

Gozitan Achievers in Australia

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Introduction

Migration has been the lifeline for many Maltese over the years, but has been a particular boon to Gozo. It has contributed enormously to the well-being of the individual and to the island's economy as a whole. Migration to Australia was already evident over a century ago, but became a deluge during the 1950s and 60s.

It is salutary to retell the story of those who have managed to achieve a considerable success in Australian life. For this purpose the author has been labouring on a publication: *Maltese Achievers in Australia* (currently in press), to highlight the achievement of a cross-section of the Maltese-background persons in Australia. I propose to highlight some of these personalities of Gozitan origin, just as a taste of the contribution that these people made to their adopted country.

One example of a not atypical unsung life is to be found in an interview conducted by Mark Caruana with Ġużepp Camenzuli, a migrant from Gozo who found himself on a farm in northern Queensland in the early 1920s. This is the story of a 14-year-old lad from Ġharb, Gozo, who came over to Australia in 1922 with his mother and the rest of the family to join their father. They settled on a farm in Ingham (Queensland), where they grew cane. What strikes one in reading this story, however, is the initiative and creativity with which ordinary persons from a farming background, with little or no education, can achieve without in any way even realizing the magnitude of their achievement. Ġużepp recounts how they had to transform their house from a shack into something more respectable, how they dealt with the intricate procedure of carrying their produce to the train, how, with no previous experience whatsoever, they built their 22-foot boat to go fishing for kingfish. His intimate knowledge of the geography of the area eventually came in very handy when he was given the job of ferrying soldiers and other personnel to and from the islands around Queensland in 1942.

Another interesting story is that of Emmanuel

Attard, which has been written up by Barry York and Mark Caruana (1994: *Emmanuel Attard: from Gozo (Malta) to Gallipoli and Australia.*)

The following is a brief extract from the book mentioned above, highlighting some achievements of persons of Gozitan origin in Australia.

Business Success

Lawrence Mizzi: Lawrence, today 81 years of age, will be remembered for the invention of the *Don Mizzi Harvester*. Lawrence's father came from San Lawrenz. Invention seems to run in the family. His brother Joe Mizzi invented a machine-gun. Lawrence's son invented another version of the harvester, known as the 'Walker Mizzi Harvester'. In recognition of his contribution in the development of the mechanical sugar cane harvester, Laurence received an OAM, on the Queen's Birthday Honours, 2005.

Celestino (Charlie) Bajada [1902-83]: Another success story, illustrating the way in which migrants can progress from rags to riches is that of Celestino Bajada. Born in Gozo, he left for Australia with his father in 1916 on the ill-fated *Gange* when he was only 14 years of age and settled in Sydney.



They bought a few acres of land, cleared it, and started a market-garden. By 1928 they bought a bigger and better farm. Over the years they developed various businesses, bought 150 acres of land in the vicinity of Sydney, and started chicken production, a company which today employs 1,500 workers. He died in 1983, aged 81 years, but his business is carried on by his children with branches all over Australia. As Mark Caruana remarks: *He was a multi-skilled pioneer, very entrepreneurial, the kingpin of the Maltese in Western Sydney in pre-World War 2, such that Pendle Hill is 'Little Malta' largely due to his influence, presence and the fact that he owned land, sold and lent money to new arrivals to buy land.*



John Mizzi: John's parents hail from Gozo. He was born in Australia 39 years ago but has lived in Gozo between the ages of 4 and 19. He then returned to Australia where he studied Business Computer Programming at the Control Data

Institute. John set up a company in Australia called MizziSoft to keep doing research and development in this new technology he invented and to market it. He was especially successful in industries in Asia Pacific. He helped companies like Qantas and Air New Zealand save millions of dollars also through efficient rostering. John's unique scheduling methodologies are now being adopted by innovative companies. Recently, John has started research and developing new technologies through his Maltese company called MobileBooks. His company has converted over 5,000 books that can be read on mobile phones. He hopes that this technology could help people, especially the young generation to read in an innovative and fun way. John has now returned to his native land and enjoys small-scale farming which helps him to stay close to nature and appreciate the environment.

