

## INTERVIEW OF FRANCISCO M. DIAZ

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

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- Willens: Francisco M. Diaz has had a distinguished career in politics in the Northern Marianas, as Mayor of Saipan among other things, and is now a successful businessman. Mr. Diaz, thank you very much for being available to help us with our project. Could we begin by asking you when you were born.
- Diaz: I was born on October 8, 1936.
- Willens: Were you born here in Saipan?
- Diaz: Yes.
- Willens: What were your parents' names?
- Diaz: My father, who died in 1942, was named Joaquin A. Diaz. My mother is still living. She's 84 years old now. She's Maria Manibusan. Altogether in my family I have four sisters and we are four boys.
- Willens: Can you give us their names?
- Diaz: My second oldest brother is Juan, then Asunta, the girl, Jesusa, Rosa, Luis, and Edward.
- Willens: Do they all live in the Northern Marianas?
- Diaz: Yes. Edward is now a judge in the Superior Court, Edward Manibusan.
- Willens: Were you educated under the Japanese system?
- Diaz: Not really. I attended kindergarten. I was very, very young at the time. Before the war broke out, we went to Guam. That was in 1942 after my father died.
- Willens: Your family moved to Guam?
- Diaz: My family moved to Guam. In Guam at the time there was no school. The Japanese had just invaded Guam on December 8, 1941. The reason why we went to Guam was because of my uncle's involvement with the Japanese. He was selected as an interpreter for the Japanese military.
- Siemer: From Saipan?
- Diaz: From Saipan. There were several young people at the time who were sent to Guam because Guam used to be American territory, so many of them there did not speak Japanese. So they sent all of the young people to Guam. After my father died, my mom decided that we should go with my uncle to Guam and stay with him there. So the whole family moved to Guam.
- Willens: How long did the family stay in Guam?
- Diaz: We stayed up until after the war. It was in 1946 when we returned.
- Willens: Did you go back to your family property at that time?
- Diaz: Here?
- Willens: Yes.
- Diaz: Well, after the war there was a lot of confusion about lands. You're talking about land?

- Willens: Yes.
- Diaz: Everybody was placed in Chalan Kanoa. They built it into a town and put everybody in stockades. Then later on, several years later, they started working on the land problems. Many of us had been given a choice whether to go back or just stay where we were in Chalan Kanoa. Some of the families decided to just stay there, so it was sort of an exchange program.
- Willens: At the time you came back from Guam, if you remember, had the people who were interned in Camp Susupe been released? Was this after July 4, 1946?
- Diaz: No, we were still there.
- Willens: So your family came over and they went into the Camp?
- Diaz: Yes. I don't think it took us that long. I don't know if it was 1946 when everybody was sort of released. I'm not too sure.
- Willens: Did you begin your education then back here on Saipan?
- Diaz: Yes. I started my elementary school in Saipan.
- Willens: Where did you go on to school after that?
- Diaz: I finished my intermediate education, which is up to ninth grade, then I went to work. There was no high school at the time here. Most of my colleagues only went as far as ninth grade. Then later on we were given the opportunity to go to Guam High School or even to Truk.
- Willens: Did you do either of those?
- Diaz: No, I didn't. When my father died I had to, after graduating, support the family. So I started working at the hospital.
- Willens: What kind of job did you have there?
- Diaz: I was a clerk. There was an opportunity for further education and my boss, who was also a chief in the Navy, encouraged me to take an examination for pre-medical school in Fiji. We were given an entrance examination. Fiji was a British colony, so we had to pass a special entrance examination. I was very fortunate to pass it and was sent on a scholarship for pre-medical. I went there for only two years, then I came back.
- Siemer: Went down to Fiji?
- Diaz: Yes. Spent two years there.
- Siemer: Who else from the Marianas was there at the same time?
- Diaz: Former Governor Camacho. He stayed behind and became a medical officer. There was Manny Cruz. I don't know whether you know him. He is working for Duty Free now. Roman Manglona. He was once a member of the Legislature after he came back. He died, I think a year ago. Last year. He died in the States.
- Willens: When did you come back from Fiji?
- Diaz: We went there in 1957. I came back in the late part of 1959.
- Siemer: Did you go back to working at the hospital?
- Diaz: I went back again to work in the hospital.
- Siemer: What was your job then?

- Diaz: I was working as a supervisor of hospital records in the records department.
- Siemer: How were the Navy people to work for? Were they good bosses? Did they give you chances to advance?
- Diaz: Yes. They were pretty good. I guess they were just carrying on until a civil government took over. They did pretty good. There were a lot of people who were sent to further their education—to Guam, even as far as Hawaii. They gave out scholarships. I think after the war they were more lax in terms of military procedures. They weren't as tough as you see them in the movies—you know, the military. They're sort of informal military personnel. You don't salute them. They were very, very informal, which was really good for us, because it made us feel like we're all buddies, you know.
- Willens: Did you have any contact with the NTTU?
- Diaz: I did earlier. After graduating, I went to work there. The only available job there was working as a messenger. That's how I started. I became a messenger, and later on I kept transferring to other jobs.
- Willens: Did you know what the mission was?
- Diaz: The mission of the NTTU?
- Willens: Right.
- Diaz: Well, later on, especially when I became a member of the Legislature, I read a lot about it. I heard a lot about it from people who had inside information. And I learned, after suspecting that a lot of things were happening in a different way, where you see these military trucks covered up and you see these busses that were painted black and things like that. Then you started asking questions, you know. This had something to do with the Chinese, who were being trained here by CIA. You couldn't go back there, and they fenced the Marpi area so you could not get through there. So people were pretty much aware, even at the low levels, as to what was going on.
- Willens: It's pretty hard to maintain a military secret here.
- Diaz: It's pretty hard. It's a small island, and people sort of speculated at the time. We called it "telephone ilii." You know, the vines that grow on the beach, they call it ilii, and it grows and it kind of embraces everybody. It's like telephone lines going from house to house, so if they learn something, everybody will know, because they talk about it.
- Siemer: Quickly.
- Diaz: Very quickly.
- Willens: Can you tell us when you first got involved in politics?
- Diaz: Well, it is sort of a very funny story, because actually it has something to do with my personal life. It all started when my wife was working for Joeten. We finally got married. Joeten was very deeply in politics. He controlled the businesses and a lot of people here. At one time, I started falling in love with my wife, who was working for Joeten as a cashier. I didn't really admire the way Joeten treated me at the time, because I would normally go there and bother her and things like that. I think I was pissing him off. In return I got pissed at him and, knowing that he was deeply involved in politics, I started saying the hell with him, you know. So I started gathering the young people and forming our own club. It was not really intended as a political group. When I was very young, I was very much deeply involved in working with young people. I like to see young people develop themselves. I was involved in organizing young people in cleaning up some of those left-

