

INTERVIEW OF AGNES M. McPHETRES

by Deanne C. Siemer and Howard P. Willens

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- Siemer: Agnes McPhetres is the President of the Northern Marianas College and has had long and distinguished government service in the Trust Territory government and the Marianas government. Agnes has kindly agreed to assist us with our history research project. Why don't we start, if we may, with where you were born and when.
- McPhetres: I was born in Rota during the war, that was in 1944. Right after the war, my family moved over to Saipan, so actually I didn't even know Rota until I graduated from college and I went back to see Rota. But since I left Rota when I was baby, I had never gone back. I was brought up in Saipan, I went to school here in Saipan. I went into the Convent for a while. I had a lot of religious training. Then I went to Omaha, Nebraska to do my undergraduate work and came back to Saipan in 1971. But before I got to Saipan, I was in Truk running one of the private schools there as principal for a year and a half. Then I came here and starting working in the Trust Territory Department of Education. I started off as a researcher of manpower needs for the whole Trust Territory, so I had that document put together for the Trust Territory in terms of manpower needs. And I was moved from that job to be in charge of the Vocation Advisory Council for the whole Trust Territory. And from there, I was moved to head up the testing program for the Trust Territory, working with the testing program. Then the Director of Education wanted me to assist him for the hiring of all the staff for Education in the whole TT. I worked in that position for about a year and a half, and then he wanted me to be his assistant in the instructional division. So I was heading the Educational Instructional Program for the Trust Territory for about six years. During that period we did all the orthography for all the languages of Micronesia, the 11 languages here, and did also a lot of training of local people, sending them to Hawaii to get their degrees as they worked on the orthography. So that was the beginning really of pushing education here in the Pacific for the local people to start getting higher education. And I worked there, as I said, for eight years for the Trust Territory.
- Siemer: Until what year?
- McPhetres: I moved down to the CNMI, worked with OTSP, this is the Office of Transitional Studies and Planning, in 1978, I guess. No, before it became the Commonwealth.
- Siemer: Before the election?
- McPhetres: Before the election, because I was working with OTSP on the federal program aspects. So it has to be 1976-77, around that time. So I worked at OTSP that's why I mentioned those people. And my job primarily at OTSP was looking at all of the federal programs that could becoming over to the CNMI, analyzing them to see the economic impact, social impact, and making recommendations for that. And I think that's one of the reasons why I was appointed to be a member of the Commission on Federal Laws, because of my background in all this research. I was with the Commission for four years.
- Siemer: Until what year?
- McPhetres: Gosh.
- Willens: It must have been about 1985 or so?
- McPhetres: Yes.

- McPhetres: The current Lt. Governor [Jesus Borja] and I were the ones who were replaced by Benigno Fitial and a lawyer who replaced me. That was almost the end, but we finished the work. When we got replaced, it was just to carry it out. We had already finished all the documents, all the work. It was mainly to try to see how the U.S. Congress would start enacting all that legislation.
- Siemer: Let me go back just for a minute, if I could, to your family background, because Rota's been so important in the Commonwealth. Could you tell us your father and mother's full names.
- McPhetres: My mother's full name is Anna Ada Manglona, and my father is Jose Mendiola Manglona.
- Siemer: Were they educated in Rota in Japanese times?
- McPhetres: No, they were educated during the German period. My father was sent to Ponape, because they had a seminar school there in Ponape, so my father was sent there to study to be a priest. It was a higher education there for some elite local people. My father spoke German, some Japanese, but he was more fluent in German.
- Siemer: What did he do prior to the war?
- McPhetres: I don't know. I really don't know.
- Siemer: What did he do after he came here?
- McPhetres: Oh, when he came here, he worked for a little while with the Naval Administration. They hired local people as guards. But then he was just a plain farmer. So he brought us up on a farm, where the Joeten houses are. That was our farm over here, close to the airport, until the Navy moved us out because it was supposed to be a restricted area. But I remember growing up in that area. So we are primarily farmers.
- Siemer: How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- McPhetres: We're ten in the family. I'm the youngest. My oldest brother was killed during the war because the Japanese took all of the able male population to get them to work in the field for the Japanese. So the Americans, when they saw people in the field, they thought they were Japanese, so they bombed. They were in Rota, so he was killed in the field. There was only one casualty in my family, my oldest brother.
- Siemer: Who are your other brothers and sisters?
- McPhetres: My other brothers are here. One of them is in Haywood, California. My other brother is in Guam. He's a successful businessman, Don Manglona.
- Siemer: What's the name of the one who's in California?
- McPhetres: Herman.
- Siemer: Herman's in California, and Don's in Guam?
- McPhetres: Don is in Guam. Martin is here. And Jose is in Rota. Martin was above me, he's the youngest man in the family. He's the one who entered the U.S. military and did have quite a successful career as an enlisted soldier. He went up to the top of the enlisted ranks. In fact, before he retired in the military, he was working for a four-star general in Virginia, head of the national communications. Then he retired from there, so he's here now on Saipan.
- Siemer: How about your sisters?

