great. The only thing that I blame here is the beginning of the tourism industry when the Japanese took us in as partners, you know, 51/49. Then we were gradually bumped out. That is a bigger problem than anything else about the Covenant.
- Willens: That was a product of Commonwealth legislation sometime in the early 1980s.
- Rosario: Yes. It was repealed. Remember it was repealed?
- Willens: So as far as you're concerned, it should have stayed the way it was to guarantee local participation?
- Rosario: Participation and investment. But see, we were also dealing with the dilemma of the Trust Territory moving out and a lot of the revenue would be gone. That's why you saw the introduction of casino gambling, the repeal of the law to open that investment floodgate.
- Siemer: But that happened before you actually lost revenues.
- Rosario: Yes, that's right.

- Siemer: And the fact is if you'd waited, because the economy was beginning to boom, you wouldn't have lost those revenues anyway.
- Rosario: Yes, that's right. But I think economics predominated over everything that had to do with the Covenant the Constitutional government, the Constitutional Convention, the establishment of the first Constitutional government. We were preoccupied. We didn't have anybody to guide us in the first period of Commonwealth.
- Willens: Is that a comment about the elected leaders? Or are you talking about the business community?
- Rosario: Everybody. I think if you look at business here, the history of business, it was designed just for certain people Joeten, Villagomez, Borja. Anybody from Japan that comes in hooks up with one of these.
- Willens: You've written extensively, John, over the last many years and certainly recently about the government, the alien labor problem, relations with the federal government, family-raising practices and teaching children discipline. I don't want to ask you to repeat all that. Is there anything you'd like to say in summary about how you think it's worked out and what the problems are that now confront the Commonwealth?
- Rosario: I think the Covenant itself is the best, with hindsight, that I have seen. Whether they like it or not, the Marianas, through the Covenant, is a model government. And I've seen some recent materials written about it the use of the Covenant funds, investments with Japan, Far East. I've seen a masters thesis written about it, how it played, how we were willing to roll with the punches, to achieve what we have today. No other government, not in Micronesia, not anywhere north and south of the Equator could you find this kind of government. We have progressed far greater than all of them put together, with the exception of Guam. And I think it worked. I think that the American experiment worked. And I'm proud of it too, because imagine being like in the state of Truk, where nothing moves, where everything is just stalemated, stagnant. That plus the fact that we're close to Asia. I think we were fortunate. We were fortunate in the fact that we fly the American flag. It gives us stability. And I'll say yes, it gave us stability. Palau has the same opportunities. Beautiful place, you know, the natural beauty of Palau. But if there's anything they regret it's the fact that they don't have stability. They have their own government. I've heard from a lot of my friends there that I've met as representing the NMI and the South Pacific Commission, they comment a lot about how great it must be to be in the Marianas where there is political stability. At least we don't kill our presidents. So in more ways than one, the founders of the Covenant, those here and gone, did well. You can't say that there's something substantively wrong with it. It's just the players the Legislature, you know. I think it's going to take time for people to develop politically.
- Willens: Regarding the question of political leadership and maturity, some people have suggested that the people who ran in the early years in the Commonwealth were strong, independent-minded and mature leaders and that has changed over time.
- Rosario: Yes. They were visionaries. That has changed.
- Willens: To what do you attribute that?
- Rosario: One, I think the salary of the Legislature. How could you attract anybody for \$39,000 a year? Maybe I want to run, but my son will never go to Mt. Carmel School. So it's more my obligation as a father, putting that aside, putting my pride aside and staying with something that is practical, something that works, for my family. So the salary has never been able to attract good people, other than Heinz Hofschneider and Eusebio Hocog,