over military basketball courts and tennis courts. We cleaned them up, we put up the boards, and then started organizing some sporting events for the youth. It so happened that Joeten realized that the group was sort of leaning toward the Popular Party's side, because that party had just started. And from what I know, he started getting some of the young people to start splitting that group and developing another political group of young people. So with that, we decided that we knew that it was going to be political, so we switched our club's name into a political party, and we called ourselves the Young Popular Party of the Northern Marianas.

Willens: There was a Popular Party at the time?

Diaz: There was a Popular Party in effect, yes.

Willens: Was this after you came back from Fiji or before you went to Fiji?

Diaz: That was after I came back. It was brewing since 1959 when I got back. So if I'm not mistaken, the actual party split started in 1960.

Willens: Some people remember the campaign for mayor in 1957, when Elias Sablan was defeated, as being the start of the two political parties. Does that make sense? You may not have been here at the time, but he was defeated, I believe in 1957.

Diaz: Yes. I'm not too sure whether the Party started there. Well, let me backtrack. It probably started earlier. I probably wasn't here. But I knew that for some reason the strength of the Party was much stronger than it was in 1960, and I think that's when it started in line with the plan for reintegration with Guam.

Willens: I see.

Diaz: So maybe if you go back to the other people that were in the area at that time, because I wasn't here like you said.

Willens: I remember talking to Herman Q. Guerrero, who may have mentioned the Young Popular Party to me.

Diaz: Yes. He was one of our officers.

Willens: Do you remember anybody else?

Diaz: Herman R. Guerrero. Then Mitch.

Willens: Mitch Pangelinan?

Diaz: Yes.

Willens: And did there come a time when the Young Popular Party sort of merged with the Popular Party?

Diaz: Eventually it merged. I was the president of the Young Men's, then when we switched to the political organization, I think Herman R. Guerrero became the president. So we did our own campaigning separately from the older Popular Party. We went from village to village campaigning. We paraded around villages with our signs and everything. That had never been done before. I think that was the first time. I think we started the—when you have everybody around the villages with the cars—motorcades.

Siemer: Yes.

Diaz: We started the motorcades.

Siemer: With the trucks?

- Diaz: Yes. We even got the bus to go with us for the kids to come along. And we were singing. I was one of the people who wrote songs for the Popular Party, and I was singing in the campaign. So we were really very active. At the time, the Party was very strong.
- Willens: And you were campaigning at that time for the Municipal Council or it may have been called the Saipan Congress at the time?
- Diaz: The Saipan Congress. And also for reintegration.
- Willens: For reintegration?
- Diaz: Yes. Because all the campaigning at the time, the political campaigning, was based on the proposed reintegration. The other party, which was the Territorial Party, was against it. So whenever the candidates ran, they talked against reintegration, and the Popular Party always talked about reintegrating with Guam. So you had these two factions fighting pro and con. So we were doing the campaigning based on that.
- Willens: When did you first run for office?
- Diaz: I first ran for office when they started the District Legislature. I think it was in 1963 when I ran.
- Willens: Do you recall something called a Charter Convention? The Interior Department had taken over the administration of the Marianas District.
- Diaz: That was in 1962.
- Willens: Yes. Did they convene a group of leaders to help prepare for the Legislature?
- Diaz: Yes.
- Willens: What do you remember about that?
- Diaz: I remember it was held in Mt. Carmel auditorium at the time.
- Willens: Were there people from the Territorial Party there too?
- Diaz: You mean when we started forming the political party?
- Willens: No, when you started to think about creating a District Legislature.
- Diaz: Oh, there was like a constitutional convention.
- Willens: Yes. That's what I have heard about, but I've never met anybody who really recalls anything about it.
- Diaz: Yes, that was some time ago. I recall that there was a convention. I think that the leaders from both sides participated, just like when you had this constitutional convention. I remember that there was a convention regarding the creation of the Legislature.
- Siemer: Were they talking about things like how many members there should be in the Saipan Congress and what districts they should run from? Things like that?
- Diaz: Did Ben Santos ever mention anything about that? Because he's much older than I am and he probably remembers. I'm not even too sure.
- Willens: Okay.
- Diaz: Have you ever checked the United Nations report?
- Siemer: We did.
- Willens: I know there was a process.

Diaz: I remember there was a sort of a big political meeting, big group meeting regarding the situation, but I get lost already. We had so many constitutions and conventions.

Willens: Right. You mentioned the critical difference between the parties being reunification with Guam and that your party favored it. What were the principal reasons why you personally thought reintegration was a good idea?

Diaz: Well, really I wasn't even thinking about the political ramifications of it, or even the economic ramifications of it. It's just that I thought that because we are families, you know, we still have a lot of families in Guam that were split just by political separation. At the time I felt, "Why should brothers split as in the case when parents are divorced?" I don't know. Later on I started to realize that there were a lot of political ramifications and economic ramifications about it, but I still thought that, for me, you should be reunited with your own people. You know, how many Chamorro people are on this earth? You can really count them very easily. It's not that many people.

Siemer: Did people back then talk about being united with the rest of Micronesia?

Diaz: I think the Congress of Micronesia did at one time, but not the people here. For some reason at the time, both parties resented being with the other Micronesian people because of our cultural differences. I felt at the time that we were sort of putting ourselves higher than the rest of the Micronesian people.

Siemer: Had you traveled to any of the other areas of Micronesia back then?

Diaz: Yes, I had.

