

INTERVIEW OF JESUS G. VILLAGOMEZ

by Deanne C. Siemer

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- Siemer: Jesus G. Villagomez was a delegate to the First Constitutional Convention. Thank your for assisting us on this project. Mr. Villagomez, would you tell us your full name just for the record.
- Villagomez: My name is Jesus G. Villagomez.
- Siemer: And where do you live?
- Villagomez: I live right here on Saipan, up at the Capitol Hill area.
- Siemer: Tell us what you're doing right now.
- Villagomez: I am a retired government employee. I've been retired for about five years now. And I am a simple farmer.
- Siemer: Tell us what kind of crops you grow.
- Villagomez: I grow just one crop, which is the tropical yam.
- Siemer: And that's sold here locally?
- Villagomez: Definitely, and strictly for that matter.
- Siemer: Tell us where your family is from. Start with perhaps your father's family.
- Villagomez: I believe my father's family originated from this island. My mother's family, my grandmother came from Guam.
- Siemer: Were your father and mother here during the war?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: Where did you go to school?
- Villagomez: I went to school here up to high school and then I went to the University of Guam.
- Siemer: What did you study there?
- Villagomez: Well there's a break in between. After I tried for about three years, I wasn't making it, so I managed to sneak into the U.S. Army at that time, which we're not supposed to because we were TT citizens. And after I got back, I loafed around for a few years, and then I finally went back to school, back again to the University of Guam. At the time that I went there first back in 1961, it was the College of Guam then. Then when I got back in 1973, 1974, at that time it's already the University of Guam.
- Siemer: Where did you serve in the Army?
- Villagomez: I went through different posts. I took my basic at Fort Ord, and then I transferred over to Sam Houston, Texas and then went up to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and then I ended up at Fort Knox, Kentucky. I spent a few days at Oakland Army Base, transiting back to Saipan. And, between Oakland Army Base and Guam, I stopped over at Scofield Barracks and stayed there for about two weeks waiting for transportation back to Guam. Then from Guam onto Saipan.
- Siemer: What years were you in the Army?

Villagomez: I was in there from 1964 to 1966.

Siemer: And then when did you go back to the University of Guam?

Villagomez: 1974.

Siemer: What did you study at that time?

Villagomez: I took my undergraduate in accounting.

Siemer: After that?

Villagomez: And then of course I continued on and got my M.B.A.

Siemer: An M.B.A. from the University of Guam?

Villagomez: Right.

Siemer: And when was that?

Villagomez: That's in 1975.

Siemer: So you finished your undergraduate degree and went right on for your M.B.A.?

Villagomez: Right, and then of course after that one I came here, and I continued to work for the Internal Audit Office for the Trust Territory government.

Siemer: What was your position at that time?

Villagomez: I was one of the staff auditors.

Siemer: Where did you work after that?

Villagomez: I transferred down to the Office of Transition Studies and Planning. It was an office created to take care of the transitional government.

Siemer: That was run by Pete Tenorio?

Villagomez: Pete A. Tenorio, right. So I was one of his staff members.

Siemer: What area did you cover in OTSP?

Villagomez: I was supposed to put together a package on federal programs, which we did along with Agnes McPhetres, the president of the college.

Siemer: Very successfully?

Villagomez: Right. So we put together a thick package of all the federal programs that could apply out here.

Siemer: How long did you work for OTSP?

Villagomez: It wasn't too long. Not even a year. After that, I got transferred down to the new government as the Chief of Finance and Accounting Division.

Siemer: For the Commonwealth?

Villagomez: For the Northern Marianas government. Well, the Northern Marianas government at that time. The Commonwealth came later.

Siemer: In Governor Camacho's Administration, where were you working?

Villagomez: That's when I got into finance.

Siemer: And then what position did you have after that?

Villagomez: Well, when they created MPLC.

- Siemer: Marianas Public Land Corporation.
- Villagomez: Corporation, right. Pete Tenorio asked me if I wanted to be the accountant for the new office and I said yes, why not. So I went straight from the finance [office], the Northern Marianas [government] finance [office] to OTSP and I became the accountant there.
- Siemer: What year was that?
- Villagomez: I believe it's in 1979.
- Siemer: And you stayed at MPLC until you retired?
- Villagomez: Until I retired in 1988, December of '88.
- Siemer: What were the positions that you had at MPLC?
- Villagomez: Well, I started out as an accountant, and then they created a better title, Comptroller. And then after that one of course, Pete became Lieutenant Governor. So the Board of Directors selected me to be the Executive Director, and that was, I'm not too sure now, 1983 I guess when I became the Executive Director up to 1988.
- Siemer: Had you run for public office before you ran for the Constitutional Convention in 1976?
- Villagomez: No.
- Siemer: What made you decide to run for the Constitutional Convention?
- Villagomez: Well, it's the challenge, and the experience, and of course, to help out since I just got out of school and at that time there weren't that many people with masters degrees.
- Siemer: There weren't any, I don't think.
- Villagomez: Well, Pete Tenorio was one, of course.
- Siemer: Is that right?
- Villagomez: Yes, right and my brother's already out of law school.
- Siemer: He had his law degree, that's right, and Pete Atalig had a law degree.
- Villagomez: Pete Atalig too. We had quite a few more, but very few in the masters program.
- Siemer: But there weren't any M.B.A.'s though, were there?
- Villagomez: I don't think so. I think I was the only one.
- Siemer: What party did you run with?
- Villagomez: At that time, I think we had these Territorial and Popular Parties. I think I ran with the Popular Party group.
- Siemer: Had you been active in Popular Party affairs before that?
- Villagomez: No.
- Siemer: How did you wind up running with the Popular Party?
- Villagomez: Well, you had to pick a party in order to run you know.
- Siemer: What was the process by which you became a candidate?
- Villagomez: Let me see. You have to have some kind of petition, I guess. And you get people to sign up for the petition and this would be submitted to the Resident Commissioner at that time. What's his name, Canham?

