

# Meet Maltese-American Travel Editor, Charlie Gatt: Always on the Move

*Editor's Note: I always believed that most Maltese were infected with the "bug" to travel. Many traveled at least once, leaving Malta for new or better opportunities; others, returned to the Mediterranean from their adopted homelands for family visits. Still others, like myself, have the yen to see as much of the world as possible.*

*Sliema-born Charlie Gatt, the editor of Travel World News, who now lives in Connecticut, tells Maltese Link readers about his travel adventures... which started with a ferry to Tunis in 1938.*

Here is Charlie's story:

It is no wonder that I found a lifetime of enjoyment in the travel industry! Like the famous song, 'Rambling Man, I, too, was born to be a 'rambling man.'

Actually, the year was 1938. I was four years old and can still remember my first trip—a sea voyage by ferry to Tunis to visit my father's relatives.

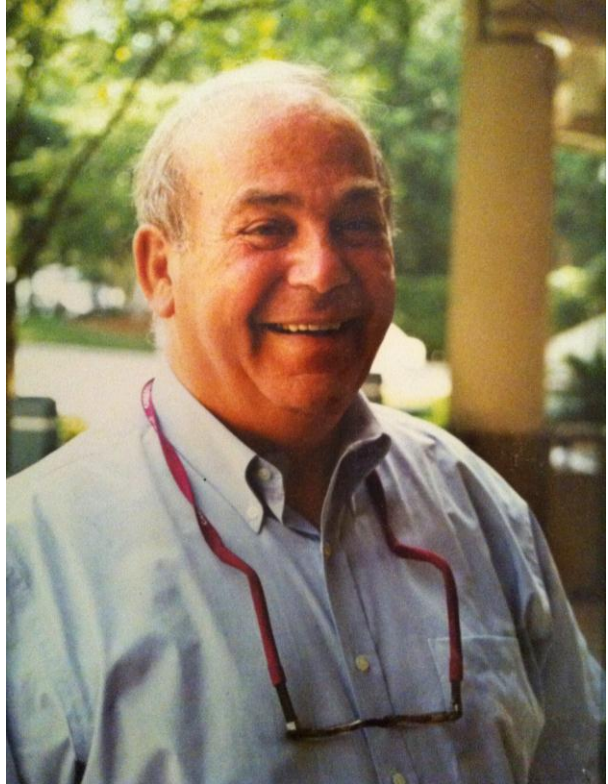
## **To Canada and then Back to Malta**

I am a two-time emigrant, originally to Canada in 1952 when I immediately joined the RCAF (Royal Canadian Air Force). I spent the next three months at OCS (Officer Candidate School) in London, Ontario.

After graduating in February 1953, I was assigned to the Second Air Navigation School in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Air Force insisted that my aptitude tests indicated that I was born to be a navigator; I told them that my heart was set on being a pilot.

They were not easily persuaded but did accept the fact that they had an unhappy camper on their hands and a mutual agreement was reached to part ways amicably.

I stayed in Winnipeg for a while and worked



for SunLife Insurance. I moved to Banff, Alberta and worked for the Banff Springs Hotel.

My next stop was Vancouver for a short stint with Canadian Pacific Ferry, and finally back to Montreal for a short while before deciding to move back to Malta in December 1955.

In 1956, I 'wangled' a job as the Purser on the newly refurbished 'Star of Malta,' a splendid yacht recently purchased by the Maltese businessman Paul Laferla, to operate 10-day cruises from Monte Carlo, down the coast of Italy, on to Sardinia and Corsica before returning to Monte Carlo.

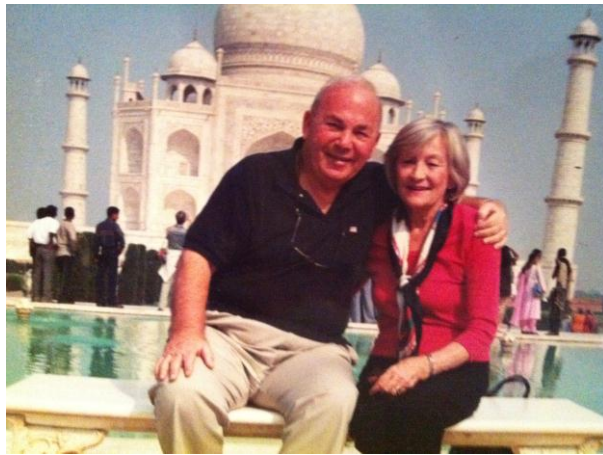
Those were good times that I prayed would never end, but the season ended in October at which time I moved to London and several other European hotspots in between.

## The "Call" to the United States

Two years later, while living in London, I received a phone call from my father to inform me of the good news that his long-standing visa application to emigrate to the USA had been finally approved and wanted to know whether I would like to join them.