Siemer: What did you think with respect to the way that the other areas of Micronesia were organized politically and the way that they thought about these things?

Diaz: I'm really not too sure, because I never talked about it with their leaders. But I think even at that time I didn't feel that their leaders wanted reunification with the whole of Micronesia. The islands of Micronesia have different cultures, even here. You know the Carolinians have lived here for almost a hundred years, and they still feel that they're just completely different from us. And likewise—we still feel that they're really different. Although we walk together very nicely and we sort of put ourselves in a situation where we are considered brothers, yet we still have that sense of really not being with them, because we identify ourselves as different. And although the Carolinians right now are sort of more leaning towards adopting the Chamorro culture, still they segregate themselves from us, and likewise.

Willens: Why was it that the Carolinian leaders seemed to affiliate with the Territorial Party?

Diaz: At the time?

Willens: Yes, going back to the 1960s.

Diaz: See what happened, the Carolinian leaders at the time resented the people of Guam. There were quite a large number of Carolinians who were chased out of Guam by the Chamorro leaders there. They didn't want the Carolinians to come to Guam, because actually they're semi-naked and at the time they were saying that they were people who don't take care of themselves, that they're lazy, that they are unsanitary, and all of these things. So for some reason, they convinced the Governor at the time in Guam that they didn't want the Carolinians there. So those Carolinians were moved over to Saipan. They asked permission if they could come over to Saipan and Tinian. So a lot of the Carolinians leaders, like Dr. Kaipat and the late Mayor Sablan, resented the Guamanians. At the time, the Popular Party identified themselves as more of the poor people's party,

and the Territorial at that time inclined more to the merchants and the better-off group of people here. With respect to the Carolinians, I think the reasoning was that, because they resented the people of Guam and didn't want to reunite with Guam, the Carolinians tended to lean towards the Territorial Party at the time. The Territorial Party at the time didn't want to reunite with Guam.

Siemer: Back at that time, were there many Carolinians who would vote with the Popular Party?

Diaz: No. They were very, very limited in numbers. These limited numbers had something to do with the former Mayor Sablan, because the former Mayor Sablan was a Carolinian, and a lot of Carolinians were saying that they were cheated on the land, because the former Mayor Sablan was also the land title officer at the time.

Siemer: So those people who had a grievance against Mayor Sablan tended to vote with the Popular Party?

Diaz: Yes. They moved towards the Popular Party—but only very, very few—you could easily count them.

Willens: One of the political leaders who I worked with closely for many years was Dr. Palacios. At one point, he was an outspoken advocate of all of Micronesia staying together in free association with the United States. It was only later that he came to the view that commonwealth was the preferred status.

Diaz: Originally he was one of the leaders for the reunification.

Willens: What happened to change his mind, if you know?

Diaz: What happened is that everybody got sort of resentful of the people of Guam because right after we voted, about how many, 76 percent, to reunite with Guam, they voted us down. So everybody was sort of mad at the people of Guam, saying that: "If you don't want us to be with you, the hell with you people." So we started going around and looking for other status alternatives. That's when some of the leaders changed their opinion regarding the type of political affiliation with the United States. So again, the Popular Party started campaigning to be with the United States as a commonwealth.

Willens: Yes. Do you recall whether or not you personally opposed the creation of the Congress of Micronesia?

Diaz: I did at the time.

Willens: I've read something about the leadership of the Popular Party being opposed to the formation of the Congress of Micronesia. Why was that?

Diaz: Well, I think it was not only the Popular Party at the time; I think it was also the Territorial Party. Because like I said, they resented the people in the rest of Micronesia. They never really wanted to be part of Micronesia.

Willens: And you think that's so even of the Carolinians who were leaders in the Territorial Party—that they wanted to be separate from the other islands?

Diaz: I think so, yes.

Willens: Did you ever consider running for the Congress of Micronesia?

Diaz: No, I never did.

Willens: What was your feeling about the Trust Territory government during the 1960s when the Kennedy Administration adopted some new policies and increased funding? Were you

still working for the Trust Territory at the time in the 1960s? Did you continue working for the Trust Territory government?

Diaz: Yes. I think I started working there in 1964 to 1969. I worked for five years I think for the TT government. But what was your question?

Willens: My question was whether you have any recollection today of the fact that the United States was increasing funding for the Trust Territory government?

Siemer: Did it get better when Kennedy came into office?

Diaz: I think it did have more funding. I think every year there was more funding. But I think that the only reason why the Northern Marianas were kind of reluctant with the Congress of Micronesia is because most of the money was actually going toward the rest of the islands. I guess they were sort of behind in terms of their progress. This was the impression that I got from some of the members of the Congress of Micronesia when they did their campaigning, saying that the Trust Territory government is spending more money on the other Micronesian islands than on the Northern Marianas.

Willens: How did you feel about the fact that the Trust Territory Administration restricted foreign investment here in the Northern Marianas? Did you support that policy, or not?

Diaz: At the time I did, because I thought the whole idea behind it was to try to encourage the local people, the Micronesian people, to develop their own businesses. I'm not really too sure how effective they were, because I don't think it ever worked.

Willens: What do you mean? You did have some significant local businesses—Joeten and Oly Borja and others.

Diaz: Yes, but only to a certain extent. I guess I expected more than that. I expected that we should have done more to encourage the local people. From what I gathered at the time when I was a member of the Legislature, my thinking was that they have this available funding for the local people in terms of loans, but there is really nobody there to sort of follow up and guide them, take the people by the hand and give them some direction. They just said we've got so much money to loan here, you know, so they would lend it, and then there's nothing that followed up from behind to really push them up.

Siemer: Was it technical assistance like accounting and business practices and things like that that were needed?