- McPhetres: My sisters are here. The two older ones were educated during the Japanese Administration. My sister's last name had to be changed. They had to adopt the Japanese last name in order for them to have a better education. The local people could have only up to a fifth-grade education during that time, and if you were excelling in your studies, sometimes you could be allowed to take higher education, but you couldn't as a native, so you had to be adopted into a Japanese family. So my sisters had a Japanese last name, and they went there.
- Siemer: Did they get that Japanese education in Rota?
- McPhetres: In Rota, because we had a Japanese school, just for the Japanese. So she was able to attend the Japanese school to further her education. Now my other sister graduated here. She went through the American school, elementary, secondary, and her highest level was ninth grade at that time. And of course she got married after that and she never went through school.
- Siemer: How about yourself? You were educated here in Saipan?
- McPhetres: I was educated here. All my elementary and secondary levels were here.
- Siemer: At Mt. Carmel?
- McPhetres: Mt. Carmel, yes. I was one of the first graduates at Mt. Carmel.
- Siemer: At the time that you went to Mt. Carmel, were there students from other places in the Trust Territory there?
- McPhetres: Not when we started it. Later on, the nuns brought students from the Trust Territory, and we had a boarding school. They were mainly ladies. These ladies would attend the Mt. Carmel schools.
- Siemer: Did you do your convent training while you were at Mt. Carmel?
- McPhetres: Yes, they called us aspirants, you know, aspiring to be a nun. We were young kids. I entered when I was 14 years old. So I finished my high school there, and of course later on I left the convent and pursued my degree.
- Siemer: Were you in the convent here on Saipan?
- McPhetres: Yes. We went up to Maturana Hill. It used to be a naval hospital, and that was given to the nuns for training. We were the first ones to be trained how to demolish buildings, how to build up the facilities, so we were part of the rebuilding of the facility up at Navy Hill.
- Siemer: What made you decide to go to Omaha to college?
- McPhetres: It's quite simple. When you send in applications, the first college that will respond will be the college where you would go. And normally a small college will respond faster than a state college.
- Siemer: What did you study?
- McPhetres: I studied secondary education, with an emphasis in history.
- Siemer: What was the name of the school?
- McPhetres: College of St. Mary.
- Siemer: When you graduated from college, that's when you came back here to work for the Trust Territory?
- McPhetres: Yes. But before I worked for the Trust Territory, I went to Truk for a year and a half.

