

THE AGIUS FAMILY

By
Carmel Agius



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DEDICATION

I dedicate this story of our family to the memory of my daughter,

Teresa



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PREFACE

I have written these few notes about our family for my brothers and sisters and for my children and theirs. I gave the necessary background information so that anyone reading these stories could understand our ancestors better.

During a few months in Malta, I tried to uncover more details about our family tree, but it was financially impossible. It was also very difficult for the following historical reasons:

The frequent raids by corsairs, Turkish pirates and Tunisian Hafsids who invaded and sacked Malta and Gozo frequently. The Hafsids' biggest raids were in 1423 and 1429. The Turks sacked Birgu in 1488 and Mosta in 1526. These and other numerous raids by pirates caused a lot of damage and the destruction of archives and documents.

The sacking of Gozo in 1551, when the official records were taken to Constantinople and other documents burnt.

The Great Siege of Malta in 1565, when the Turks devastated both Islands.

The lack of proper record keeping. To offset this Mgr. Pietro Dusina, Apostolic Inspector in 1575, ordered the parishes to register properly all births, marriages and deaths.

There were very few records kept prior to the coming of the knights in 1530, and their language is hard to decipher.

For the benefit of my brothers and sisters I included some Maltese names, which I hope will revive some old memories. I ask my brothers and sisters to add their side of the story for their children.

Carmel Agius, 1998



Francisco (Nunnu), Carmel, Angela (Nunna) and Tonina(?) c.1929

Editor's Note

My uncle Carmel produced a small number of copies of his book with the aid of his son Joseph. They used a variety of analog and digital methods to personally hand craft each print. I have digitized his work so that this wonderful project can be more easily shared with the family.

Joseph passed away in 2006 and Carmel 2011. I dedicate this enhanced edition to their memory, and to that of my father, Anthony (1932-2005).

Charles Agius, 2011

Ver 1.10.05.22

(most current version is available at <http://agius.com.au/book>)

Early Records

The earliest AGIUS recorded, lived in France, in the 9th in century. In the year 853, he was made bishop of Orleans. Another Agius was archbishop of Narbonne. He was prominent in the defense of the Church, and was awarded the 'Pallium' by archbishop Emino in 915. (1)

The Agius that came to Malta

In the Middle Ages, Sicily and Malta were part of the kingdom of Catalonia-Aragon (Spain). When King Frederick died in 1377 a period of anarchy, upheavals, insurrections, sieges and intrigue followed. In 1393-1397, King Martin the Elder of duke of Mont Blanch, was asserting his authority in Sicily, over the aristocratic families who had divided Sicily among themselves. The royalist supporters were lavishly rewarded for their services, in a series of royal acts. These formed the nucleus of Sicily's and Malta's fifteenth century upper social class.

A Catalan knight, **Guagliardo Ages** went to Sicily from Spain, and joined the service of King Martin. In 1396 Guagliardo was awarded the town of Santo Stefano and lands in the valley of Mazzara (Sicily) with the title of **Baron of Santo Stefano**. The title and lands passed to his eldest son **Filippo**, and then to Andrea, son of Filippo. Andrea in 1498 became the *Praetor* of Palermo. Many Agius barons and knights followed through the years. (27)

In 1397 King Martin incorporated the Maltese Islands in the royal demesne by royal act issued in Sicily on the 27th of November 1397, and Catalanian and Aragonese administrators, soldiers and merchants came and settled in Malta. These settlers became principal landowners and office bearers through royal and social connections and local marriages. It was at this time that one of Guagliardo Ages's sons came and settled in Malta. (3)(4)

Throughout the centuries many members of our family made a name for themselves.

The Consultant

Fr. **Antonio Agius** was a Carmelite who was many times a Prior He was general Commissioner and Provincial of his order and consultant of the Tribunal of the Santo Officio. He died on the 14th of November 1669.

The Philanthropist

In 1708 Father Andrea Agius a Jesuit priest and his sister Laura established a boarding school for teenage girls at Valletta, Malta. He left a yearly sum of 135 escudos to the Grand Master Perellos (Acts of Dominic Chircop) (1-9-1708) for the running and maintenance of the school. He died in 1732.

This school is now run by the sisters of Saint Joseph. My sisters Bina, Gola and Gejta benefited from this legacy. For some years they were boarders at this school, free of charge.

The Bishop

In 1800 died Fr. **Serafino Agius** who was elected bishop assistant to Bishop Bettini of Comacchio in Italy, by Pope Benedict XIII.

The Rector

The Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament situated next to the church of Saint Domenic in Valletta is a part of the Maltese cultural and artistic heritage. Architecture, applied decoration, statuary and painting combine in a coherent expression that takes us back to the 17th Century. The site was donated by the Dominican Friars to the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament in 1671. The Oratory was erected and the inauguration took place in 1674. At the inauguration a titular painting of the Last Supper by Mattia Preti was placed over the altar.

In 1694, when the rector was **Mattiolu Agius O.P.** the Oratory was enlarged and an exedra erected behind the chapel altar. In the same year Giuseppe D'Arena painted four large lateral paintings, and some smaller ones. The walls were accentuated by the apse and the niches with heavy statues. The Baroque style Oratory is dominated by the ceiling painting with tumbling angels, billowing clouds, saints in ecstasy and agitated movement. Its opulence is manifested in the gilded stucco and sculptural decoration, in the gilded stone statues, painting, soffit decoration and wooden paneling.

The Architect

In April 28, 1688 the little church of Our Lady of The Assumption became the parish church of the new parish of Zebbug Gozo. It was too small for 544 parishioners. The architect **Michele Agius** designed a bigger church in 1692 which was built between 1692 and 1719. This was the first church with naves in Gozo. It is a beautiful church which is still the parish church of Zebbug.



The Scholar

Canon G. P. Agius de Soldanis who was a close relative. He was born on the 1st of November 1712 at Rabat, Gozo. He was a pioneer in Maltese linguistics and philology. He studied the classics, philosophy, theology and jurisprudence at the Università di Studi in Valletta. He was a keen archaeologist and historian. At 17 he was made a canon of the Collegiate Church in Gozo by Bishop P. Alpheran. Later by the heel of the bishop's brother, Mgr. Fra Melchiorre Alpheran he went to continue his studies in Italy where he attended various cultural institutions. Later he graduated from the University of Padua, Italy. He was well versed in Latin, Italian and French and was made a fellow of various scientific academies.



In 1750 while in Rome, he published the first known grammar of the Maltese language which was used in schools up to 1865, and translated into Maltese the fifth act of Plautus comedy. His other important works include a Maltese dictionary and a book of Maltese proverbs and idioms. (Aphorisms)

On the 14th of June 1763 he was appointed the first librarian of the newly founded *De Tensin Public Library of Valletta*.

He died on the 30th of January 1770 and was buried in St. Paul church in Valletta.

The Accountant

The Maltese were for centuries the right hand of the Order of Saint John. They were employed in the dockyard, arsenals, auberges, forts and in offices, as well as on it fighting ships.

The list of the crew of the galley *San Giovanni* of May 1796 mentions many Maltese. They were doctors, nurses, pilots, boatswains, sailors, wardens, gunners, and sail makers. The Accountant on board was **Guse' Agius**.

The Photographer

One of our relatives in Malta was **Razio Agius**. He was by far the most prolific photographer when photography was still in its infancy. This colourful character (like all the Agiuses!!!) started life as Razio Agius. Then he changed his name to Orazio, and then to Horace and finally he settled for Horatio. In 1893 he obtained a phony Neapolitan knighthood and henceforth his photographs were endearingly imprinted "**Chev. Horatio Agius.**"

Horatio was no mean photographer. His enormous production focused mainly on towns, land and seascapes and he also had a good business for ships, groups and portraits. He did mainly down to earth, unobtrusive camera work that showed his artistic bent. He played around with composition, light, tones, contrast, and volumes and blends them into a harmony that greatly appealed to his numerous clients. His photographs are still treasured by museums and rich families.

The Artist

Tommaso Madiona was the father of **Gaetana**, wife of **Michelangelo Agius**. He was born in Sanglea, Malta in 1804. By profession he was an artist painter and engraver and a renowned musician. At an early age he showed great talents in design. His drawings often impressed teachers and also attracted the personal attention of Governor Sir Thomas Maitland, who recommended him for further scholarships abroad.

The University of Malta awarded him a gold medal for his drawings. Later he proceeded to the *Accademia Delle Belle Arti* in Rome, where he studied design under the celebrated professors, Minardi and Overbeck. While in Rome his art was also patronized by high personalities such as Principessa Donna Vittoria Barberini. He was best known for facsimile engraving reproductions of Italian Masters. Among his masterpieces is a detailed study of Raphael's *La Deposizione*, which he reproduced in twelve detailed drawings.

On his return to Malta, Madiona was recommended to paint the altarpieces in various churches. His *St. Philip Neri* painted in 1852 at the Gozo cathedral is regarded as a masterpiece and the *Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, at the Cospicua Collegiate church and the *Immaculate Conception* at the Zebbug parish church are considered of high artistic value. The *Virgin of Mount Carmel* at the wayside chapel of Ta' Hamet Xaghra, Gozo, is very attractive, well painted work that has some historical interest because woven into the composition is a Gozitan landscape with a view of Ta' Hamet church as it was in 1833. He also painted *Our Lady of Sorrows* at Rabat, Gozo, and other various altarpieces for churches in Malta.

Tommaso Madiona also prepared the models for the companion canvasses of The Nativity of the Virgin and The Presentation in the Temple in the parish church of Zebbug. Besides, he was an excellent guitarist and inventor of a pedal geared guitar. He died when he was 60 years old, on the 6th of April 1864. (10)

The Doctor

Dr. Antonio Agius graduated from Montpellier in France. He lived in Rabat Malta, and was known as The French Doctor. He was renowned for his skill and kindness. He died at 66, on February 6th 1799, and was buried in the family grave at the Cathedral church in Mdina, Malta.

The Young Officer

Tommaso son of Tommaso Agius was a French sympathiser. When the French expelled the Knights and occupied Malta in 1798, he joined the French army as an officer and left Malta with Napoleon on his way to Egypt, and settled there.

The Merchant

Tancred Agius was the grandson of **Tommaso** son of **Pietro Paolo Agius**. He achieved fame in Egypt during the Crimean War (1854-55). He saved Lord Raglan's British army from starvation and defeat. The British Consul in Alexandria asked the merchants if they could find grain to feed the troops in Crimea. In Egypt there was a drought. Tancred went down to the Sudan, bought the entire harvest and with two hundred fellahin he transported, threshed, bagged and loaded it onto flat-bottom boats. He brought the load to shore at the Nile cataracts, thence to Alexandria. He achieved all this in three weeks. Later, Tancred came to Malta. He lived at 269, Strada Reale, now the La Vallette Band Club.

The Cardinal

Ambrose, son of **Edward T. Agius**, was a Benedictine monk. He was one of the first catholic army chaplains in the First World War to be recommended for the Military Cross. He was a well-known poet and writer, and served in the Papal diplomatic service. He was made an archbishop and chosen as a Papal Nuncio to the Philippines to settle the dispute over the schism of some priests there, who wanted to be allowed to marry.

Archbishop Ambrose was nominated Cardinal 'In Pettore' that is, his name would not be announced until he returned from Manila. Unfortunately he never did. He was due to embark for Italy, when on December 13, 1911; his life was suddenly cut short at 55 years of age, within two days of suffering an acute attack of peritonitis. He was murdered by the schismatic priests, as the criminals later confessed. He was poisoned when powdered diamonds were mixed with his stew.



The Diplomat

Edward Tancred was born at Heliopolis, near Cairo and was educated, at the Lazarists School, in Paris. He established himself in London as a coal merchant. His family lived partly in England and partly in Malta. He travelled continuously to meet his several commitments overseas, because he had fifty offices all over Europe and America and one in Malta. (12)

Once, on his way to Paris on a very stormy day, he could not cross the channel at Dover. He went to a cafe, and at another table he saw a young man sitting by himself. Edward went to his table and introduced himself. The young man said that he was Lord Renfrew, and that he was going to Paris to learn French, but was very worried because he did not know anybody there. Edward told him that he had his own house in Paris and that he knew many people there, and that he spoke French, and offered his help and friendship. From that friendship developed a connection with the British Royal Family. Lord Renfrew became King Edward VII and remained his close friend. Edward coined and established, through the king the name of the "*Entente Cordiale*." (8)

Edward T. was the head of the Maltese community in London, seeing to its social welfare. He was a philanthropist that helped the Maltese in Malta too.

He was Cavalliere Di Spada e Cappa. He acted as the go between, the Vatican and the British Government on the matter of mixed marriages and other religious matters, including the Malta Question. Popes Pius IX, Leo XII, Benedict XV and Pius XI were all close friends.

After the First World War, there was great poverty in Malta. The Maltese expected better treatment by the British after the enormous effort they made during the war. There was great ferment for self government that came to a head when the people were called to Valletta to protest. Some demonstrators burnt the offices of the pro-British newspaper, The Malta Chronicle, the army was called in and soldiers were ordered to fire on the crowd. A couple died and many were injured. It was the 7th of June 1919. (*Sette Giugno*).

That afternoon, Edward received a batch of telegrams from Malta that told of the tragic events of the day. Without delay he went to the palace to see his friend the king. He explained the situation in Malta and the aspirations of the Maltese. He also stressed that the Maltese had their own self-government.

When the new governor, Lord Plumer arrived on the 10th June, Malta was still under marshal law. Little by little, calm and order were restored and the troops withdrawn. Self-Government was granted and installed two years later in 1921.

So, it was Edward who started the ball rolling toward Self-Government in Malta. (15)

The Nurse

In 1915 when Winston Churchill had the idea of defeating Turkey through Gallipoli, the disastrous result was 25000 wounded men. These were brought to Malta lying on deck, covered in mud and blood, and others came on barges towed by ships.

The governor, Lord Methuen made an appeal for nurses. **Laura Agius-Burns** Edward's daughter answered Lord Methuen's appeal. In fact, she also took with her to Bigli Naval Hospital three of her cousins. She was the Maltese Florence Nightingale.

