

## INTERVIEW OF MANUEL S. VILLAGOMEZ

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

February 7, 1997

- Willens: I am here in the study of Manuel S. Villagomez on Friday, February 7, 1997. I am accompanied by Deanne Siemer and the former Chief Justice and good friend, Joe Dela Cruz. Mr. Villagomez has agreed to be interviewed as part of our historical project. Manny, thank you very much for agreeing to be part of our project. We would like to begin by asking you when you were born.
- Villagomez: I was born in Garapan way back in January of 1924 during Japanese times. I went to school in Japanese schools.
- Willens: Who were your parents?
- Villagomez: My father was Manuel Castro Villagomez. He was born in Guam. He came here around 1899. My mother was born here in Saipan. She was the half sister of Elias Sablan.
- Willens: Why did your father decide to move from Guam to Saipan?
- Villagomez: I think for economic reasons, at that time for copra production. The whole family moved here, brothers and sisters.
- Willens: How many were in that group?
- Villagomez: Two brothers and three sisters. But I am the youngest in my family.
- Willens: How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- Villagomez: There are six brothers and four sisters. Before I was born, three sisters died. There were ten, and I am the tenth.
- Siemer: Tell us the names of your brothers and sisters.
- Villagomez: The oldest brother is Joaquin S. Villagomez. He was at one time on the Municipal Council. My second brother is Jesus. He is Dr. V's father. Then Jose Villagomez. Then Rita, my sister. She is married to Joaquin Tenorio Doi.
- Siemer: What did Jose Villagomez do?
- Villagomez: He was a policeman, mostly during Japanese times, from 1932 to 1944.
- Siemer: Tell us your wife's full name.
- Villagomez: Luise San Nicolas Pangelinan
- Siemer: How many children do you have?
- Villagomez: Only one dozen. Six boys and six girls.
- Siemer: What are their names?
- Villagomez: Tomas Pangelinan Villagomez, my oldest son, is a Senator. He used to be House Speaker. Manuel, Jose, Eddie, Jesus, Juan—those are the boys. The girls are Linda, Patricia, Barbara, Nora, and Ramona. Ramona is going to be a lawyer. She is number 11. Antonia is the last one. She is named after my mother's name.
- Siemer: What does Jose do?
- Villagomez: Jose is in the camera business.

- Siemer: What about your son Juan?
- Villagomez: He works for me. Eddie is in California, in the Bay area.
- Siemer: What does he do there?
- Villagomez: He supervises an office; he is in the building business. Jesse is ex- Army. He is in the Post Office now in Hawaii. Manny used to be in the United States and then he moved here. He works for the Hafa Adai Hotel as a manager.
- Siemer: And Linda?
- Villagomez: She used to work for me but now works at the Bank of Guam.
- Siemer: Antonia?
- Villagomez: She runs my travel agency—Pacific Sky. Norrie works at the court with Judge Demapan. Pat and Barbara are my right hands in business.
- Siemer: Were you educated in Japanese school in Garapan?
- Villagomez: Yes. Up to sixth grade. The law is five grades, but in my time, my generation studied for six grades.
- Willens: Do you know why they changed the rule from five grades to six grades?
- Villagomez: Yes, because of the war. They were training us like soldiers. Here, look at this.
- Willens: Mr. Villagomez is now showing us a picture. What is in this picture?
- Villagomez: Our teachers were only military. Half of our time was in drills and how to use a gun. [Picture includes teachers.]
- Willens: Is that your class at school?
- Villagomez: Yes. This first row is [Japanese].
- Willens: How old were you at the time?
- Villagomez: I think I was 14.
- Willens: You had completed your schooling by that time?
- Villagomez: Yes. I graduated when I was 12 years old. Judge Dela Cruz's mother was my classmate for five grades. And Joeten, and Ben Sablan of Sablan Construction. That is Jesus now, because Ben has died. Ben is here [in the picture] as well.
- Willens: Are they all local citizens.
- Villagomez: Yes. Chamorros and Carolinians. There were maybe 10 Carolinians. About 20 percent. But here I see [in the picture] only three or four.
- Willens: You were about 14 years old in that picture?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: So that was about 1938?
- Villagomez: Yes. It was before 1940.
- Willens: Did the military training come after your school training, or was it all part of your school training?
- Villagomez: Part. Half time.
- Willens: It was all part, half military and half academic.