Sports

If there is one area where Maltese have excelled in Australia, it is in the area of sport, as the following couple of examples will illustrate.

John Vella is clearly the most successful of the current group of Maltese Australian horse trainers. In the Owners Premiership for 2003/04, the Harness Racing Owners Association (with Vic Fenech on its 2004/05 committee) gave the award for the Most Consistent Horse to Gozo Pride, trained by John Vella. In 12 starts, Gozo Pride placed 1st four times, 2nd 6 times, and 3rd twice.



Darren Gauci has been acclaimed as one of Australia's greatest-ever jockeys. He was the first apprentice in Victoria to win stakes of more than \$1 million. He rode his first city winner at Moonee Valley in 1982. In one golden patch in 1983, he rode 18 consecutive

winners. He is still riding and winning races today. By the age of 13, he had a major decision to make. As a 9-, 10-, and 11-year-old, he had won best player awards in soccer and was chosen to represent Victoria. He concluded that 'at every training session, they got taller and I didn't'. His father, Bill, a wharfie, bowed to the inevitable and moved the family to Caulfield to be close to the stables. Gauci would get up at 2.30, start work mucking out the boxes and preparing the horses at 3.30, ride for other stables at 5 o'clock, ride for Frank King to whom he was indentured at 7 o'clock, bed the horses down at 9 o'clock, go to the park to cut fresh grass for the horses, then practise in the hay loft on a bag of chaff to hone his skills. By the time Gauci finished his apprenticeship, he had won four junior riding titles and one senior riding premiership. He won three more premierships before a stint in Hong Kong, then another on his return. His trainer said that Gauci was 'just a natural with balance and maturity... He was the best. He was phenomenal. You wouldn't get a better jockey.' His early mentor, Geoff Bamford, describes him as 'fearless, determined, and the most important ingredient, a natural'.

Politics

Others have made a name for themselves in politics, both at local as well as at State level.

Edward (Eddie) Micallef (b. 1941): Eddie was born in Australia. His father had migrated from Gharb in 1928, at the beginning of the depression and worked in various jobs, including cane-cutting in Babinda (Queensland), Broken Hill, and on the railways on the Nullarbor Plains, finally settling in Melbourne, where he worked for the Melbourne City Power station for 33 years. In 1983 Eddie was elected to the Victorian State Parliament representing Springvale for the Australian Labor Party (aligned to the Socialist Left faction). He was the first Maltese politician in the Victorian Parliament. In 1998 he lost pre-selection for the seat of Springvale.



Several Gozitans have become involved in local politics and have spent useful years as councillors or mayors in various cities. The following are some with a Gozitan connection.

Loreto John York: Loreto was born in Sliema on 14 December 1918. His parents came originally from Gozo, and his relatives still live in Ghajnsielem. Loreto John York was the first



Maltese to be elected mayor of an Australian city (Brunswick, Victoria). He was a councillor of the city of Brunswick, Melbourne, for six years and mayor in 1972-73 and again 1976-77.

Joseph Camilleri (b. 1927): Joseph was born in Gharb. His father Luigi had migrated to Australia in 1916, at the age of 22, and was one of those



involved in the infamous incident of the *Gange*. He returned to Malta in 1926 but returned to Australia with his family in 1928 when Joseph was just over a year old. Joseph worked on various jobs, starting as an apprentice baker (1941), He then ran his own taxi service (1949-54), as well as managing a service station with his brother (1954-62) and dealing in new and used cars (1970-85). His interest in politics started in the late 1950s; in 1980 he was elected to Stirling Council (WA). He was elected mayor of Stirling (West Australia) in May 1983.



Charlie Apap was born in 1937 in Gharb, and migrated to Australia in 1955 on the *Sorriento*. He was elected councillor for the city of Keilor in August 1980 and in the same year he was elected mayor. He remained on the council until 1988.

When, in 1990, the Liberal government of the State of Victoria re-organized the various councils, Charlie was elected to council of Brimbank City in 1997 and became its mayor in 2000. He retired from the council in 2003.