One of the wounded was her brother Richard, who was later killed in battle at Passchendaele on the 16th of October 1917. Another one of the wounded that recovered in Malta was the future British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee (1945-1951). (11) (16)

The Pioneer

Esperanto is an international language created by Dr. Ludvik Lazarus Zamenhof (1859-1915). He published his first book about the language in 1887.

The first pioneer of the Esperanto Movement in Malta was chemist **Arkangelo Agius**. He influenced Dr. Gustav Busuttil and together started the Esperanto Movement in Malta in 1903. Arkangelo was the first treasurer while Dr. Busuttil was the first secretary. Beside Esperanto, Arkangelo Agius was fluent in Latin, Italian, French and Spanish.

The Sculptor

Gusepp Agius (Breibex) was a relative who lived at Rabat, Gozo. He was a sculptor and worked mainly in stone. He had his studio at Rabat in Marsalforn road, where he made many statues for churches, parishes and cemeteries in Malta and Gozo. He was a good designer and water colourist, and painted beautiful land and seascapes, birds and boats. He was my friend and I used to call at his studio for a chat, and to watch him at work.



Sculpture at Ghajnsielem

The Jurats

In 1282 the Crown recognised officially the Municipal Councils, one for Malta and one for Gozo. These Councils were the government of these islands called *Universita* when they directly formed part of the *royal demense* and also when they were subject to the authority of a particular feudal lord. The head of the government was known in documents as **Capitano Pella Verga** The Maltese called him **Hakem**.

The *Universita'* was made up of the Hakem and four Jurats. These were elected annually on the 24th of June, the feast day of St. John the Baptist, from notables and members of the gentry. They were elected by the **Consiglio Popolare**, an assembly of nobles, landowners and clergy. It took decisions on everyday matters which formed part of its normal administrative duties.

A number of officials fulfilled the different functions within the government jurisdiction as heads of departments. These were:

- The *Castellano* - maintenance of fortifications.
- The *Capitano* - maintenance of ports.
- The *Massaro* - supervision of the local markets.
- The *Acatapano* - responsible for Public Health.
- The *Secreto* - exacting dues and taxes.
- The *Baillio* - responsible for prisons.
- The *Credenziere* - The head of the treasury.
- The *Portulano* - The Custom Officer and responsible for coasts.
- The *Falconiere* - The Head of Falcon Catchers.

Another department was introduced in 1740. It was called *Diritto di Calesi e Cari* to control the traffic of carriages and carts.

These centuries old councils were abolished by the British Governor Sir Thomas Maitland in 1830.

In 1961 Municipal Councils were reintroduced, in a modified form, with less power, to represent towns and villages. I was elected for Ghajnsielem, but I was not the first Agius to serve as a counsellor, because some of our ancestors were elected councillors centuries ago. They were called Jurats.

The list of jurats for Gozo for the years 1530 to 1754 mentions members of our family. The first jurat Agius recorded was **Gianni Agius**. He was elected for the years 1576, 1577, 1591, and 1594. Another one was **Giamri Agius Galtier** who was elected for the years 1596, 1601, 1604, and 1605. Notary Gianpatist Metallo was elected for 1651, 1652, 1653, 1655, 1656 and 1698. He was the brother of Maria Metallo who married **Domenico Agius** on the 2nd of July 1658.

The ancestors of Gaetana Madiona who married **Michelangelo Agius** on the 9th of July 1841 were jurats in the second half of the 17th century. These were **Domenico Madiona** who was elected for 1643 and Eugenio Madiona elected for 1681, 1683, 1684, 1685 and 1687.

The Procurator

On the 8th of October 1617, the Conciglio Popolare met to elect a procurator to fill the vacancy that had occurred. **Lazzaro Hagius** and Joannes Ferriolo received an equal number of votes. The new Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt nominated Lazzaro Hagius to the position. Lazzaro Hagius was also mentioned in 1613 on a marble plaque on the ground floor doorway lintel commemorating the rebuilding of the place when the jurats were Michele Cassar, Giovanni Paolo Mizzi, Lazzaro Hagius and Domenico de Bononia. (19)

The Deputy

In 1798 Napoleon expelled the Order of the Knights of St. John, and occupied Malta. England, Spain and Russia tried to help the Maltese to oust the French and curb the French expansion in the Mediterranean. The Czar of Russia was on the side of the Knights. He tried to help them regain Malta so that he would have more influence in the Mediterranean. The king of the Two Sicilies, a Spanish dependency, was claiming sovereignty over the Island because Charles V of Spain in 1530 had ceded Malta to the Knights.

On the 7th February 1799 the Maltese National Assembly, not to antagonise him, decided to send three deputies to ask permission to fly the king's colours together with the British flag. These three deputies were Abbot Dovik Savoye, Baron Gaetano Fournier and the assessor **Wigi Agius**. They travelled to Sicily on a British warship.

In that troubled period in the history of Malta, one of the jurats of Mdina, Malta was **Dr. Francesco Giovanni Agius**, and in 1805 **Giovanni Battista Agius** was one of the jurats of Valletta.

The Maltese were being helped by the British, and preferred to put themselves under the protection of the king of England. They did not wish that Great Britain restore Malta to the Knights of St. John according to the Treaty of Amiens of 1802. Their wishes were confirmed by the First Treaty of Paris in 1814.

The Itinerant Dealer

The second half of the 19th century ushered in prosperity to Malta. The Crimean war (1854-1856) brought many English and French warships to our harbours and English and foreign soldiers were garrisoned here. The supply of cotton from America ceased, because of the Civil War, and the cotton mills in England needed cotton badly. So cotton fetched good prices, and it became one of the main crops, and this meant prosperity to farmers.

The Suez Canal opened in 1869 and Malta became a port of call for ships crossing the Mediterranean to and from Port Said. Later on when steam replaced sails, Malta became a coaling station for the new steam ships.

Gozo became a diocese in 1864 and new churches and houses were built. Stonecutters, stone dressers, labourers and stone carriers were in great demand. In 1870 Primary schools were opened in towns, and prosperity brought a demand for better clothes.

Our family owned and ran a drapery and haberdashery shop at SL George's square in Rabat Gozo. There were no such shops in the towns. Country people had to travel to Rabat on foot or on donkey carts, and only on Sunday morning, (The only day they were not working), to buy whatever they required.

It was at this time that grandfather Nannu Toni Agius decided to go around the towns and villages to sell fabrics and sewing requirements. He put a tray on his horse-cart and in it he put rolls of cloth and boxes of thread, needles, buttons, hooks-and-eyes, and other sewing material. He had a measuring stick (*qasba*) and big scissors. He sold his wares mainly to tailors and seamstresses in towns and villages, because in those days clothes were made to measure, as there were no ready-made ones. That is how Nannu Toni met Nanna Angla Grech, who was a seamstress at Ghajnsielem. They were married at Ghajnsielem parish church on the 2nd of February 1891. They set up house in half of the huge house Nanna and her sister Serafina had at 35 Benghazi Street.



Scale model boat by Anthony Agius 2003 (21)

The Advertisement

Serafina, Nanna Angela's sister was married to Gusepp nicknamed 'It-Biezel'. They ran a general store near the church square. Once they had for sale the newly imported enamel chamber pots. They were a novelty, because up to that time only earthenware ones were available. The old ones looked like an upside down top hat, but the new ones were quite different in shape.

Nannu Toni was interested in buying one. He liked the shape but not the price. While he was undecided, il-Biezel challenged Nannu to walk home wearing one of the chamber pots like a hat. Nannu accepted the challenge providing he kept the chamber pot. il-Biezel agreed to let him have it free providing he did the walk on a Sunday afternoon when the square would be full of people. Nannu liked the joke and the deal was done.

As agreed, the following Sunday afternoon, Nannu went to the shop, chose a chamber pot, put it on his head and walked solemnly across the square to his house. Everyone burst laughing, but Nannu did not mind. He saluted everyone who greeted him.

That must have been a very good advertisement because the whole stock of chamber pots was sold during the following week.

Nannu's Flag

The British military bands so fascinated the people with their marches, that in the second half of the 19th century, band clubs were set up in Malta and Gozo. At Rabat two band clubs were formed: the Leone (Lion) Band Club and the Stella (Star) Band Club. From the very beginning there was great rivalry between them. These two band clubs had many supporters, and Nannu Toni was a fanatic supporter of the Leone Band Club.

The Ġhajnsielem people supported the Stella band, which was invited to play marches at the festa. Nannu Toni did not like that, and decided to do something about it. One day, when the festa was approaching, Nannu asked his cousin Gusepp Agius, the sculptor, to paint the family coat-of-arms on a big flag. Now, our coat-of-arms shows a griffon on three hills, smashing a star with a sword. Nannu told his cousin to substitute the griffon with a lion because this, he thought, was a good way to spite the Stella band supporters. (2)

On the day of the festa, Nannu Toni flew his flag on top of his house. He was sure that it would upset the Stella supporters. But they knew that he would be busy selling nougat at the piazza (square), so someone climbed up to the roof and tore the flag to shreds.

Coming home, the first thing Nannu did was to look up to see his flag. It was not there, but he was not upset. He smiled contentedly because he realised that his flag did what it was intended to do: annoy and upset the Stella supporters.

The Nougat Maker

Nannu was also a well known nougat maker and seller. Many times, old people told me how good his nougat was. His nougat was the best and in great demand. He made both the amber and the white variety and the ingredients were almonds or peanuts or pistachios or sesame.

He made it in blocks called turruni (30cm x 10cm x 7cm) and sold it by weight.

On the days of the festa, he erected a stand in the piazza, decorated with festoons and a canopy for shade. At the front he had a big glass and mahogany showcase where nougat blocks split in half lengthwise, were placed to attract customers. On one side of the table he had a big ornate Scale and weights of shiny brass, and on the other side he had an acetylene lantern, and in the middle, he had the cutting board a stack of wrapping paper, and big knives. With a shrill voice he called, "*Tal-Qormil-ahjar qubbajt*" "Qormi nougat is the best." 'Qormi' was the family nickname. It was like a brand name for him. He did very well in summer because every Sunday there was a festa in one or other of the towns. Many people from other towns went to enjoy the band marches, visit the church, watch the fireworks and take back home some nougat.

Returning home from the festa, at night, with the takings of the day was a great risk. Nannu carried a six chamber revolver like the ones in old western films. (24)(26)

Nannu Toni's Public Spirit

Incidents from the life of Nannu Toni give a glimpse of how public-spirited he was. One day, a destitute old man died. Nannu paid for his funeral and burial. In another instance, one of the neighbours was very ill, and the doctor prescribed some medicine, which was urgently needed. The only pharmacy on the island was miles away. Nannu Toni took his horse, went to the pharmacy at Rabat, and was back with the medicine, in no time.

Nannu Toni was the first person to carry stones for the new church. When the Ġhajnsielem people decided to build a new church, the parish acquired a quarry and employed some men to cut the stones. One day Nannu found out that there were stones ready to be carried to the building site, and decided to help. There were no trucks then (1920), and carrying the stones for the new church, was one of the problems facing the parish.

One morning, Nannu took his cart to the quarry and with the help of two friends, he loaded the biggest stone and very proud and happy, he carried this first stone to the new church site. This prompted others who had carts, to carry stones in their spare time, especially on Sundays.

The Sailor

Mum's dad was Gusepp Meilak. His nickname was *Il Kule'*. His family lived at Rabat, and its nickname was Tal-Gummiena. He was well built but not very tall. He lost his hair quite young. He was fair, he had blue eyes and a bushy moustache. He smoked a pipe and wore a hat. Like most sailors he had a tattoo. It was a small cross on the inside of his left wrist. In the past, he once explained, this was an indication that the sailor bearing it was a Christian. He did not like milk, and he always had black coffee with a drop of blossom-water. When the coffee was piping hot, instead of drinking it straight from the cup, he poured it little by little into the saucer, to cool down, and sipped it.

Nannu was a sailor on tall ships that carried wine, oil, dates and other farm produce from Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Sicily, and other countries in the Mediterranean. It was a hard job going up and down the rigging, furling and unfurling big sails in all kinds of weather. He could do many things that old sailors did. He could read the weather, tie many intricate knots, splice ropes, and make and mend sails and predict the weather. He was also a skilled carpenter, very useful on those timber ships. He had many tools which he kept in an old sea - chest.

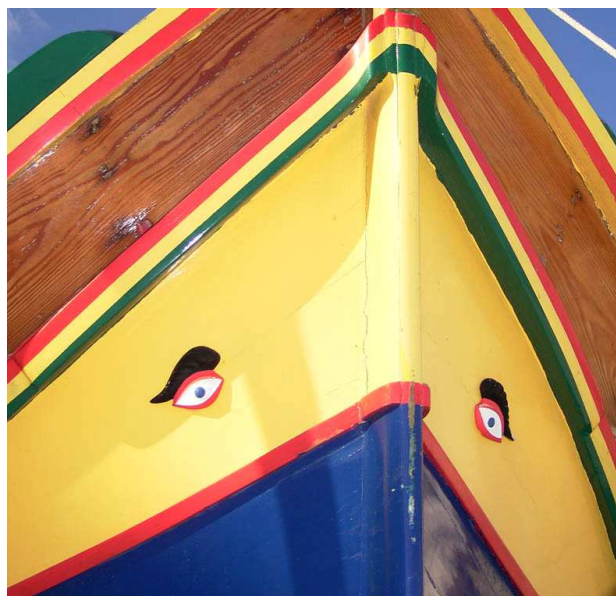
Once, a rich American, while cruising in the Mediterranean on a big yacht, called at Malta. He required a sailor that could manage sails. Nannu got the job, and after some time in the Mediterranean, which he knew so well, they sailed back to America. It was a long and cold voyage, Nannu recalled. There was no wheelhouse on the ship, and sailors at the helm and those on watch had to stay in the open air, exposed to rain and sea spray. They had to wear oilskins and sou'westers all the way till they reached America.