- Villagomez: Half military and half classroom teaching.
- Willens: Do you remember what you studied back then?
- Villagomez: Mathematics, reading, and other things.
- Willens: Was it all taught in Japanese?
- Villagomez: Oh, yes.
- Willens: Did your father have a job in the Japanese Administration?
- Villagomez: No, only my brother.
- Willens: What did your brother do?
- Villagomez: He was a policeman.
- Willens: Did your father have his own business.
- Villagomez: We had a big farm. Ten hectares. Right where the College is now.
- Willens: Where did he sell his produce?
- Villagomez: We produced sugar and tapioca. No copra at that time. We planted pineapple and banana. These were sold in the stores for the public.
- Willens: Did your family have a store?
- Villagomez: No. We sold to the stores, to the Japanese stores. The tapioca factory was big. It was the second largest economic factor here, after sugar cane.
- Siemer: Was it a Japanese tapioca factory?
- Villagomez: Yes, and big.
- Siemer: And the Japanese had a sugar cane factory here too, prior to the war?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: What else did they manufacture here at that time?
- Villagomez: Coffee. That was number three.
- Siemer: Did they grow coffee here?
- Villagomez: Yes. Sugar, tapioca, coffee, then vegetables. Exports.
- Willens: Was it all for export?
- Villagomez: Yes, I think so. My house was near the dock. Right where NBK Dock is now.
- Willens: That is where you grew up?
- Villagomez: Yes, it's the Lollipop building now. That's my father's land. I built that.
- Willens: Did many local families have farms of that size?
- Villagomez: Oh yes, up until 1943 or 1944.
- Siemer: How did the Japanese treat the farmers?
- Villagomez: The best, because that is the economic base. Back at that time, there was no open land like this. During Japanese times.
- Willens: You mean it was all developed.
- Villagomez: All developed. Anything would grow here.

- Willens: I understand that the Japanese imported many Okinawans to provide farm labor.
- Villagomez: That was during the 1920s. By 1935 or 1936 the land here was 100 percent developed.
- Willens: Who was doing the manual labor on the farms?
- Villagomez: The Japanese brought their own alien labor here.
- Willens: Did the Japanese permit your family to own your own farm?
- Villagomez: Oh, yes.
- Willens: Were there any restrictions that the Japanese placed on the ownership of land?
- Villagomez: No. But there were no more homesteads like there were in German times. My father got the land first thing in German times, in 1900.
- Willens: So there was a homestead program under the German Administration.
- Villagomez: I think so. Yes.
- Willens: But no homesteads under the Japanese Administration.
- Villagomez: No. They needed land. They used all the government land for sugar cane.
- Siemer: What did you do after you finished school?
- Villagomez: Farmed.
- Siemer: You worked with your father on the farm?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: What happened on the farm when the war started?
- Villagomez: It was still good. When the war started, they sent a lot of young Chamorros to Guam to work as translators because there were Chamorros there. Like me, I went there, but it was at the last minute. They sent me as an interpreter too. But my brother stayed maybe two years there.
- Siemer: When did you go to Guam?
- Villagomez: In 1943. December.
- Siemer: You worked for the Japanese as an interpreter in Guam?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: How long did you stay there?
- Villagomez: Up to June 6, 1944. Then I came back here. On June 10 they started the air raids.
- Siemer: How much did they pay you at the time?
- Villagomez: That was the first time I got a salary, from the Japanese. Before that, I was only paid for what I could sell from the farm.
- Siemer: Do you remember how much they paid you?
- Villagomez: It was yen; maybe 30 yen. Better than average.
- Siemer: What kinds of things were you interpreting?
- Villagomez: Labor. They had free labor [from the Chamorros]. They would pick up from all the districts, all over Guam. Every day, different. I think once or twice a week you have to go to provide labor, to give free labor. Actually, forced free labor.

- Siemer: When you came back to Saipan, what were you doing then?
- Villagomez: Farming again, but only for one week. Then the Americans came.
- Siemer: Then what happened?
- Villagomez: Then soon there were no more Japanese. My father could speak English and Spanish. And he knew American customs. And we, together with Kili [Jesus D. Sablan], Gregorio Sablan, and their families, we went to the jungle. They [the Japanese] pushed us up to Talifofo.
- Siemer: Were there caves in Talifofo?
- Villagomez: No. If there were caves, [and Chamorros were in them] you have to go out because the Japanese took over.
- Willens: The Japanese took over the caves?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Did the Japanese force you to leave the farm or did you leave for safety purposes?
- Villagomez: Sometimes they said, you have to go. Like my place, they had aircraft guns there; five, I think, or six.
- Willens: On your property?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: So they told you to leave the property?
- Villagomez: Yes. They were digging bunkers.
- Willens: How did it happen that your father knew Spanish?
- Villagomez: He was born in Spanish times. In 1880. And he also knew good German and good English. A little bit better German than English.
- Siemer: Did you know any English then?
- Villagomez: Yes, some.
- Willens: Did the Guamanians resent the fact that you were there working for the Japanese?
- Villagomez: Yes. Any my family. I have my Auntie and Uncle there. That's why I know that my father came from Guam. Because when I was first going to Guam, he told me who to see, his cousins.
- Willens: So you had family in Guam.
- Villagomez: Yes. They took good care of me. They said stay [in Guam], the Americans are going to come.
- Willens: To Saipan?
- Villagomez: No, to Guam. But I was lucky I went back to Saipan. The Americans came here first [to Saipan], then to Guam. I saw the Americans before [people in Guam did]. When the Marines came in, I say I like Americans. I love America, I say.
- Siemer: How long did your family stay in Talifofo?
- Villagomez: We came out on July 4. Since June 14 or 15 we left [the farm to go to Talifofo] when the landing was going to be.
- Siemer: You stayed until July 4?