Are you kidding?

Of course I wanted to come to the United States as this would provide me with another opportunity to have a crack at actually flying for an Air Force.



### At the Taj Mahal with Sallie.

We arrived at JFK Airport (then called Idylwild) on November 6, 1958 and by November 12, I was on a train heading for San Antonio Texas and Lackland AFB, courtesy of Uncle Sam.

I received an honorable discharge on March 23, 1962 with my dream of flying still unfulfilled but with a lot more travel experiences under my belt, since I spent three years stationed at Hahn AFB in Germany (my future wife's maiden name and now a full-fledged airport serving the Frankfurt area).

I also became an American citizen in March 1962, sworn in at the Brooklyn Supreme Court.

That same month, I joined TWA as a reservations agent and that first day at work changed my life: my undeclared commitment to perpetual bachelorhood was shattered by meeting a gorgeous gal, Sallie Hahn.

She proved to be quite elusive, and the chase took almost 18 months, but in the end, we both knew we were made for each other. Now 48 years later, we are still together and still in love.

My 10 years with TWA provided ample opportunities to travel including a three year assignment in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and a one year assignment in Bangkok.

By 1972, Sallie and I decided that we had enough of a nomadic life, and the family now consisting of twin boys Pete and Chuck (sadly he passed away last year) and daughter Heather (born in Beirut) needed a permanent home. I decided to go into business on my own.

## The Earliest Publishing Venture

In March 1972, with a TWA colleague, Cliff Cooke, we launched Jet AirTransport Exchange (JAX) headquartered in Stamford, Conn. We had a branch office in London. We wanted to exploit the advent of the small computer, so we purchased an IBM System 3 to operate a computer bank of aircraft space availability. According to IBM, we were the first company to link a System 3 across the North Atlantic.

In those days, many airlines operated a large number of charter flights that naturally resulted in a lot of 'empty legs.' Our idea was to link the airlines to the buyers and promote the existence of this aircraft inventory, thereby turning a perishable product into an asset. This new service was well received by the industry, but it did not turn us into instant millionaires.

Our end users, many of them US retail travel agents - would ask us for a copy of the IBM printout because this would save them the time to call or telex their requests to us. This was the only form of communication in those days.

After many months of growing pressure, we finally succumbed and got into the publishing business. *JAX FAX* began in 1973 and was a 48-page compilation of all the 'empty leg' listings. It was boring, but very useful.

*JAX FAX* was a big hit from the very beginning because it did fill a vacuum. We immediately started to provide editorial content and by 1988, it was averaging 320 pages monthly.

In 1988 my partner and I decided to exercise our 'buy-sell' agreement, and I sold him my shares which allowed me to immediately launch *Travel World News*, as a monthly publication dedicated to the destination travel specialists within the travel agency community.



**The nine Gatt grandchildren.**

Change is in the air, and the last printed issue of *Travel World News* is the December 2011 Issue. We have become a completely on-line publication: [www.travelworldnews.com](http://www.travelworldnews.com)

### **Joys of 'Rambling'**

I am a very fortunate man and born under a lucky Maltese star: my work has provided me with innumerable opportunities to travel including frequent visits to my favorite Mediterranean island.

Malta is no different than anywhere else and has changed beyond belief over the years. But I never tire of going back time and time again to visit with relatives and friends and to explore the old and new neighborhoods.

We are also blessed with nine grandchildren, and I am working hard to inject them with the travel bug at an early age. It has become something of a tradition to hold an annual 'Gattogether' in the

Riviera Maya in Mexico every June just after school closes.

The travel industry is the biggest beneficiary of all the change that surrounds us; it is the most dynamic and resilient of all industries, and actually is considered to be the Number 1 employer worldwide. I am somewhat bemused by the current hysteria about the 99% vs. the 1%, since the reverse is true in the travel industry, which today serves as the playground of the middle class.

Go back 60 years: only the rich and dilettantes were traveling. In those days, travel was considered and, indeed, was a luxury and beyond the means of most people.

Take a look at the change all around us, millions leave their backyard on a regular basis to explore new adventures and experiences. What a major turnaround!

### **The Push for More American Travelers to Malta**

All my adult life I have attempted to persuade the people responsible for tourism in Malta not to forget about the American tourist. More than 10 million Americans visit Europe annually, and it is not far-fetched to suggest that a tiny 1% of the 10 million can be persuaded to add Malta to their extensive European itinerary. Besides rambling, I also enjoy dreaming, and I always dream of the day that every single Maltese residing in North America will pledge to self-appoint themselves as an MTA (Maltese Travel Ambassador) with the sole objective of persuading a family member or friend who has never visited the Maltese Islands, to do so.

It is no wonder that I found a lifetime of enjoyment in the travel industry!

**Charlie Gatt** ■