When they reached New York, the owner did not pay Nannu off. He realised that Nannu, though young, was a seasoned and skilful sailor, and employed him for some years till Nannu became home sick and decided to return home



The Boat Owner

Back in Malta Nannu gave up sailing and settled down. He married Nanna Karmni (Refalo), and acquired a new Gozo boat, which the Caruanas of Kalkara built for him. Boats were painted black with pitch. Nannu was one of the first to paint his boat in many colours. The other boat owners liked the idea, and from then onwards all boats were colourful and attractive. His boat, like all Gozo boats, had two lateen sails and a jib. It had no deck. It had an Osiris 'Eye on each side of the bow (14).



Nannu named his boat *Joan Of Arc*, a name suggested by his brother, Fr. Thomas. Its registration number was G6. It carried fifteen tons of cargo, usually meat, eggs, poultry, fruit, vegetables, and other farm produce from Gozo to Malta, and brought back to Gozo, fodder, flour, groceries, furniture, household items and manufactured goods.

Nannu was also the skipper and manager. He had to call at flourmills, stores and warehouses and the Valletta markets to take orders. When the Grand Harbour breakwater was being built Nannu's boat carried loads of sand which was collected from various sandy beaches.

The boat had a crew of seven: the skipper, five sailors, and a junior sailor. Besides working the sails, the sailors loaded and unloaded the cargo, and once a year hauled up the boat, to clean it and paint it. The wages were paid by the 'Share' method. Each sailor was paid one share, the junior was paid half a share, and the skipper received two shares. Two other shares were allotted to the boat. Half a share was reserved for the church as a tithe. The takings were divided in these proportions.

In the depression Nannu Gusepp sold his boat and went into the egg business. He went around on his donkey cart buying eggs from farms and homes that had chickens. He put the eggs in cane baskets, and once a week, he took the eggs to Malta, and sold them to retail shops at the Valletta markets. The price of eggs depended on the British Mediterranean Fleet, which had its base in Malta. When the fleet was in port, eggs fetched a better price and Nannu made a profit.

The Capuchin Monk

Once Nannu Gusepp took me to Malta to visit his brother who was a Capuchin monk, retired at *Santa Liberata* monastery at *Rinella*, on the other side of the Grand Harbour. While waiting for a boat at the quay near the Custom House, we watched the picket-boats come and go. They had huge shiny brass funnels and big cowls. When they reached the quay the sailors fore and aft did a kind of drill, shouldering the boathooks, swinging them around, and then use them to stop the boat. The midshipman in charge gave orders and steered the boat.

We boarded a *dghajsa* and the boatman (*barklor*) rowed the boat past a row of warships moored in the middle of the harbour. I saw sailors painting the side of a ship and a small tugboat towing a large barge and tooting every now and then to warn boats to keep clear.

Father Thomas, Nannu's brother, was old and frail. He had a ruddy complexion, blue eyes, white moustache and long beard. He was happy to see us. In his younger years, he was several times Father Provincial of his Order. In 1913 when the Marsa parish was assigned to his Order, he built the parish church and a monastery near by.

The main benefactor was Mr. Balbi, a rich businessman. But in 1917, when the Bolsheviks became the rulers of Russia, he lost all his wealth because it was invested in Russian rubles. He was evicted from his house, but Fr. Thomas provided accommodation for him and helped him to start business again.

Nannu was very proud of Fr. Thomas because he was an eloquent preacher and a holy man.

Political Parties

When in 1798 Napoleon expelled the Knights and occupied Malta, the Maltese were very upset. The French despoiled the churches and public buildings and carried away all valuable objects they could lay their hands on. The main opposing power to the French was Britain which had a big fleet in the Mediterranean. The Maltese needed help and they petitioned Lord Nelson to come to their aid. Nelson realising the strategic importance of Malta, grasped the opportunity and the French were expelled. The Maltese needed protection and so they acknowledged the king of England as the sovereign of Malta providing that the Roman Catholic Church was maintained and the Maltese Declaration of Rights was honoured.

In later years the Maltese started to resent the arbitrary way of the British administration when the welfare of the people was ignored and Malta became a colony of the British Empire. This gave rise to a faction, made up of the landed gentry and the intelligentsia clamouring for representation in the running of the country. They asked for power sharing, a diarchy. To appease them many constitutions were granted but revoked after a short time.

The 1921 Self government constitution was abrogated in November 1933, and repealed in 1936. Between 1933-1939, there was practically no proper constitution for the Maltese had no representation in government. Malta was directly governed by the Colonial Office. Representative government was restored in 1939 by the Macdonald Constitution that provided for a Council of Government with 10 elected members, 5 ex-officio members, 3 official members and 2 nominated unofficial members.

In 1939, there were two parties contending for seats in the Council of Government one was the Constitutional Party the pro British party of Lord Strickland, and the Nationalist Party led by Nerico Mizzi which aimed for Self government. This party leaned towards Italy that at that time was ruled by the Fascists under Benito Mussolini, and so this party was labeled as the pro-Italian Party.

The election rallies were noisy and rowdy. The Nationalists organised a march along the main streets of our town with young men carrying flags and chanting party songs. I knew that Nannu had a small American flag which he had brought from America many years before. I found that flag, tied it to a stick and joined the rally which I enjoyed immensely.

Nannu was furious when he found out that I had taken part in that rally. He confiscated the flag and I fell from grace. I was only eleven years old and could not understand why. It was many years later that I learned about political parties and why Nannu was so upset. He was a supporter of the Constitutional Party so he opposed the rally. Dad, on the other hand, was a Nationalist and he was delighted.

I also found out, to my amazement, that one of the songs we sang was "*Giovinezza*", the rallying song of the Fascist youth, and I regretted that without knowing, I had supported Mussolini.



Nannu's Friend

In the days when the Knights ruled over Malta, there were numerous slaves. They were dark men from North Africa. They worked for the Order and private people as farm hands, servants, stone dressers and builders.

But when I was little, the only dark people we saw were Tunisian peddlers selling orange - blossom water (*Ilima zghar*), date rush-nuts (*Habba ghaziz*), earthenware pots, pans, pitchers (*bomblijiet*) and basins, (*zniegel*), Palm-leaf fans, (*paljijiet*) and baskets, (*gwielaq*), and rush mats (*hsajjar*). Kids were scarred of these dark men which they called torok and when they were naughty they were threatened with the expression: *Jigi t-tork ghalik*, "A Turk will get you."

Nannu Gusepp had such a friend, called Il-Hagg. He was a huge dark man with a deep voice. He wore a red fez (*tarbux*), a long white vest with a colourful sash, and baggy trousers (*sarwal*). Nannu carried his wares from the quay to his farmhouse on his donkey-cart. He also gave him a room to live in for the duration of his stay in Gozo.

When Nannu Gusepp was a sailor on sailing ships he met Il-Hagg's father who had a shop at the Souk in Tunis. His name was Ibn Ahmad. It was Nannu who suggested to him to come to Malta, every now and then, to sell his wares. When the old man died, il-Hagg took over his father's business, and made trips to Malta, periodically, like his father.



Nanu Gusepp Meilak, now blind, with grandson Joe c 1949.

Gozo's First Traffic Accident

Nannu Guzepp was involved in the first motor traffic accident in Gozo, back in 1926. The 12th of March, St. Gregory's Day is a very special day in Gozo. By tradition, on that day the clergy, religious Orders and confraternities from every parish in Gozo march in procession from the cathedral church to the church of St. Gregory in Kercem. The clergy in full ceremonial vestments chant the Litany of the saints along the way, and people line the route. Many people from all over the island go to Rabat to watch or participate in the procession.

In the 1920s, people travelled on foot or on donkey-carts. There was no public transport yet. But this was going to change; a bus was starting the first service from Qala to Rabat. (18)

That year Nannu Gusepp decided to go to Rabat, watch the procession, and then visit his brother who lived there. Quite early, Nannu harnessed his donkey and off he went. On the way, he gave a friend a lift. Farther on, a young woman asked for a lift and Nannu obliged. She sat at the back clutching her faldetta. When they reached the old windmill at the crossroads, they found that the crowd of people going to the festa was getting thicker.

All of a sudden, the tooting of a horn was heard; the bus was approaching, swerving from side to side to avoid carts and curious pedestrians. When the bus came to Nannu's cart, the driver swerved, the steering-wheel jammed, he lost control, and the bus crashed into Nannu's cart with a big bang. With the impact, the cart was smashed and Nannu and his friends were catapulted into the adjoining field, but they were not hurt. The bus overturned and the passengers were injured mainly by broken glass. They screamed and cried with pain and panic, while people milled around the overturned bus. Many cursed the new bus, and were scared to go near it. Others managed to extract the wounded from the wreckage, load them on carts, and take them to hospital.

Nannu's smashed cart was afterwards removed by the cartwright who had his shop near the windmill. Nannu shocked, upset and frustrated had to walk back home pulling his bewildered donkey behind him.

This was the first traffic accident in Gozo. It made front page headlines in the papers the following day

The Tobacconist

Nannu had another brother who had a liquor and tobacco shop at Rabat, and another one at Mġarr, where he also sold fishing tackle. Tobacco came as big leaves pressed in big shallow wooden tubs, two metres across and a metre high. There were two kinds, the amber and the brown leaf. Nannu preferred the amber leaf tobacco because it was mild and mellow. He cut some everyday and put it in a leather pouch, which he carried in the left-side pocket of his waistcoat.

The Weavers

Malta produced cloth since prehistoric times. The classical writer Cicero, referred to quantities of Maltese doth and stated that Malta, in Roman times, became a factory for weaving fine women's garments. (22)

Deodorus Siculus mentioned local artisans of every class and added: "The most expert are those who weave textiles, famous for their fineness and softness." Nanna Karmni and her sisters were very industrious. They were weavers, who used wool and cotton grown locally.

Gozo cotton had two natural shades, the white and the red. The red, when woven with the contrasting cream coloured warp thread, gave a very interesting effect to the finished cloth. Nanna used the soft tones of the two natural colours to great effect in making striped weave pattern, narrow ticking for pillow cases and mattress covers, medium width for sheets and broad for other furnishing items.

Nanna and her sisters did all the seed separation, flaying, dying, spinning and weaving. She spun the wool by hand against the thigh and then twisted it into thread by means of the rotating spindle.

Certainly, her cloth was as good, even better than that eulogised by Strabo and Cicero for its excellence for household furnishings and good clothing.



Carmela Meilak

29-9-1877 to 14-4-1927

The Fishermen

Nanna Karmni's brothers were fishermen. They owned a *Firilla*, which was a fishing boat with four oars and a spritsail. They had a variety of traps, nets and lines.

When they were not fishing, they made new nets or mended the torn ones, or made traps and mended lines. The lines were very long and had over 500 hooks. It was a time consuming job to bait all those hooks, and very tedious to undo the remaining bait after a fishing trip, dry the lines in the sun, and place them neatly back in the baskets.

The pear-shaped traps, of different sizes for different kinds of fish, were made of thin strands of shaved cane, which they whittled themselves.

They made drift-nets and trawling nets. The nets had to be dried in the sun, and mended after every fishing trip.

George, (*Girgi ta' Harbat*), one of Nanna's brothers, told me how once while he and his brothers were fishing, miles out at sea, a whirlwind capsized their boat. They swam for hours clinging to the oars till they reached land.

This kind of marathon swim happened again to George, years later, when he was a seaman in the British merchant navy one night, while his ship was crossing the North Sea, in very rough seas, he was swept overboard. This was not discovered before the next watch came up on deck to relieve him. He could not find him, and gave the alarm. The ship turned back to look for him, and George was rescued seven hours later, very cold and tired. This was, obviously a miraculous rescue obtained by the intercession of Our Lady of Loreto whom he prayed for help. He died of old age.



Gusepp (Joseph) Meilak

19-3-1876 to 15-10-1955

The Nanny

During the First World War *Fort Chambrey* became a military hospital again. Many families of officers serving there were lodged at Ghajnsielem. Nanna Karmni was the nanny of one of these families and also did their washing at the Ghajnsielem, a spring of water in the valley not far from her house.

During the reign of Grand Master Perellos, (1697-1720), a wash-house (*logga*) was built there for the use of the locals. The water came out of an earthenware pipe, and flowed continuously down into a through hewn out of a large flat rock. From there it ran to a covered reservoir and thence to the wash-house. There were six stone vats and flat slabs for washing clothes. The surplus water went down stone canals to water the orchards down the valley.

The Ghajn was a very important place for the people, because it was the only drinking water supply in the area. It was also a sacred place, because according to legend, a holy man, Anglu Grech, (a relative of Nanna Angela,) while he was watering his flock at the Ghajn, had a vision of Our Lady. He was asked to erect a shrine in honour Our Lady of Loreto which he subsequently did. This spring of water gave the town its name: Ghajnsielem, that means *Fountain of Peace*.

The Nuns

Two of Nanna Karmni's sisters were cloistered nuns at St. Ursula 'S Convent in Valletta. I remember only Sister Loretta. She entered the convent at seventeen and never came out again except during the war, when the whole Community was evacuated to Marsalforn, Gozo. She wore a black habit with a big, white, eight-pointed cross in front, like the knights of St. John. She was always glad to see us when we visited her. We used to bring her fruit and eggs, which we placed in a semicircular, revolving window. We sat in the parlour and she sat on the other side of a double steel mesh partition. She gave us small delicious cakes which she pushed through the partition. These cakes were a speciality that the nuns baked for hundreds of years. They were called Dead Men's Bones, and were distributed free to the general community, at Christmas time.

Nannu Toni's Family

Nannu Toni had three brothers Cannel, Mons. George and Rev. Marcelli, and four sisters Marianna, Nicolina, Carmela and Gaetana. Mons. George and Rev. Marcell lived in Geneva, Nebraska U.S.A. Carmela and Gaetana were married, and Marianna and Nicolina were single. Marianna kept house and Nicolina ran the old family haberdashery shop at Rabat.