- Siemer: What was the school that you worked at in Truk?
- McPhetres: St. Cecilia School.
- Siemer: How big was that?
- McPhetres: It was an elementary school up to eighth grade. We had a population of about 500 students.
- Siemer: When you came back to Saipan to work for the Trust Territory, what was your impression about how the Trust Territory was carrying out its responsibilities for education?
- McPhetres: When I first got into education, I became part of the system, and I had no critical view on what was happening. But as I moved on to greater responsibility, I realized that the schools and the system would not work unless we started building from within. Since I was involved in recruitment from off-island, and the teachers or faculty or staff would be here only for two years or four years, I saw that a lot of the money that came in would just go out, and continuity was never there. A new science specialist would be brought in, and would start assessing the needs. And then in two years, they would go back. We would recruit another science specialist, and the person again would start assessing the science needs. So we never moved from A to B to C. So that's why David Ramarui and I felt that in order for us to have a better educational system, we'd better focus on training the local people so that they could start taking the leadership. And we should also emphasize the language, and that's why we contracted the University of Hawaii to start helping us develop the orthography.
- Siemer: Approximately when was that when you started to work on the orthographies?
- McPhetres: That was in the very early 1970s.
- Siemer: Was that also when you switched your emphasis to training local people and emphasizing continuity?
- McPhetres: Yes.
- Willens: There had been a long history of local people being educated to be teachers back in the 1950s and the early 1960s.
- McPhetres: Yes. The Trust Territory had set aside money to send children of what we call expatriates off-island for high school because there wasn't any high school here. There was a private high school only. So if they wanted to send their kids for example to Mt. Carmel, the government would pay for their school. If they want to send them to Guam, they'll pay in Guam or someplace else. The public high school wasn't really encouraged until later on. But even when we had the public high schools, they were still given what we called an educational allowance for parents whose kids were of high school age to send them there. Then the Trust Territory also set aside money for scholarships, for financial assistance. So we would send students abroad to go to college. At one time we were just doing training, not necessarily degree programs. The first people that really were getting into formal degrees were people from Palau and the CNMI. That's why Palauans had their first doctors, lawyers, more degrees coming out of Palau than the CNMI, and to some extent Ponape and Truk and Yap. The Marshalls were always behind in terms of getting the people to get their degrees. They would go, but the students at that time were not really prepared to meet the educational challenge, as well as the cultural challenge.
- Siemer: Plus being away from home and managing by themselves.
- McPhetres: Yes, so many of them dropped out. Very few got through, although the Trust Territory had

been helping them through the financial assistance. I was the first woman graduate from the CNMI. And that was in 1969.

Willens: And then you spent the year and a half in Truk and came back to Saipan in about 1971.

McPhetres: Right.

Willens: Many of the people we've interviewed, like Ben Santos and Felix Rabauliman before his death, and others were educated, as you say, off-island for high school and beyond. And many of them returned as teachers to the local school system.

McPhetres: Yes, because that was the primary scholarship. They gave you money if you became a teacher. Unfortunately, I didn't get any scholarship from the Trust Territory. I was able to get a scholarship from the college. That was good; it was very good because it was more challenging. You had to maintain a certain GPA if you're getting a scholarship from the college. I went there, got scholarship from the college, and they gave it to me because I was a foreign student, the first year, and then they challenged me to live up to a certain academic level, and so I completed my bachelor's degree through the scholarship.

Siemer: Had the nuns sent other CNMI students from here to St. Mary's?

McPhetres: Not to the College of St. Mary. I was the only one out there.

Willens: When you returned to Saipan about 1971, there had been about six or eight years of increased U.S. funding for the Trust Territory, and a large percentage of that had been devoted toward education the construction of facilities and the hiring of teachers. Did you have any sense as you got involved in the TTPI Administration as to how well those funds had been expended?

McPhetres: Actually, a lot of the money that went into the orthography was federal money, and so I feel that it was spent quite well. Some was spent on bilingual education. Also, the teachers that were sent to get their bachelor's degree as they worked on the orthography were also under the bilingual education program. Title III money at that time was for elementary and secondary curriculum. So we started developing the curriculum, localizing curriculum development with that federal money. Excuse me, not Title III, Title IV. And so all of the curriculum that was developed at that time would use federal grants. We didn't have enough money, or we didn't really have money from appropriations by the Congress to develop curriculum. All of the curriculum that was developed was through these set-aside funds, discretionary funds from the U.S. Department of Education. We had only enough money to hire teachers, to hire local teachers, as well as to hire non-resident instructors, and to pay the housing allowance and all those other goodies that go with it. And that's where the money comes in. When the Trust Territory was managing the funds, I would say that the money actually was managed quite well you know, was directed to its purpose. When we started decentralizing, some districts really took advantage of it. Other districts rechanneled the funds for other purposes. I remember, maybe without mentioning the district, we would send money for such things, and when we go down to check whether those things were done, the money disappeared and they haven't done any of those things.

Siemer: When did you start decentralizing?

McPhetres: What did they call that before we became a Commonwealth?

Willens: Separate administration?