- Siemer: Yes.
- Villagomez: And that's the process. However, you get to be endorsed by a party. We have two parties at that time, like I said, Territorial and Popular, and I just ought to be in either one and said well, I might as well go with the Popular.
- Siemer: Do you recall going to the Popular Party Convention in early September of 1976 where they talked about their delegates for the Constitutional Convention and also their candidates for the District Legislature?
- Villagomez: The one I recall was the Central Committee meeting and, if I am not mistaken, it was down at what used to be the District Legislature building. And I was one of the interested individuals who wanted to run for the Constitutional Convention. We had so many of them and there is only a number that is supposed to be selected. So, after we gave a little speech, then we waited, and then the Central Committee members voted. I just happened to be one of those selected.
- Siemer: Do you recall there were a lot more people who wanted to run than the number of seats for Saipan?
- Villagomez: Yes, that's correct. And this is just in the Popular Party and of course I think they did the same thing in the Territorial Party.
- Siemer: So the Popular Party had a nominating committee to sort through the candidates and decide.
- Villagomez: And I think they called them the Central Committee.
- Siemer: Once the Central Committee decided that you should be a candidate, then what happened? How did the campaign go?
- Villagomez: Well, then you are carried in their listing of candidates to be placed in the official ballot.
- Siemer: Do you recall drawing a number for your place on the ballot?
- Villagomez: Yes, we were called in by Resident Commissioner Canham and he wanted to be fair with respect to who was supposed to be first. So, we had to pick a number. I don't recall what number I picked, but it wasn't way up there. I think it's about three quarters down the list.
- Siemer: But you did well in the vote totals.
- Villagomez: Right, well I did well, that's for sure. Of so many of them.
- Siemer: But you were someone who had never run before.
- Villagomez: No, I had never run before.
- Siemer: How did you campaign? What activities did you undertake to let people know you were running?
- Villagomez: Well, actually what happened there was the party more or less did most of the campaigning. They would set up the different strategies and the different places where we were going to go and they would set up all the necessary arrangements. You just be there and make sure that you have something to say when you get up there on the platform.
- Siemer: Did you campaign in a group with other delegates?
- Villagomez: Yes, yes we did. But as I recall I don't think I got involved with, I didn't think I ever got up there to actually sell myself and the reason being that I was working for the Internal Audit Office for the TT and it wasn't nice to be up there being an auditor. So, I think I asked the

- party if I could be excused. So, other members, other candidates of the Popular Party sort of campaigned for me.
- Siemer: Mentioned your name and kept people aware that you were running?
- Villagomez: Right and always explaining the reasons why I couldn't get up there.
- Siemer: Where were you living at the time?
- Villagomez: Still on this island.
- Siemer: Which village?
- Villagomez: I was down here in the Garapan area, right next to this hotel in here, it's not the Continental Hotel any more. What do you call this hotel right now?
- Siemer: The Hyatt back here? The Dai Ichi?
- Villagomez: The Dai Ichi, right next to Dai Ichi, across the street.
- Siemer: At that time, was the Central Committee concerned about having delegate candidates from each of the villages?
- Villagomez: I don't recall if there was any requirement with respect to representing [villages]. To my recollection, it was just island-wide type because we had our delegates, then Tinian had their delegates and of course, Rota the same thing. But as far as identifying yourself to a specific area, like a village, I don't recall that.
- Siemer: Who was on the Central Committee at the time, do you recall any of them?
- Villagomez: Well, I could recall Ben Santos there and Jesus Sablan. In fact he is still a treasurer of the CNMI government. Those are the only two that I could vividly recall.
- Siemer: Because I'd like to talk to some of them about how they made their selections and what they did. So you recall Santos and Sablan?
- Villagomez: Yes, right.
- Siemer: Who were the leaders of the Popular Party at the time, back in '76?
- Villagomez: I think Santos is one of the leaders, Ben Santos.
- Siemer: Were there particular people who were in charge of this campaigning or someone who was active in making the arrangements?
- Villagomez: I don't know, you will have to talk to Ben on that one. I am sure Ben could recall.
- Siemer: After you won the election, were there meetings of the Popular Party candidates before the Convention got under way?
- Villagomez: Of course.
- Siemer: What kinds of things were talked about at those meetings?
- Villagomez: Well actually, mostly it was who is supposed to be what, you know, the selection of the officers. Somehow our efforts didn't materialize as much as we would like because of the fact that the Territorial Party were the majority.
- Siemer: Why was that? The Territorial Party had not been strong in Saipan before this.
- Villagomez: Not before this. That's the time when they started becoming strong.
- Siemer: What happened that sort of turned the tide for them?

- Villagomez: I don't really know what happened. We had been under the, for the most part, Popular Party rule or domination I'll say. And, somehow the people, they want a change. Just like what happened to this last election. They wanted change. So, I think that's what happened then.
- Siemer: What was the situation on the other islands at that time? The Rota and Tinian delegations were almost entirely Territorial Party delegates.
- Villagomez: That's true.
- Siemer: Did that happen with respect to the District Legislature as well? Were the Republicans very successful in those elections?
- Villagomez: Right, that's right.
- Siemer: Remember there was a District Legislature election that came right along during the Constitutional Convention?
- Villagomez: And they dominated the seats, that's correct, you're right.
- Siemer: When the Popular Party folks met, were there particular committee chairmanships or other things that the leadership wanted to try to get as far as the Constitutional Convention was concerned?
- Villagomez: I don't recall. Knowing at the time that we were a minority, we just sort of went in there and went along with the decision of the majority.
- Siemer: How about redistricting, did you talk about that at all before the Convention?
- Villagomez: I don't recall.
- Siemer: When the Convention got under way, Larry Guerrero tried to appoint some Popular Party people as vice chairmen of the committees, I think, and he was turned down. They turned down that office. Was there a reason why they did that?
- Villagomez: Well, one of them didn't turn down though, my brother. He was with the Popular Party and when he was made assistant or whatever to a committee, he accepted it.
- Siemer: Did he accept that?
- Villagomez: Right, he did. I think others turned it down. And I couldn't get the explanation on that one as to why they turned it down, but my brother accepted the position to be assistant to Felipe Atalig. That's a committee about personal rights, it's a strong committee.
- Siemer: That's right, that was Personal Rights.
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: You were on the Government Institutions Committee?
- Villagomez: Yes, government and finance, right.
- Siemer: Did you pick that committee?
- Villagomez: No, no, I think I was assigned to that committee.
- Siemer: Who assigned you to the committee?
- Villagomez: I don't recall.
- Siemer: Do you recall when you learned about your committee assignment?
- Villagomez: I think the president at that time just announced out that these are the people who would be serving in these different committees, and as a committee to select a chairman.