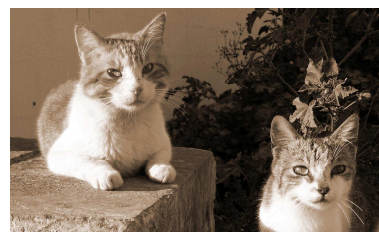
Dad's Family

Dad had a brother and two sisters. The brother's name was Joseph, and we called him Barba Gusepp. He was married to Tonina Costa, and he ran a wine shop. The sisters were Lonza (Annunziata), who was married to Loretu Grima. She ran Nanna's old grocery shop, at Garden Street. Zija Kannni, the other sister, was married to Wenzu Grech, the principal of the town's primary school. One of Zija Karmni's sons, was cousin Ganninu. We were of the same age, in the same class and close friends. We played hopscotch, hide-and-seek and soccer. We played with hoops and marbles, and flew kites and caught eels and frogs from the stream behind his house.

Early in the morning, of the 2nd of January 1942, German bombers were flying over to bomb Malta. Gozo, being unarmed, was not a target, but that morning a bomb fell on auntie's house and demolished it. Zija Karmni, together with three daughters and Ganninu were killed instantly. The other members of the family escaped the tragedy because they were not at home at that time.

Dun Wigi

Nanna Karmni had two cats: Wigi; a docile, lovable and lazy male cat, and Gerita, a wild, unfriendly, suspicious female cat. She was lean, agile, black and white cat that hunted birds and mice, fought over food and pursued the fish-hawkers as they passed by. She was never at home except when she was hungry. She made her presence known by mewing incessantly till food was provided.



Wigi, a cream and yellow blotched tabby, liked to stay at home. He brushed against people's legs as if to say, "Stroke me, I am a friend". He was Nanna's favourite. He sat at her side and followed her everywhere. He even went to church with her, and sat quietly under her chair. (no pews in church, then) and never disturbed the congregation.

The parish priest did not like the fact that he had a feline parishioner, and made his objection known to Nanna. From then on, she had to lock Wigi in before she went to church, but sometimes, he managed to escape and go to church looking for Nanna. She had to sit at the back of the church not far from the door so that Wigi would not be noticed.

Everybody liked Wigi because unlike Gerita, he kept himself out of mischief, played with kids, and was the friend of everyone. He was Nannu's favourite too because every evening he waited at the door to greet him when he came back from work. Nannu liked Wigi and called him 'Dun Wigi.'

Mum's Brothers

Mum had six brothers. They were Carmel, Frank, Joseph, Sam, Larry and Tony. Carmel was in New York when he was young. Frank and Sam were sailors on the Knight of Malta, a ferry that plied between Valletta and Syracuse in Sicily. In the 1930s they went to Cardiff, England and embarked on British ships for a while and then they jumped ship in New York, and worked there. Larry was a sailor on a schooner that carried wine from Cyprus, Greece, and Spain. He worked in the merchant navy for some years and then joined his brothers in New York. Joseph was a sailor on Gozo boats before he too joined his brothers in America.

When Great Britain declared war they received an appeal from the British Embassy urging them, as British subjects to join the British forces or the British merchant navy. They were surprised to know that the British embassy knew their address.

Not long after the U.S. government published a proclamation in the newspapers that all aliens that joined the armed forces would be given American Citizenship. So they joined the army. When the Victory ships were being built to help the war effort, the US Government needed sailors to man them. Frank, Sam, and Larry were given the option to join the merchant navy; and they did. They sailed in convoys to Russia, via the Norwegian Sea, carrying arms and ammunition and to Europe and the Pacific carrying army supplies. When the war was over, Frank left the merchant navy but Larry worked as a Quartermaster on the *Argentina* a cruise ship of the McCormack Lines. Sam met Enza in Naples, married her and left the Navy

Ziju Salvu (Sam), was very generous. For many years he sent parcels of food and clothes to us, to Nannu and to Zija Anni. He supported Nannu and Zija Anni all his life. He died in 1966.



Pepe, Angela, Charles, Enza, Salvo, and Frank. Astoria, c.1963

Ziju Loretu (uncle Larry) married Enza, Uncle Sam's widow and retired in Gozo. They renovated Nanna's old house at Fuq-il Ghajn Street (See page 14) and lived there till they died.

Ziju Toni

When the Second World War broke out, Ziju Tony enlisted in the army. After some training he was stationed at Fort St. Elmo, situated at the entrance to the Grand Harbour. His regiment was the 1st Coast Regiment RMA, (Royal Malta Artillery) and his army number was 11076.

The best gunners were stationed at Fort St Elmo to defend Valletta and the harbour from seaborne attacks. Early on the morning of the 26th July 1941 the Italian Navy attempted to force an entry into the Grand Harbour with a combined force of ICCs (*human Torpedoes*) and MTBs (*Motor Torpedo Boats*), in order to attack a recently arrived convoy. Uncle Tony was on duty on one of the guns. They made many direct hits and the attacking enemy craft were all sunk or captured before they could penetrate the harbour defences. The result was a prestigious victory for the 1st Coast Regiment, in what was officially styled as *The Battle of Valletta*.

After the war Ziju Tony and his family migrated to America.

Zija Anni and Zija Wenza

Mum had two sisters, the elder was Zija Anni and the other was Zija Wenza (Lorenza). Both loved us very much. Zija Anni was married to John Pace from Xewkija. They had a baby boy who unfortunately died at birth. There was high unemployment and many Maltese men went to the French town of Marseille, seeking work in the soap-making, engineering and shipbuilding industries. Being unemployed for a time, Zija Anni's husband went to Marseille to look for work. After a while he wrote asking her to join him, but Nanna Karinni, her mother, had thyroid cancer and was very sick. Zija Anni felt that she could not leave her sick mother at that time when she needed her most, and she declined. Her husband never wrote to her again and she lost contact. But she always treasured two big pictures, one of Notre Dame De La Gard, and the other of the Grand Theatre, two landmarks in Marseille. These prints were sent to her by her husband. Zija Anni spent the rest of her life looking after and nursing her father. She loved me and my brothers and sisters as if we were her own.

The other auntie was Zija Wenza who was married to Paul Zerafa, the local postman. She died at the birth of her first child. I remember her as very clean tidy, and kind.

Mum's and Dad's Wedding

When Mum and Dad were young, a father would advertise that he had an available marriageable daughter, by placing two plant-pots in a front window. The pot on the right contained basil and the one on the left red carnations. At the request of a suitor the matchmaker (huttab), would go to the young lady's home to tell her parents that someone had noticed the carnation in their window and was interested in making a proposal of marriage. The parents would assess the young man's suitability as husband for their daughter. If they find the young man suitable, they negotiate the dowry (dota): linen, furniture, clothing, gold, jewellery and money the girl would take to her new home. The girl had no say in the matter and the only contact the lovers had was eye contact or a furtive wink or a smile. After the necessary preparations, the dowry was carried to the new house of the bride in a glory box (*senduq*). At a formal meeting of the two families called Gherusija (Betrothal), the future bride and groom exchanged rings and refreshments followed. The first time the engaged couple went out together (with a chaperone of course!) was usually to a special festa like L'Imnarja, (29 June), Santa Maria, (August 15) or San Giorgor (March 12).

Mum and dad did not follow these customs. Mum used to say that Nanna Angela did not want Dad to marry though he was 30 years old, because she did not want to miss his income which he contributed to the family for a long time. After the usual preparations were done, Dad went to the parish priest to set a date for the wedding. The wedding day was the 13th May 1926 and the ceremony took place at the local parish church Of Our Lady of Loreto, Ghajnsielem. According to custom, Mum went to church on foot, accompanied by her father mother brothers and sisters. Nannu Toni was supposed to take Dad to church but he did not turn up. Mum, like all brides in those days, was dressed in black She wore a Faldetta, a black silk dress, black shoes and stockings, gold rings, earrings bracelets and a big necklace. (13)

The wedding ceremony was conducted by Rev Francesco Mizzi the parish priest during nuptial mass. Mum and Dad knelt on kneelers, in the sanctuary, each holding a big candle. Coming out of the church, they were showered with grain for good luck and fertility. Then all walked to Nanna's house nearby, for the reception (trattament). In a room prepared beforehand the furniture had been removed and chairs placed all around. Mum and Dad, Mum's family and the guests (haddara), were first served hot cocoa and *Pane di Spagna*, a kind of sponge cake fingers, then different kinds of cakes, tarts bonbons and an assortment of sweets. (29)

The men enjoyed small glasses of whisky rum, brandy and gin and the women were served vermouth, cherry brandy and other liqueurs.

Dad's family did not attend the betrothal nor the wedding ceremony or reception Dad was ostracized and Mum and Dad and later all of us, were treated worse than strangers by dad's family.

My Brothers and Sisters

In the thirties families were big, and ours was no exception. Mum and Dad had full trust in Divine Providence. "*Alla jipprovdi*" "God provides ". They were blessed with fourteen bundles of joy, and had no trouble finding names for all of us.

1927-The first-born was Zarenu (Nazzareno), who was named after Nazzareno Abela, a Maltese man executed by hanging, but found to be innocent afterwards.

1928- I (Carmel) was named after Nanna Karmni who had died the year before.

1929- Tonina was named after Nannu Toni

1930- Bina (Bernadette) was named after St. Bernadette Soubirous, who experienced numerous visions of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes and was canonized some years before.

1931- Annunziata Agius was a well known member of our family and Nancy was named after her.

1932- Toni took Nannu Toni's name because Tonina died when she was a only few months old and Toni was given her name.

1934- Golina was given Nanna Angela's name, who had died months before.

1937- Wenzu (Lawrence) named after Zija Wenza.

1938- Gejta was named after Gaetana, Dad's auntie who according to old people she was a very beautiful woman.

1940- Dad named Thomas after Fr. Thomas, Nannu Gusepp's brother who passed away that year.

1941- Freddie was named after Fr. Alfred Gatt who was a an outstandingly devout and virtuous priest.

1942 - Loreta was named after Our Lady of Loreto, the patron saint of our town.

1944- Marija was named after Our Lady.

1948 - Guseppi was named after Nannu Gusepp, who liked him very much for having his name.

Families were big in those days, but infant mortality was high. Zarenu, Tonina, Wenzu, Thomas and Loreta died when they were a few months old. (30)



Our Homes

Mum and Dad's first home was Nannu's old house at 36 Fuq-il-Ghajj Street. This was a little house Nannu Guepp built on land he had bought from Nanna's family, adjacent to their house. They were not only stingy, (they could have given the land to Nanna as a dowry after working so hard for the family,) but they were also mean because they sold it with the proviso that only a one storey house could be built on it.

It was a one bedroom house with a tiny kitchen, a toilet, and a verandah facing a little yard covered with a trellis supporting a grapevine. It had also a little garden on one side. Zarenu was born there.

This house was tiny and Dad preferred a bigger one. After a year Mum and Dad moved to 14 Church Square, opposite the old parish church. It was a two storey house with two front doors. I was born there. Tonina, Bina and Nancy were born there too.



In 1933 Dad bought house number 44 Simirat street, next to the police station, and the Berga and lived there till 1939. Toni, Golina, Wenzu and Gejta were born in that house.

When Nanna Angela died, Dad inherited her house at 35 Benghasi Street. So Dad sold the Simirat Street one and in the summer of 1939 we moved to that house. We liked it because it was bigger, and it had a well and a big garden. There were an almond tree, a fig tree, a pomegranate tree, and a prickly-pear tree. One of the walls was covered with passion-fruit vines. It had a beautiful view of Nadur hill, and a spiral staircase which led up to the roof from where we could see the sea, Comino and Malta. Halfway up the stairs there was a tiny room which was Dad's playroom when he was young. It became our playroom too. Thomas, Freddie, Loreta, Marija and Guseppi were born there.



We lived in that house till Mum migrated to Australia. My brother Toni, pulled that old house down (in 1984) and built a beautiful one where he lives now (Toni died in 2005.)

The Cradle

Many Maltese folktales do not end with the words, "They lived happily ever after," but with the expression: "*Ughammru, tghamru u spiccat.*" They lived together, had children and that's the end of the story. People held that a childless marriage could not be a happy one, (*Zwieg minhajr tarbija ma fihx tgawdija*) On the other hand, a marriage blessed with children brought happiness in its wake. Big families, whether consisting of boys or girls were always welcome. Boys could rise to good positions in life, and become rich and respectable, while girls could make a substantial contribution to the family's income by weaving or lace making. Our family consisted of seven boys and seven girls.

Married women felt proud of being pregnant. As soon as Mum knew that she was pregnant, she would spread the news subtly by starting crocheting tiny booties or little bonnets in public.

The cradle was a permanent fixture in our house for many years. Dad made a beautiful one, and Mum made the mattress, the pillows, and the sheets. The pillow slips had lace fringes, and the canopy was made of lace. But Mum preferred the hammock type cradle which was suspended by cords from hooks in one of the bedroom corners above Mum's bed. It was safer and more manageable.

Mum claimed that she could forecast the sex of her unborn child by looking in the mirror, or a basin of water. If her face looked hollow-cheeked, (*mixrub*) during pregnancy, a boy was expected, because she used to say, "tifel jixorbok" When she felt like sleeping more than usual, or her face became blotchy she expected a girl.

It was traditional that after giving birth mothers have chicken soup during the first week. Mum prepared for this by rearing chickens herself. She acquired a broody-hen and an odd number of fertilized eggs, which she put on some straw in a wide cane basket. The hen sat on the eggs for four weeks till the eggs hatched. Mum sometimes force-fed the hen with warm pollard. It was fun to watch the chicks hatch and then returning after their mother in the coop.

When the male chicks were big enough, Mum used to send me to an old woman to castrate them. These were supposed to grow bigger and their meat to be more tender. Dad cooked delicious chicken soup when mum was in bed nursing her new baby.