McPhetres: Yes. When we had the constitutional government, and they passed their own Constitution, that's when the decentralization started. It wasn't suddenly; it was little by little at first. At

first we still kind of controlled the funds by applying to the U.S. Congress and then giving it down to the districts, and we still monitored. But the true decentralization occurred during the McCoy period.

Willens: That's much later in the 1980s.

McPhetres: Yes, much later. I left the Trust Territory when Fred Zeder was the Director of Territorial Affairs. The policy was to try to take all of the CNMI out of the Trust Territory, as well as CNMI residents, to eventually de-hire them and send them to the CNMI government. And I was one of the top-level persons there in the Trust Territory. In fact, I was the only one there from the CNMI, and John Sablan, who passed away recently. And I just couldn't take that any more. When they got together and said how many CNMI have you fired or have you sent down? And it looked like our meeting was just that. We had to continuously take CNMI people out of the Trust Territory. So that's when I actually submitted my resignation. I said I think I should go, too.

Siemer: There was a determined effort to separate?

McPhetres: It was a real determination on the part of the Trust Territory, or at least the Director, to pull CNMI people from the Trust Territory. I resigned because I was one of the top individuals in the Trust Territory and getting a good salary. I said I don't like to see these discrimination practices going on. Adrian Winkel was the High Commissioner then, so he changed that.

Willens: Did he?

McPhetres: Yes. He changed that, and he continued using CNMI people. Because what happened is that they were bringing in Filipinos or third-country nationals to replace the CNMI . . .

Siemer: The CNMI people?

McPhetres: People in the Trust Territory were more capable in many instances. I could see what they intended to do is to prepare the CNMI to start the new government. But it was backlashing, you know.

Siemer: Was it also a feeling on the part of some of the other districts that if the CNMI wanted to go its own way, then they should just push everyone out?

McPhetres: I think there was a little resentment, also, to that. But there was also resentment on the part of the CNMI for being pushed out. In fact, that's one of the reasons why I resigned from the Trust Territory. If that wasn't that policy, I would have worked a little longer in the Trust Territory. But because of that practice, I didn't like it at all. But High Commissioner Adrian Winkel stopped that practice after that.

Willens: When you came back in 1971, did you become familiar with the political status objectives that some of the Marianas political leaders were advocating?

McPhetres: I was not really involved in it. I saw them going to Washington, and they were meeting, and then the Political Status Commission would come over here. But later on, I became very involved in the negotiation, not with the negotiators but as a group of concerned citizens of the CNMI. In fact, our group, the Women's Association, got very, very active during that period of time. We tried to read as much as possible of all the documents that the Political Status Commission was entertaining and tried to give input to the Commission. And at one time, the Commission's meetings were closed all the time, but we kind of pushed the issue to open it up so that the public would also have the opportunity to give their input. They were closed sessions, but there were also some open sessions for the community. What we did with the Political Status Commission is to have

separate meetings with our own members before they would go to negotiate, and there were several concerns that we voiced on the issues of negotiation. One major concern was the economic zone, the 200-mile economic zone. Why are we letting it go? Why aren't we negotiating to keep that? That was one issue. We also touched upon the land alienation issue as well as the price of the land that was being negotiated to be leased. The other issue that we touched upon, at least our group, was that we were trying to ask the Commission whether the CNMI was actually ready to enter into self-government. Looking at the people that we had, I think at that time we only had ten or less CNMI people who had college degrees, and so we felt (at least I felt and many of the women's group felt) that the CNMI was not really ready to move into this jump without having proper preparation of its citizens.

Siemer: You actually had many of the college graduates in your group, didn't you?

McPhetres: Yes, most of them were college graduates. And we felt that we were not ready yet to move in, or at least to come up with a certain type of government that would accommodate the situation over here.

Siemer: What do you recall of the discussion about the economic zone? Do you recall your group discussing that with particular members of the Commission?

McPhetres: Our own group did say, "How come you're not talking about this?" because we looked at some of the documents there. And I remember meeting with Oly Borja and Ben Manglona and some of those people, saying, "How come you are not fighting for the economic zone?"

Siemer: How did they try to explain that back in those days?