Diaz: Precisely, yes. I don't know whether it was the people that they hired or not. I'm not too sure at the time. But it seemed to me that there was a lack in that area. And even today, I still argue about the way the CDF funding is made available, because I do believe that we are at the stage where we still need to be guided. We cannot compete with outside people who have been in businesses for years and years, and they know what they're doing. They were in a situation where they had to struggle to live. The Micronesian people don't really need to struggle. They can find food out in the ocean, can find food on land. If they don't have food, they can get it from their families and friends. That's why I feel that we don't really have that incentive, because everything is available, especially now that the U.S. has started giving money for this food stamp program. As a matter of fact, we were just discussing last night with some of the people why Micronesia has never had anybody that invented something, while the Filipinos and all are very—what do you call it—creative and things like that. And I was telling my friend the reason for that is because we never go hungry. People who go hungry just start using their mind to think about how to eat. We don't need to do that. It's there. So that's the big difference.

- Willens: Back in the 1960s and the early 1970s, did you think that tourism was going to be a promising economic development?
- Diaz: It's a coincidence, because I was the first chairman of the Tourist Commission at the time, back in 1967.
- Willens: Was that the very first one?
- Diaz: That was the very first one. As a matter of fact, I was a member of the Legislature which introduced the bill creating the Tourist Commission. At the time, you know, the Legislature was only part-time, and I was working for the government at the same time. So the District Administrator at the time decided well, who else shall I pick to become the chairman other than the person that really knows about it, and that's how we got started.
- Willens: What did you do?
- Diaz: Well, we started getting information, feedback, from other places about tourism. We had heard at that time a lot about tourism. As a matter of fact, the Japanese at that time were just about—I don't know whether they were already—ready to, you know, begin their travels. But then we had the support of all these elderly people, they always know how to do business. They started giving us information, this is how tourism is done, and we had all these workshops, conferences and whatever. Then we started expanding. Then the Chamber of Commerce started also doing something about it: "Hey, look, tourism is an unpolluting type of business that probably is the best thing to have, because we have the natural beauty, we have the climate, we have the ocean, and we have the people." So that's when we started developing something. We started cleaning our tourist sites, preparing brochures, sending them out to travel agents. Then in 1967 Continental Air Micronesia began its service.
- Siemer: That's what I was going to say. That's when regular flights started coming in here, wasn't it?
- Diaz: Yes. So the airlines started promoting tourism also, and then we started getting tourists. Then we started relaxing the procedures for visitors. We used to have very strict requirements during the Trust Territory. So the leaders at that time decided to do something about waiving the visa requirements and things like that. So eventually we started reaping the benefits of tourism development.
- Willens: Was the Royal Taga built at the time?
- Diaz: The Royal Taga was built already at that time. I think it was intended first for the military people in Guam when they come and visit here. It was built on a very small scale. Actually, they were probably not thinking about expanding their promotion to further than Guam. Because at the time we had a lot of military from Guam coming over here for R & R, so that's how the Royal Taga began. The Saipan Hafa Adai Hotel was only 10 rooms. The Saipan Hotel was run by the TT government at that time for Micronesian visitors when they came.
- Siemer: Back then when you started, did you think that the Japanese would be the principal tourists here?
- Diaz: I knew it was going to be the Japanese. Because we are so close to Japan, and we started reading in the papers about the Japanese, and that their economic situation was growing very fast. So we knew that the Japanese would be our biggest market.
- Siemer: Was the language also a benefit here?

- Diaz: It was a benefit, because a lot of the people my age and up can speak the language fluently. They can speak it very fluently. So they have no problem. And even at that time, the people here, since we didn't have a lot of outside foreign people here, people were very friendly at the time, because they could identify you from afar, you know, whether you're local or you're Trukese or whatever. They knew immediately who you were, and people started waving.
- Siemer: Still do.
- Diaz: Have you been to Rota? They still do it now. You know, waving. That's the old time, when it was really fun. I mean, you know, a lot of our people who visited, who came here, didn't realize how friendly the people were at that time. But now with the influx of other people, they don't do it anymore, because you don't know whether you're waving to a Bangladeshi or a Filipino.
- Willens: How many years did you stay as head of that tourism commission or board?
- Diaz: I started in 1967. I think I left when they changed the status of the Legislature and it became a full-time job. Sorry, I don't remember.
- Willens: Then you stopped working for the Commission.
- Diaz: Then J. M. Guerrero took over. They changed the name to Marianas Visitors Bureau.
- Siemer: Did you stay with the TT government until the District Legislature became full time?
- Diaz: No, I went back to the District government at the time in 1966. Yes, in 1967, I went back.
- Willens: What did you do there?
- Diaz: I was working for economic development and at the same time was chairman of the Tourist Commission.
- Willens: Do you recall any of the economists who came over with the Nathan Associates in the middle 1960s?
- Diaz: I remember the Nathan Associates, but I'm not too sure about the names of the people.
- Siemer: Did they come and talk to you?
- Diaz: I think they did.
- Willens: One of the points they made in their report was that it was very hard to develop here economically until the political status issue was resolved. They said that investors would be reluctant to invest money here in major facilities unless the political status was clear.
- Diaz: Well, at the time you know the Trust Territory government allowed something like 51-49 percent investment. Then I think the local government at the time kind of relaxed it, made it more relaxed so that the foreign investors would be able to come in. I remember at the time, they were having problems. They didn't really like the idea of 51-49, because the 49 is very hard to get from the local people at the time. So they changed that. They were more lenient, but to what extent I'm not too sure.
- Willens: Were the local business leaders like Joeten and others receptive to the idea of changing the rules and encouraging investment?
- Diaz: I think they were. As a matter of fact, Joeten was an investor with Japanese partners in the Hafa Adai Hotel. Herman Guerrero, I think Manny Villagomez— most of the businessmen supported this. Oly Borja as well.