- Siemer: Do you know why they put you on the Government Institutions Committee?
- Villagomez: Well, it might have something to do with my background.
- Siemer: You had a lot of experience in the government departments.
- Villagomez: And also being a staff auditor for the TT, I've had a lot of experience with respect to reviews of government operations.
- Siemer: The chairman of your committee was Jose Mafnas, right?
- Villagomez: No. Benigno Fitial was the chairman of the committee I served in.
- Siemer: He was chairman of the Finance and Local Government Committee?
- Villagomez: Right, big Ben.
- Siemer: Who was the Vice-chairman of that Committee? I am trying to remember.
- Villagomez: Maybe Joe. Joe Mafnas I guess.
- Siemer: Pedro Dela Cruz?
- Villagomez: Oh, Pete Dela Cruz. Right. I don't think you can talk to him because he isn't here in the island.
- Siemer: He is one of the people we are trying to find.
- Villagomez: Well he is in New Mexico, I guess.
- Siemer: In New Mexico. What's he doing there?
- Villagomez: Well, he's married to a girl there, and he's got a family there.
- Siemer: Well, that's why I can't find him.
- Villagomez: Well, right. In fact this last summer one of his sons, I think the oldest son, got married and his brother Joaquin Dela Cruz was a member of the choir and the wife Margaret Dela Cruz, the director of the choir had to leave for the wedding.
- Siemer: Who would be able to tell me where in New Mexico he is?
- Villagomez: Call up Jack Dela Cruz at the CDA.
- Siemer: CDA, the Commonwealth Development Association?
- Villagomez: Right.
- Siemer: Where is their office?
- Villagomez: Well, let's see. Watkins Building, do you know that, where that is?
- Siemer: No. Where's that?
- Villagomez: It's the Upper Road.
- Siemer: Okay.
- Villagomez: The Upper Road right next to, well there is a gas station in there and then next to a gas station is a mom and pop store and then next to that one is that building.
- Siemer: Okay, so it's Upper Road. You go to a gas station and then to a mom and pop store and it's the next building?
- Villagomez: Yes. It's the next building, right, on the western side.

- Siemer: My thought with respect to the people who are off-island is that when we get back to the United States, we will go visit them.
- Villagomez: Well, that's good.
- Siemer: I travel a lot when I am trying cases and we'll just schedule a visit but we have to find out where they are. So, that's good, I will call up Jack Dela Cruz and see if I can get a phone number.
- Villagomez: Yes. He's the brother.
- Siemer: That's very helpful because it's very frustrating trying to find people when no one seems to know where they are.
- Villagomez: And of course, Maggie Camacho or used to be Castro, and she is now a Camacho. She's somewhere in Washington state. But the husband is working for the Superior Court.
- Siemer: What is her husband's name?
- Villagomez: Fred Camacho.
- Siemer: Is she off-island for a long time, or will she be back?
- Villagomez: Oh she's going to be there for quite some time. They already own a house there.
- Siemer: In Washington?
- Villagomez: Yes, and the kids are going to school.
- Siemer: So I should call. What does he do for the Superior Court?
- Villagomez: I'm not sure what he is doing there, but he works there.
- Siemer: One of the other ones that we can't find is Jose Cruz. Do you know where he is?
- Villagomez: It's hard to find that guy. He works on a ship, and he travels a lot. He has a home somewhere in California, but I'm trying to think of a person that you could contact.
- Siemer: What kind of work does he do?
- Villagomez: I couldn't remember the title on a ship. A navigator or something.
- Siemer: How about Antonio M. Camacho?
- Villagomez: He should be here on the island.
- Siemer: Do you know where he is?
- Villagomez: You should call up the Legislature. He is one of the legislators up there.
- Siemer: I ought to be able to find that.
- Villagomez: Ask someone up there if they could contact him.
- Siemer: How about Vicente Manglona from Tinian?
- Villagomez: He should be still down there in Tinian.
- Siemer: I have him on the list in Tinian. How about David Atalig?
- Villagomez: David Atalig is here on the island.
- Siemer: Is he?
- Villagomez: If you can contact Pete Atalig, he'll tell you.
- Siemer: Okay.

- Villagomez: Right.
- Siemer: Okay. Back to the Convention, when you were assigned to Ben Fitial's committee, did you get a set of the briefing books?
- Villagomez: Yes, that is correct, of course.
- Siemer: What was your impression of the briefing materials when you first looked at them? I have had reactions from too big, to . . .
- Villagomez: Well, it wasn't really a surprise as far as I am concerned. I just came up from, got out of school, so I was used to . . .
- Siemer: You were used to big documents?
- Villagomez: Yes, big documents, so it wasn't too bad at all. And it kind of paved the way. It's a very complete document.
- Siemer: Ben decided to start off the Finance Committee's activities with some less controversial things. Remember he did education and corporations and things like that first, and you didn't really get to the local government issue until you had been working for a couple of weeks together. How did the committee work together?
- Villagomez: Well, I think if I recall that correctly, the reason why we were sort of soft peddling the local government was we had the mayor with us.
- Siemer: Who's that? Oh, Luis Benavente.
- Villagomez: Luis Benavente. All along we wanted to pull the plug, and get rid of the local government which we did, but . . .
- Siemer: You did, quite successfully.
- Villagomez: Right, and subsequently Luis came in and started questioning us. Why? What's the rush now for getting rid of the local government? And of course, objectively, we tried to convince him that we are over-governed. But somehow it's not working. We are back again to the same thing.
- Siemer: I was going to ask you what happened. Your committee put a ban in the Constitution on any changes for five years.
- Villagomez: That's correct.
- Siemer: You said you can't create any new local government, you can't do any of this for five years. What happened after that?
- Villagomez: Well, we created the mayor just to pacify people because of course, remember the other two islands, they wanted three lieutenant governors. So that was sort of like a compromise. We said, "Okay let's have a mayor." But the mayor is supposed to be just a spokesman for the people and nothing else.
- Siemer: No tax power?
- Villagomez: Nothing at all. No structures of government in there for him to be serving to be looking after. But, it didn't work.
- Siemer: Well, David Maratita got up in the Convention and made a big speech about a proposal to do away with all the local government and basically said, it's a waste, it costs too much money, we don't need it. He said to the Rota and Tinian delegates, look, you have your representatives in the upper house and that's where your control is. Why did that argument not work?