McPhetres: I don't think they were explaining anything. They were trying to pacify us. You know, they were not telling us the advantages or the disadvantages. They were saying, "Well, don't worry, we'll take that into consideration, and just trust us." They were trying to pacify us rather than addressing our issues. But they did address the human resource concern there by putting about half a million dollars in the Covenant itself as an appropriation for training of the people of the CNMI to meet the political change. So that was an accomplishment.

Willens: Yes, I always wondered what happened to that money. Was that money spent in fact for that purpose?

McPhetres: To a certain extent, yes. It was given to Personnel, and Personnel gave some to the college back when the college was starting. About \$200,000 was given to the college, and so that's how we started training the teachers to get their bachelors degrees. That's why I said to a certain extent, yes we did. I don't know what happened to the rest.

Willens: I don't want to cross-examine you, but you reminded me that that was put in at a last stage, and it seemed like a very useful objective. The debate about readiness for self-government had been going on for many years as you know, and there were some people back in Washington who thought that no one in the Trust Territory was going to be ready for self-government for another many years. Did you have any sense, based on your experience in Truk and your work as administrator, as to whether the people in the Marianas were more prepared for self-government than their counterparts in the other districts?

McPhetres: Oh, yes. Actually I thought Palau was more ready than the CNMI.

Willens: And that was primarily because of their strong drive toward education?

- McPhetres: Yes. And also whenever I would get reports, you know, because I would be in the TT asking for reports or visiting their schools, I would see Palau and the CNMI to be the top, and Palau would respond much better, Palau would write better, Palau would have a better concept of what they wanted at that time. They put a lot of importance in education, both Palau and the CNMI.
- Siemer: What was your own view back at the time after you came back from Truk and you began to work for the TT government about whether the Marianas and Palau for example should stay with the other districts in one political entity?
- McPhetres: After hearing what was happening, I went along with our negotiators, because the population here in the CNMI was quite small at that time. And I also had attended the Congress of Micronesia many times and testified many times up there, and I saw that the Marianas would not have much advantage economically or politically if they remained with the other Micronesian islands. I think personally I felt the choice was good to separate. And again, my parents and people here in the CNMI always wanted to be with the United States. They always wanted not to be with Micronesia. There is some sort of a social stigma other than political that it would be better to be with Guam or to associate with the United States than to be with Micronesia.
- Siemer: Is it a sense of a Chamorro community?
- McPhetres: I think it's Chamorro and I think in a sense there is a prejudice that is there, too. We felt, or the Chamorros feel, that they're a little more superior than the Carolinian counterparts, the Micronesian counterparts. And they do not want to be called Carolinians so that they do not want to be called part of Micronesia. There is a social aspect there as well as economic and political aspects. And they were afraid that if we continued to be with them, we would become one of them.
- Siemer: People on Rota seemed to be very determined to send their kids away for education. And in the CNMI you began to see more and more graduates, not as quickly perhaps as it should have been, but more and more people coming back with good education.
- McPhetres: Right. Actually, Rota per capita is the most educated in the Marianas.
- Siemer: To what do you attribute that?
- McPhetres: You're coming from a small town and you want to prove something. I remember when Rota didn't have high school, and the kids from Rota would come over here. The people from Saipan because I identify myself as both Rotanese and Saipanese, and the Saipanese think of me as Saipanese, but at the same time my blood is still there they would tease the Rotanese all the time, and the Rotanese will say I'm going to prove to you that I could be better than you. And this happened to me also because I went to Guam for my elementary education. My mother pulled me back later on when I was growing up because she was afraid that things would happen over there. But the same feeling when I was in Guam, the Guamanians looked down on the Saipanese. So I had to work really hard to prove to them that I could be as smart or smarter than they. So I think that's what's happening with the Rotanese. Same thing in Truk or in Ponape. Students or people from the outer islands, if you really look at who has better degrees, are people from the outer islands rather than from the district center. And a lot of the leaders in Truk and in Ponape really are from the outer islands.
- Willens: Some of these leaders from the other districts made very eloquent speeches in the Congress of Micronesia about how they wanted to be independent. They didn't want to be Americans. They wanted to control their own destiny. And it poses the question as to

why those leaders elected to go in a very different way than the leaders here. Do you have any judgment now looking back on what sort of prompted these different evaluations?