- Villagomez: Half. We split. My father only stayed five days. The Americans met him and he went to work right away. As soon as the Americans catch him, my father's job is to collect all the live animals. Cows and so on.
- Siemer: Because he spoke English?
- Villagomez: Yes. Me, I stayed [in Talifofo] up to July 4. And a couple of my brothers also.
- Siemer: Then what happened on July 4?
- Villagomez: A Marine, at 10 o'clock, came in and said, hey, let's go out. No more Japanese. You know, that night, there were about 200 Japanese around us. But that morning, there was nobody. Only Chamorros. They had moved.
- Willens: As the Japanese retreated, you stayed.
- Villagomez: Yes, we stayed. Because a Japanese said stay, because he showed us before that—see that truck, they [the Americans] load civilians. They don't kill them, like what we had learned before. I saw civilians before that morning, they are already in American hands. That's why we stayed.
- Willens: You had been told by the Japanese that Americans would kill civilians.
- Villagomez: Yes, before. This last Japanese said, "By the way, see, I saw too many trucks already loading civilians." Then I said, "where?" He said, "See, up there," and then I saw it. That was a good Japanese. One time they interviewed me in Japan and I mentioned about that. That some Japanese are good.
- Siemer: They told you to just wait, because the American trucks were picking up civilians.
- Villagomez: Yes. Because civilians do not have to run away, he told me. And at 10 o'clock the next day, a Marine came.
- Siemer: And what did the Marine tell you?
- Villagomez: Oh, it was a big party. Right there. The Marine said, we've got Sablan. You see they were looking for that guy, Kilili. And my uncle talked to them that day, Elias Sablan.
- Willens: Why were they looking for him?
- Villagomez: Elias was already with the Americans. I think Elias was coming out on June 20. And we were coming out on July 4. We were about 74 people, including Teno's family, the former governor, and my wife's family too.
- Siemer: Where did your family go, once you left Talifofo?
- Villagomez: We were coming straight to the Susupe Camp.
- Siemer: How long did you stay in the Susupe Camp?
- Villagomez: That became our home until the peace.
- Siemer: Were you allowed to move back to your house?
- Villagomez: Not yet.
- Siemer: When did that happen?
- Villagomez: Move back to the farm? Not until 1948.
- Siemer: Where did you live after you left the Camp?
- Villagomez: We lived in Chalan Kanoa from 1945 up to now.

- Siemer: Were most people kept in the camp for some time?
- Villagomez: Yes, the camp had a security fence.
- Siemer: Were you working yet?
- Villagomez: My first job with the Americans I got in the camp as a mess boy. Joeten, John Blanco, me, Jack Sablan, six in all.
- Siemer: All of you were working as mess boys?
- Villagomez: Yes. For the enlisted men. But it was all in the same place.
- Siemer: Did all of you speak some English?
- Villagomez: We learned fast. I don't know why, but we got along. I never learned [formal English] as a matter of fact. I never studied English, even now.
- Siemer: After you worked as a mess boy, what was your next job?
- Villagomez: Before Japan surrendered, I moved to the farm. I liked the farm. We farmed for all the American soldiers. Fresh products.
- Siemer: You sold your produce to the Americans?
- Villagomez: No, they owned [the operation]. They put us [on the farm land and told us] what they wanted to have, what to plant. They owned all the machinery.
- Willens: Did they recognize that you owned land?
- Villagomez: No, we just thought that we were lucky to be alive. We didn't care about land at that time. Nobody cared about land then.
- Willens: But in 1948, you said you went back to your ranch?
- Villagomez: Yes, but we are talking now about 1945. This is before the surrender. Because when Japan surrendered, they formed the Marine Scouts, and I was one of them.
- Willens: You were a Marine Scout at that time?
- Villagomez: Yes, I was. In the first group. They had two groups.
- Willens: What were your duties as a Scout?
- Villagomez: To look for Japanese snipers. On the Northern Islands. I went to all 12 islands.
- Willens: Did you find snipers?
- Villagomez: Yes, we found plenty of snipers. But they had already surrendered. They had communications in Pagan. They had 1,000 Japanese Army personnel in Pagan. They had [an aircraft] runway there.
- Willens: The 1,000 up there had surrendered?
- Villagomez: Yes, before we went. Because they had received a communication already. We took four ships, two for Pagan only for those 1,000 personnel and two for all the civilians on the islands. Maug, Pagan, Ascuncion. There were four cargo ships and two destroyers. One of the destroyers was for us Marine [Scouts]. When they left off the islands, we would come in after them and check to make sure nobody was hiding there to stay [on the island].
- Siemer: Did they evacuate the civilians on Maug, and the other islands?
- Villagomez: Yes, at the same time we went there. We evacuated all the military and civilians. The only one they didn't come in is Anatahan.