- Villagomez: There is a big difference between an administrator and a legislator. If you are an administrator, you actually have the time to listen to the problems of the people. As a legislator, you do something different. You are not administering. You are not hunting things out and you are not looking after the details. And that's where the problem is. There is nobody in there to actually help the poor people, the local people, the specific people who don't seem to understand much about government structure.
- Siemer: And so that's what
- Villagomez: Yes. There's no one else to go to.
- Siemer: That's what the Rota and Tinian people wanted.
- Villagomez: Right, a mayor.
- Siemer: They wanted an administrator on their islands who they could go to.
- Villagomez: Yes, that's correct, someone they could go to. We didn't see that when we were putting together the government. We should have seen that, in retrospect, clarity of hindsight. And now, of course, we had the mayor up to even bigger than they used to be.
- Siemer: Well, you allowed Daniel Castro to have a mayor for the Northern Islands, do you recall that?
- Villagomez: Ah, yes.
- Siemer: Why did that come about?
- Villagomez: At that time we got a number of people up there.
- Siemer: Not very many though.
- Villagomez: Still, but like I said, we have to have one person to be accountable for the people there and to make sure that the people up there, however few of them are up there, they have somebody to look to and to help them out, to coordinate with the central government here with respect to whatever programs there may be.
- Siemer: What happened to the mayor up there after people were evacuated?
- Villagomez: They came down here too.
- Siemer: Is the mayor for the Northern Islands living here on Saipan?
- Villagomez: I don't know. I honestly don't know that right now at this moment. I wasn't keeping up with the . . .
- Siemer: There's no residency requirement, that a mayor be resident in the islands where he serves?
- Villagomez: They're supposed to, right, there is a residential requirement. And of course, Pagan is no more. Aguigan is . . .
- Siemer: Pagan is no more? What do you mean? There are no people up there?
- Villagomez: No people up there because of the volcanic eruption.
- Siemer: When was that?
- Villagomez: I think that was in 1981.
- Siemer: And they were all evacuated?
- Villagomez: They were all evacuated, and they still consider it hazardous place to live.

- Siemer: Even now?
- Villagomez: I believe even now. The smoke is still coming out and at times it pours out fire.
- Siemer: Really?
- Villagomez: That's correct.
- Siemer: Was Aguigan the other island?
- Villagomez: North of Pagan is Aguigan.
- Siemer: Were there people living there?
- Villagomez: There are people living there, but they were also evacuated a couple of years ago because of an indication of an eruption. But then they are back again in there because nothing happened. It didn't erupt.
- Siemer: The feeling of your delegates in your committee at the time was that it was fair to have an administrative person there to take care of government programs up in the Northern Islands. That's why you agreed to a mayor?
- Villagomez: No, really we agreed to a mayor because of the fact that somebody has to be there. It's knowing that we have people up there and it's not fair to actually have somebody from this island representing them. If there is nothing at all, no one would be appointed to take care of them. So that's why we agreed to this mayor thing. And also we were anticipating that the Northern Islands would become more populated as time passes. We didn't know anything about the volcano. And the volcano is a costly one because we sent up our people from MPLC to do the necessary survey, subdivision survey.
- Siemer: Oh, before the volcano?
- Villagomez: Before the volcano, right, to issue homestead lots, also to entice the people to go up there. And right after the survey . . .
- Siemer: Isn't that interesting.
- Villagomez: . . . the volcano erupted and covered the entire place up there with so many feet of ash, cinders. So there goes our program.
- Siemer: What about the other islands south of Pagan?
- Villagomez: There was only one island inhabited at that time and there's only two people on Alamagan.
- Siemer: On Alamagan?
- Villagomez: No, only one family. In fact when we stopped by there, in 1985 I guess, we stopped by there (we had this about two-week field trip) there is only one family up there. So you know, it's not fair to spend . . .
- Siemer: So MPLC did not do surveying there?
- Villagomez: No. The cost is too much and the benefit is not there. Who is to benefit, just one family? And the same thing with Anatahan which is right next to this island.
- Siemer: What about the question, if you provided for mayors in the Constitution, didn't that inevitably mean that they would build up their staffs?
- Villagomez: Well, that's why we put a word in there that this mayor is supposed to be just a spokesman for the people. They could have an office, a secretary, and maybe an aide, and that's it. That's the vision we had. And everything else would be taken care of by the

Commonwealth government. We have different departments to take care of different programs. So we would like to have these different departments actually be responsible to administer the different programs, directly to the people.

Siemer: But all of the government programs were going to be administered by the Commonwealth, right?

Villagomez: Right, that's correct.

Siemer: And the mayors were supposed to make sure that any complaints were aired or any investigations were done and report to the governor when things . . .

Villagomez: Report to the governor, right or to the representatives or to the senator or even go directly to the departments and register a complaint that this person living within this island here is having a hard time trying to get water or power or whatever.

Siemer: Fairly early on in the Convention, Ben Manglona circulated to the delegates a Rota position and said, in essence, this is what we want out of local government and it's very important to us. If we don't get it, we just won't be satisfied. Many of the leaders seemed to be quite concerned about that. Were the delegates concerned as well that there might be some disruption of the Convention if the Rota position was not accommodated?