McPhetres: I think there were different influences that were getting at them. There were some groups in the community that would tell them that it is better for you to control your destiny. There were other groups that would say yes, but what is your destiny? So to be honest with you, I think a lot of those leaders were confused. They weren't so sure as to whether they wanted to go, although they would come up and say eloquently that they wanted to control their destiny. The proof today is that the United States has given them certain control, or a lot of control, but not totally controlling their destiny because the United States is still giving them the resources towards what they want to do and still they are not getting there. There's some influence from outside. I'm not so sure the influence is from within. And I think the Jesuits have a lot to do with influencing.

Siemer: The Jesuits always were in favor of independence, weren't they?

McPhetres: Yes. I think they were very active.

Siemer: Intellectually they seemed to think there was something purer about being independent than associating with one country or another.

McPhetres: Yes. And this is my feeling about that. A lot of the people really look very very highly at the Church, and they respect the Church. And so they think or they see or they feel that this may be the direction, is the best direction. And I think that's really what prompted them to think that way. The other area was I'm not so sure they saw both sides clearly. What it takes to be independent and what it takes to be that other way. I think the CNMI on the other hand had seen Guam progressing, and they saw Guam when they were not U.S. citizens yet, and they saw that when they became part of the U.S., they just moved towards development, and a lot of good things were happening to Guam. So it was very clear for the people over here that they wanted that way for good or for bad they wanted that way. Whereas a lot of the Micronesian people always thought that their world was just their surroundings. Communication was not there. The individuals that played the greatest role in their lives were the missionaries, other than the school. So it was between the school and the missionaries, those were the ones that helped them to think for the future.

Willens: How about the role of the traditional leaders and chiefs, particularly in Palau, but also in Truk and elsewhere? Do you think that was a source of influence that related to this issue?

McPhetres: Yes and no. I said yes, because they listen to their leaders, but who do the leaders listen to? That is the other thing. I'm not saying the Church is bad -- I think the Church has done a tremendous job. But when you look at and I'm not just saying Catholic, it's also Protestant who do they go first to? They go to the leader, and then the leader is influenced very, very highly with whatever philosophy that church group will bring.

Siemer: That's a very interesting insight about the Church, because by that time the Church here in the CNMI was in the hands primarily of Chamorros.

McPhetres: Yes.

Siemer: Bishop Camacho was on his way up the hierarchy. Other Chamorros had held important positions in the Church. So here it was quite different, wasn't it?

- McPhetres: Yes. It is. And communication is much better here. Those other islands, communication was almost nothing. And so communication, the outside world comes from the outside people. And who are the outside people really there, other than Peace Corps?
- Willens: You mentioned a whole new subject. The Peace Corps program was active in the Trust Territory when you came back and went into the Trust Territory government. Many of them, I gather, ended up as teachers.
- McPhetres: Right. They were not too active in the CNMI. They were very, very active in the other islands, especially the outer islands.
- Willens: Did you come to have some judgment about the efficacy of that particular program out here?
- McPhetres: The Peace Corps? Actually they played some role. I think we did not take advantage of their presence.
- Willens: Really?
- McPhetres: Yes. We could have utilized the Peace Corps much, much better. It was more of a replacement or meeting a need there, a gap, rather than using the Peace Corps as counterpart to maybe mentor, you know, the local people there so that when they left, the work would continue. But it was more of supplanting rather than more of a mentor-type process. And I know that the intent of the Peace Corps was to mentor or to help the local people get to where they wanted, to teach them. But they were the teacher, and the local people just pulled out. So they filled a gap, but not as a partner. And that's how I saw they were being treated or they were placed. For example, I was trying to encourage the principals there or the District Administrators to work with the Peace Corps to train the teachers so that they could upgrade. But no, they would try to put the Peace Corps to teach in a classroom rather than be trainers.
- Willens: How did you feel about the teaching of English by local people as distinct from people from the mainland? This was an issue that was much debated in the early 1960s, and you bring to it a special perspective. Was it best to train (by the time you got involved) the local people to teach English in the schools?
- McPhetres: For lower grades, yes. Also the problem here is that actually we should have taught the children first to really know one good language. But we only started the orthography in the 1970s, and we don't have books in Chamorro. So the kids don't know Chamorro or English.
- Siemer: It's actually still quite confusing. We do Chamorro here at your college, and different people spell the same word differently, and different people hook different syllables together, some people separate them off. And I can certainly relate to that. It is difficult to learn the language in a written form that way.
- McPhetres: It still is very difficult, plus we have two language commissions on Guam, the other one over here. I don't know why they don't have one Chamorro language commission so we could spell the same word the same. You know, so one spells "k", we spell "c".
- Siemer: Yes.
- McPhetres: So we have really a problem. But I think it would be best for the kids to learn their language well but at the same time, while they learn their language well, at the same time to teach them a foreign language while they are small. But they have to be taught in the language that they are more proficient in, but teach them a foreign language between since they're small until they're 12 years of age. This is the time when they could grasp a foreign