- Siemer: They were all brought back here to Saipan?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: Were people left on Anatahan?
- Villagomez: No. Those people were surviving after their ship sank near there, and they came in to Anatahan. And they met one girl there. They have a movie of that. 31 Navy and only one girl.
- Siemer: What was your next job after that?
- Villagomez: I became a policeman.
- Siemer: How long were you a policeman?
- Villagomez: 12 years. In 1955 I opened my business.
- Siemer: What was the business when you first opened it?
- Villagomez: A grocery. A very small one, about 20 x 10.
- Siemer: Where was it located when you first opened it?
- Villagomez: In the current Post Office. That's my land. I exchanged with public land—a two story on the highway there. That's mine.
- Siemer: How did you get your business started.
- Villagomez: While I was a policeman, they promoted me to be an administrator. Then I ran all police supply system, like clothes, shoes, and everything like that. I was in charge of that. Then I opened a club. They were always broke before me, but after I took over, every three months there was a 100 percent profit. I said I'd better go into business rather than being a policeman.
- Willens: Where was the club located?
- Villagomez: Where the Civic Center is.
- Willens: Who else from the local community was in business in 1955?
- Villagomez: Already Joeten is in business seven years ahead of me.
- Willens: He was located in Chalan Kanoa?
- Villagomez: Yes. All were in Chalan Kanoa. Because there were no villages yet, except they had a village in As Lito.
- Siemer: Is that the original Joeten store, the one in Chalan Kanoa around the corner from the Post Office?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Was anyone else in business back at that time?
- Villagomez: There were three top ones when I opened. Edward Flores, Joeten, Herman Guerrero, and Francisco Cruz too. He used to be in politics too. He went to law school in Japan.
- Willens: Where was his store located?
- Villagomez: Right across from TownHouse. Now it is the Meitetsu. He owned that place. Olympio Borja bought it from Francisco. Borja was also before me. He opened a store a couple of years before me.
- Siemer: What kind of store did Olympio Borja have back then?



- Villagomez: All the same. Grocery.
- Siemer: How many were there?
- Villagomez: Oh, about 20. But only five or seven can import.
- Siemer: What did you have to do to be able to import at that time?
- Villagomez: You had to have a good name with the bank. You had to have a line of credit. For dealing with Japan, only LCs [letters of credit]. Even now, that is what you need.
- Siemer: Did the American military require you to do certain things to be able to run a business.
- Villagomez: Before, yes. When we opened, we were called Saipan Importer. And like Herman's bakery. All that was military. We offered the village to do something.
- Willens: Was there something called the United States Commercial Company?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: What did they do?
- Villagomez: All military surplus, he collected. Mostly clothes but a little of everything.
- Willens: Was it available to be sold to the people?
- Villagomez: Yes, maybe also to the States. But I think that hundreds of pounds of clothes they never shipped.
- Willens: What happened to them.
- Villagomez: They rotted.
- Willens: Did anyone go into the clothing business?
- Villagomez: No, back then we've got plenty all over the island. No need to buy clothes. Khaki, navy blues, jeans, everything we can find.
- Willens: Did the USCC also sell food; did they compete with you?
- Villagomez: No, they had already left.
- Willens: When did they leave?
- Villagomez: No more military stuff; why should they stay?
- Willens: The Naval Administration stayed on until 1961 or 1962.
- Villagomez: They left in 1950; then they moved back in again during the Korean War. In 1952, the TT [Trust Territory] came back. The TT was here in the 1950s before the Korean War. They left then, but Rota was still under the TT. And here, we were under the Navy.
- Willens: Did you and the other business people form a Chamber of Commerce in the 1950s?
- Villagomez: Yes. We organized everything. We even organized a bank.
- Willens: What bank was that?
- Villagomez: We tried to connect with the Bank of Hawaii.
- Willens: Did that work out.
- Villagomez: That didn't work out.
- Willens: How did you meet your banking needs back then?
- Villagomez: The Bank of America was here.

- Siemer: So they were here in the 1950s?
- Villagomez: I think 1948 or 1949.
- Willens: Did they give you the lines of credit and the financial support you needed for your business?
- Villagomez: Yes. They called me and said, "I'm going to help you." I said, "why?" They said, "Because only you can compete with Joeten."
- Willens: How would Joeten feel about that?
- Villagomez: Anyway, the bank was very good to me. They would call me for dinner, you know, and they would offer me a line of credit. I say, how much. They say, \$5,000. I say, oh, that's big money for me.
- Willens: Was it different for your business when the Navy came back in 1952?
- Villagomez: Some. A lot of businesses, they got a loan from government.
- Willens: When did you become aware that the CIA was building an operation on Saipan called the Navy Technical Training Unit?
- Villagomez: In golf. When they came in, already we met in golf. And we talked. You know, ex-Army, for example.
- Willens: Did you know what they were doing?
- Villagomez: Yes. They told me when I asked them. They told me it was secret, but they were training some people.
- Willens: This was on the golf course.
- Villagomez: Yes. More than secret. One time I met one of them in Tokyo, you know, in the hotel. I say, "Hi Ray." And he doesn't know me. I say, "Oh, forget it." Then we kept going and later I go off to my room. And he went out, and when he came back he knocked on my door. He say, "Don't talk to me here in Japan. You are not to know me." I say, "Oh, I didn't know about that."
- Willens: During the 1950s, there was a movement to arrange some relationship with the United States. Did you want a relationship with the United States, going back as far as the 1950s?
- Villagomez: Yes. As a matter of fact, we had two parties here at that time, the Territorial and the Popular. The Democrats at that time were the Popular Party. They wanted to join Guam. But we in the Territorial Party, that was Elias Sablan, we go for direct [relations with the United States].
- Willens: So you were in the Territorial Party back then?
- Villagomez: Yes. We organized, and we had meetings in my house sometimes, you know. As a matter of fact, we even had a riot there at one time, one of those meetings. Because both parties get together for their rallies at the same day and the same time, and boy, brother against brother, sister fight sister. That was in 1959 or 1960. My house was big back then. It was near the Bank of Hawaii, on that corner. And we meet there. It was a good place to organize a campaign.
- Siemer: Back in those days, why did some people think it was better to join Guam than to have a direct relationship with the United States.
- Villagomez: I don't know. We enjoyed the government system at that time, under the Navy. Why