Community Leaders

A number of persons have involved themselves in various activities directly relating to Maltese settlers in Australia, particularly taking part in the many associations that have mushroomed among Maltese settlers to serve the needs of the newly-established communities. These include:



Gorg Cini (b. 1933):

Gorg was born in Victoria (Gozo) where he was active in drama circles before migrating to Australia in 1954. He became involved in drama groups when he started the Malta Star

of the Sea Drama League in West Melbourne. He appeared as an actor on Australian Television in the series *Homicide*, including *The Edge of Happiness* and *When Greek meets Greek*. As producer/director of the Drama League, he produced among others, *Joan of Arc*, George Pisani's *Għanja tar-Rebbiegħa*, as well as *Passjoni ta' Sidna Ġesu Kristu* written by himself. He also wrote several other plays, including *Il-Hajja Pubblika ta' Sidna Ġesu Kristu*, *Iż-Żwieg tal-Aħwa*, and *Hamsa f'Xibka Waħda*. Gorg has been very much involved with the social services aspect relating to the Maltese community, including the introduction of social services for Maltese in St Albans (1967), the building of the Malta Star of the Sea House (1978), and the founding the Maltese Pensioners Association of St Albans (1983). After a sojourn in Gozo (1988-94), he returned to Australia where he continued working with the Malta Star of the Sea Drama League and taking part in other social activities.



Chev. Joseph S. Attard (b. 1934):

Joe was born in Nadur, the eldest of four children. He migrated to Australia by air in November 1960 and soon became involved in voluntary work which has never ceased

since. He was funded to start the North Altona Migrant Community Centre, of which he served as president for several years. He has been involved in the founding of several ethnic associations, clubs, and societies around Melbourne. He has been ethnic broadcaster on several radio channels. He is also a justice of the peace, and has been given several awards in recognition of his work, including knight commander of the Order of St John (1965) and member of the Order of Australia (AM, 1979).

Peter Paul Portelli (b. 1952) was born in Nadur and emigrated to Australia in 1971 at the age of 19 and settled in Melbourne. In Australia he formed soccer teams at his work place and in 1979 he formed the Australia Nadur Association to organize the feast of Sts Peter and Paul and became its first president. In 1986 he became elected councillor of the city of Sunshine. During his term in office of councillor, the council named a street after Portelli's home town of Nadur. The street, called Nadur Court, has 19 houses and is in the suburb of St Albans. In 1987 the council of the city of Sunshine chose Nadur as its sister city. In 1991 he founded the Maltese Cultural Association Inc. In 1992 he acquired an old railways building and established the Maltese Cultural Centre in Albion. The centre was officially opened by Ian Baker, state member for Sunshine, the person who supported Portelli's request to acquire the premises. Portelli founded many associations some of which are still very active today. In November 1996, he formed the Order of Sts Peter and Paul to honour members of the community for work in their society. The Order today has priories in many States in Australia, Malta, Croatia, and Austria.

Several Gozitans have contributed significantly to the growing corpus of publications in Maltese in Australia. Of these one can mention the following:

Publishing and Broadcasting

Joe Axiaq was born in Żebbug, Gozo. He migrated to Australia in 1974, aged 19 years. He was one of the first Maltese to join the first group of broadcasters when ethnic broadcasting started in Melbourne in 1975, first on Radio 3ZZ and, a few months later, on Radio 3EA, today known as SBS



Radio. He has worked as a broadcaster, journalist, producer, and head of programmes. He is now head of the Maltese Programme at SBS radio in Victoria. Joe was involved in establishing the