- Willens: The Congress of Micronesia established a negotiating group that met with the United States. It was a result of a visit out here by Secretary Hickel in 1969. Do you remember being part of a crowd that might have met with Hickel and his advisors?
- Diaz: I think we did meet as a group from the Legislature.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection today of what your impression was of Secretary Hickel?
- Diaz: No, I'm sorry.
- Willens: He gave a very optimistic speech about how the United States wanted to explore a permanent relationship with all of Micronesia, and he also outlined an action program of equal pay for equal work, more Micronesians hired in TT government jobs, and so forth.
- Diaz: I must have been off-island at the time, because I know that he came and I know that we met, but I don't recall what he said.
- Willens: As a result of the negotiations that started after that, the United States proposed something called a Commonwealth proposal to the Congress of Micronesia that was rejected by the Congress in 1970. But Oly Borja stood up and said: "Well, it's not perfect, but I think it's what my constituents in the Northern Marianas want." Do you have any recollection of whether that was an important event?
- Diaz: I think it was an important event, because I think that was the time when the majority of the people here were sort of pulling together and pushing for commonwealth, although there were some people that went for independence and some people that went for free association. But I think the majority of the people were really rooting for commonwealth status.
- Willens: In early 1971, the Congress of Micronesia was burned down. It seems to have resulted from some disputes between the Congress of Micronesia and the Marianas political leaders. What's your recollection of what prompted that event?
- Diaz: I think it had something to do with some of our delegates that went up there. I'm not really too sure. I remember the speech that I gave at the Legislature.
- Willens: What did you say, generally?
- Diaz: After that dispute, I sort of just blurted out that I wished that somebody would burn the Congress of Micronesia. Then the following day, it was really burned.
- Willens: You were the person who gave that speech?
- Diaz: Yes.
- Willens: I didn't realize that. I thought it was Danny Muna.
- Diaz: No, it was me. So the police confiscated the tape of those discussions during our Committee of the Whole, and I was sort of a suspect. Well, they really couldn't do anything about it, because we were sort of immune.
- Siemer: What were you debating at the time that caused you to say that? Was it the distribution of revenues or the new taxes they were trying to impose?
- Diaz: It had something to do with what had happened during that incident up there but, I'm sorry, I cannot recall what the incident was.
- Siemer: The Congress of Micronesia was meeting at the same time that your District Legislature was meeting?

- Diaz: Yes. And there were some debates, I don't know whether it had something to do with the commonwealth or with other issues. Because I remember that there were several people, local people who went up there and they were trying to protest. They said that they wanted to slap somebody up there.
- Siemer: So feelings were getting stronger by then?
- Diaz: Yes. And I think at the time there was already talk, like you said—Oly was talking about splitting and becoming a commonwealth. I think the other members of the Congress of Micronesia resented the fact that one of the districts was thinking of getting out. I think they were relying on the intent of the United States to pull the Micronesian people together as a whole, which some of the Marianas people resented. So we were trying to pull out, and I think they didn't want us to pull out. So that's how things got started.
- Siemer: Was there anybody in the District Legislature back then who favored staying with Micronesia?
- Diaz: I don't recall anybody.
- Siemer: Did any of the Micronesian leaders come to you and others to try and persuade you that staying with the rest of Micronesia would be a better idea?
- Diaz: Not that I recall.
- Willens: Did you know any of the leaders from the other districts who were in the Congress of Micronesia at the time? Like Andon Amaraich or Bethwel Henry or Lazarus Salii?
- Diaz: Yes. Lazarus Salii.
- Willens: Did you ever discuss political status with those individuals?
- Diaz: When they came here, we didn't really get together. They had their own separate ways. I never recall a time when they even called us for a hearing. I guess because we did have a representative. But when there was a party for the High Commissioner at the time, we said hello, but I don't think we ever discussed anything.
- Willens: At about this time, Senator Borja was still a member of the Territorial Party...
- Diaz: Yes.
- Willens: Then there came a time when he switched to the Popular Party. Then he later on ran in the Republican Party with Joeten for the first election for the Commonwealth. What's your recollection today of Oly Borja and his contribution to the community?
- Diaz: Oly was a true politician. He knew how to convince people. He was pretty good at it. I knew he was at one time sort of favoring the Democratic Party at the time, but it was just momentary. He spent most of his time in the Territorial Party and then the Republican Party. He was very active. I can't really recall anything else.
- Willens: How about Joe Cruz?
- Diaz: That's the guy that I know was switching parties every now and then.
- Willens: Where did he begin? Did he begin with the Popular Party?
- Diaz: He began with the Popular Party.
- Willens: And then what happened?
- Diaz: Joe was the kind of person that if you cross him, then he would just kind of pack up and leave. I remember when he started with the Popular Party and he started criticizing

individually a lot of people. A lot of people got mad because he called them names. Joe was the kind of person that was feared, because he would do things that normal people wouldn't do. He started a newspaper called the *Free Press*. Do you remember that?

Willens: Did he use that politically?

Diaz: He used that politically. And not only that, but he got into your personal life and he would say all the things that people had never even heard about you.

Siemer: Were people worried about that?

Diaz: Yes. They worried about it because, like I said, he would just write anything. At the time the people were not so sophisticated about bringing people to court or filing suit. They were not sophisticated enough to know their rights, so they feared him. Even businessmen feared Joe. He was a very fearful person.

Willens: The people on Tinian kept electing him to various positions over the years, didn't they?

Diaz: As Joe became mature, then he started changing. When he was young, he did all those unbelievable things that nobody would ever do. You probably heard about his trek to the United States and his plan to go to Cuba. He went as far as Miami. He would joke about it. He would talk about it in his campaign.

Willens: He would or he wouldn't?

Diaz: He would.

Willens: Was that in the 1960s?

Diaz: Yes. He would talk about it; he was proud of it. He would talk about it in the campaign and say how he got caught by the FBI. And he said he was very proud, because he had a bodyguard from the States over here with the FBI, handcuffed on the plane and things like that. But his main purpose was that he was going to go to meet Castro. He was going to go to Cuba. I don't know whether it was Dr. Kaipat that he called Fidel.

Siemer: How did he get started on all that? What got him angry in the beginning?

Diaz: About his trek?

Siemer: About Cuba? What started him on that whole Cuba thing?

Diaz: Well, you see when he went to the United States. I don't know what the purpose was of him going there, but he was telling us that he was writing bad checks. He even called himself "pink check." And we asked him, "Why check?" And he said because that's what he does. He writes bad checks. He would tell us what he would do: he would buy a suit, then a briefcase, and he would wear a tie. He would go the bank. And because he's very fluent in English, and he's a very good actor, he would go in there and write a check, tell them that he was a businessman, he would show a card and things like that to prove that he's a big businessman. Then they would really cash his checks. So he started in California and started moving down to Miami. Since that time, what he was telling us, well actually I don't know whether he was really telling us the truth. But I believed him, because he would always talk about it. Like he had so much money that his plan was to go to Cuba. Then I think finally the FBI caught up with him in Miami, so they brought him back.

