



BY OLYMPIA TERRAL

There's No Place Like Home

After 15 years of living and working in Boston and New York and traveling the world, Jay Rojas returned to Guahan a year ago to discover how much his island home really means to him. The son of John Rojas and Janis Ferrante, Jay came back to take care of family business interests and enjoy island life.

"It is just the right time, I think, for me to come back. I feel good about it. I love it. I walk down the street and see people, I know who they are and I know who they were 15 years ago," Rojas said.

After graduating from St. John's School, Rojas decided to attend Boston University. Having attended such a small high school (there were only 27 people in his graduating class) he looked forward to the anonymity of a large university in a metropolitan area. He remembers when he first arrived on campus.

"I hated it because I didn't have those other 26 people there I grew up with. I was a nobody; I was lost in this concrete jungle," Rojas said.

But once he got involved in university life, he took full advantage of his opportunities. He met people from around the world, including legendary writer Maya Angelou and the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. As the vice president of Multicultural Affairs with BU's Student Union, Rojas remembers giving a speech with Joe Kennedy during a tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King (an alumnus of BU). It was a rich time for him and a terrific transition from island life to city life.

Having graduated from Boston University with a degree in French and Continental European Literature, Rojas first moved to Sacramento, California to be near his mother. He then moved back to Boston where he worked with Investors Bank & Trust, building their staffing team and practices.

He then took a position hiring TSA screeners for airports across the country, a job that had him on the road 100 percent of the time. He lived for three months in a hotel outside of Washington D.C. while he hired

screeners for Dulles International Airport. He was then sent to Montana to hire screeners for airports in Montana and Wisconsin. Then he and a team of colleagues were sent to New York to hire for seven airports there. That's when New York City became his home.

Rojas began working for a Fortune 100 company, McGraw Hill Corporation, in their human resources staffing division. Several magazines recently had honored the company for its successes. Working at such a prestigious and forward-thinking company was an incredible opportunity for the young man from Tamuning.

"When I was in high school I couldn't wait to get away, and in college and the first few years of my twenties I would never think about moving back to Guam," recalled Rojas.

"But sometimes things change, and things change quickly," he said.

With the passing of his great uncle, Leo Slotnick, things did change. Leo Slotnick was a partner with Con Ros, Inc. and had sold his partnership in 1997, which Jay says was a way for him to retire. In "retirement" he



Jay Rojas

How has Guahan changed in the 15 years you've been away?

It is different from what I remember it to be, mostly because I am different than I was before. The ideals behind the community haven't really changed that much. No matter how long you're gone, whether it's a year or 15 years, the family is always there. And no matter how many places one visits or lives, there's no place like Guahan!

What is your biggest weakness?

Coffee is one of my weaknesses and SPAM is the other. Whenever I was back for one of my trips it would be; O.K., what do you want for dinner? I'd always say, let's go home and fry some SPAM and titiyas. That's one of the best things about living here, the food!

Do you think there will be more people of your generation moving back home?

Yes, I have heard from several friends that they are planning to move back. Whether it is to come back to take over the family business, or they are at a point in their life where they want to be, then have a mid-life crisis and decide to move back to Guam. There is something that is drawing us back right now. There are going to be more of us.

How do you see the future military investment in Guam?

I see it as an opportunity, both as a businessman and as an optimist for the island, if we accept it. One of the things that will come out of it is larger corporations taking a look at us where they never really saw us before.

managed his numerous properties, which kept him working until the day he died.

When the family needed advice sorting out his uncle's business assets, they called Jay. He was very pleased to be asked to come home and help, and there also was a sense of familial obligation.

"I'm where I am because of them. My mother's family is very small. My mother is the only child out of my grandmother's entire generation. So that's why, when we

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talk about my uncle Leo, he's also essentially like a bonus grandfather," said Rojas.

The transition to island life did take some adjustment. He credits his friends with helping him through that time, always there to remind him, "Relax, you're back on Guam now, this isn't New York!"

Since returning to the island, Rojas has taken up diving, something he never had time for or cared to do in his youth. He is now a certified dive master. "It's all I really want to do now!"

The greatest part of leaving and then having come back for Rojas is being able to apply what he has learned while living in the states. "I learned a lot working with the businesses I worked with in New York, Boston and California, where I don't really think I would have gotten that exposure here. What I learned in working with a Fortune 100 Company and bringing that back here is what I think my biggest strength is. It's not me trying to say I'm this big former New Yorker who's coming back home to turn this place upside down. ... There are certain things that I feel that I've been exposed to that can (be beneficial). Learning how to run the operations behind McGraw Hill for instance, and how they operated, it's immense: 40 countries, 300 hundred offices."

Jay believes the island has come to a critical juncture with the military coming in and spending so much money over the next eight years. He understands the controversy – whether a larger military presence is a

blessing or a curse for the island – but he feels "whether it's a good thing or a bad thing depends on how well we're prepared for it. We need to prepare ourselves. Eight thousand more people on this island and 10 or 15 billion dollars into the economy is scary. It is scary because I see so many people jumping at the opportunity already and I'm just worried they will make wrong decisions and wrong choices. With the real estate boom there are families going out

and spending their life savings building a house, hoping they will be able to rent it," he said.

Coming back to manage Slotnick Enterprises without his uncle around, Rojas has had to do his homework. It has been a challenge trying to deduce what his uncle was planning for the company by looking at the decisions he made before he died. Rojas arrived a year ago and was basically handed the keys to the business and charged with turning it into something.

"And that's where I'm going with it. Trying to turn it into something, looking into to different business ventures and weighing the possibilities. Is this something that Guam wants versus something that I want? That's where major conflicts can occur; I may think of something I want but then the island isn't ready for or doesn't want it."

Rojas is happy to be back home among family and to let go of the fast-paced life he led in New York. "I was working 110 hours a week," he remembers not too fondly. "I had just been too busy to realize how much I missed it," he said of Guahan. One clue for his family was the fact that in 15 years of living on the eastern seaboard, he never missed a Thanksgiving back here.

"Nothing would stop me, or make me cancel my Thanksgiving trip to come home!" he recalled. ☺