Maltese Literature Group in 1979 and was in charge of buying and bringing Maltese books from Malta to Australia for school libraries and students of Maltese classes. He started writing in Maltese at a very young age and read his first poems and stories in the Children's Programme on Rediffusion. He wrote a number of short stories and radio plays that were broadcast on radio in Malta and Australia. His poems, short stories, and features of historical/folk nature were published in magazines and literary periodicals such as *Sagħtar*, *Forum*, *Lejn ix-Xefaq*, and the literary pages of many Maltese papers. Joe wrote also many children's stories and songs. He is the co-author of the poetry book *Bejn Vjagġ u Iehor* which was published in Australia in 1979 with another two Maltese young poets. Joe's poetry and prose are also published in anthologies by the Maltese Literature Group (in Australia) and *Għaqda Letterarja Maltija* (in Malta). He won literary competitions such as the short story competition organized by *Għaqda Letterarja Maltija* in 1987. Today Joe writes short stories with Maltese/Australian themes which reflect the life of the Maltese in Australia, sometimes with a satirical angle. A number of these stories were also adapted and dramatized for radio. Joe's poetry is short; the verses are drawn from the simplicity of the daily life and open to individual interpretation. Malta and Gozo are also a source of inspiration, but not a nostalgic one as in much of the Maltese poetry in Australia.

Frank Zammit (b. 1944) was born in Victoria, Gozo but was brought up in Marsa. In January 1965, aged 20, Frank migrated to Sydney where he undertook further studies and graduated in commercial law and accountancy and later he obtained a diploma of information technology from the Automation Academy of Australia and for many years worked as a computer systems analyst



and programmer. After a short return to Malta (1981-84), he returned to Australia where he undertook further studies and training in journalism and broadcasting at the Special Broadcasting Services, Sydney, where he was employed as a broadcaster/journalist with the Maltese Programme team for ten

years. Earlier, after obtaining the required formal qualifications from NAATI, he had started working as a freelance interpreter/translator for various governmental institutions, mainly in health, social work, and the judicial court systems – a position he stills holds. He formed the Maltese Entertainment Organization of the Western Suburbs in Sydney. In 1988 he founded the Maltese Cultural Association of NSW and was its president until 1996. For many years he was also a member of the Maltese Community Council of NSW and he chaired various sub-committees regarding cultural activities and promotion of the Maltese language. Frank continued writing poetry, mostly in Maltese, and contributed articles in Maltese and English to various media, mostly in Australia and Malta. In 1988, he wrote the historical *Il-Ballata tal-Maltinta' New Caledonia*, a 100-stanza ballad which was put to traditional Maltese music and published in the form of a kit – a book and cassette. In 1990 the Maltese Cultural Association of NSW published his second kit – *Il-Quddiesa bil-Għana Malti* and in 1992 *It-Triq Imqaddsa*. All these have since been performed regularly in various locations for the Maltese community. In 1996, Gozo Press published his 760-page anthology of Maltese poems – *Bejn Żewġ Gżiriet*. The year after, SBS TV chose this title to produce a documentary about Maltese culture – *Bridge between Two Islands* in which Frank also participated. Also in 1997, the University of Victoria published his English translation of Dun Karm Psaila's *Il-Jien u Lilhinn Minnu* (The Self and Beyond It). Since the publication of his first anthology *Bejn Żewġ Gżiriet*, the author has written over 400 other poems in Maltese and 300 in English, which are ready for publication. Frank also participated in a number of anthologies in Malta and Australia. Recently

he rendered a poetical translation in English of Prof. Oliver Friggieri's *Pawlu Ta' Malta* (Paul of Malta), which was very favourably received. In recognition of his work Frank has been accepted as a member of *L-Akkademja tal-Malti* (The Academy of Maltese Language). He was honoured with *The Maltese Millennium Cultural Award* by the Maltese Cultural Association of NSW Inc.



Pauline Curmi:

Pauline was born in Victoria, Gozo. She qualified as a teacher from the Malta Training College in conjunction with the London University Institute of Education (1964) and then taught English and French at St Mary

Grammar School, Gozo. In 1967 she migrated to Australia where she obtained a Diploma of Teaching (1982) and graduated B. Educ. (1984) at Phillip Institute of Technology. She then majored in Applied Linguistics, MA (Hons.), University of Melbourne (1994). She was awarded a diploma for professional creative writing from the Australian College of Journalism (2001). Her teaching career at secondary and tertiary level spans from 1967 to 2001. She taught English and French at Moonee Ponds Central School in Melbourne (1967); HSC Maltese at the Victorian Saturday School of Modern Languages (1984-88); tutored in the School of Community Studies at Footscray Institute of Technology; and lectured at Phillip Institute of Technology (1984-88). She held the position of senior teacher for English, French, and ESL at Mount St Joseph Girls College (1984-2001) and was faculty head for English Language and Literature Studies, Year 7-Year 12. She currently runs advanced courses in English Language and Literature for VCE students. Pauline is a member of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, Victoria and has served as member on various professional bodies. Her publications include: *L-Avventuri ta' Alice* (Gozo, 1998) / A creative translation of The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll and *Holm u Fantasija* (1987) (On Dreams and Fantasy), a collection of original short stories and poems for children. She has also contributed

