

**Nicholas J. Goetzfridt, Ph.D.**  
**Emeritus Professor of Library Science and Micronesian Studies**

I was born and raised on the Iron Range in far northeastern Minnesota where most people make their livings from one of several iron ore mines – some of which were established in the 1880s. I grew up in the little village of Parkville which no longer exists after the U.S. Steel company bought up the land and all the houses on it. I graduated from Mountain Iron High School and held several jobs shortly thereafter including as a busboy, an orderly in the area's only hospital and for a few years, as a truck and tractor driver on my brother-in-law's carrot (and, eventually, sod) farm. I tried to get into the iron ore mines after graduating from high school but perhaps fortunately, the iron ore mines were in a recession, squashing my intention to become a life-long miner. My mother encouraged me to meanwhile take a few classes at a local community college. In my second semester I had an excellent English composition teacher whose teaching of Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* changed my perspectives on literature, and I never looked back.

I eventually got a B.A. in English at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, went back to work on the farm for a couple of years and then went to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where I earned a M.A. in English while teaching part-time at the university, cleaning a bar, and driving a Milwaukee Journal delivery truck around Milwaukee from 11:00 p.m. until dawn. After graduating I replaced a professor on sabbatical (he had been awarded the National Book Award) at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside for a year. After that I moved back to Milwaukee and applied to the Peace Corps. I was accepted and was assigned to move to Thailand.

But as fate would have it and which would start my 30 years career in the Pacific, a Peace Corps volunteer at the University of the South Pacific in Fijihad fallen sick and I was asked if I would consider going to Fiji. I did and my life changed forever. I ultimately married into the Indian culture of Fiji and upon the completion of my two-year Peace Corps stint, moved to Madison, Wisconsin to work on a Master's degree in Library Science (MLS) which I considered at the time to be a more practical career move. (I would also earn a Ph.D. from the same university in 1997 but I did not travel back to Wisconsin to accept my doctorate. Instead, I sat waterless and powerless for several weeks in Mangilao after Typhoon Paka while my wife Shanti and the kids went to stay for a while on the family sugar cane farm in Fiji.) As I came close to graduating with the MLS, I applied to many libraries throughout the United States. One day there was a 3x5 index card posted on the school's placement board (this was in the days before the Internet) about a tenure track job available at the University of Guam. I applied and, as they say, the rest is history. I began my career at UOG in February 1987 at the bottom of the academic scale as an Instructor 1 and retired as a Professor in December 2016. We first lived in the Nelson Apartments (\$300 per month) overlooking what is now the Hagatna shopping center. It would be a couple of weeks before I realized that besides going through Sinajana, one could also drive to UOG through Mongmong-Toto-Maite.

The library at UOG would not be renovated into its present complex for several years. I remember that as you came into the lobby, there was a special enclosure where a woman named Rose took incoming calls to the university at a kind of switchboard from which she funneled calls to whatever department the caller was trying to reach. Getting a home phone line without having to wait three months depended upon knowing someone at GTA (I did). Calling to the states cost about a dollar and a half a minute with time delays in transmission. Librarians used the Dialog database service to search "online" with a modem and its gurgling sound as it connected to a main database within which existed numerous sub-databases whose focuses ran

the gamut of academic subjects. The sciences were far more expensive per minute than the humanities and educational databases. The faculty member requesting the information typically sat next to the librarian searching specific databases as he/she searched hopefully without any costly mistakes. That was what it meant to “go online.” There were of course many technological advances that transpired during my career at the University of Guam – way too many to discuss in this brief synopsis.

I served on every University-wide committee (sometimes several times) ultimately including the Faculty Senate for about ten years, beginning on the committee which created it and then as the chair of the Senate committee on graduate programs, then as its Vice President and finally as the Senate President for three years until I retired at the end of 2016.

I saw Guam change considerably both physically and otherwise. Through a better understanding of CHamoru history, I also came to understand and accept the need for CHamoru Self Determination. I published five books through mainland presses on indigenous navigation, indigenous Pacific literature, Micronesian histories, Pacific ethnomathematics and the 600+ pager *Guahan: A Bibliographic History* which I intentionally made lengthy and detailed semi-essays on scholarship on Guam’s history because I strongly felt that Guam’s rich history deserved such complexity, even if it perhaps challenged the user of the book. I actually could have written a couple hundred more pages but I was under page constraint through the publisher – University of Hawai’i Press (which also published the ethnomathematics book). I was twice awarded the annual Faculty Excellence in Research on Charter Day.

I also wrote and published a number of papers (one of the best is probably *The Sovereignty of the Line: A Case for the Indigenous Swirl* – *Pacific Asia Inquiry* 6(1): 130-143 – with its layered nuances that might require an extra read) and presented at conferences on Guam, elsewhere in the Pacific, and in the U.S. mainland (*The Metaphysical Guahan* – The 2<sup>nd</sup> Marianas History Conference – available on [Guampedia.com](http://Guampedia.com) is perhaps my favorite). I am also on the Editorial Board of the *Pacific Asia Inquiry* journal and have been the Editor of two of its issues.

However, in retrospect, I would consider my service ‘home run’ have been my early creation of *Guampedia* in 2000 and beyond by designing its subject structures, execution strategies, and serving as its Editor-in-Chief for at least a dozen years. I was serving on the Guam Humanities Council (where I would volunteer for 8 years, including 3 years as its Chair) when a federal project initiative was brought up in passing. I seized the opportunity and working with the GHC Executive Director Jillette Leon-Guerrero, received a travel grant to visit three state related encyclopedia projects (New York, Chicago, and Texas) (the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) wasn’t convinced that we could actually undertake such a massive project). I returned after those visits and, eventually, we received larger grants that enabled us to hire a managing editor (Shannon Murphy) and a software development company (in those days you had to develop individual software for these kinds of projects). *Guampedia.com* now has over a thousand entries on Guam’s history and culture – the majority of which are written by CHamoru people – which I had hoped would ultimately be the case. *Guampedia* is regularly used throughout Guam’s public and private school systems, is accessible throughout the world, and holds great potential for helping to increase fluency in the CHamoru language. Although I am not a fan of pride, I have to say that sitting here in my retirement days, I am proud of my contribution to this important project.

During this time, I also began to regularly paddle and race six-person outrigger canoes, ultimately for 15 years – first with JOG (Just Old Guys) and then the Bihun Tasi team. It kept me

in excellent shape (coupled with early morning gym workouts on the mornings I wasn't out on the ocean at 5:30 a.m). I now live in Rochester, Minnesota. A ten-minute drive will take me to either the world-famous Mayo Clinic and its main hospital or to long fields of corn and soybeans. I volunteered at St. Mary's hospital in the Emergency Room department and the surgical messaging and No One Dies Alone programs for about three years until the pandemic started. I am waiting to be called back to those duties. Meanwhile I volunteer weekly at the local food bank and am a 'lead farmer' for one of the community gardens under the purview of the Revolutionary Earth organization – both of which are dedicated to reducing the problem of food insecurity in the city.

It's been an interesting life so far.