Willens: Did they convict him of writing checks illegally?

Diaz: I think they did. I think they put him in prison in the States, and then he finally came over here. At one time, he was into trouble here also. Because when he was younger, he stole a military uniform and he wore it. And he started talking to the guards to let him go into

the NTTU. And you know the guard being local didn't realize that he was not authorized. Nobody would ever think that he would do it. So he went inside and he got caught. Then later on, he was placed in there, and when he came out he was already working as a clerk in the police department.

Willens: He was a character.

Diaz: If somebody could write his story, it would make a very good movie. All his life. The guy died last year. I think it was last year when he died. I think when he went to Tinian he started changing his ways. He became a family person. I guess really when it's all said and done, everybody seems to have liked it, enjoyed it.

Siemer: Was his family one of the ones that originally lived on Tinian?

Diaz: No.

Siemer: They came from Yap?

Diaz: Yes. Actually, his true and real wife is still here.

Siemer: In Saipan?

Diaz: Several kids. But then, after I don't know how many years, they separated. From that point on there was always a different girl with him. I knew that he was with this lady in Tinian that owned a store, and they were successful. Joe, I think, was hard to satisfy. He moved around so much. He didn't stay in one place.

Siemer: So he's the one who moved to Tinian. It wasn't based on family connections with Tinian.

Diaz: No. He moved to Tinian I think for the purposes of running for office. Because at the time when they started redistricting the District Legislature, he moved to Tinian. I don't know whether he intended to move there to run for the Legislature. From what I heard, he went there because he planned to run for political office. Because in Saipan I think everybody knew him already. He knew that he didn't have a chance to win. But in Tinian he started convincing people that, you know, like you said, he was always winning. He was the Mayor of Tinian. He was a representative of the Legislature. But he's a changed person. And I'm really happy, because before he died he was a changed person—for the better.

Willens: In 1972, the Legislature that you were part of created the Marianas Political Status Commission. There were 15 members and it included representatives from the parties and from the Chamber of Commerce. Do you recall any debate about what kind of negotiating commission to create?

Diaz: Well, actually I think at the time we were looking at options—it was commonwealth, it was freely associated state, and I think they even talked about independence.

Willens: By the time it got to 1972, Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero were members of the Congress of Micronesia, and they participated in the Micronesian negotiating group that dealt with Ambassador Williams. On instructions from you and your colleagues, I understand that they asked the Ambassador for separate negotiations because they wanted to be part of the United States. The Ambassador finally said yes, and then you created the Commission. Do you recall being briefed from time to time during the negotiations about what the Political Status Commission was doing?

Diaz: They were required to submit their reports to the Legislature, and they would briefly talk about it. But you know nobody would read their reports. You will find it very difficult for each individual member, or, you know, somebody like me—especially I don't like to read long reports. I only listen to what they say.

- Willens: Ben Santos was president of the District Legislature at the time.
- Diaz: He was the president.
- Willens: And Felipe Salas was pro-tem at the time.
- Diaz: Yes.
- Willens: Would those two talk to you and others from time to time about what they were doing and what the issues were?
- Diaz: Yes. They were talking about it.
- Willens: What do you personally recall as being most important to you about those negotiations? Was it the land on Tinian or financial support or local constitutional government or what?
- Diaz: Foremost I think we were looking at that time for financial support. I think that was one of the most important issues there. Actually another important issue was to just get out of Micronesia as a whole, to just separate. That was actually the original intent of us looking for another political status—just to get away from the rest of the Micronesian people. That's how I felt about it from talking to people. Don't get me wrong. It's not as if we really don't like those people. It's really not that. It's just that we felt that we just have to be among ourselves, to go alone on a separate way.
- Willens: Even if they wanted to go in the same direction as you did, you'd like to go by yourself?
- Diaz: Yes.
- Willens: Was the financial support that you referred to based on your sense that there was a great need for infrastructure or for other purposes?
- Diaz: I think it was mainly for infrastructure.
- Willens: Some of the other districts thought that the Trust Territory government should spend more money on infrastructure. How did you feel about that? Had the Trust Territory not spent enough money in your judgment on the Northern Marianas?
- Diaz: That's the impression I got from our leaders. Like for example, you've got this big pie, and then you have to divide it among the different districts. I think what motivated us was that we felt that we were really way behind compared to Guam. And we felt that since we are so close, our original intention was to be with Guam, our brothers, and at the time we felt that the people of Guam were looking down at us. As if they were saying, oh, these Chamorros up there, you know, are poor. Things like that. I don't know, but that's how I felt from the rest of the people that were talking about it. We just kind of were saying that, you know, you resent us, you don't want us to be reunited, we've got to do something about having a better economic development and better infrastructure. And that's precisely what's going on now. We have a better political status, and now Guam is saying: "Man, I wish we could be a commonwealth, too."
- Siemer: That must be some satisfaction.
- Diaz: Yes. That's what the leaders felt about it. Even if Guam asked us to join us there now, I think probably we would just turn them down. I don't know. I don't know how you call it—sort of jealousy at the time. Now that we're up here, it's sort of like: "You can go to hell," kind of attitude. I hope that's not really the way it is.
- Siemer: After the Covenant negotiations finished up, there was a period of public education before the vote, and a number of people came out with reasons why the Covenant should not

be accepted. Back then, did you think that those folks had any chance of swaying many voters?

Diaz: The thing with the Covenant is that the group went out and explained to the people. And when you're explaining something and you want people to sway to your side, you always tell them the good things. As for the bad things or for the disadvantages, you'll probably be able to mention them a little bit, but you just kind of hide that.

Siemer: Touch on it lightly.