Villagomez: Yes. We were concerned. But on the other hand, it's sort of like a blessing in disguise for holding up firmly and not submitting to Ben's request. And finally, of course, they threatened and they walked out. But then when we took a tally, we found out that we could pass a Constitution without their presence.

Siemer: Well your committee seemed to be quite skillful.

Villagomez: That's exactly what we wanted to do.

Siemer: This was a key issue and your committee seemed to be quite good at counting noses and figuring out where you were. There were a number of very tough speeches on the floor, but your committee just kept right on going.

Villagomez: We tried to keep this government as small as possible.

Siemer: It's been difficult over time to do that, but the original design was that.

Villagomez: Making a government small would entice the private sector to think things over. But it didn't work.

Siemer: Well, in fairness it's probably hard to make that work anywhere.

Villagomez: No, I don't think so. The problem in here is we have been over-governed for so long, and the mentality of the people is to let the government take care of it. In fact, I can still remember way back in the old days, if you take something from the government, it's okay. It's not a sin. And the reason for that was its, especially when the island is GI (and that means government issue, it's a military term), so it's okay and they are going to throw it away anyway. Which they did, they did right after the war.

Siemer: When the armed forces were here, they threw away a lot.

Villagomez: So our people, they got this idea that if it's from the government then no problem, you know. It's an excess. And that continued on into the Trust Territory government, where the government came in here and practically took care of the people.

Siemer: The Interior Department?

- Villagomez: The Interior Department, right. There is very little with respect to actually cutting off the umbilical cord and say hey guys, you are going to have to do it, or putting up programs that would get these people to actually develop themselves to a point that they will take care of themselves. It's like they came out here sort of like a babysitter. They spoon-fed everybody.
- Siemer: Yet the economy here seems to be working quite well, particularly if you contrasted to the other islands that used to be in the Trust Territory.
- Villagomez: You know, we are strategically located. Also, when the Navy moved out, we had this as the headquarters. So most of the money that was expended, it's on this island. You ought to see those other islands down there. They have district administrators, but very little money was going down to them.
- Siemer: Well and the people resources were developed here too. People were trained and educated and there was a reservoir of talent here to run things.
- Villagomez: Well, don't forget when the military came in here, at one point in time we had 200,000 troops and how many local people at the time, about 3,000. So here you are with the 3,000 local people surrounded by 200,000 troops. What do you expect of that? There is just direct exposure to things different from the old days. In fact, even during the Japanese time we had about 70,000 Japanese here, if I am not mistaken. So the local people they absorbed these outside influences very fast. And like I said when the TT headquarters was established over here, again we attracted investors from the outside to take care of the Trust Territory government.
- Siemer: When you were a delegate, was there ever a time when you thought there was some issue that would affect the ability to get the Constitution ratified by the people?
- Villagomez: No, I don't think so.
- Siemer: Going into the Constitution as a delegate, did you think that there was a good deal of popular support for the Convention and the Constitution?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: So it's pretty likely that whatever you came up with was going to be ratified?
- Villagomez: Was going to be ratified, right. And then of course, I was part of this political education as a delegate.
- Siemer: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.
- Villagomez: So, we did go out there and we did do our best to actually, not so much sell the Constitution, but to make the people aware that we have this document. We tried to explain to them the purpose for putting the document together.
- Siemer: How did that get organized, the political education effort after the Constitutional Convention was over?
- Villagomez: Oh, let me see. I think the law gave the Resident Commissioner the responsibility to appoint members to this educational committee.
- Siemer: So he is the one who appointed you?
- Villagomez: Yes. He is the one who appointed us.
- Siemer: How many people did he appoint?

- Villagomez: Oh gee, I don't recall a number, but maybe up to 10 or 12 I guess. Something like that.
- Siemer: What did you all do?
- Villagomez: Well of course we had to get together and get organized. We had the late Dr. Francisco Palacios as chairman, and again this happened because of the fact that more Republican, what's called at that time the Territorial Party, members got into committee, than the Popular [Party]. So when we had a vote, he became the chairman.
- Siemer: But Canham appointed both Territorial and Popular Party delegates?
- Villagomez: That's right.
- Siemer: Were there people appointed who had not been delegates?
- Villagomez: Oh yes, right. In fact one guy was—no that's another one, sorry. I'm getting mixed up with another committee. I think all of us were delegates.
- Siemer: Were there radio and TV appearances?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: And how about actual campaigning around the meetings here?
- Villagomez: That's right. We went around the island throughout the different villages. We gave them notice ahead of time that we will be coming in to present the Constitution to them and then of course we go in there and we explained, we separated the different articles. Each delegate, whatever article that they were involved in the Convention itself, would take care of that article as to the new government.
- Siemer: You had the pleasure of explaining local government?
- Villagomez: The local government and finance [articles].
- Siemer: Was there any difference between the Carolinian community and the Chamorro community as far as support where the Constitution was concerned?
- Villagomez: No difference for the most part. You know, if I am not mistaken, it's about 80 percent that ratified the Constitution.
- Siemer: There had been some opposition from the Carolinian community to the Covenant, and I wondered if that carried over to the Constitution.
- Villagomez: No, no.
- Siemer: The Carolinians were by now persuaded that this was a good idea?
- Villagomez: It's a good idea and of course, you know, what they asked, we gave them. [The Executive Assistant for] Carolinian Affairs.
- Siemer: I was going to go back and ask you about that in a minute. But the result of your political education campaign was really an overwhelming vote, I mean it was a spectacular success. How long did you spend at the political education campaign?
- Villagomez: I don't recall the exact time frame in there.
- Siemer: Did it take a fair amount of your time?
- Villagomez: No, not really.
- Siemer: You were still in the Finance Office at that point?
- Villagomez: I was with the Audit Office.

