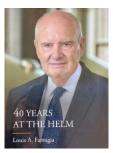
## ARTSANDENTERTAINMENT

## Reflections, balance and endurance



40 YEARS AT THE HELM by Louis A. Farrugia, Kite Publications, 2019.

## PETRA CARUANA DINGLI

Readers have certain expectations when opening a new book. This partly depends upon the genre. A book of memoirs is often a one-off work, unlike publications by a regular writer of some kind, perhaps a historian or a novelist.

Louis Farrugia is the author and protagonist of these memoirs. He says immediately that, while persuaded to document his experiences, he did not have the inclination to sit down and put his thoughts on paper. He was, however, willing to talk about the important events of his life for someone else to interpret them in writing.

Joseph Cassar, diplomat and political commentator, agreed to collaborate. The result is based on a series of 10 meetings and long interviews. Sadly, Dr Cassar passed away with the text still unfinished, and the book was completed for publication without him.

For the general reader, the interest of memoirs typically lies in the insights offered by the protagonist, from an individual's point of view and derived from experience. The narrative of this book moves chronologically, not thematically, from Louis Farrugia's childhood to the present day. It follows three main, intertwined threads.

Firstly, the personal thread recounts incidents and anecdotes, with family photographs and opinions on relatives and friends. This is of special interest to the family and friends themselves, and those who know them, offering more personal than public relevance. Yet the early memories hark back to the quiet seaside town of Sliema decades ago, which a wider readership will recall with a touch of nostalgia.

On a second level, the book charts the development of the company Farsons, a leading commercial and industrial entity in Malta, and a household name. Its story is presented from the point of view of a major player in its history from the 1970s onwards, when Louis first joined the organisation as a young man and which he then led for around 40 years.

"A celebration of the Maltese people's will and ability in bravely overcoming numerous challenges"

- Louis Farrugia

The narrative reflects on how he balanced his early training in accountancy with an entrepreneurial spirit, striving to keep the company abreast of changing times. The importance of remaining competitive is highlighted.

A defining period was the difficult economic situation of the 1970s and 1980s in Malta, suppressed by stifling governmental controls imposed upon economic activity. Another milestone was Malta's accession to the European Union in



Louis A. Farrugia (second from left) celebrating 50 years of Kinnie with Bryan A. Gera, Nini Miceli-Farrugia and Gino Miceli-Farrugia in 2002.

2004 and its consequences for the economy.

In tandem with the account of Farsons, Louis outlines his experiences as a player on Malta's commercial and political scene. This was partly due to his position, heading a leading company, but also to his commitment and interest in current events and to his personal skills and abilities.

He focuses on the ramifications of politics as conducted in Malta over the last half a century and its effects on foreign and local investment, on business confidence, economic development, job opportunities, industries such as manufacturing or tourism, and standards of living.

This leads to the third level of the book, which provides a broader account of Malta's political and social scene, changing from the 1950s until today. This is not a historian's analysis but a personal, informed account of events from an individual standpoint. These are the insights aptly provided by the genre of memoir, unlike other types of writing. We are invited to listen to the wisdom of experience, to hear the viewpoint of an eyewitness, of a person who was there'.

These three different threads all feature a persistent sense of the need to face up to challenges or setbacks, and a desire to work out and explain how these were overcome. As also reflected in the chapter headings, the challenges arise at all levels – personal, economic and political.

The tough experience of losing his father at only five

## Why my choice is YES Up with competition LOUIS FARRUGIA, managing director of Farsons, employer of 700, and father of two, speaks to The Times about why he will vote yes in the referendum voting no to pro ny view that stay od running dtering. Run Competition does not work in one direction only. We will be able to compete on the European market, and sell our products on the continent. ,, Union will

Campaigning for membership of the EU, *Times of Malta*, February 21, 2003

years of age gave Louis an early understanding that life "is full of unpredictable developments and that it is how we deal with such developments that ultimately makes a difference".

Life's journey continued along its way and solutions were always found as time moved on. Guiding principles emerge in the narrative, alongside a weighing up of rights and responsibilities – in business and society, as well as in politics and governance. The pursuit of balance holds firm throughout.

Stress is placed upon the importance of taking a stand against irresponsible entrepreneurship seeking profit at all costs. A warning is sounded against the dangers of weakening or eroding good governance in the country.

The author states that he would prefer the book to be seen as "a celebration of the Maltese people's will and ability in bravely overcoming numerous challenges", rather than as a commemoration of personal achievement.

Personal narratives have their unique value and place. They offer an insider's understanding of society, current affairs and history. Their insights gain in value as time passes and memory fades.

Like all eye witness accounts, this story is a piece of the puzzle, helping current and future readers to build a full image of a time and place. It is a window, behind which a set of eyes observes the world outside.