Diaz: Yes. Lightly. And just hope that it is not going to come back. They did translate it into Carolinian. They did translate it into vernacular Chamorro. I don't know. It's very difficult for people to really sit down and read it. In most cases, a lot of this translation is—I've never considered it 100 percent accurate, because there are a lot of American words that we don't have. You tend to just use the English words and a lot of people don't even understand part of the English words, and *vice versa*. So the people depend on their leaders. I think that it's easier for them to say well, I'll support you if this is what you want. If this is backed by a majority of the leaders, we will support it. And that's precisely what it was. So there was really not much hassle when they would go out for public hearings. There were some educated people who questioned the context. Some people that were especially planning to run for political office used those gatherings to, you know, when people are vocal and things like that, everybody would look at him and say man, this guy must know something. Maybe he's a good candidate for the next election. I think that's normal for everywhere, you know.

Willens: Oscar Rasa was a leader of the opposition.

Diaz: Oh, yes.

Siemer: He did like to make speeches.

Diaz: Yes. I remember one time we were asked to give a speech at a graduation of the sixth graders. Being a really educated person, when he gave that address, I could feel that even myself (where you know I went through at least two years of college)—but a lot of the words that he was using I couldn't understand. I said this guy must just be showing it off, because those sixth graders would never understand what he was saying. I was talking to him one time, and you know how Oscar is. As a matter of fact, you know that he's related to Joe Cruz.

Willens: He is related?

Diaz: Yes.

Siemer: No, I didn't know that. How is he related to Joe?

Diaz: I don't know exactly how—Joe Cruz' father and Oscar's mom, whether they're cousins or brothers and sisters. Oscar's middle name is Cruz.

Siemer: Cruz. That's right. I was just thinking that.

Diaz: We know that they're related, but I don't know how they're related.

Willens: Was it the mother who was from Ponape or the ...

Diaz: The father is from Ponape. But the mother's pure local. You know R.C.? They call him R.C.? Joe Cabrera?

Willens: No.

Diaz: Okay. Joe Cabrera's wife Rita's father is a brother to Oscar's mother.

- Willens: We're hoping to see Oscar in the next few days to explore some of these things.
- Diaz: You ask him about that.
- Siemer: It's hard to pin Oscar down to a particular time and place.
- Diaz: He's on-island?
- Siemer: He's here, yes.
- Willens: The Constitutional Convention took place in 1976. Did you consider running for the Constitutional Convention?
- Diaz: No.
- Willens: Did you follow any of the issues there while that Convention was in progress?
- Diaz: In the papers. I guess I was part of the majority of the crowd who decided to leave it to our leaders who were handling it.
- Siemer: The Popular Party had done quite well in elections up until 1974, and then a couple of Popular Party leaders lost. But in 1976, when the Constitutional Convention election came around, the Territorial Party did enormously well. They took two-thirds of the seats in the Constitutional Convention. Was there a political reason for that?
- Diaz: That's the difference between running for political office and running for the Constitutional Convention. In the Constitutional Convention, people were looking for people that they know can do the work. In the political parties, it's who you know. So regardless whether the guy is really qualified, if he can shake your hand every time you meet him or if he gives you some money to buy something, it's a big difference.
- Siemer: So the people who ran for the Constitutional Convention were not beholden particular to anyone?
- Diaz: No. When it comes to the Constitutional Convention, there's practically no political parties involved. Actually they don't even go out aggressively, as if you're running for political office. I think most of them just put up a campaign poster in the newspaper and talk on the TV and radio, and that's it. But in the political party, people will go out house to house, even do nightly campaigns and things like that.
- Willens: Was Dr. Camacho head of the Popular Party at the time?
- Diaz: He was. He was the chairman of the Popular Party.
- Willens: How did that come about? How had he gotten involved in politics? He was in the public health area for many years. Was he an active politician during the years you were in the District Legislature?
- Diaz: No, he was really not an active politician. I think he was only interested in the governorship. I think he wanted to be part of history, and that's about it.
- Siemer: How did he get to be head of the Party, though?
- Diaz: I mentioned earlier about the Popular Party becoming the Democratic Party. As you know, we consider the Democratic Party as a poor people's party. They lack monetary support in terms of running for political office. They sort of don't have the people that have the resources to run, so the people that have resources are not really that influential in the Party. We were, fortunately enough, back in the 1960s, where regardless of who you were, if you were running in the Popular Party, it's a vote right down there, you know, straight votes. But the younger people became educated. They were reading newspapers, watching

television, and coming back from schools on the mainland. People were becoming sophisticated in their voting. Now they were choosing the right person regardless of who they are. Later on, turning to the political situation, the mood had changed. People who are in the Democratic Party are there because they believe in it, but when it comes to voting, they will vote for a person that they know can do the work. So the idea of voting now is shifting. Even within families. It used to be that families were very strong. It's not that way anymore. People choose people who they think can do a good job. That's how I looked at the elections during the past, when I was running, compared to the present now. Because it has something to do with a lot of the people that I talk to, how do they vote. They said that they were criss-crossing. You can see this also from the fact that you have all this mixed balance. So that shows you that people are no longer voting on a straight line. They are criss-crossing.

Siemer: What made you decide to run when the Commonwealth was set up? That's when you first ran for Mayor?

Diaz: Yes. I was asked to run by the Party. My wife never really wanted me to be in politics. The reasoning behind the Democratic Party at the time was that I was probably the best candidate to enable the Party to win the Mayor's office. I thought that I was going to get out of politics and just be a member of the Party. But they came to me saying that I owe the Party that much so that I should go and continue running. So I made a promise. I said okay, if that's how you feel about it, I will run for one term and that's it. I'll pay the Party what I owe them. So I did run for one term.

Willens: Who did you run against?

Diaz: I ran against Joe Rios.

Willens: You won in Saipan, and Governor Camacho and Frank Ada won. But the Republican Party won the majority of the Legislature.

Diaz: Yes.

Willens: What's your explanation for the way in which the people voted back in 1977?

Diaz: Actually, the way I look at it, Joeten was a weak candidate. Camacho was running against Joeten.

Willens: Well, that's interesting, because a lot of people thought that Joeten and Oly Borja were going to run away with it.