poetry to the anthology *Irjieh* (1986) published by the Maltese Literature Group, Victoria. She has written a set of 'Primary Readers' translated into Maltese for the Ministry of Education, Schools Division, Victoria (1986) and developed a bilingual programme for children, broadcasted on radio 3EA (1986). She has also written *Ir-Rokna tat-Tfal* (1984-85), a bilingual 'Children's Page' for The Maltese Herald, NSW, and produced *Merħba Bik* (1988), video-recorded interviews with Maltese Australian poets residing in Melbourne.

Other writers have concentrated on various other aspects of life in Australia. **Barry York** is perhaps the best-known migration historian of Maltese settlement in Australia. The son of Loreto York (mentioned above), he has written extensively about Maltese settlement. He has been responsible for organizing and maintaining the most comprehensive oral interview collection at the Australian National University (Canberra), where many migrants, mainly from the 1920s, now deceased, have been recorded. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2005. He has written a considerable number of books and articles, including: *Empire and Race: The Maltese in Australia 1881-1949* (1990) and *Maltese in Australia: Wanderings through the Maltese-Australian story from convict times to the present* (1988).



Romeo Cini (b.

1928) was born in Tripoli, Libya, from a family that migrated from Gozo in the 1800s. In 1942, during the Second World War, together with persons of Maltese origin he was deported to a concentration

camp in Italy until he was liberated in April 1945. He returned to Tripoli in October where life slowly returned to near normality, but left for Australia in 1961 with his family. At that time there were about 200 Maltese families from Tripoli, and in 1969, he succeeded in contacting many of them

for a re-union in the Newport Parish Hall to form the Tripoli Social Club. The first committee was chosen in April 1970 and Romeo was elected president. They found an old place at the Salvation Army in Newport, which was demolished and rebuilt in just eight months where members of the club could meet. At this time he started issuing the monthly newsletter *Il Corriere Tripolino di Melbourne* which was also distributed among other Maltese from Tripoli scattered around the world. His experiences during his internment during the war are summarized in his publication: *La Nostra Storia* (1992) in Italian with an English translation by Dr George Boffa. The book proved so popular that it was reprinted. Romeo is still active as president of the Tripoli Social Club.



Raymond C. Xerri (b. 1969) Dr Raymond Xerri was born in New York City in 1969 of Gozitan parents from Qala. In March 1994 he was appointed first secretary and commissioner of oaths in the diplomatic corps of Malta and served at the Malta High Commission in

Canberra, Australia (July 1995-98). During these years, Raymond was exposed to thousands of migrants and their life experiences. In March 1995, he co-founded the Australian-Qala Association in Melbourne. Drawing from this experience, he was inspired firstly to organize the archives of the Malta High Commission in Canberra and from these manifests and records to write two volumes relating to ships carrying Maltese and Gozitan migrants to Australia. In 2002, Xerri was admitted to the degree of doctor of philosophy at Victoria University, Melbourne. Dr Xerri is an author, editor, and producer of a number of publications and multimedia and multilingual productions. He has received numerous international awards and is the initiator and editor of the series *Gozo and the Gozitans*. His books include *Directory of Ships and Aircraft carrying Maltese and Gozitan Migrants to Australia (15 June, 1934 - 30 December, 1964)* (1997); *Directory of Ships and Aircraft carrying*

Maltese and Gozitan Migrants to Australia (January, 1965 – 15 January, 1995) (2000); *Gozitan Crossing – The impact of migration and return migration of an island community* (2005); *A Decade of Australian Qala Association* (2005).

