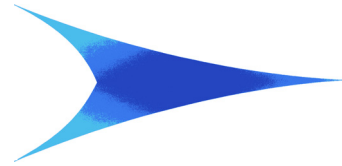


The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community



Australian-born Maltese and their Children - Family Profiles

The Valletta Family

Anton Valletta, born in Sydney in 1965, is the proud father of 14-month-old twin boys **Juergen** and **Thomas**, born in Malta. He would dearly love his sons to be Australian citizens, but the *Australian Citizenship Bill 2005* as tabled in Parliament on 9 November 2005 excludes them.

Anton's parents migrated to Australia from Malta in 1965, his mother pregnant with him at the time. The family settled in Sydney. Anton's brother Kevin was born in 1971. In March 1972, the family returned to live in Malta, when Anton was six and a half.

Anton and his brother Kevin were Australian by birth under Australian law because they were born in Australia, and Maltese by descent under Maltese law. So they were dual citizens while growing up.

But Anton was forced to renounce his Australian citizenship at the Australian High Commission in Malta when he was 18, in 1984. Maltese law, until reforms in February 2000, prohibited dual citizenship in adulthood.

Even today, Anton recalls the experience of having to make the declaration of renunciation of citizenship under Section 18 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* in emotional terms. "I was shaking", he says. "I really didn't want to do it. I'm Australian in my heart. But my whole future would have been jeopardised if I hadn't signed the form."

In the 1980s, life in Malta without Maltese citizenship was well nigh impossible. In order to apply for a driving licence, one had to present a Maltese identity card, necessitating Maltese citizenship. After finishing school Anton went on to study mechanical engineering at college, and his parents could not have afforded foreign student fees. Further, as a foreigner in Malta, he would have had to renew residency and work permits every six months, a situation which would have simply been too insecure. A move back to Australia, at the age of 18, without his immediate family, was very difficult to contemplate, and would have been impossible for the family to finance in any event.

A large photograph of a kangaroo adorns the living room of the Valletta residence, and Anton has carefully kept a number of Australian mementos that mark his time as a child in Australia, to pass on to the twins in years to come. They include a well-worn wooden rocking chair and a boomerang.

"If I had never had to renounce my Australian citizenship my boys would be Australian citizens by descent now", he points out. "It's great that the Australian government is going to let me apply for my citizenship back under the new legislation, but I want Australian citizenship for my kids too. Australia has so much to offer. It would give Juergen and Thomas so many opportunities, and they'll have a lot to contribute, too, as Maltese Australians."

During CHOGM in Malta this week Anton will be working as a chauffeur for the Canadian delegation. He doesn't think he'll be ferrying any Australians around the island, but says that if he unexpectedly found himself with Australian Prime Minister John Howard in the back of the car for just five minutes, he'd have a word or two to say to him.

"I'd ask him straight out why my boys are being cut off from their Australian heritage, when all the kids whose parents lost citizenship under Section 17 are covered by the new Bill" he says. "I had no option. I had to use Section 18 in 1984. It's like in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and I just don't understand it. They've decided some overseas Aussies are more equal than others."

To contact Anton and the twins, call Anne MacGregor, Maltese mobile 9912 9912 (from early Wed 23/11/05), Belgian mobile 0032 474 950 131, or Norman Bonello, Maltese mobile 79 468 329, norman@southern-cross-group.org.

Photos available. Video of family in Australia in late 1960s/early 1970s also available.