Baby's Trousseau

During pregnancy, baby's clothes were prepared. These included the *Fustana*, a white square of locally woven soft and warm material; The *Franella* a baby flannel; *Twittija*, a small sheet; *Hrieqi*; nappies that Mum made of white cloth or toweling, (no disposable ones then), *Qlejba*, a piece of linen placed on the navel of the baby before swathing. She also prepared *Qmejsiet*, little vests; *Faxex tas-zokra*, bandages which were wrapped around over the navel; *Bavaroli*, an assortment of bibs, and *Kalzetti*, woollen socks.

Mum bought the *Fisqija*, a stiff outer swaddling band eight inches (20 cm) wide and long enough to go around the baby several times. It was of local weave in herring-line pattern in red, white or blue or striped. The baby was wrapped in a (*fisqija*) from under the arms to the toes. This held the baby straight and rigid for the first four months, to protect the back. Mum once said that in her mum's time even the arms of the baby were wrapped.

Birth and Baptism

Babies were born at home. When Mum felt the first pain she sent us to Zija Anni. Dad went to the police station to phone the midwife (*majjistra*). (the only telephone in town was at the police station and it was for the use of everyone). The mid wife came by *karozzin*, a horse-cab.

Soon after delivery Mum lied down on the *soda tal-kurdiinagg*, (a double bed with shiny brass fitting and a lace canopy), ready to receive relatives, friends, and neighbours. Dad gave the happy news by the traditional message: " *Ejfew oqghodu*" You are welcome to visit"

Zija Anni was the first to come to congratulate Mum and bring the children to see their new brother or sister. Zia Anni liked boys and was very happy when the new baby was a boy.

The new baby was baptized the same day or the day after. So a *Reffliegħa*, usually a relative girl carried the baby to church instead of the mother. At the christening besides the *Reffliegħa*, there were the father, the midwife and the two godparents. The father gave the first name to the child, and the godfather and the godmother gave the second and the third name.

After the christening there were refreshments (*trattament*) for the godparents and relatives. Neighbours and friends came to visit at any time to congratulate Mum and see the new baby. They were served cakes, macaroons and other sweets and cherry brandy, vermouth or liqueur (*Rozojin*). They admired and praised the baby and gave their verdict about his or her resemblance.

Myths and Superstitions

It was thought that children were particularly susceptible to the effects of the 'Evil Eye' and several precautions were taken to preserve the dad's health and to ward off any harmful effects. Mum made the sign of the cross with her thumb on the mouth of a yawning child to keep off the devil who might possess him through the open mouth. She expected that anyone praising the baby say: "*Alla jbierek*" "God bless," to ward off bad luck disease or an evil spell. For protection she made the baby wear amulets in the form of a gold horn, or a (*Domna*) a holy medal, and a (*labtu*) a tiny bag with a piece of blessed candle or an olive leaf or a bit of a palm leaf blessed on Palm Sunday. If somebody did not say: "*Alla jbierek*" "God bless," or "*Imbierek*" Praised be God", she put her hand behind her back with her little finger and the forefinger pointing out like a horn (*tgharmillu il-qrun biex ma jitghajjinx*), toward her child from the 'Evil Eye'.

Mum was scared of a black moth which was supposed to bring bad luck, while a brown moth was harmless. She also believed in (*Tas-Setta*), wizards that flew overhead. She believed that certain houses were haunted by a (*Hares*) a household spirit, a genie, which was supposed to be able to assume the form of a man or an animal.

These superstitions were learnt from the many Arabo-Berber slaves that lived freely in Malta for many years. Another factor that brought these superstitions to Malta was the migration of thousands of Maltase men, to the Berber States of North Africa, in the nineteenth century. People of the countries around the Mediterranean have the same beliefs and superstitions.

Fumigation

Human beings have been puzzled and fascinated by smoke since prehistoric times. Smoke seems to come out of nothing and disappears into nothingness. It became part of rituals when communicating with higher powers and spirits. Burning sacrifices were offered and aromatic herbs were used to overcome bad smells and stench which were thought to be the cause of disease.

In time these pagan rites have blended with Christian beliefs and fumigation (*Tbahhir*) remained popular in our Islands up to recent times.

Every Friday, at 3pm, Mum used to put some dry olive sprigs in an old pan and burn it as she went from room to room reciting prayers invoking the blessing of God and the saints. She fumigated also when we had sickness in the house or a spell of bad luck.

The Changeling

In Mum's time people believed that evil spirits can change babies, giving in exchange, one of their own. She used to say that my brother Toni was a changeling, (*mibdul*) or a snatched one, (*mahtuf*), because he was very sick for a long time even though she took him to the doctor several times.

One day I accompanied Mum to the Immaculate Conception church at Qala, about three miles away. She carried baby Toni all the way. He was not that heavy, because he was sick and emaciated. When we arrived there, Mum laid him in the tomb where, according to tradition the remains of St. Corrado were buried. She invoked the saint saying: "*San Kerrew, dan mhux ibni, ibdiluli, fejjaquli, aghtini tieghi*" St Corrado, this is not my son, change him, cure him, give me back my own." Then, she undressed him and put new clothes on him, leaving the other clothes behind.

From that day onwards, I doubted whether Toni was my brother or not. But little by little he regained his health.

The Berga

Mum looked after us all the time and she worried when one of us was not feeling well. We were lucky that the Berga was next door. This was a free public clinic introduced in every town and village in 1890.

The doctor came every Saturday morning and Wednesday afternoon. People queued to see the doctor and get free medicine.

One day I looked pale and Mum took me to the clinic. The doctor felt my forehead, had a look at my tongue, and asked Mum for some information. Then from a glass jar he took out some brown lumps of dried herbs. He put them on a piece of paper and folded it into a small packet. He gave it to Mum and instructed her to boil the herbs and to give me a spoonful of the brew every morning. Later I discovered that those were dried rhubarb stems.

The clinic, like the pharmacies of those days, had big and small glass bottles and ceramic jars on shelves, with big names of the contents: Boric Acid, Castor Oil, Iodine, and many others. There were crutches, bandages, cotton wool and gauze. I liked the little scales, best, used for preparing mixtures (*mistura*) that the doctor gave in bottles because no medicine came prepacked or in tablet form.

Mum's Home Remedies

In the last 60 years (pre-1998) the use of herbal medicines declined while pharmaceutical drugs have taken over. In the same period, improvement in public hygiene and housing, surgical techniques, immunisation and preventative health care have become the new way of fighting ailments and disease. Mum used herbal remedies whenever possible. She dreaded cold droughts, cuts and infections. Water, hot or cold, was the best form of treatment that she carried at home quite effectively. It was also the least expensive. She used hot baths when we had a head cold. Siltz-baths were used for the relief of muscle cramps, pelvic pain and spasms.

One useful form of treatment Mum gave was the heated salt compress to the throat to relieve, laryngitis and stiffness of the neck muscles. Hot packs, (*Fumentu*) were useful in treating colds, local pains in the arms and legs, and for treating chest colds and pains in the back, influenza, croup and bronchitis.

Our medicine box contained cotton wool, oil of doves, smelling salts, boric acid, gauze, bandages and iodine. She always used a pinch of boric acid (*Acido Boriku*) in the baby's bath as a disinfectant. She also used chicken fat for cracks on the heels. (a common ailment when people walked barefoot in the streets contaminated with the urine of horses donkeys and goats). We always had a plant or two of Rue (*fejgel*) which was fried and the oil, while still warm, rubbed on aching joints and strained muscles. Camphor oil (*zejt talganfra*) was used for the same purpose.

Mum used potato peels for burns, dandelion (*tfief*), for liver trouble, (*Xghir*) barley, for poor digestion and loss of appetite. For colic and gas the remedy was barrage (*fidloqqom*) an fennel (*buzbiez*), and prunes were eaten for constipation and as a laxative, and senna was given as laxative to babies. Intestinal worms were eliminated by herbal brews usually given on an empty stomach. Pumpkin seeds (*zerrigha tal-qara hamra*) were eaten for the same reason. She brewed herbs and made poultices (*ghjjar*). Broomrape tonic (*budebbus*) was given for kidney trouble and blood pressure.

In those days people suffered from various skin infections due to salty food and dust from dirt roads polluted by horses, donkeys, sheep and goats. The remedy was bathing the infected parts with vervain (*buqoxrom*) or rosemary (*klin*), and then sprinkling them with sulfur (*kubrit*). Clover (*silla*), proved useful for eczema and rashes. A whitlow (an infection of the tip of the finger) was cured by wrapping it in bread steeped in milk, and a leaf of Ratstail Plantain (*werqa bizbula*), was put on swelling due to infections and abscesses.

Thyme (*saghtar*) was very effective for coughs and bronchitis. She used it also as an antiseptic, and as a gargle for throat infections and as an infusion to disinfect wounds. Lavender (*spika*) relieved gas and colic, and Corn Silk (*xuxa tal-qamhitrrum*) was used as an antiseptic for infections of the urinary tract. She used many other herbs for various ailments and made ventoses, (vacuums) (*fintusi*) to extract the cold from the body. Once I had a bad cold, she laid me face down in

bed and she put a small burning candle on a coin on my back, then she capped it with a glass. She repeated this on different parts of my back to extract the cold.

She used different oils, such a Cod liver oil, (*zejt tal-huta*) Almond oil (*zejt il lewz*), Castor oil (*zejt ir-rignu*) and Linseed oil (*zejt tal-kittien*). She also made (*Hall il-ward*), a mixture made of petals of roses sealed in a jar for a few days and kept in the sun until these petals oozed a moisture to which vinegar was added. She preserved this mixture, and used it like smelling salts for fainting fits and headaches. Sometimes, to heal wounds, Mum used Friar's Balsam, she obtained from St. Anthony's Friary on the other side of our town. She looked after us very well especially when we were sick.

Bare Feet

In the 30's there was great poverty. People lacked the essential things of life: money, food, water and clothing. There was no Social Security and those who were old or out of work had to bear it and go without. Many beggars knocked at our door. Very few people could afford a penny when the minimum pay was 15 pence a day. They were usually given a wedge of bread instead. Everyone went along barefoot. We carried our friar-sandals (*qorq*), to school, and put them on at the door, and took them off as soon as we were out.

People did all kinds of odd jobs to eke a living. Some collected thorn bushes from ditches along country roads and sold them to the bakery for kindling. An old man collected horse poo from the streets, and women worked all day long making lace. All kind of work was done from dawn to dusk, with a little break for lunch at noon.

Lack of Food

Bread was the staple food. When we were hungry we asked for a "*Bicca hobz biz-zejt*", a wedge of bread sprinkled with oil and smeared with tomato paste or tomato. For a treat Mum sprinkled vinegar or a pinch of salt and pepper. Meat was reserved for Sundays or feast days. Pasta (*ghagin*), and vegetable soup (*minestra*), were the daily meal, with fish and vegetables in season.

Many people kept chickens in coops in the back yard. The eggs the hens produced were not consumed by the family members but were sold, and with the money essential groceries were bought. Salted tuna, cod (*bakkaljaw*), eels, herrings and anchovies were eaten by everybody especially in the evening. Imported cheese and local pepper cheese, (*gobon tal-bzar*), were an important item of food, and they were cheap.

After the first rain in September, snails were eaten by many people. In summer snails stay under rocks without eating anything for three months. So they were clean inside and out, besides there were no herbicide in those days.

Those who could afford ate pigeons or game birds like turtle-doves (*gamiem*) and quails (*summien*). These birds of passage flew over in April when they were migrating to Europe, and in October when they were returning to warmer places. An assortment of small fish was available all the year round, and mum cooked octopus or turtle soup, squids and crabs. In summer a man came and sold us sea urchins (*rizzi*) and limpets (*imhar*).

Food was never in abundance but we had enough.

Patched Pants

Everyone wore old, odd fitting clothes. Kids wore their older brother's or sister's clothes, and everyone had patches.

Mum was one of the very few who could sew. Besides, she had a sewing machine, a luxury in those days. Nannu Gusepp often brought ex-navy clothes from Malta. Mum transformed them into decent, warm everyday clothes, and we were the best-dressed children in town. She also bought cloth and made us pretty clothes for Sundays and feast days. My favorite shirt was made of (*seta cruda*), raw silk, in fashion then.

Soap and water

There was no running water. Public taps at strategic points were the main source of water. Those who had wells were considered lucky because they did not need to fetch buckets of water for drinking, cooking and washing. Housewives had to queue for hours to fill a bucket of water because there were very few taps, and the pressure was low. Women carried buckets of water for long distances on their heads. In winter they collected rainwater in tubs. Sometimes, when Mum had too many clothes to wash, she preferred to take them to the *ghajn*, the public washhouse and wash them there. But then, she had to carry back home a heavy load of wet clothes on her head.

There were no detergents, as we know then today. Mum washed the clothes with a bar of washing soap 10 cms (4 ins.) cube. She preferred the "Key Brand" (*Tac-cavetta*). She had to rub and scrub to make the clothes clean again. She was very proud of her sparkling white nappies on the line.

When water was flowing in the valley, (*Wied*) she took us all for a bath there. We were stripped and had the coldest bath, using "Palm Oil" scented soap which was mild and did not burn our eyes. We were kept clean and tidy at all times.

The Golden Calf

Hercules was a god-hero in Greek mythology. He was the son of Zeus and Alcmene, and was famous for his strength. While serving Eurystheus, king of Argos, he performed the celebrated 12 Labours. To fulfil the seventh Labour, Hercules brought to Eurystheus a mad bull that Poseidon, god of the sea, had sent to terrorize Crete.

Sailors who crossed the Mediterranean Sea used to ask Hercules for safe passage and other favours. As thanksgiving to Hercules they made small golden calves. Many idols were found in various places in Gozo, and in 1720, a golden calf was found by Toni Pace at Dwejra. From then on, people in Gozo dreamt of finding a golden calf, (*Ghogol tad-deheb*), and every cave and crevice in the rocks was searched for this purpose.