- should we join Guam? Why not direct? That's why we met Solomon right away when he came in.
- Siemer: Did you meet Solomon [author of the Solomon Report] when they came out here?
- Villagomez: Oh yes. As a matter of fact, we met two times in my house.
- Willens: What did they tell you they were investigating? Why were they here?
- Villagomez: They said we [the Marianas] cannot join Japan or Russia. America will never give up Saipan because they took Saipan with American blood. You know politics. I asked [whether] if we join Japan it might be better, you know, like Palau used to be. But he told us, no. I say, okay, thank you, I know now.
- Siemer: At that time, had you been to the United States?
- Villagomez: No, I had never been. Only Japan.
- Siemer: When was the first time you went to the States?
- Villagomez: 1969. To see the All-Star Game in Washington D.C. In Kennedy Stadium.
- Willens: In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a Municipal Council and a Saipan Congress that had been formed.
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Did you ever have an interest in politics?
- Villagomez: No, never. I hate politics.
- Willens: But you have some family in politics now.
- Villagomez: Yes, but I hate it. I tell him, don't run, you know. But he cannot win if I don't say yes. He told me that. I say, yes, you can run, but I don't like it.
- Siemer: How about your brothers? Were any of them in politics back in those days?
- Villagomez: Yes, but it was not like it is now. Back then, you can win with only 10 people. With ten votes, you can win. Like Borja, he was under me when I was a policeman, at that time. Olympio Borja. He was a policeman. He was only 24 years old, and he won [the election] for Municipal Council. Only 20 votes.
- Siemer: He only needed 20 votes to win.
- Villagomez: That's right.
- Willens: So your family could supply 20 votes.
- Villagomez: Oh, more than 100 votes.
- Willens: At that time, was yours one of the largest families on the island?
- Villagomez: No, but the people, they like me, you know.
- Willens: What do you think persuaded Joeten to get involved in politics?
- Villagomez: Oh, I told him that was wrong. He should not get involved in politics.
- Willens: Why was that?
- Villagomez: Oh, it's politics, you know. Also, because he [ran] against his first cousin, Carlos Camacho. They are first cousins.

- Willens: Why do you think Joeten lost that election to be the first governor of the Commonwealth?
- Villagomez: He was not so popular. With some people, but not all.
- Siemer: Was that the first time that Joeten ran?
- Villagomez: Yes. That was the first time, I think.
- Siemer: He never ran for Municipal Council or for the District Legislature.
- Villagomez: No.
- Willens: As you were going into business in the 1950s and the 1960s, did you have the occasion to visit other parts of Micronesia?
- Villagomez: Yes. I had a store in Truk. The first time, I went to Truk to collect scrap. Like here. I make money on scrap. I bid the Marpi.
- Siemer: Who were you selling the scrap to?
- Villagomez: I called my friend in Japan who buys scrap. And they bring four people.
- Siemer: So you went to Truk to gather scrap as well?
- Villagomez: Yes, with the Japanese too.
- Siemer: And then established a store down there?
- Villagomez: Yes. With my brother-in-law, John Pangelinan. Now I lease to Shigeto. But for Palau, the High Commissioner said, Manny, don't go there. You can make more money here. And Palau does not want to let us go there.
- Siemer: So you visited Palau, but did not open a store there?
- Villagomez: I could not.
- Siemer: How about the Marshalls?
- Villagomez: No, that was too far. I've been there.
- Willens: How about Pohnpei?
- Villagomez: I've been there too, but no business.
- Willens: Who was it in Palau that kept you out?
- Villagomez: The High Commissioner told me don't go there. I remember that. It was Johnston, a Hawaiian guy, I think.
- Willens: Did you think that all of Micronesia could stay together?
- Villagomez: Not at that time, no. Even now, no.
- Willens: Why not?
- Villagomez: Because, in 1962, when they got the Micronesian Congress, mostly I invited those Congressmen from Micronesia to my house to have parties.
- Willens: Did you know them?
- Villagomez: Yes, all of them. And I found out that we cannot [join with them]. We are very different. Everything was different. Like Palau, we have different customs, different ways, everything.
- Willens: You thought the differences in customs and language would keep the districts apart?

- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Did Joeten agree with you on that subject?
- Villagomez: No, Joeten wanted the Micronesians to be like the States and to stay all together. Guam, Saipan, and all of them.
- Willens: He thought you could put the whole thing together as a single entity?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Your view was that the cultural differences were very big obstacles.
- Villagomez: Yes. Up until a couple of years before he died, sometimes we argued about that. Especially Guam and Saipan, they could start to be states, and then add all of Micronesia. That is what he told me.
- Siemer: You said that Joeten did not have any businesses in the other parts of Micronesia.
- Villagomez: No, not in Micronesia, but in Guam he did.
- Willens: At the beginning of the 1960s, President Kennedy took office.
- Villagomez: Yes, that is when the NTTU left. Kennedy said, you guys, out.
- Willens: I have seen some evidence that some journalist came here and discovered and publicized the project. Do you know why the NTTU left the island?
- Villagomez: The main thing I know is that up until that time, all of the Marianas is restricted. You had to have a Navy clearance [to come here]. See, when I go out to Japan or someplace, I have to get a Navy clearance to come back to my home. And then when the Navy left, the restrictions were not there.
- Willens: Were you pleased with the changes that came about during the Kennedy Administration?
- Villagomez: Yes. Because I know at that time that there is more money.
- Willens: What was your general impression of the TTPI Administration in the 1960s.
- Villagomez: When they moved back here?
- Willens: When they moved back. Did they do a good job, in your opinion?
- Villagomez: Not bad. They put more money here.
- Siemer: Were they better than the Navy?
- Villagomez: Oh yes, they were better than the Navy.
- Siemer: Did you meet with any of the United Nations visiting missions that came here in the 1960s?
- Villagomez: Oh, plenty. I've got pictures someplace. Yes, like Chinese, and Japanese sometimes.
- Willens: Did you think that the United Nations could help the Northern Marianas in any respect?
- Villagomez: No.
- Willens: It was just a formality when they made a visit?
- Villagomez: Yes.

- Willens: What was your opinion in the 1960s about economic development. Did you want to see more development here in the Marianas?
- Villagomez: No. That's one thing I was against. What has happened now is good and bad. But I remember when that resolution was coming out, I was against it.
- Willens: What was that?
- Villagomez: That resolution to open [the Marianas to foreign investment]. That is bringing in many businesses now, as you can see.
- Willens: Did you think that was going to bring in businesses from the United States?
- Villagomez: Not from the States.
- Willens: Primarily from Japan?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: You indicated earlier that you had some business relationships in Japan.
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: How did you establish those? Did they go back to Japanese times?
- Villagomez: I think they found me. They've got something. I don't know, but they know my name and everything.
- Willens: They came to approach you?
- Villagomez: Yes. They wrote to me first.
- Willens: And they invited you to come to Japan?
- Villagomez: No, I buy first. I sent orders, you know.
- Willens: They wanted your business?
- Villagomez: Yes. Then I met them. That was before I quit being a policeman. When I met with them, they said, better no more policeman. That was in 1956.
- Willens: Were the Japanese anxious to invest money here in Saipan during the 1960s?
- Villagomez: No, there was no Japanese money here at that time.
- Willens: Why not?
- Villagomez: The Japanese were not rich yet, at that time. They were poor.
- Willens: Did you think they had some long term plan to help develop Saipan?
- Villagomez: Not until, I think, 1980.
- Willens: Did you ever meet with Robert Nathan Associates economists including Jim Leonard who came out here in about 1965 to conduct a study for the TTPI?
- Villagomez: I forgot, but perhaps at some time.
- Willens: Did you think in the 1960s that tourism was going to be a big business in the Marianas?
- Villagomez: Yes, but not this fast. Because in the 1960s, still Japan is not rich. But we were lucky, because we like to see that. It used to be that when we travel by plane, you have to go to Guam and the Philippines by Pan American. There were no direct flights from Guam, only to Manila. And then anyplace from Manila. Hong Kong or Japan. But when they opened this [route to] Continental, I supported that.