language much, much better and much more proficiently. After that, then they can pick up any language, because you develop that. But if you haven't even developed a language capability when they are small, it will be very difficult for them to handle any language, or be proficient in any one of the languages.

Willens: What was your own experience when you were a student? Were you learning and being taught in Chamorro?

McPhetres: Yes, we were taught in Chamorro. In the elementary level I attended the public school, so our teachers were Chamorro. And to be honest with you, I couldn't understand why kids can't read, because we were reading. They taught us in Chamorro, but we read in English. Seriously. We were in the third grade and we were already reading. But they were teaching us all in Chamorro. Our teachers were all Chamorros, and they taught us numbers, the name of the numbers, one-two-three, but then they explained it in Chamorro so we understood what was going on. But if you try to teach a concept in a foreign language, maybe some, the smart ones, could grasp it, but the average students can't grasp it.

Siemer: Then how old were you when the instruction switched over to English?

McPhetres: In high school.

Siemer: Ninth grade?

McPhetres: In high school. When I went to Guam in fifth and sixth, the instruction was in English, but I had enough English already. We didn't have kindergarten. First, second, third, fourth were all taught in Chamorro, but we read in English, and then the teacher explained it in Chamorro so we understood through our medium of instruction but learning a foreign language also.

Siemer: Why did your parents decided to send you to Guam?

McPhetres: Because my parents thought that the schools in Guam were more superior than here. And we had our relatives in Guam, too, like uncles and aunties. And my brothers, my older brothers Martin and Don and Herman, were sent to Guam for their elementary school.

Siemer: Your parents made a very substantial investment in all their kids' educations.

McPhetres: Yes. They felt education was very important.

Willens: Going back to the Covenant and the process of public education with respect to it, did you think there was a fair effort to get out the arguments pro and con on the Covenant under Mr. Canham and his staff?

McPhetres: I think when Canham was explaining about the Covenant, and not just Covenant, but the whole association with the United States, the emphasis was primarily the pros. The emphasis was on the advantages to be a U.S. citizen.

Siemer: That's a very important point.

McPhetres: Yes. The disadvantage was really downplayed, and that's one of the things also we were talking about within our group. You've got to explain to the people that to be a U.S. citizen you have to be taxed. You have to be responsible. On the day of the inauguration of the Commonwealth, people thought that money would be pouring in. No, seriously, that was the feeling of the majority. Well, where's our money? Where are the things that you said that they will give us? Because the whole campaign was we would have SSI. I didn't know what SSI at that time was. We would have SSI, we would have x number of millions of dollars. Under the TT, we only had this many millions. Under this, we would have this many millions. So they saw the millions. And it is a pity. It's a pity, because to be a U.S.

citizen you have to be responsible. And I think if you sell it both, the people will still buy it. But at least they will become U.S. citizens with a broader concept that to vote for this, I also have to put in something. But the responsibility was really downplayed.

Willens: How about the U.S. citizenship as a goal? Did that carry any particular political or emotional concept?

McPhetres: No, that was very palatable to be a U.S. citizen. It was very palatable, because, whether they understood what it was, that would give us a ticket to go to the United States and the United States, you know, that was a great opportunity for everyone over here.

Siemer: When people talked about money coming into the Commonwealth, did they think that individual people were going to get money?