When Nanna Angela married Nannu Toni, Nanna and her sister Serafina divided their big house and land between them. The well was on Serafina's side, so Nannu dug a new well in the back yard. When in 1939, Dad inherited Nanna's house the well was very convenient for washing and watering the garden. One very dry summer the well dried up, and Dad decided to dredge the debris accumulated at the bottom. Jokingly he said that we might find a Golden Calf. He brought a thick long rope, which he tied to the puteal, (*Herza*) a stone curb round the well. The plan was to lower me down to the bottom of the well to clean it. I was scared, but to my relief my brother Toni volunteered to go instead. He was lowered down slowly, with a hurricane lamp in one hand and a shovel in the other. Dad asked Toni if he could see any shiny object in the crevices in the shaft, but Toni could see only dust.

Finally Toni reached the bottom of the well and started filling buckets of mud which Dad brought to the surface and I dumped in the garden. It took a long time to clean the bottom of the well. Toni was disappointed because all he found was one of Nannu Toni's clay pipes and not the Golden Calf.



The Sacristan

Dad's day started very early. In summer he had to open the church at half past three, and in winter at four in the morning. He rang the *Pater Noster*, seven peals with the biggest bell, followed by peals with a little bell calling people for mass. Then he prepared the altar and vestments for the first mass. He assisted the parish priest to say mass, and then he prepared for the other masses at five and six o'clock. Sometimes, there were many masses at all the five altars.

Before seven he prepared the chairs for the Bible lesson classes which were conducted in the church every school day. After the lessons he rearranged the chairs and rang the morning Angelus, (*It-Tminja*) closed the church and went home for breakfast and some spare time. Sometimes, he had to return to the church or go around collecting the tithes.

At 12 he rang the midday Angelus, (*Nofsinhar*) and wound the church tower clock. This dock had three weights to wind up; one that worked the pendulum and kept time, and the other two moved the mechanism that rang the bells to show the hour and the quarter hour.

Then it was time for a little siesta till 3 o'clock, when he opened the church again for the afternoon. On Fridays he rang the (*Tlieta*) to commemorate the death of Christ. Then there were flowers to be arranged, altar fonts and tabernacle covers changed according to liturgical seasons. Mass vestments: chasubles, stoles and maniples (Now obsolete vestments), were changed every day. On days commemorating martyrs, the vestments were red, on those of virgins or confessors the vestments were white. During lent and Advent the vestments were purple, and on other days they were green. For requiem masses the vestments were black.

At sunset Dad rang the evening Angelus (*L-Ave Marija*), and went home for a hurried dinner. He returned to church an hour later to ring (*Tal-Imwiet*), a peal of the big bell to tell the parishioners to pray for the faithful departed. He also rang the small bells, sometimes. (There was a code for bell ringing, and Dad rang the bells to give different messages to the parishioners.) Then the sacrament lamp (*Il-lampier*) was renewed, and the church was searched and locked. Then Dad went home but he had to return sleep in the sacristy because he was on call 24 hours a day.

Dad had no holidays or days off, and every two years he had to spend a week at *San Calcedonio Casa Santa*, a house of retreats. He was a very dedicated man to lead such a life for 25 years.

The Old Parish Church

By the beginning of the 19th century, the population of Ghajnsielem was increasing and the people felt the need of a church, because the nearest one was miles away.

Indri Xuereb, an ancestor of Nanna Angela, who looked after the shrine of Our Lady, was chosen as the *Promoter* of the building of the new church. He started collecting donations for this purpose and, asked Frangisk Mercieca, a rich ancestor of Nanna Karmni, to help him.

These two good men went to the parish priest of Nadur to ask for his approval. He happily gave his consent, and on his request, the bishop gave his permission. To show their appreciation they donated to the parish priest a big live eel that some women had caught at the Ghajn.



Frangisk Mercieca paid for the building, the parvis (*Iz-Zuntier*), the doors, one of the bells, the big crucifix, the main silver chandelier, the altarpiece of Our Lady of The Rosary, and other items.

The church building took ten years and it was completed in 1820. Eventually, in 1855, it became the first parish church of the new parish of Ghajnsielem.

This church has a special sentimental and historical value to us. It was our parish church for four generations. Dad spent the best years of his life looking after this church with great care. He was the sacristan, the organist, the bell ringer, the tithes collector and the helper in the church services.

The Tithes Gatherer

Besides looking after the church, it was Dad's job to collect the church tithes. There were tithe collections of various crops depending on the season. Some of these were cotton, clover, and wheat. The cotton was sold to the local weavers; the clover was sold to farmers, but there was no market for wheat and barley, so Dad bought it. He went around from farm to farm collecting sheaves of wheat and barley, and he carried them on his hand cart to a farmer friend to be thrashed.

The farmer prepared the thrashing - floor (*andar*) in a field not far from his farmhouse. It was a circular area of about 10 metres across. He made it hard and smooth by wetting it and then leveling it with a roller. In late June, the farmer reaped the crop, tied it in sheaves and then carried it to the threshing area, and piled the sheaves in stacks.

Every day the farmer untied some sheaves, and spread them on the threshing floor. Then he drove his horse or donkey and sometimes both together around and around, from dawn till dusk, to break the ears of corn and loosen the grain. When the wheat or the barley was totally husked, he winnowed it to separate the grain from chaff. He did this by tossing it up in the air with (*nudra*,) a winnowing fork, preferably on a breezy day. The wind blew the straw away and the grain being heavier, dropped back to the ground. He repeated this using a wooden shovel, (*luh*) to clean the grain from the remaining tiny fragments of chaff and husks. The grain was then swept to the centre and collected in bags and taken away.

Dad brought the sacks of wheat and barley in separate bags, and Mum washed the two lots separately to clean them from dust and tiny stones. She then carried it up to our flat roof, and spread it on sheets to dry. In the evening Mum collected the clean grain in dean sacks and stored it under the staircase.

On calm days, when the wind was not strong enough to turn the mill, the miller came on his cart collecting the wheat and delivering the flour. At street corners, he blew his (*Bronja*) which was a *Great Triton* shell, to announce that he was around. Mum used to give him a mixture of wheat and barley in a bag. When the miller came again, he brought back half a bag full of flour and tied in the middle, and bran in the upper half of the sack.

Mum mixed bran, and water, and make a kind of meal for the chickens. They loved it.

Our Daily Bread

Dad made our bread by kneading measures of our flour mixed with Australian or Canadian flour. He made seven loaves every week, which he carried to the bakery on a trencher, (*ciknatur*).

The baker did not make bread to sell. People made their own, or employed kneaders who made bread for them, at the bakery. These women kneaded the dough in earthenware vats placed along one side of the kneading room. In the middle of the room there was a big table where freshly baked loaves were placed to cool.

It was necessary to mark each loaf for identification. Surplus dough was used to make marks like a cross, or a dot, or a circle, or a stripe on the top of each loaf.

The oven was a huge stone cavern lined with special stone. The baker lit a fire on the floor using dry thorn bushes for kindling, then castaway wood and tree stumps were added to make a glowing red fire. When the oven was hot enough, all the ashes were raked out and placed under a cauldron of water at the side of the oven.

Then the baker shoveled the loaves from wooden trays and arranged them in rows on the oven floor, and a heavy iron door was closed on them. Dad usually asked the baker to put in our loaves first, so that they become crusty. Mum carried the fresh, warm loaves home on her head, on a wide, shallow cane basket (*kannestru*). Our wholemeal bread smelled good and was delicious.



Eastertide

The time of the year that Dad liked best was the Easter season. In the week or two after Easter, it was the custom that the parish priest wearing surplice and stole, and accompanied by an altar boy and the sacristan, went door to door, blessing the homes of parishioners.

Each household made a donation to the priest and the sacristan, as Easter dues. Cash was scarce and people preferred to donate in kind. Usually the housewife waited outside her door, with a big rooster or a fat hen in her arms to greet the parish priest and show him her gift. People who did not keep chickens donated money, and the well to-do also prepared a cup of tea or a nip of brandy.

Mum was always happy to have some extra cash at this time of year.

Dad's Illness

In 1933, when he was 37, Dad fell ill suffering from Undulant Fever, (*Deni Rqieq*). This disease was prevalent in Malta for hundreds of years. At the turn of the century, thousands of Maltese people and British troops stationed in Malta, fell victim of this disease which sapped their vitality and killed hundreds of them every year. No wonder, that it was known as Malta Fever, (*Micrococcus Melitensis*). This kind of microorganism was discovered in man by Sir David Bruce who at that time was an army surgeon in Malta. From then on this disease was called after him: "Brucellosis".

No one knew the source of this disease and how man becomes infected with it. It was Sir Temi Zammit, a Maltese doctor, who discovered the source, and how it was transmitted, eighteen years after Bruce's discovery.

Up to the 1930s milk was sold straight from the goats. One could see flocks of goats driven along the streets, in the morning and in the afternoon. The herdsman used to stop one of the goats and milk it straight into one's mug. Sir Temi Zammit discovered that this was how the disease was transmitted to humans from infected goats.

This was confirmed in 1905 when Mr. Thompson of the United States Bureau bought a flock of 65 goats and sent them to America. During the voyage some members of the crew drank milk from these goats and fell ill with Undulant Fever. From then on, military establishments and hospitals started to pasteurize the milk. The pasteurization of milk started in Malta in 1930s and goats were banned from the streets, but in Gozo milk was still sold straight from the goats in 1960.

Dad struggled against this disease for two years. He was in great pain and very weak. After Dad's illness Mum never bought fresh milk any more. We used canned condensed milk instead. Dad's heart was weakened and this illness could have contributed to his fatal heart attack.

The Festa

The festa, of the patron saints in towns and villages, started in the 16th century. At first it was a small affair. Wine and food was distributed to the people attending the religious ceremonies and money was given to the poor. The procession with the saint's statue was produced around 1690. Sometimes, groups of three or more musicians went around playing fifes and tambourines. From 1860 onwards, the newly formed bands, played marches at the church square, and the streets nearby. By the 18th century bonfires were lit, and oil lamps (*fjakk*) decorated the facade of the church and small petards were fired; the government supplying the gunpowder and the know-how. More elaborate firework displays were introduced in 1876, during Prince Albert's visit. But the center of the festivities was always the parish church.



Festa time was the busiest time of the year for Dad. A week before he had to organize the general cleaning of the church. Women young and old, scrubbed the floor which was made of limestone slabs, and it was still the burial place. Young boys carried buckets of water from the public tap or the *Ghajn* nearby.

Dad started by lining the interior walls of the church with red damask. He hung the chandeliers, replaced the altar candlesticks with festa ones, and put altar fronts at all five altars. Carpets were laid, and credences were placed on each side of the main altar, where silver candelabra and other ceremonial articles were displayed. The Statue of Our Lady of Loreto was put on a pedestal in a prominent place in the church, surrounded with huge bunches of flowers and candles. He had to organise the placing oil-lamps on the facade of the church. He prepared the acetylene cylinders and placed light brackets all around the inside of the church. He had to supervise all the church activities during the five days of the festa, and organised refreshments for the visiting priests.

On Sunday the bishop came to preside over the church ceremonies in a carriage (*kales*), driven by a coachman (*kuccier*) and accompanied by a page who stood on a platform at the rear of the coach, both in livery. On reaching the outskirts of town, the bishop was welcomed by the locals, the horse was unhitched, and the town young men towed the coach to the church square, while bells rang and petards boomed to welcome the bishop.

The high mass was sung accompanied by an orchestra of violins, violas, clarinets and a double bass, and a lengthy panegyric was delivered by one of the best religious orators available.

In the afternoon, vespers were sung and the procession with the statue of Our Lady of Loreto marched through decorated streets around the church. The cacophony was deafening: bands played, bells rang, petards boomed and mortars banged. But Dad was too busy and he did not have time to enjoy the festivities.

When the festa was over, he had to dismantle all the church decorations, replace or remove candlesticks, altar-fronts, carpets, lights, chandeliers, curtains and drapes. The ceremonial vestments were stored flat in big drawers in a huge chest called *Bankun*.

All this took several days to do, but Dad liked the festa and was proud to see the church decorated and attractive.

April Fool

It was customary on the first of April to expose somebody to ridicule by causing him to believe some falsehood or to go on a fruitless errand. Mum used to delight in making Dad an April Fool.

One morning, on the first of April, when Mum came back from shopping, she told Dad, who was minding the kids, that she had just met Karmni, Dun Gusepp's housekeeper, who asked her if Dad could do Dun Gusepp a favour. He needed his chicken coop fixed because the door broke and the chickens were all out and about.

Dad knew Dun Gusepp quite well and felt obliged to help him. He immediately, grabbed his tool basket, put in it all the required tools, and went to Dun Gusepp's house. He pulled the bell knob, the bell rang and without delay, Karmni opened the door. "Good morning", Dad greeted her, "Here I am, I came as soon as possible." Karmni looked perplexed at first and then she burst into laughing, and asked Dad the reason for going there. Dad, realised then what had happened, he explained to Karmni the trick Mum had played on him, apologized and left.

He went back home smiling because he had made a fool of himself when he knew quite well that Dun Gusepp kept no chickens in his back yard.

The Reading Glasses

Mum, because of seasickness, found it hard to cross to Malta to visit my sisters when they were boarders at the Sisters of St. Joseph School in Valletta. But when in June 1940, Italy declared war, and started bombing Malta, Valletta became a very dangerous place to live in. The Sisters, like many other people, had to move to a safer place. They settled in Gozo, at Marsalforn, in a big house overlooking the picturesque bay.

Mum was delighted to be able to visit my sisters more often. She usually visited then on a Saturday. She took the 7 a.m. bus to Rabat and then walked two miles down to Marsalforn.

One day Pawla, our neighbor, ask Mum if she could go with her to Marsalforn to see the optician. The following Saturday, they went to Marsalforn, and while Mum visited my sisters, Pawla went to the optician. When Mum went next time to visit my sisters, she also collected Pawla's glasses.

Pawla was delighted to have her reading glasses and rushed home to try them. She could not read as she had expected. She tried and tried, but could not read. Perhaps, she got the wrong glasses, she thought. Very upset, she came to see Mum to explain her predicament. Mum assured her that the glasses were hers, as her name was on their case. "Did you learn to read?"asked Mum. "No", answered Pawla," But the priest said that he could not read without glasses, neither, he needed glasses to read."