- Willens: The Royal Taga Hotel was built.
- Villagomez: In 1967. But it opened for business in 1968.
- Willens: Was that a good idea, in your opinion, to increase hotel rooms?
- Villagomez: Oh, yes.
- Willens: Did you have any business dealings with Ken Jones?
- Villagomez: At that time, yes.
- Willens: What kind of relationship did you have with him?
- Villagomez: Only whatever we were short of here, we could order from Guam. He was a wholesaler in Guam. But we are against Jones to come in here [to Saipan], at that time. Because he was big.
- Siemer: When did he actually come to Tinian?
- Villagomez: Tinian was the early 1960s.
- Siemer: He established his ranch over there in the early 1960's?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: Did you buy from that operation?
- Villagomez: No. I don't think anybody [from here] bought from them.
- Siemer: Who were his customers then? Was he shipping to Guam?
- Villagomez: Yes. He was his own customer. He bought [what was produced at the ranch].
- Siemer: He supplied his own wholesale house?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: You mentioned when the Congress of Micronesia met here, you would sometimes entertain the members of the Congress.
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: What is your recollection of Lazarus Salii? Do you remember him.
- Villagomez: Yes. Boy, we miss him. He spent a lot of time in Saipan. We played golf too. And he worked for the government here.
- Willens: He was the head of the Congress of Micronesia negotiating committee for several years.
- Villagomez: For Palau.
- Willens: Well, they had a committee called the Joint Committee on Future Status and Lazarus Salii was the head of it. Andon Amaraich was on it. Bailey Olter was on it. Ed Pangelinan was on it.
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Did you ever discuss political status with some of those members of the Congress of Micronesia?
- Villagomez: Oh, yes. At that time, before they left here [when the Congress of Micronesia moved from Saipan], I thought it would be one Micronesia together [other than the Marianas], but now it is three. With Saipan, it is four.

- Willens: There was, at times, talk of independence for Micronesia from Truk. Andon Amaraich and Nakayama were often identified as favoring independence. Did you ever hear from anyone in the Congress of Micronesia that they really thought Micronesia could be an independent country?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Did you think that was realistic?
- Villagomez: I think so.
- Willens: They could support themselves?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: What was your reaction when the United States agreed to separate negotiations with the Marianas? Did you think that was a good idea?
- Villagomez: Yes. The best.
- Willens: In 1969, there were plebiscites in Guam and in Saipan about whether Guam and the Northern Marianas should become reunified. The Guamanians turned that down.
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Why did they turn it down, in your opinion?
- Villagomez: We were lucky here in Saipan because they turned that down. Because we are against [reunification]. When they turned that down, we are having a big party. That meant we were better off.
- Willens: So the Territorial Party was pleased with that result.
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Did you think that the Popular Party then changed its position, because the Guamanians had turned down reunification? Did that bring the two parties closer together?
- Villagomez: Yes, I remember because the stronger people, like my cousin Dr. Palacios, changed [their position]. I tell him and he agrees that it is going to be direct [relationship with the U.S.].
- Willens: Dr. Palacios was your cousin?
- Villagomez: Yes, first cousin.
- Willens: He was a member of the Popular Party at that time, wasn't he?
- Villagomez: Oh, yes. One of the stronger ones.
- Willens: But then he changed later on to become part of your party.
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: What prompted him to change, if you remember?
- Villagomez: Ben Santos and he, they don't get together on some issues. The big issue, in politics at that time on Saipan, was direct [affiliation with the United States] and [reunification with] Guam. But we are lucky to be a Commonwealth.
- Siemer: If the Guamanians had voted yes in that plebiscite, then the Marianas would have joined Guam.
- Villagomez: Yes, and then we would be third class citizens. We would be going back to Japanese



- times. I remember they called me a number three citizen. And not as a joke. Especially in the police force. The Japanese police, when they take something criminal, they call by citizen—nito, santo, and so on, you know. Second or third.
- Siemer: Who were the second class?
- Villagomez: Koreans.
- Willens: Dr. Palacios was in the Congress of Micronesia for awhile, and he made some speeches to the effect that he thought all of Micronesia ought to stay together. Did you ever discuss that issue with him?
- Villagomez: Yes. But I was against that. Because I think that not only the custom and culture separates us, but we are too far apart in distance.
- Willens: Did Dr. Palacios have any position in the Carolinian community?
- Villagomez: He is one-half, I think, Carolinian. I am one-quarter. My mother is half Carolinian. Her brother is Elias Sablan. Her mother was Carolinian; and Elias's mother. Elias is a Sablan and my mother is a Palacios.
- Willens: When the Marianas Political Status Commission was formed, Joeten was designated to represent the business community on the Commission. And he served on the Commission for less than one year. And then he resigned saying that he thought that people would regard his participation in the Commission as motivated to protect his business interests. Did you discuss with Joeten whether he should serve on the Commission?
- Villagomez: No, I don't remember that.
- Willens: Did you have any discussion with him about resigning from the Commission?
- Villagomez: No.
- Siemer: Did you think it was a good idea for Joeten to be on the Commission?
- Villagomez: I think so, for our protection on the business side, you know.
- Siemer: What did you think about the Commission at the time it was put together? Was it a good group?
- Villagomez: I think so, because I agreed with what they have done.
- Siemer: Was there anyone on the Commission who had an anti-business outlook?
- Villagomez: No.
- Siemer: So Joeten was not opposed to other members of the Commission about business interests?
- Villagomez: No.
- Siemer: Did Joeten have to convince other members of the Commission about particular aspects of the business interests at stake?
- Villagomez: I think plenty, like they organized a lot of companies, with friends, you know.
- Siemer: Did Joeten talk about problems that he had while he was on the Commission?
- Villagomez: No.
- Willens: Oly Borja was on the Commission and he was an active business man at the time.
- Villagomez: Yes, he was.