- Siemer: The Audit Office.
- Villagomez: Right. I don't recall the time frame then, but we did spend time getting together and going from village to village every night. We went to Tinian and went to Rota. So it must be about two or three weeks time.
- Siemer: Tell me what your views were about the special Carolinian provisions that were requested in the Constitution. I know Ben Fitial was instrumental in some of those.
- Villagomez: Actually, I don't go along with the idea, and the main reason for that is putting something separate from the rest is in itself already a discriminatory approach.
- Siemer: It sort of announces the discrimination.
- Villagomez: Yes. The problem with that is that it's coming from them and, let's face it, we're different with respect to many of the practices, the customs, and traditions, whatever. And we would like to respect that difference. We don't want to impose on them and try to change them. And when they asked for that one, I don't like it but it's coming from them and if they feel that these will make them become more [of a] participant in the overall government, okay, let's go for it. But it's another layer of government. It's not really that necessary.
- Siemer: What was the Carolinian perception of the benefit to them, for example, from the Special Assistant for Carolinian Affairs?
- Villagomez: Well, for one thing they would have a voice, to voice whatever concerns they have.
- Siemer: Why wouldn't they have that voice under normal circumstances?
- Villagomez: Well, they seemed to feel that because they are a minority on this island they might not be able to get somebody into the government to represent them, which is totally not true.
- Siemer: That had not been true before the Convention, had it?
- Villagomez: But they still have that fear.
- Siemer: The Carolinians felt strongly about that during the Convention?
- Villagomez: That's correct.
- Siemer: That was their particular issue?
- Villagomez: Right, and Ben Fitial was the head honcho.
- Siemer: How do you think that has worked out in practice?
- Villagomez: It seems okay. I don't really see the need, but I suppose it's working. We have a lot of people going in there, Carolinians. I will give an example. Whenever we have a Carolinian land problem, when I was with MPLC, I would get a call from the Carolinian Affairs officer to try to assist in land matters of the Carolinians.
- Siemer: Has the Carolinian Executive Assistant always been a Carolinian?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: So each governor has appointed somebody from the
- Villagomez: In fact that's in the Constitution, that it's someone that is highly recommended by the Carolinian community.
- Siemer: But, interestingly enough, that could be a very effective politician who is not a Carolinian. That could be quite an effective spokesman if you were simply talking about getting things done in the government. For example, firms often hire lobbyists who are of some different

persuasion than they might be, but the lobbyist is very effective in getting something done.

Villagomez: Well, I suppose they could do that.

Siemer: But that's not how it worked out?

Villagomez: No it's not working out that way. They always have Carolinians to head that office.

Siemer: So your view, in the Convention, was that if they thought they needed it, you were prepared to go along with that?

Villagomez: I didn't vote for that. I abstained really. That's the only time that I have ever become indecisive because of the fact that there is a conflict in myself between the need for that office and their request.

Siemer: Were there delegates who were particularly opposed to that?

Villagomez: Oh yes. If I am not mistaken, my brother was quite upset with that. It's very interesting because in addition to this (I didn't make it into the Second [Constitutional] Convention, the amendment convention) they put some ridiculous thing in there, the Office for Indigenous Affairs.

Siemer: Did you run for the Second Constitutional Convention?

Villagomez: I ran, but I didn't win.

Siemer: Have you run for anything else since then, any other public office?

Villagomez: Oh yes, I tried when they first came up with this Board of Education, the election for Board of Education. I ran for that one but I didn't make it.

Siemer: How about any other times?

Villagomez: No.

Siemer: Back to the Constitutional Convention, tell me what you recall about the debate on the Commonwealth Legislature. That is the precise issue on which Ben Manglona and his folks walked out.

Villagomez: Yes, right. Well, they wanted more in there, you know, but again this, what do you call that, one man, one vote concept, and we just couldn't allow them to really have three or four representatives. And then to be fair, we would be allowing thirty representatives from this island, and that's crazy. Such a small island with how many people, 18,000 people to have that many representatives? To begin with, the Senate is ridiculous. To have three senators from an island that's only 700 people and here we are in Saipan with about 15,000 and only three senators.

Siemer: What was it that was so important about the number of representatives, if Rota and Tinian had equal representation in the Senate? Why was it so key that they have more representatives? They were going to be outvoted in the House in any case, if they thought that the Saipan majority would vote together.

Villagomez: Well, you know the only thing that I could gather from them was that they just want to have more bodies in there. They want to put up a ratio.

Siemer: Well let's suppose it was thirty and four and two, what difference does that make from twelve and one and one? They are still going to be outvoted. I don't understand what their thinking was with respect to why those extra seats in the House were important enough to walk out of the Convention over.

- Villagomez: That wasn't the only issue that actually made them walk out.
- Siemer: What were the other issues?
- Villagomez: Well, they wanted a lieutenant governor for each of the islands, and that we didn't give it to them.
- Siemer: That was an issue the delegates really were not very sympathetic to.
- Villagomez: We just couldn't allow it. Even some of their delegates [were opposed]. And another thing, don't forget that we had so many delegates from the island, not just one, we had quite a few.
- Siemer: When they walked out, did you know beforehand that the other delegates, that some of the delegates from Rota would stay?
- Villagomez: Yes, like Pete Atalig for instance. He understands that what they're asking was ridiculous. He stayed in. And Pete Dela Cruz stayed in, he was from Rota, and if I'm not mistaken even David Maratita stayed in. It was this guy, what's his name, Jose Cruz from Tinian and Benjamin Manglona.
- Siemer: Pete Ogo.
- Villagomez: Ogo and Taisacan.
- Siemer: Taisacan.
- Villagomez: Yes, those were the guys who walked out. I thought they were going to get all their peers or the members from the island to walk out, but it didn't work that way. So we just quickly took a count on the number of people left behind, with them [gone]. We went in there, and we just decided to have a motion to pass a consensus.
- Siemer: Once that happened, it was really over.
- Villagomez: Yes, that's it, it's over.
- Siemer: Once there was no complete walk-out, you knew you could put the Constitution together. So it was really a collection of issues not just the precise thing that was on the floor for vote at the time that caused them to walk out?
- Villagomez: That's correct. It wasn't just one issue, it's quite a few of them put together.
- Siemer: What do you recall about the issue with respect to the resident administrators of each of the Executive Branch departments? That was another thing that Rota and Tinian were trying to get. They wanted their own administrators from each Executive department on each island.
- Villagomez: Well, we did give in a little on that one. But what they wanted to have was complete control over the local program or over the program that is administered locally in each island, and we said no, we cannot do that.
- Siemer: Well actually, in your committee they really had in mind local governments that would have all powers, and the Commonwealth would just kind of do studies.
- Villagomez: Right. What they wanted to do actually is administer everything, by themselves, for themselves, away from the central government. Then why have central government to begin with? And we were under the impression that actually we have different departments, they have directors, then the director would be responsible to have someone to represent him down there. And we told them, that's as far as we can go. And that's why we have this

resident representative for each department. But we made sure that that representative is answerable directly to the . . .

