**FSM—Thirty Years of Independence**

**Independence Day** **(November 2015)**

Celebration of FSM Independence brings us together today

* Creation of the Congress of Micronesia 50 years ago, in 1965. Recognition of aspirations of island people to have a hand in ruling themselves.
* World was changing in 1960s: US attention to Micronesia, increased US financial support, realization that the islands could not be a colony forever.
* New aspirations after nearly a century of colonial rule. Determination of islands to take control of their own future.
* Passionate speeches in Congress and over the radio on political status
* Generation of great leaders: Tosiwo Nakayama, Andon Amaraich, Bailey Olter, Bethwel Henry, John Mangefel, Petrus Tun, our Vice-President here (although he was not in political office at that time)
* Finally, in November 1986, almost exactly a century after Spain took possession of the Carolines, FSM finally gained formal recognition as an independent nation.

Our celebration today is here on Guam, not in FSM itself.

* So here you are celebrating your Independence Day on foreign soil. Does this mean that FSM has let you down, failed to deliver what you expected from your own country?
* What brought you here? Opportunity, I suppose–paying jobs, education, and for some health care they can’t get back home.
* Have you betrayed your cultural heritage in coming to Guam? You hoped to bring it with you (like my grandfather who came from Germany in the late 1800s). You cherish it, I’m sure, but eventually your children or grandchildren will grow up unable to speak the language you learned as a kid. (I’m an example of this. My father, born in the US of migrant parents, spoke almost no German.)
* Do you claim FSM as your own? I hope so. No reason for you to have to choose between your adopted home and your birthplace. (That’s why many of us keep beating the drums for dual citizenship.)

Understanding of Life

* Mine changed gradually during the years I’ve been in Micronesia. Before it was “either-or”: sheep or goats, yes or no, this or that...
* Now there is room for ambiguity (“maybe”). Also room for “this and that”–both are true.
* Room for Micronesian and American–I can see the strengths and weaknesses of both. So can you. We can live with a dual identity, sort of. People have been doing it for centuries as they migrated from one place to another.

Life in Guam for a Micronesian is challenging

* Micronesians seen as a burden on the economy (food stamps, housing, medical care) and sometimes on the culture as well. Guam leaders strongly maintain that Micronesians are brothers and sisters, but still Micronesians are often viewed as parasites.
* Cultural oddities are picked out and often are the subject of jokes: dresses, for instance. Drinking habits and fights.
* That sort of thing happened to my family, too. My grandparents’ house was stoned during WW I when Germans were out of favor in US. (An old story in the US: reaction against migrants–eg, Irish and Italians as well)
* Be confident that you are making a contribution to the island, even if you get the opposite impression from the press.

What to Keep in Mind

* Don’t live down to your image! (Story of those who seem to think that if people think badly of them, they might just as well behave this way) Who cares what people think! You need an internal guide and only that. Nice to have the support of the community, but not absolutely necessary.
* People on Guam envy Micronesians in some ways and have a lot to learn from you. You’ve preserved your language, and an identifiable culture–complete with sakau, breadfruit and taro, customary practices, dances and chants, legends, and navigation. Remember that you have things to share with them. Be generous in doing so.
* You are a living symbol of your nation and your culture. Your fellow citizens and your own people will be judged by the way you act. So behave yourself. (Like wearing a Roman collar–people impute things to you and judge others by what they observe in you.) In other words, you wear a uniform 24 hours a day.

Conclusion

* No reason to regard FSM as a failure because it wasn’t able to develop the economy big enough to provide the kind of jobs you looked for. These are the limits of a small island economy, I’ve always said. FSM leaders envisioned this happening years ago when they insisted on right to access to the US in the Compact. I was against this at the time–but they were proved right, and I was wrong. Emigration was a very useful fallback.
* You should be grateful to FSM for the national identity it offered and the cultural identity it supported. Be grateful also to US and Guam for providing the benefits you could not easily obtain back home.
* Great hopes back in 1965 when the Congress of Micronesia first convened–and in 1986 when full self-government finally was achieved. These were proud moments that opened up a promising future. Let’s keep those great hopes alive.