- Willens: Did you respect him as a politician?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Did you know him well?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Was he related to you?
- Villagomez: No, but I traveled with him.
- Willens: He had some interests with Japanese companies as well, didn't he?
- Villagomez: Yes. He opened a big nightclub. I knew his Japanese friends too. We met. As a matter of fact, all these friends I met in Japan. And all of my friends, he met too. Even Joeten and Herman, we all knew the same Japanese [businessmen]. Sometimes we traveled together, all four of us.
- Willens: There is some indication that the business community here was concerned that if the negotiations went too quickly it might lead to an invasion of business concerns that would come into the Marianas. Did you have any concerns back then that the negotiations were going too fast?
- Villagomez: No. Only this, the opening of business [to foreign investment]. That's too fast.
- Willens: You think that went too fast?
- Villagomez: Yes. And it was too spread [out]. See if it was limited to hotel and golf, the big ones, you know, I agree with that. But even mom and pop stores [were open to foreign investment].
- Willens: You disagree with letting so many small businesses in?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: You mentioned earlier that the Japanese really began developing here in the 1980s?
- Villagomez: Yes. In the late 1980s.
- Willens: Was there any development here during the 1970s that you were concerned about?
- Villagomez: No. Like I said, at that time Japan is not rich yet. Still poor.
- Willens: Did you believe there was going to be more United States investment here than actually has developed?
- Villagomez: No.
- Willens: Why not?
- Villagomez: I met a lot of businessmen. I asked some to join us here, but they don't come. But we are lucky now, they come in. Like McDonald's, Seven-Eleven.
- Willens: What do you think about those developments?
- Villagomez: Yes. Those are good.
- Willens: What is your judgment now about the extent of the tourism industry and the number of alien laborers on the island?
- Villagomez: I think you have to monitor the aliens, and then stop, you know. Because it is too overpopulated with them now. There are too many of them. But the tourist industry is good.

- Willens: What kind of business interests do you presently have?
- Villagomez: Oh, I've got the recycling [business]. I still sell to Japan. The Japanese have given me a big machine, you know, to press this [recycled material]. My friend is the recycling business in Japan. In a matter of fact, there are two factories there that I know. We are selling to them.
- Willens: Do you still have any retail stores?
- Villagomez: No. We lease out all the stores. We have a travel agency, for ticketing.
- Willens: Does anyone in the family still do any farming?
- Villagomez: I am farming, but only a little.
- Willens: During the 1960s and 1970s economists thought there should be more agriculture and more fishing industry here in the Northern Marianas. What is your judgment about agriculture and fishing as potential industries here?
- Villagomez: It is good, you know, but we have to start it out, the farming and fishing. We don't farm like before, you know. Anything you plant is going to grow. Even fishing. Within two or three miles, you can catch a lot of tuna. But now, no.
- Siemer: Is farming more difficult now?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Siemer: Why is that?
- Villagomez: Oh, because you have to use a lot of fertilizer and you have to know how to use it. And the worst one is the melon fly. Some things like cucumber and melon are very hard to grow if you don't spray every day.
- Willens: Going back to the Covenant. The Covenant was signed in 1975. Did you or any members of the business community go to the United States when the Covenant was being considered by the U.S. Congress?
- Villagomez: Right away. Me, Joeten, Herman Guerrero, Olympio, Larry Guerrero. We bought houses in San Leandro, in California, the Bay area between Hayward and Oakland. All near each other.
- Siemer: Did any of you go to Washington to try to help persuade the Congress to approve the Covenant?
- Villagomez: No. I remember, I think I went one time to support the tax—me and Joeten and Larry Hillblom. We went to D.C. We met the Russian [delegate] and the other U.N. Security Council [members].
- Siemer: How about in 1975 and 1976, did you go then?
- Villagomez: No. But a lot of people went.
- Willens: Did you ever meet Congressman Burton?
- Villagomez: The one from California? Yes. The one who died? We were at his funeral. We were there. Olympio Borja, me, my wife.
- Willens: Did you regard him as a friend of the Marianas?
- Villagomez: Yes.
- Willens: Did you ever discuss with him the future development of the Northern Marianas?

- Villagomez: Yes, yes.
- Willens: What did he think the Commonwealth would be able to accomplish?
- Villagomez: I hope that he can see what we've got now. Because he wanted to see the Marianas grow, you know. He would be pleased.
- Willens: What do you think are the major problems that the Commonwealth has today?
- Villagomez: Oh, that's what I said, the aliens. And drugs.
- Willens: What do you think can be done?
- Villagomez: The public, every family has to take care of their own.
- Willens: Manny, thank you very much. Are there any thoughts you have you want to add about the Commonwealth and what your hopes are for it.
- Villagomez: I am very lucky to be a U.S. citizen. Since Spanish times, control always changed. My father was born in Spanish times. Then, America came in Guam when he was in Guam. Then, he came here in German times. Then the Japanese came in 1914. In 1944, 30 years later, America came. So I am lucky to be an American and not to have any more changing, I think.
- Willens: Thank you very much.