Siemer: To the governor?

Villagomez: No. To the director.

Siemer: To the director of the services who is responsible to the governor.

Villagomez: Right.

Siemer: What is your assessment of the actual situation on Rota and Tinian that led them to say they had been discriminated against in the past and therefore they had to have all of these protections in the Constitution? Was that really the case, were they really poorly off because of the way they had been treated?

Villagomez: Well, we have to look back into the TT time, where we have the headquarters here, okay? And we have five other districts to take care of. We have Majuro, Marshalls, Palau, Pohnpei, Yap, Truk, and we have only so much money. Now whatever money they appropriate for the Marianas, it's a central government here [on Saipan] and not only central government but it's the most populated island. And therefore, most of the money for the Marianas District, at that time, would end up in Saipan. As far as Tinian and Rota are concerned, it's an outer island type thing. And at that time I think we only have about 500 people in Tinian. You don't want to put up everything in there to a replica of what we have in Saipan. It's ridiculous.

Siemer: Is that what they really expected though?

Villagomez: Yes. They wanted to have everything down there. Whatever we have here in Saipan, they would like to have it down there.

Siemer: And that's what they were complaining about with respect to discrimination?

Villagomez: Right.

Siemer: How was the actual quality of life on those islands?

Villagomez: Well it's a little bit behind as far as standard is concerned and it's to be expected. It's like staying out in the country in the States, where you have scattered houses all over the place and there's no central community to actually provide the services.

Siemer: Is that the population pattern on both Tinian and Rota?

Villagomez: Yes, right. Of course, whenever they come to Saipan they see paved roads, new signs up here and who knows what else. And then they go to Tinian and you don't even see lights at night there at that time because of the fact that the power is not that good.

Siemer: So the discrimination that they were complaining about had to do with the sophistication of services?

Villagomez: That's correct and that lack of services for that matter. And the reason why they didn't have the services at the time was we only were receiving a very nominal amount actually from the Interior Department to administer the Trust Territory and we've got six districts.

Siemer: But, as you say, that would be the case in any situation where there's a scattered population as opposed to a concentrated population.

Villagomez: Yes, that's correct.

Siemer: In any county in the United States where you had that situation, you would have the same result.

- Villagomez: That's correct.
- Siemer: And yet they seemed to feel strongly that this was a conscious discrimination, that it was intended that they not be developed.
- Villagomez: Right. They always have this "left out" feeling type thing and they always seem to think that it's intentional. And it's still going on right now, actually with respect to putting together a budget.
- Siemer: That's been a difficult issue in the Commonwealth, hasn't it?
- Villagomez: Yes, right. And you might have recalled, we never had a 1993 budget. Can you imagine a government not having a budget?
- Siemer: At all?
- Villagomez: Right. And so I don't know whether you can continue with a continuing resolution so many years down the line.
- Siemer: Well one of the issues that you discussed in the Convention was the initiative issue which would allow popular passage of laws and constitutional amendments. The Rota and Tinian people were very afraid of what the Saipan people would do once they realized how much control Rota and Tinian had in the upper house. Remember there was a big battle over what the requirements would be for an initiative?
- Villagomez: Right, but then of course, they agreed, because we accepted the requirement to have that initiative passed by each of the islands, not just one island but all the three islands. And that took care of that.
- Siemer: That's a very substantial protection.
- Villagomez: Very.
- Siemer: Because otherwise, the people on Saipan would simply pass an initiative and do away with the blocks that are being exercised here.
- Villagomez: Right.
- Siemer: When you brought the things out of your committee and back to the floor of the Convention, did the committee members help to work the situation on the floor to get your particular things passed?
- Villagomez: That's correct.
- Siemer: Your committee seemed to be very effective at that.
- Villagomez: Well, we have Ben Fitial, he really knows how to . . .
- Siemer: He was quite a young fellow at the time, wasn't he?
- Villagomez: Yes, right.
- Siemer: But he seemed to be quite effective, he seemed to have a good sense of humor.
- Villagomez: That's correct, right. He knows three languages real well.
- Siemer: And yet, now here is a Carolinian . . .
- Villagomez: A Carolinian, right.
- Siemer: Young.
- Villagomez: Yes.

- Siemer: Who was a made a committee chairman, and yet the Carolinians are fearful that they won't get their fair share.
- Villagomez: And it came from him. Don't ask me.
- Siemer: Why do you think that is?
- Villagomez: I don't know.
- Siemer: The reason I ask the questions is because up to that time, the elections and most of the political party affairs seemed to have a fair awareness of keeping the Chamorro and Carolinian balance. There seemed to be considerable amount of effort to involve Carolinians. Well, there were three Carolinians elected to the Constitutional Convention.
- Villagomez: That's correct.
- Siemer: That was about their representation in the population overall.
- Villagomez: About, yes, that's correct.
- Siemer: And yet, with Carolinians elected, with a committee chairman, they were still concerned about this.
- Villagomez: That's correct. And where to find the answer, I don't know.
- Siemer: Were there other issues that you found particularly difficult that you can remember now worrying about at the time?
- Villagomez: Not really, I think we have already pretty much covered all those issues.
- Siemer: How did you feel about the 50-day time limit on the Convention?
- Villagomez: It's too late. I mean it's too short. I believe there should be several months preparation and education for that matter.
- Siemer: For the delegates?
- Villagomez: For the delegates.
- Siemer: It was a little hard for you folks getting inches of briefing books right at the beginning.
- Villagomez: Right, yes. Like I said, it wasn't too bad to make for me because of the fact that I am used to books, but for the other delegates in there, I found that it was quite a burden for them and that most of them, if not, well, many of them didn't really get to appreciate what you guys [the consultants to the Convention] were trying to tell us.
- Siemer: Well, some of them found it hard to read that much material, I'm sure.
- Villagomez: That's for sure.
- Siemer: Tell me what you recall about the public hearings that were held right in the middle of the Constitutional Convention. Remember there were preliminary votes on all the issues and then a draft Constitution was put together. There were a couple of days of public hearings on Saipan and there was a day of hearings on Tinian and Rota and I think you even sent delegates down to Guam to have hearings for the students there.
- Villagomez: As far as that public hearing is concerned, I don't recall. The only thing that flashed back to mind was when we opened that Convention area, it used to be just one room, and then we opened up another room and we got a lot of people at the back. No, I don't recall anything on that public hearing.