these are two people who I trust. Today, no, you don't find them. It's not a matter of pride to say I'm running for the Legislature. Take for example the recent legislation that some members of the Legislature, House of Representatives, wanted to introduce to provide a half a million dollar appropriation for picnic tables along the beach. This is what I call the picnic table mentality. There are a bunch of substantive issues that have never been addressed. Labor laws require a lot of work, overhaul. Health, the proliferation of health maintenance organizations, the fact that a lot more people are getting diseases we have never seen before stomach cancer, liver cancer. These things require attention. But with \$39,000, no. We continue to attract what I call the mediocre and below. It's hard to talk to members of the Legislature. It's hard to say excuse me, Congressman, I think this is the reason why we feel this law should be written this way. We think that this thing on land alienation, you have no business dealing with, because it is the purview of the court, and you should respect the separation of powers. Or you know, down the line. You can't talk economics, because most of them didn't take basic economics. I guess I'm just airing my frustrations at what I've seen and how I've had to deal with it. So the only member of the Legislature that has become a very close friend of mine, because I can go there and shoot the breeze with him anytime and I know I'm getting somewhere, is Heinz.

Willens: Why is it the Legislature doesn't perceive their need to hire economists and experts so they can deal with the Executive Branch on more of an equal basis?

Rosario: I've been telling them that, Howard, believe me. When I started working in the First Legislature, Oscar was able to hire some consultants and experts. I've been telling them since six, eight years ago, you have to have experts in this thing, you have to have the money to retain experts legal experts, economists and all those things. You can't just rely on in-house lawyers, most of whom have never passed the Bar. And some of them I think are environmentalists by nature or by inclination. Congressman, this is unconstitutional. How do you know it is unconstitutional? Why don't you tell him that it's not unconstitutional until the court says so? But then a lot of these guys are not equipped. They don't have the wherewithal, the verbal facility, the writing facility, to say no, I disagree.

Siemer: Where do you think it will go over the next ten or twenty years?

Rosario: I think it will go for the better. I'm beginning to see young ones questioning excuse me, Congressman, I think you're wrong. Why are you doing it this way? I'm encouraged by that. It makes me enthusiastic to see what's coming up.

Willens: How about the relations with the federal government and this current threat to take away some of the advantages that the Commonwealth has? What's the best strategy for dealing with that?

Rosario: This is another problem where we just react. When we go to Washington, you have to have leaders who can articulate issues, who know how to think, and how to approach people. With the exception of people like Pete A., he's very articulate, and he fights for the common good left and right. Heinz would be one of them who would be good in that job. I think a lot of it is really that we have never used common sense. We can't just go to the U.S. Congress and say Congressman, we need \$20 million. Why? Well, we need it. Well why do you need it? I don't know, Congressman, I think we need it. This is the kind of justification, the mentality that we have. We never think in terms of: I want to take this \$20 million, but if Florida had a hurricane, they're going to need this \$20 million. I have enough with what we have today, but I'm going to ask for it anyway. Dependence mentality, you know.

- Willens: Well, people like Alan Stayman complain that the Commonwealth says it's going to increase its minimum wage, and then it doesn't increase its minimum wage. It says it's going to produce a report to justify its position, and he complains the report isn't submitted on time. What's going on here in terms of organizing some way to deal with the federal government?
- Rosario: What the Governor is doing is one way of doing it getting to the people who matter.
- Willens: That's very impressive.
- Rosario: Yes. I've dealt with those people because they've come out to attend breakfast meetings and all that. I play golf with them, and I get to hear them.
- Willens: What is their impression when they see the place and then they hear about the alleged abuses? Do they talk to you about that?
- Rosario: Yes.
- Willens: What do they say?
- Rosario: One of them said—in fact, the attorney for [Congressman] Armeo said that they're very fortunate that they came out, because we had been fed age-old information from Manase.
- Willens: Yes.
- Rosario: Or Jim Bierne. Some of the guys that used to come out 20, 30 years ago. So what they've been told and what they have seen are entirely different things.
- Siemer: You're optimistic on that front as well? That the relations with the federal government over the next ten or twenty years will go well?
- Rosario: Yes. We're like a juvenile kid today trying to learn the old ways of our mother country, you know. I look at government just like a human being, go through stages. My mother country has dealt with the labor compliance over the last 200 years and never resolved it for immigration. Hey, I'd like to know what else they're going to do so we can learn from you.
- Willens: Well, it is refreshing to hear an optimist, and we want to thank you, John, very much for taking the time to participate in our project. We really appreciate it.