Mum could not restrain her laughter when she was told that Pawla fooled the optician by reading a prayer she knew by heart



The Birgu Interlude

In 1936 Dad asked for a rise in pay and was refused. So, he quit and went to Malta and started work with the Harbour ferries that plied between Valletta, Senglea and Vittoriosa (Birgu). We moved to Birgu soon after. Birgu is an old city on a narrow peninsula jutting into the Grand Harbour. It originated in 1283 when the Angevins made it a base for their timber trade which was carried out by vessels plying between the eastern and western basin of the Mediterranean.

On the arrival of the Order of St. John in 1530, Valletta was still a rocky wasteland called Xiberras and Birgu was the centre of the harbour activities. The Order was an important sea power and had its own fleet of fighting ships. Thus arsenals were built at Birgu together with buildings to accommodate the people they brought with them. They built the Magisterial Palace, the Holy Infirmary, the courts and prisons. They also built their inns or *Auberges*, as they were called.

We lived in one of those Auberges that was converted into flats. It was a huge house with a wide staircase and a big courtyard. The school which my sister Bina and I attended was on the high side near the city walls, overlooking Kalkara Creek. At lunch time we enjoyed the panorama of Valletta, and the harbour activities.

On Sundays, Dad took us for a ride on one of the ferries. We watched with awe the big warships in the harbor, and the many small boats, the high bastions around Valletta and Senglea, and could not understand why there were no trees anywhere.

At Birgu, the streets do not cross each other at right angles. They snake uphill, twisting between ranks of houses piled one on the other, and narrow lanes wind around into each other. There are no open spaces or parks, and it was one of the most densely populated area of Malta, but we had no friends. Kids laughed at me when I spoke because I could only speak the Gozitan dialect. We felt claustrophobic and could not get used to the place.

Luckily we lived there for only a short time because the parish priest asked Dad to go back and promised a better pay. Dad accepted and we returned happily to the open spaces of Gozo.



The Balzan Break.

In 1943 Dad was tired of his old job and wanted a break. He quit his job and found work in an army officers' canteen, at Balzan, Malta. Balzan was a small old town with an interesting history which goes back to the 14th century. It is situated in the centre of Malta, about six kilometers inland from Valletta.

Balzan was granted the status of a parish on the 14th of August 1655. Dad leased a house by the parish church which was built between 1669 and 1695. When Mum and family arrived at Balzan, she was welcomed by the new neighbour Gusepp, the butcher, a huge man but friendly. He told Mum that the only disadvantage there was the pealing of bells. Mum put his mind at rest and assured him that she was used to bell noise as our house in Gozo, was close to the church.

Bina and Gola did not go to Balzan because they were boarders at the sisters school in Marsalforn, Gozo, nor did I, because I was a boarder at St. Aloysius College at Birkirkara, Malta.

Dad's last job

When the war was over, the family went back to Gozo because Dad found a new job at various hospitals in Gozo. He worked at Chambrey Mental Hospital, at Ghajnsielem, Ta' L-ibrag (St.Teresa), Tuberculosis Hospital, at Victoria (Rabat), and sometimes he was on duty at The Isolation Hospital, (*Lazzarett*) at Xewkija. But he worked mainly at the Central Hospital at Victoria.

On the day before he died, while he was on duty at the hospital, he felt some pain at his right arm. The junior doctor prescribed *Ergopyrine* tablets because his diagnosis was arthritis. Dad took the first tablet in the morning and he felt sick. The second tablet in the afternoon caused a heart attack, and by the time the doctor arrived, he was dead. He was 63 years old. Dad was a quiet family man. He preferred to stay at home, and never went out to drink in the many wine shops of the village, like other men. He liked music and his joy was playing the organ. His hobby was carpentry. To earn some extra money he made rosary beads, and picture frames at a time when people decorated their rooms with big pictures of saints and photo enlargements.



Mum

Mum was outspoken and never minced words, but she was kind and helped others. She used to buy tobacco for a poor old man every week. Once, on a stormy afternoon, a poor woman was passing our way. She had just arrived from Malta, where she went to see her daughter who was a house maid there. She was soaking wet, and her village was three miles (5km) away. Mum invited her in and persuaded her to stay the night. She dried her clothes, gave her a plate of hot soup, and prepared a bed where she slept till morning. Mum did not know who that woman was. She only knew that she was going to Xaghra. Mum took us wherever she went, she never went out by herself. She liked reading, and she had a perfect memory and a beautiful handwriting. She remembered dates and names accurately. She liked walking and was an expert in crocheting.

Once Mum was at Rabat shopping, when suddenly she had a hemorrhage. She was rushed to hospital and was operated on straight away. I had an urgent phone from the hospital and I rushed to give her blood. She was very sick.

One afternoon, while I was at her bedside, Dad came to see her. He asked her how she felt, and she replied that she felt very sick. Then she looked at Dad and said, "Frenc, I was always faithful to you". Dad squeezed her hand and replied, "Ang, I never doubted that", and kissed her. She looked very happy.

When Dad died she was devastated. She was not herself again. She felt lonely and when my brother Freddie and my sisters migrated to Australia (*Nov. 1960*), she decided to join them. She died in Melbourne on the 12th of July 1982, aged 79.



(Editor's Note: Angela actually wanted to migrate to the USA because her brothers were already there. America's immigration rules were that nanna would have to live there on her own for a year before she could bring her young children Guiseppe and Maria, 12 and 17 years old at the time. Nanna didn't want to go without them so Gaeta's husband Issac acted as guarantor for them so they could come to Australia.)

NOTES

(1) The Name

The surname **Agius** (pronounced <Adjüz> in Maltese and <Ages> in English).

The name AGIUS was written in different ways like: HAGIUS, AGES, AGIOS, AIUS. This was because people around the Mediterranean, up to the Late Middle Ages spoke what was called Lingua Franca, a mixture of Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Turkish and Arabic dialects. Countries were not unified as they are today. They were fragmented into small independent states, each with its own dialect, and the languages were still being developed. So was spelling at a time when very few could write. But now, to ensure the continuity of personal identity for legal purposes, Maltese surnames are spelt according to the old rules of Italian spelling as they were recorded in testimonial deeds later on.

Ancient Egyptian Language, -the far origin of the term **Hagg** or **Hajj** goes back to the ancient Egyptian word, HD' which means white, a color that was used to describe purity. It was also used to describe a smiling face, and a "white heart" which meant a happy or joyful heart. This word became 'Agius' in Greek, and **Hajj** in both standard and colloquial Arabic. It means the one who wears white, the pure or the holy, the sacred, or the saintly. It refers to someone who has been on pilgrimage to Mecca, ie., performed hagg (male) or hajj (female).

The Greek word **Agius** (classical Greek hagios and in Coptic, ⲁϣⲓⲟⲥ) means saint, and therefore 'holy' or 'deserving of honour'. The female personal name 'Agatha', meaning 'the learned one', the original derivation being from the Greek 'agathos'. The first known Agatha was martyred in Sicily in the 3rd century. The surname Agios thus could have been a nickname describing someone of high morals or who was very pious. (Editor's speculation; **Agius** did not derive from **Agius**, instead, they both originated from the earlier Hagg or Agg.)

Arabic	Laqab	(nickname)
Surnames: Some surnames are obvious derivations of the laqab element of the Arabic personal nomenclature. These terms are often demeaning in a humorous way. In many cases reference is made to physical defects. In a similar vein one finds: AGIUS In Sicily (1169) meaning "the old man", or "the old woman" or 'son of the old woman', and is actually the epithet applied by the Arabs to the biblical prophet Ezekiel; 'adjüz means 'old, overage, emaciated man'.		

Roman naming convention; In Latin, most nomina were formed by adding an adjectival suffix, usually *-ius*, to the stem of an existing word or name. (Editor's speculation; when an early member of the (H)Agg family became a member of the Roman Empire, they added the "ius" ending as was the custom.

(2) The Coat- of-Arms

Motto: 'Labore et Virtute' (*Through Work and Valour*)

Armorial Bearings:

1. **Argent** (Silver or white): A griffon salient.
2. **Azure** (Blue): Upon a mount of three.
3. **OR** (Gold or Yellow): Crowned of gold and holding in pale a sword of the first with crosspiece and grip of the third, and in chief dexter a mullet of six points.

This charge is composed of a GRIFFON: a mythical monster with eagle's head and wings, and lion's body beginning at the waist. The qualities of valour vigilance and perseverance are often associated with this creature in addition to Blue, Silver and Gold:

PALE - Upright or Vertical (The beast is also standing).
MULLET -Star (Denotes Honour and Achievement in service of the State).



Editor's Note: Different interpretations of the Agius coat of arms exist, all based on the above elements.

(3) The Family Tree

Carmelo Agius 22 July 1951 Ghajnsilem **Maria Costa**

Francesco Agius 13 May 1926 Ghajnsilem **Angela Meilak**

Antonio Agius 2 Feb 1891 Ghajnsilem **Angela Grech**

Giuseppe Agius 26 Jan 1863 Nadur **Teresa Cassar**

Michelangelo Agius 9 Jan 1841 Matrice **Gaetana MaDiona**

Francesco Agius 6 Feb 1800 Matrice **Francesca Calleja**

Carlo Agius 9 Aug 1766 Rabbat **Angela Said**

Francesco Agius* 30 Aug 1716 Matrice **Graziulla Bonici**

Domenico Agius 21-July-1658, Matrice **Maria Metallo****

(Testamento in Atti Tomaso Xiortino, 21 Ott. 1857 Aperto e pubblicato in Atti Gaetano Xiortino 17 Gennaio 1863). (Dei Libri Genealogici da me sottoscritto Citta' Vittoria Gozo 18 Nov. 1939 Felice Attard).

***Francesco Agius** (widower of Paola Farrugia 15-8-1710 Xew)

****Maria Metallo** (widow of Nicola Meilak Matrice 13-2-1650)



See expanded pictorial family tree on page 30

(4) Wedding Places

Weddings were celebrated in the parish church of the bride. In the Family Tree records Matrice means the main church of all Gozo at the Citadel. Rabat referred to the parish of St George in the suburb, outside the Citadel. Its limits were established in 1623 by Mgr. Cagliares. In the 17th century an effective system of coastal defenses were erected, designed to prevent corsair raids which had been largely responsible for the devastation of the Gozitan countryside. Women had to sleep in the Citadel at night when the drawbridge was lighted and the Citadel sealed. This law was abrogated in 1637 because the threat of the Barbary pirates receded and people could live away from the Citadel. Sprawling rural settlements were created, some on flat hilltops and some in flat fertile land. Six parishes were established: Xewkija in 1678, Gharb (*Garbo*) in 1679, Sannat, Xaghra (*Caccia*), Nadur, and Zebbug in 1688. Ghajnsielem was established in 1855. Nowadays, when we say Rabat we refer to the suburb and the Citadel together. In 1887, the year of the jubilee of Queen Victoria, the name was changed to Victoria in honour of the Queen. But the locals still call it Rabat.

(5) Gozo

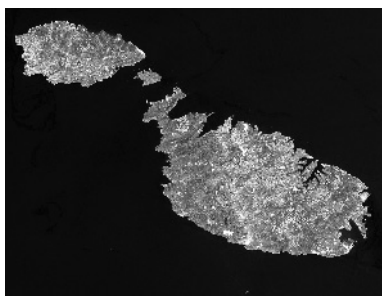
The first mention of Gozo was by Homer in Greek mythology. He wrote how the Nymph Calypso kept Odysseus (Ulysses) for seven years on the island of Ogygia (Gozo).

Diodorus Siculus, a first century BC historian, referred to it as the island of Gaulos. The Romans changed it to Gaulus and the Byzantines (Greeks) changed it to Gaudos. The Avengins latinised it and called it Gaudisium, meaning 'Joy'. The Arahs gave it the name Ghawdex as it is known by the locals today. The Costillians called it Gozo. The motto of the island is "Feifilis ab undis caput efferd", (A fertile land raising its head from the sea).

(6) The Maltese Islands

The Maltese Islands lie 90km to the south of Sicily and 290km to the north of the African mainland, 1830km to the east of Gibraltar and 1500km to the west of Alexandria.

The group is made up of the islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino. The total area of the archipelago is 320km square. Malta is about 27km by 14 km. The corresponding figures for Gozo are 14km and 7km.



(7) The Maltese

The first people that lived in the Maltese Islands were the Sicans and the Sicels. They crossed from Sicily to Gozo on primitive rafts about 7000 years ago. These people built the Neolithic temples. The Ggantia temple in Gozo is the oldest free standing structure in the world according to the Guinness Book of Records. After the Neolithic, other people came and settled in Malta. They were:

The Phoenicians (700 BC)
The Carthaginians (480 BC)
The Romans (218)
The Byzantines (525 AD)
The Saracens (1127 AD)
The Normans (1127 AD)
The Hohenstaufens (1192 AD)
The Avengins (1266 AD)
The Aragonese (1282 AD)
The Castifijans (1410 AD)
The Knights of St. John (1530 AD)
The French (1798 AD)
The British (1800 AD)

(8) Lord Renfrew

Lord Renfrew was commonly known to be the name given by the Prince of Wales when travelling incognito.

(9) Entente Cordiale

This was the name of the friendly understanding established between Britain and France in 1904 when France recognized Britain's '*Spécia/Intérest*' in Egypt, while Britain professed herself disinterested in Morocco. This ended a long standing friction over the countries' claims to parts of North Africa.

(10) Padre Tommaso Da Tarxien ofm. cap.

According to the Rule of the Franciscan Order of the Capudins, a new name is given to its members, and the name of the place of baptism replaces the surname. Narnu's brother was Francis Meilak, which was changed to '*Fr Thonias Da Tarxien*'. Tarxien is a town in Malta.

(11) The Nurse

Up to the Second World War there were separate hospitals for men and women. Male nurses served in hospitals for men, and female nurses in women's hospitals. Laura Agius was very brave to go to serve in a military hospital. Such nurses were looked upon as no better than prostitutes.