- Siemer: That was the time in which the Saipan Chamber of Commerce came in, and they were very concerned about the amount that you were proposing to pay legislators. Remember the debate about \$12,000 versus \$8,000? And immediately after the public hearings, there was a long series of speeches.
- Villagomez: That's correct. Now I remember, the long speeches. I think I even gave one speech on that. You know looking back, the Constitution has no business whatsoever mentioning anything about salaries. No business in there. It should be just a document to provide for the foundation. Everything else should be left up to the legislature over time.
- Siemer: How did people feel about that at the time? Were people more worried about providing specifically how all these things were going to be done?
- Villagomez: The feeling of the people at that time was that they don't trust their leaders.
- Siemer: Really? Why was that?
- Villagomez: You know, we have seen leaders abusing their position and for that reason, they don't want to let them decide for themselves how much money they would be making.
- Siemer: They are afraid that they would simply . . .
- Villagomez: That they would just simply go ahead and say let's have a ridiculous figure of so much, and not in line with the prevailing rate.
- Siemer: Did they think people would get voted out of office if they did that?
- Villagomez: But in the meantime.
- Siemer: So, that's what they were worried about?
- Villagomez: Yes, right. I got the feeling from the people that we can't allow you guys to just do what you want.
- Siemer: And that money was a principal issue?
- Villagomez: Money was a principal issue, right.
- Siemer: Let me show you one of these, there's an amendment that I wanted to ask . . .
- Villagomez: We had been throwing that back and forth. I was even involved with suggesting \$8,000 and allowing the Legislature to actually change it. But the change would have to be in line with the prevailing salary.
- Siemer: That's right, you provided for a commission to study it.
- Villagomez: Right, to study what's the prevailing salary.
- Siemer: And then you provided that the Legislature couldn't affect it's own salary. It could only be for the next legislature.
- Villagomez: For the next salary, right.
- Siemer: And that seemed a sensible way to go about it.
- Villagomez: I still think it should not be included in there.
- Siemer: At all?
- Villagomez: Yes. Clarity of hindsight.
- Siemer: This is amendment number 87 that Joaquin Torres provided and that you joined in. Let me ask you if you can remember what the issue was and what you were trying to do.

- Villagomez: Was that Article 7, 6, and 1 of the draft, do you remember?
- Siemer: Yes. This is for people who can vote. The qualification to be a voter.
- Villagomez: Okay, okay.
- Siemer: And they had put in here “any crime”. They wanted to disqualify people who had committed any crime. Torres apparently wanted to limit that to felonies.
- Villagomez: I don’t think I can recall back what really took place in here, and why I put my name in there.
- Siemer: I just wondered if there was a thought that people wanted more people disqualified, because that is what “any misdemeanor” or anything like that would do. That would disqualify quite a lot of people. But I didn’t find any discussion of that issue one way or another when I looked at the records.
- Villagomez: Maybe there’s not, I don’t recall any. No, I couldn’t recall anything with respect to this one.
- Siemer: Are there other issues that come to mind that you recall strong debate on or things that concerned you, particularly?
- Villagomez: It’s such a long time ago.
- Siemer: It is a long time ago.
- Villagomez: If I were still working for government, I might be able to remember more for the fact that I would be constantly going back and forth in this one there. Especially in the Analysis. You know that Analysis became almost a constitution itself.
- Siemer: Do you remember in the very closing days of the Convention we were trying to get the section-by-section Analysis together?
- Villagomez: Right.
- Siemer: And explain to people why it was important to do that . . .
- Villagomez: Very important, right.
- Siemer: And then your delegates spent a whole day looking at it very closely. It was an interesting time. Yes, the section-by-section Analysis was used quite a lot.
- Villagomez: It was used. In fact, it’s the authority. It’s not so much the Constitution, that’s the authority and you know, looking back we should have actually spent more time on that one and clarified some of the things in there for instance because the court just used it as the Bible for that matter.
- Siemer: It’s interesting how over a period of 10 or 20 years there’s always something that you could have put in a document like that and just didn’t think about.
- Villagomez: Well, at that time you know, we were trying to rush things through and I think we spent a lot of time on trying to pass a Constitution. But, that’s another thing that I would like to see, more time to make sure that the Analysis would actually represent the feeling, the general feeling, of the delegates. In fact the first thing that was used in the Analysis actually was, budget. Unified budget. The Legislature and the governor, they fought and fought and fought because one says, hey man, you’re supposed to have one budget. The other guy says, well no, we could pass a separate budget for separate things. No problem. They even called in some budget expert. Dr. Desidario is his name.
- Siemer: How did that come out?

Villagomez: Well because they couldn't agree on how to pass a budget.

Siemer: That's part of the current impasse?

Villagomez: No. That was the first government.

Siemer: Oh, in the Camacho Administration.

Villagomez: Camacho Administration, right. And just for that simple "unified", that word unified in there. Boy they capitalized on that one. They kept fighting and fighting and fighting, and I'm thinking oh my god. But it's still ridiculous and no matter how good a system you put in, if you don't have the right people to implement it, it's no use.

Siemer: Well, thank you very much for this interview. It has been very helpful.

Villagomez: Well, thank you, too. It is fun remembering these things.