Diaz: I think what happened is that Joeten was a weak candidate for the reason that he didn't really speak the English language well. That was what I heard. And I guess some of the people also sort of felt that they got cheated by Joeten when he was starting his business. This is only what I heard people saying. There were a lot of things about him and his wife when they started in the business that people didn't really like. As to how many people, I'm not too sure. But from what I heard, the reason why Joeten had a lot of land is because when they started in their business, they were giving credit to a lot of people. People could not afford to pay them back, so in exchange they gave him their land. They would talk about even five cents if they're short, you know, Joeten's wife would say well, I'm sorry I cannot sell to you. You'll have to come up with the five cents. You know, people are very sensitive. And whether this is the truth, I cannot say. But these are some of the things that I was hearing at the time when Joeten was running. I am sure that it has something to do with that. And besides, I think that at the time there, the strength of the Party was already kind of weakening.

- Willens: The Republican Party?
- Diaz: No. The Democratic Party. But from the beginning, I knew that the Republican Party did not really pick the right choice to run against Camacho.
- Siemer: So they had good choices to run in the Legislature but not a good choice to run for the governor?
- Diaz: Not a good choice for the governor.
- Siemer: Was Joeten a good Chamorro speaker?
- Diaz: Yes.
- Siemer: Did he make good political speeches?
- Diaz: Not so. Oly could do much, much better. But it was not a good choice. I think if it would have been Oly for the Governor and then Joeten for the Lt. Governor, it probably would have made a good choice.
- Willens: I've heard some suggestion that putting two businessmen on one ticket was a disadvantage, because your Party emphasized that the Republicans were the Party of the rich and that the businessmen would advance their own interests once they were in political office. Do you recall that being an issue?
- Diaz: Yes, probably. But I think that from what I'd been hearing people say, they were saying that it's just going to be very embarrassing, because Joeten cannot speak the way that the Camachos speak, and Oly can speak. You know, the Chamorro people had their own fights too. They wanted to see their governor be able to speak good English and understand and negotiate and things like that.
- Siemer: If he went to Washington, for example?
- Diaz: Yes. And everybody felt that Joeten was good in business, but he had never had experience in political things. Like I said, if Oly had been the one that was running for the governor, they probably would have won. I guess I was fortunate enough, too, to run against Rios, because Rios was a very weak candidate. And I was telling the Party, I said you know if Rios was running, I think any of you could win against him.
- Willens: They didn't want to take that chance, obviously.
- Diaz: Yes.
- Willens: What were your principal accomplishments as Mayor as you think back on your term?
- Diaz: The reason why I ran for only one term is because there were a lot of things behind it too. There was a compromise. At the time, there was a compromise with the Party. See, in the Constitution they sort of took away the responsibility of the mayors. So if you look at the mayor at the time, he sort of served in an advisory capacity. The previous mayors, prior to the Constitution, could impose taxes, they had their own counsel, they had their own public works and all the other departments. In the new Commonwealth, it was sort of like an advisory capacity. I wasn't really enthused about running, because I knew that's what it was. But during the negotiation of compromising with the Party, they were saying that well, if you become a mayor, we will sort of do something about changing the way it is. And I told them, you cannot do that because it's part of the Constitution. Then they said well, what we can do is we can give you people, we can support you with equipment, things like that. Unfortunately, it didn't happen during my four-year term. So that was the second part of that negotiation. I told them that if you don't give me all

these things that I can help the people with, then I'll just quit after one term. So that's precisely how it was. Well, actually, when I was a mayor I tried to accomplish things with my limited resources. Originally, they gave me some people to assist. The funny thing about it is that the Legislature was Republican, as you've mentioned, and they sort of gave additional responsibilities to the mayors of Rota and Tinian and didn't give me additional responsibilities. I knew it was political, but I never said anything. What they said was that they had to because they were isolated islands. But it was intended as a political thing. You know, Rota and Tinian had been supporting the Republican Party for a long, long time. At the same time, the mayors there were Republicans. So what I did during those four years was actually limited. I concentrated on getting some programs for the young people, exchange programs with Japanese students. We sent our students there for a week, stayed with the families, and they did likewise. During my mayorship, there were a lot of Japanese who were coming and saying you're doing this program, can we do this? Sure. So in that four-year term, we had so many young people, and it even went up to university students where they sent their students here to learn our culture, and there were so many programs in that regard. And with the cooperation of Public Works, we cleaned all the villages, like removing all the vehicles and all the debris and things like that. So I did something. I wasn't really proud about it, but there wasn't anything I could do.

Willens: I understand. I know that you have other business here. Just a few words: what is your sense of how it's worked out here with the Covenant in the last 20 years? Are you generally satisfied with the way events developed?

Diaz: I think my only concern is that we are overwhelmed with people from the outside that has sort of destroyed the local culture. I mentioned earlier that it used to be that when people met people around the roads, they were waving. Now it's no longer there. And I'm concerned about the criminal elements. I hope that our Immigration people would be sophisticated enough to prevent people coming in from the outside. You've probably read in the papers about all those illegal aliens with criminal backgrounds, mainly the Chinese. All the news about the abuses. My reservation in that regard is that people who are reading the papers outside of the Marianas do not realize actually that the majority of the abuses is being done by the aliens, the people themselves that come from the outside and are doing business here. They are the ones that are doing all of this. And yet, we are being blamed for it in the CNMI. I think that the people here are very hospitable and are very good people. But I think the people from outside are taking advantage of the situation. So although we're economically (as you've said) moving forward, as you can see the roads and everything, all the businesses and whatever, have expanded tremendously. It's like an overnight change. I really surprise myself as I travel around. Hey, how did this come up?

Willens: That's certainly true. It's very dramatic. Every time that we come here, there are important new developments.

Diaz: Yes.

Willens: Well, we want to thank you very much for your time and your help on this project. Thank you, sir.

Diaz: Thank you. I wish I could help you. It's so bad that you come at a time when we're sort of getting further away from all those years, and there are a lot of things that are hard to recall.

Willens: That's certainly true. Better for us to do it now than for no one to do it at all.

Diaz: I imagine it's about 30 years, huh?

Willens: It is 30 years that we're talking about.

Diaz: When you were here 30 years ago, you looked so young and handsome.

Willens: Well thank you for that, and thank you for this interview. It has been very helpful.