McPhetres: Not necessarily. Roads would be fixed immediately, we would have 24-hour water, electricity, all this the infrastructure. I don't think people expected to have money in their pockets, but they expected to have jobs, they expected to have the roads fixed, they expected to have better facilities in the schools. Yes, that was expected. And I think the money that was given to the CNMI was sufficient if we followed the plan.

Willens: Well, let's come to that. I would be interested in your judgment about the plans that were generated by OTSP. Did you think that the office retained good consultants and supervised them adequately?

McPhetres: Yes. I think the office did a marvelous job, and I think the document they produced was very good, adequate for a new government. The law that was in there, you know, could give us a good foundation. But there was a political problem.

Willens: What was that?

McPhetres: The political problem was Pete A. Tenorio was the Director, and Carlos Camacho became the first Governor. And because of that, two hard-headed people, two opposing parties, Carlos could not accept the documents that were produced by OTSP.

Willens: Well, Manny A. Sablan was involved in that, too.

McPhetres: Yes, Manny was another person who . . .

Willens: And Manny ended up taking over (I think) the planning job in the government.

McPhetres: Not immediately. That was later. But see what happened, if we followed the budget process that OTSP has provided, we would not start the government in deficit.

Siemer: But there were people like yourself who worked for OTSP who Governor Camacho respected.

McPhetres: But the signature was Pete's. That's number one. The other one was the Legislature. Our Legislature was taking office in January, not in October. The budget that OTSP prepared for them, they felt it wasn't sufficient because they felt that oh, we are the first Legislature, we have to have control over the whole thing. So their first action was to run into deficit. If I remember correctly, I think the OTSP had proposed for them about \$800,000-some for their budget to take them from January-October. They appropriated \$1.3 million for the first year. So they had taken money away from projects that OTSP had already laid out, you know. So the Legislature, as well as the Executive Branch, did not follow the plan. The Governor, who already had all those plans, I think he called you back to rewrite it, didn't he?

Willens: Not me, no.

- McPhetres: Oh, no. The same people, the same consultant.
- Willens: Was that Mr. Mantel?
- McPhetres: Yes. The same consultants were brought back.
- Siemer: To do it again?
- McPhetres: To redo it, and we ran over. I think he charged the CNMI over half a million dollars. So there we go again, half a million dollars for the Executive Branch, close to half a million dollars in the Legislative Branch.
- Willens: Just one question about the federal programs. Did you make an estimate as to what would be the dollar value to the Commonwealth of the federal programs that were available to the Commonwealth?
- McPhetres: When I was doing a study? Yes. Our estimate at that time would be about \$20 million of federal programs, yes. And I told the government that we would have more money from all these other programs other than the Covenant funds.
- Willens: You told me once that you dealt with Washington with respect to federal programs. Did you feel that programs like food stamps and others should be rejected by the Commonwealth?
- McPhetres: Oh, yes, I definitely did. I didn't think we should bring food stamps here. Although we amended some of the applications here, that we should buy the crops and things grown locally here. But it would have been better if it was defined differently, put that for low income, but have them work and be paid for their work out of those funds, rather than just wait and get the money.
- Willens: We really appreciate your time, Agnes. Are there any comments you'd like to make for the record just about how well or not well the Commonwealth has worked out over the last 20 years?
- McPhetres: Actually, the Commonwealth has progressed a lot. The problem we are facing here, and I will go back again, is that our leaders, and when I say leaders it's not just the Executive Branch, it's Legislative as well as the Executive Branch, I'm not so sure we really understand what it is to be a U.S. citizen. You know, the responsibility that goes with it. I still feel we do not understand the responsibility of it. We have more than sufficient money. And I could say that we have a lot of money that we are wasting. If we could put those resources into where we said we would put them, we would have a better Commonwealth today. I think the status is good. A lot of people believe in it. I believe in it. It's the way we are implementing it. It is not the fault of the United States. It is the fault of the CNMI leaders. All of these non-residents that are coming in is not the fault of anybody outside. It's our own fault. We let it happen. And it's again going back to the responsibility, you know, what it is to be a U.S. citizen. Protect that sanctity, that Covenant that we have negotiated with the United States. If we are given something, we also have to be responsible for what we are given.
- Willens: Thank you very much.