(12) Heliopolis

This was a town in Egypt about 6 miles N.E. of Cairo, near the modern town of Matariah. It was the chief centre of worship of the sun-god '*RA*' in ancient Egypt. It appears in the Bible as '*On*'.

(13) The Faldetta, (*ghonneila*)

The Faldetta was typical female attire for centuries. It was like a mantle with a graceful arch stiffened with cardboard and whalebone. It was black and sometimes made of silk. It was always a part of the Maltese bride's trousseau. It fell out of favour during the Second World War.



(14) Osiris' Eye

Osiris was an ancient Egyptian god who personified the power of good. He was the enemy of Set, the god of evil. So the eye of Osiris became a good luck charm.

(15) The Feudal Government in Malta

The feudal government was made up of:

- A) The Assemblea Parlamentare or Commune known as *Parlamentu Generali*; or *Consigh-o Popolare*. The members of this assembly were the nobles, the mayors of each town, and the higher clergy; and,
- B) The Consiglio Particolare, *Universita'* or *Governamentu*. Its members were the *Hakein* and four Jurats or Town Magistrates, chosen each year by the Assemblea Parlamentare, on the 24th of June, the feast day of St. John the Baptist. The choice had to be confirmed by the king.

(16) The Gallipoli Campaign

The majority of the Gallipoli Campaign troops were ANZACS because it was fought mainly by Australian and New Zealand forces, who suffered many losses. An estimate 36,000 Commonwealth troops died and many were wounded during the nine - month campaign.

(17) The Knights

The knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem trace their origin to the foundation, about 603 AD., of a hospice by Benedictine monks in Jerusalem, in the vicinity of the Holy Sepulcher. This hospice came to an end in 1009 AD. It was revived by a number of merchants from Amalfi about 1048 and 1070.

Its members were young men from aristocratic European families who pledged themselves to look after, and provide shelter to the pilgrims who went to the Holy Land. They also took religious vows and devoted themselves to military service against the Saracens. They were grouped into *languee*, according to the country of origin and the langue members lived in a hostel or quarters called Auberges. The knights came to Malta in 1530 and were expelled by Napoleon in 1798. Today, the Order is established in Rome, and carries out many humanitarian tasks in various parts of the world.



(18) The Buses

After the First World War, some Maltese men migrated to the U.S., and worked at the Ford factory in Detroit. There, they learned to drive and to maintain cars. When they earned enough, they bought a car and brought it to Malta. Some of these cars were used as taxis and some were converted into buses by building a timber frame on the chassis. They could carry ten passengers sitting on narrow benches along the sides facing each other. At the back of the bus a circular staircase was attached.



(19) The Courier

Nannu Toni had to make frequent trips to Malta to replenish his stock. The Gozo boats were the only regular link with Malta at that time. He went to the drapery and haberdashery importers selecting items he required. He hired a man with a hand- cart to carry the merchandise down to the quay. He also was a courier for people who needed goods that could not be found in Gozo. He carried his merchandise by boat. He could not use the *Gleneagles*, the ferry that started on the 13th of June 1885, because it carried passengers only. (*Gozo*, by C. Cam p.3)

(20) The Central Hospital

The founder of this hospital was Gregono Camilleri. The building started in 1718 at the time of Grand Master Mark Anton Zondadari. Patients were first admitted in June 1728. It consisted of two large halls with an altar in each, one dedicated to St. Anthony of Padova, and the other dedicated to Sts. Gasma and Damien. (A.de S. vol 2, p.108)

(21) The Firilla

The Firilla was a low fishing boat with sails and oars. It was used for fishing with a drift net, (*parit*) and a trawling net (*tartarun*).

(22) The Pallium

The Pallium is a circular band of white wool worn on the chasuble over the neck, breast and shoulders, with a pendant in front and in the back. There are six black crosses of silk, one each on breast, neck and shoulders and one on each pendant.

It originated in the 4th century when it was worn by the Bishop of Rome and by bishops of the Eastern churches as a mark of their Episcopal dignity and their pastoral office.

It was conferred by the Pope on bishops of the Catholic Church, especially metropolitan, that is those having authority over other bishops of their province. Gradually it became the symbol of that metropolitan office.

(23) The Tensin Library

Bali' Louis Guerm Tensin founded the National Library of Malta in 1763. He donated all his books and other books that belonged to Cardinal Portocorrero, altogether 9,700 books.

He obtained many rare books from the king of France Louis

XV. The king also granted a copy of every book published 'Ex

Typographia Regia Many other books were donated by Grand

Masters, Knight Commanders, Grand Priors of the Order, and others.

(S. ta' M. by A. P. Vella, p. 171).

(24) White Nougat Recipe

Ingredients, -- 4 ozs of icing sugar, 4 ozs of honey, 8 ozs of almonds (or other nuts), 2 whites of eggs, wafer paper.
Method -- Blanch and dry the almonds thoroughly. Line a box of suitable size first with white paper and then with wafer paper, both of which must be cut to fit exactly. Put the sugar, honey and whites of eggs into a pan and stir by the side of the fire until the mixture becomes thick and white. Drop a little into cold water; if it hardens at once, remove the pan from the fire, and stir in the almonds. Dredge the slab with icing sugar, turn on to it the nougat, and form into a ball. Press into the prepared box, cover with paper, let it remain under pressure until cold, then cut up into squares.

(25) Brown Nougat Recipe

Ingredients: 12 ozs. of castor sugar, 8 ozs. of almonds, 1 dessertspoon of lemon-juice.

Method: Blanch and chop the almonds coarsely, dry them thoroughly in the oven, but do not let them brown. Place the sugar and lemon juice in a pot, stir with a spatula until it acquires a pale brown colour, and add the prepared almonds. Turn on to an oiled slab, press it out with a hot wet knife, mark into small squares, and when cold break them apart. (N.B. If you are looking after your figure, forget it.)

(26) The Malta Question

After the 1921 Self Government elections the British Government realized that the church had great influence over the people. To curb this influence it was decided to prohibit the members of the Catholic Church clergy being elected to government. The church opposed this prohibition on the grounds that this constituted discrimination against individual citizens because of their religious affiliation.

This problem was solved by the church who voluntarily agreed to disallow its clergy to nominate to government elections. The church also prohibited the clergy to join political parties or take part in political debates.

Now-a-days, this is one of the ecclesiastical rules of the Church binding its clergy all over the world.

(27) The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies

The kingdom of the Two Sicilies was the territory of the southern Italian mainland and Sicily. It was ruled by Catalonia Aragon a part of Spain.

(28) The Prohibition

In Gozo there were two kinds of wine: the amber, which was locally made (*Inbid t 'Ghawdex*) and the red, which was the imported variety (*Inbid ta' barra*). There were many wine-shops where one could go for a glass of wine and a chat, after the midday and the evening meals. Nannu Gusepp never went to these shops, and preferred to have a glass of wine with meals at home.

When he went to the States, he found out that he could not buy wine because of the Prohibition laws. He could not live without and decided to brew his own out of sultanias instead of grapes. His plonk must have been quite good, because he became very popular with his friends and the local policemen. They all came in for a drop.

(29) The Marriage Banns

The Banns of Marriage were announced during mass on three consecutive Sundays or Holy Days preceding the wedding. The announcement ran like this: (The sacrament of holy matrimony to be celebrated of Angela natural legitimate and virgin daughter of Guseppe and Carmela Meilak, and Francesco, natural, legitimate and unmarried son of Antonio and Angela Agius both of this parish. Members of the faithful are obliged to reveal any knowledge of any impediment under pain of excommunication.

(30) Names

We called Mum, "Ma" and Dad, "Pa". When we referred to them we said "il-Mamma" for Mum and "il - Pa" for Dad.

Ziju means uncle,

Zija means Auntie.

Nannu means Grandpa, and

Nanna means Grandma.

Barba means an uncle on the father's side.

Because up to the early thirties the official language was Italian, the official names for:

Karmni (Carmen). was Carmela,

Frangisk or *Frencu* or *Cikku* (Frank) was Francesco

Thoni (Anthony), was Antonio,

Salvu (Sam), was Salvatore,

Tumas (Tom), was Tommaso,

Gusepp (Joseph), was Giuseppe,

Wigi (Louis), was Luigi,

Ganni (John), was Giovanni,

Wenzu (Lawrence), was Lorenzo,

Gola, *Golina* (Angela), was Angela,

Bina (Bernadette) was Bernardina.

Lonza (Nancy), was Annunziata

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(Editor's note: This is the end of Carmel's original book the following pages are by Charles Agius with contributions from cousins.)



The Great Generation

(Editor's note: This next section continues on from Carmel's original book. As he stated in the preface, it was his wish for his brothers and sisters to add their own stories for their children.)

Uncle Carmel and his siblings were born and raised during the great depression and Second World War. They endured many hardships and eventually all left Malta to establish better lives for their own families.

The University Teacher

Carmel, the author of this book, was the first born of Angela and Frank. He was also the last of the family to migrate to Australia in 1966.

He moved to Sydney where he became a University teacher in the Geology and Mines department.

Carmel was an avid ham radio operator and talked to fellow enthusiasts all over the world from his radio shack.

The Sister Who Didn't Become a Sister

Benna had started studies as a nun but a more secular life was in the cards for her. She had her first two children while still in Malta. She and husband Tony, migrated to Australia with the rest of the family.

Benna was very skilled at decorative cake making and edibles made from marzipan.

The Sister Who Became a Nurse

Lunza was the first to leave the shores of Gozo and Malta. Whilst serving as nurse, she met a Sicilian man who she married and moved to New York City in the United States. Lunza helped her brother Anthony to migrate there as well.

There was about 18 years difference between Lunza and the last born sibling, Joseph. She remembered when she would take her younger brother to the village square in the baby buggy, and the people would ask if he was her son.

During the early part of WW2 there were many air raids over Malta. To sound the "All Clear", the church bell would be rung. One day, Carmel and Lunza were in the church and had a race to be the first one to ring the bell. Lunza got their first and rang the bell, but a police man said that the air raid was not over! Lunza was so scared, that she hid in the confessional booth.

The Agius who went to America

Anthony Agius was the fourth child and second son. As a young man Tony was very handy and inventive. He worked as a carpenter building boats at Mgarr harbour. He created stencils to mark the street names and numbers in his local village of Ghajnsielem.

After WW2 when people were free to travel again, many yearned to seek out new horizons. Tony decided in the early 1950's that Australia would be his destination.

His mother though, didn't think that it was a wise decision for a young man starting out of the nest. She reasoned that there was nothing in Australia except kangaroos hopping around the outback. It would better if he went to America like her brothers did in the 1930's. (Except not the jumping ship part)"The streets in America are paved with gold", so went the old adage.

Being an obedient son, Tony did migrate to America. There were 4 uncles and his sister there to guide him. He started out in the Bronx where his sister lived, then bought a 2 storey house with his Uncle Sam Meilak (Salvatore or Salvo). His other uncle, Larry, lived there too. Ironically, Tony's mother, Angela, had migrated years later to Australia to be with most of her other children who were already there.

In the days before commercial airline travel was commonplace, Tony sailed to America several times aboard the Italian Ship, SS Andrea Doria. That ship famously sank after a collision with another in 1956. Tony was lucky in that he missed that fateful voyage having been a passenger on the Andrea Doria twice that year.

After establishing a foothold in New York, he returned to Malta to get married. Tony met his future wife at the Nadur village festa. In large Maltese families it was customary to arrange the marriages of the children in descending order. But Tony's younger sister wanted to get married first because her merchant seaman fiancé planned to migrate to Australia then. Being a good brother, Tony agreed to let his own marriage wait and his younger sister get married first so she could sail off to Australia with her sailor beau.

In New York, Tony had several occupations, machinist at Brillo, a soap pad factory, a repairman for General Electric white goods, mechanic at a hospital, and finally chief custodian at a few public schools. He worked hard and earned the respect of all those he engaged. Upon retirement, Tony decided to return to Malta where he enjoyed the remainder of his days.

The Bride Who Wore Black

Jula had a bittersweet wedding at the church overlooking M'Garr harbor in Gozo. Nanu Frank had recently passed away and Jula was still in mourning, so she did not wear the traditional white wedding gown.

Soon after the wedding, she and husband Michael headed off to Australia where the other siblings were already there.

The Daughter Who Married a Sailor

Like many of the Agius' Gaetana had a creative soul, her outlet was poetry and had quite a collection. Gaeta met an adventurous merchant seaman at the Ghajnseliem festa. They wasted no time in deciding to start a new life in Australia. The mantra at the time in Australia was "Populate or Perish"; Gaeta and Issac certainly took that advice seriously, having 9 more children in Melbourne.

The Brother Who Changed His Name

Alfred "Freddy" was born at the beginning of the Siege of Malta during WWII. He was actually named Joseph; Alfred was his middle name. But afterwards Nunna Angela promised (a priest?) to name the next son Joseph too. So then the first "Joseph" became "Alfred".

Fred migrated with the rest of the family to Melbourne. He met and married another young Maltese Migrant.

Fred, like his brother Toni, was good with his hands and was always doing construction, renovation and carpentry works for business and many times for family.

The Youngest Daughter

Maria....

The Youngest Son

Joseph.....

The George Cross Award

The George Cross was awarded to the island of Malta by King George VI in a letter to the island's Governor, so as to "bear witness to the heroism and devotion of its people" during the great siege they underwent in the early part of World War II.

Italy and Germany besieged Malta, then a British colony, from 1940 to 1942. The George Cross was incorporated into the flag of Malta beginning in 1943 and remains on the current design of the flag.

The George Cross was instituted by King George VI, replacing the Empire Gallantry Medal. It is the civilian equivalent to the Victoria Cross. This medal is awarded only for acts of the greatest heroism or the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger.

Usually awarded to individuals, Malta's Award was a collective recognition. The actual award is in the War Museum of Malta.

Our family endured that hardship. Let us not forget.



**THE
AGIUS FAMILY**

By Carmel Agius



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