Art

Victor Grech was born in Gozo (1942) and studied at the Teachers' Training College at Ta' Giorni in Malta and obtained his teacher's certificate in 1965. He studied art at the Government School in Msida and clay-modelling at STS (Paola 1973-74). He graduated BA (Hons.) in 1976 from the University of London in History of Art. In 2000 he was awarded a certificate in religious education. He spent 20 years teaching in Malta, including teaching art at the Lyceum. At the age of 37, he migrated to Sydney in October 1979 where he continued his teaching career at Bankstown (NSW). His work has been exhibited at various venues. In Malta he participated in some collective exhibitions including 'Sacred Art' at the Catholic Institute and also with the Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce. He also had artworks exhibited for some years to help fund-raising activities by the Committee of the Physically Handicapped Rehabilitation Fund. He also took part in the 'Maltese Talents Abroad' at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta, in Jan/Feb 2000 where he exhibited a small sculpture called *L-Oraklu* (The Oracle) which indicates the influence Malta still held on the sculptor. He designed the bronze blocks which are attached to the walls of the Maltese Australian Bi-centennial monument at Pendle Hill NSW and on which there is sculpted the history of emigration to Australia. Victor has also been involved with the Maltese community in other ways, including participating with the Cittadini Theatrical Group founded by the late Virgilio Zammit, where he makes some of the scenery.

Academic Success

A number of second generation Gozitans managed to get a tertiary education. A not untypical example is that of **Penny Antoinette Theresa Cefai**, whose parents hail from Zebbug and left for Australia in 1960. Penny was born in Melbourne's West



in 1972. She is a barrister practising in personal injury law in Melbourne. She was admitted to the Victorian Bar practising as a barrister, specializing in plaintiff and defendant personal injury law.

One pleasing feature of migrant life is the opportunities presented to younger people to continue their education, whether as full-time or part-time students. A not untypical example is that of **Victoria ('Vicky') Borg** who started her academic career with the Adult Basic Education Program at the Western Institute (1987), and this was followed by a BA in psychology (1994) from Victoria University. She obtained first-class honours in her BA (Hons.) with a thesis on 'Ethnicity and Adjustment: A comparative study of Maltese and Anglo-Australian adolescents' and her Ph.D. in 2005 with a thesis: 'The life satisfaction of adolescents: A cross-cultural study in Malta and Australia'. She worked as project worker with the frail aged with the Maltese Community Council in Victoria (1995-96), as tutor, and, more recently, as lecturer in psychology at Victoria University. She is also very much involved with community affairs, being a member of several Maltese associations (e.g. Maltese Literature Group, Xaghra Association) and other generic associations



(Wellness Promotion Unit at Victoria University). She has been active in various committees, including Friends of Western Institute, Workers of Maltese Background, educational programmes at Marion College mother's club, as well as on sub-committees determining new policies at St Albans South primary school. She has received a number of awards, including the Australian Postgraduate Award (1996), the Harmonic 65 Award for an outstanding piece of work by a student of Maltese background (1996), the Maltese Literature Group Award (1997), and the Air Malta-World Aviation Systems scholarship (1998). She has presented her work at several conferences both in Australia and in Malta. Her publications include *The Maltese Cultural Kit* (1996) which was published under the auspices of the Maltese Community Council of Victoria; *Maltese Community's Clustering Support Project for the Frail Aged* (1996) which was published under the auspices of the Maltese Community Council of Victoria; *Sex differences in pathological gambling using gaming machines* (1997); *Ethnicity and Adjustment: A Comparative Study of Maltese and Anglo-Australian Adolescents* (1999), in M. Cauchi, H. Borland, & R. Adams, Maltese Background Youth. Melbourne: Europe-Australian Institute Victoria University.

These few examples illustrate the sort of contribution that many Gozitans have made to their country of settlement.

More information may be obtained from the new publication: Maurice Cauchi, *Maltese Achievers in Australia* (2006). [e-mail: mnc25@optusnet.com.au]

Professor Maurice Cauchi was the head of the Pathology Department at the University of Malta. He is currently retired in Australia, where he is also President of the Maltese Community Council of Victoria.