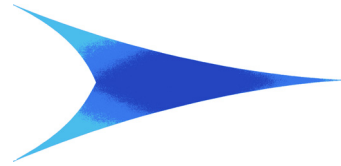


The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community



Australian-born Maltese and their Children - Family Profiles

The Cassar Family

When Thomas Cassar was born in Melbourne on Australia Day in 1966, the Australian government presented him with a special commemorative emblazoned spoon. The accompanying letter from the Australia Day Council given to his mother began:

Dear Mother,

Two great events occurred on Australia Day, January 26th, 1966 - first, the 178th anniversary of the landing of Captain Arthur Phillip and the first British settlers in Australia at Botany Bay, - and second, the birth of your baby.

Thomas' parents had migrated to Australia from Malta in 1960 and Thomas was their third child born in Australia. In November 1970, when Thomas was nearly five, the family went back to Malta. In 1974, the family came close to returning to Australia to live in Brisbane, but plans were aborted after watching television news reports of Cyclone Wanda which flooded Brisbane and most of South East Queensland.

Thomas and his two sisters were dual citizens growing up. They were Australian citizens by birth under Australian law and Maltese citizens by descent under Maltese law.

But just before his 19th birthday, in 1985, Thomas had to renounce his Australian citizenship under Section 18 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948*, by making a declaration at the Australian High Commission in Malta. Until reforms in February 2000, Maltese law prohibited dual citizenship in adulthood.

Thomas, who put off renouncing his Australian citizenship for as long as he could until just days before the deadline of his 19th birthday, was taking a six-year course at a technical institute at the time and could not have paid foreign student fees if he'd lost his Maltese citizenship. During his studies he was sponsored by the Maltese public service and then employed with Enemalta (a local energy company). None of this would have been possible without Maltese citizenship. He would also have had problems purchasing property in Malta as a foreigner, accessing social security benefits, and obtaining credit, and would have been subject to a higher tax rate without Maltese citizenship.

"Renouncing my Australian citizenship was a gut wrenching step, but I had to do it", he says with deep regret. He still has the commemorative spoon he earned as an Australia Day baby.

Today Thomas works as an assistant engineer and assembles integrated circuits for a living in Malta. He's married to Annabelle and the couple have three children, **Abel-John**, 16, **Sean-Kaene**, 14, and **Martha-Marie**, 10, all born in Malta.

When the *Australian Citizenship Bill 2005* becomes law, Thomas will be able to apply to resume his lost citizenship, a moment he has been dreaming of for a long time. But his three children won't be given access to Australian citizenship unless the government can be persuaded to amend the draft legislation before it is adopted.

Had **Abel-John**, **Sean-Kaene** and **Martha-Marie** had an Australian-citizen parent at the time of their births overseas, they would have qualified to be Australian citizens by descent. But they were born after Thomas was forced to renounce his Australian citizenship.

Children born to those who voluntarily acquired the citizenship of another country and consequently forfeited their Australian citizenship under the now-repealed Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* are more fortunate. The Australian government is welcoming them, without exception, back into the Australian family.

To contact Thomas, Abel-John, Sean-Kaene, and Martha-Marie, 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 and scan of 1966 Australia Day Council letter available.