



**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF GIBRALTAR**

**TRIBUTE CEREMONY IN HONOUR OF THE LATE**  
**MR LOUIS W TRIAY KC**

Held on 29 March 2023

**Tribute held by the Court in memory of the late Mr Louis Triay KC before Mr Justice Dudley Chief Justice, Mrs Justice Ramagge Prescott, Mr Justice Yeats and Mr Justice Restano**

**DUDLEY CJ:**

Louis Triay King's Counsel died at the age of 94 in his 73<sup>rd</sup> year of call to the Gibraltar Bar, 40 of those in silk, the Guinness World Record Holder for the longest career as a lawyer, beyond any reasonable doubt, we will not see the likes of that again.

But ultimately those are only numbers. His was not only a very long life, but more importantly one lived and enjoyed to the fullest to the very end. And so, although we mourn his passing, we all know that Louis would very much rather that we celebrate his life.

And what an exceptional life it was. A litigator at the start of his career; a member of the then Legislative Council and a minister in the 1960's; instrumental in developing Gibraltar's finance centre, whilst together with the late Guy Stagnetto QC and James Neish KC establishing one of Gibraltar's leading law firms and practising until the very end. And still finding time to battle for the recognition of Gibraltar by the International Olympic Committee. And of course, there was always time to sail and compete, whether in World, European or Spanish championships or in his Victory in our bay, still competing and winning regattas as recently as last year. My sense of Louis is that he was evidently driven to win, but more than that he was driven to be the best that he could be, in whatever he did.

But notwithstanding that fire, self-confidence and his many accomplishments there was no arrogance. Rather, in the very best traditions of the bar he was inclusive of his fellow barristers even those 70 years his junior. Always able to put everyone at ease with a smile, an anecdote. And a huge interest in what others had to say about the profession or the challenges which we face as a community, as if he had another 94 years ahead of him.

For my part, throughout my judicial career, and having been appointed to various offices relatively young, Louis was always supportive and I had a sense that he was proud that our judiciary was drawn from the Gibraltar Bar. I will always be grateful for his support, not least coming as it did from such a pre-eminent member of our profession and more widely of our community.

But the loss to the legal profession and the wider community is not comparable to the loss to his family. He was a devoted husband, father and grandfather. To his widow, Valerie and his children Louis and Sophie and to his grandchildren they have the consolation that Louis was not only a great man but more importantly he was a good man. Whether at sea or on land, he was a man for all seasons.

In a minute I will invite Mr Neish to also pay tribute to Louis. Perhaps more than anyone else in the profession he is the one who knew him best. But before I do so, my sister judge wishes to also say a few words.

**RAMAGGE PRESCOTT J:**

Thank you Chief Justice for allowing me the opportunity to say a few words. And touching upon your point about the support that Louis afforded to Judiciary I would like to share a short memory.

When I was appointed to the Supreme Court Bench some 13 years ago, it was a Big transition for me. I was aware of the very great privilege it was to be, to serve in this way. But also scared very scared by the enormity of the task before me, and by the ground that I was breaking. I suspect not without a degree of certainty, that apprehension was felt in some quarters of the Bar.

First fortnight of my appointment, I was sitting in what is now courtroom 2 but was then still the old Magistrates' Court which was being used as a Supreme Court whilst the refurbishments were carried out.

Went in, Bailiff called all to stand, the courtroom was empty but for counsel and there in the public gallery with a big grin on his face was Louis, he sat through the entire morning's proceedings and then asked to see me in chambers.

He congratulated me on my appointment, with contagious delight and explained he had wanted to come to court to show his support and offered to be a confidential ear should I ever need to bounce things off him.

That seemingly effortless gesture on his part charged me with a much needed confidence which enabled me to navigate those early days on the bench with greater calm.

I never took him up on his offer of advice, but from that day on I felt I had an ally in him.

I had the silent and ever present support of a respected elder of the law, whose acceptance of this relatively young, Gibraltarian, female appointee, perhaps went some way to making the appointment seem less alarming to those who may not have shared Louis's enthusiasm, for that I will be forever grateful.

But his kind gesture did not only benefit me, it taught me the importance of lending support and giving encouragement to the young and new in the profession, and every time I encourage or commend a novice or even not so novice, I think of Louis.

Some 4 years ago, 10 minutes after the Chief Minister had rang us both independently of each other to inform us we were being awarded the Gibraltar Medallion of Honour, Louis rang me with great vivacity and we had an animated chat about that and various other things. It was wonderful we were able to receive that honour together some short weeks before he passed.

He was a gentleman and a professional, whose manner was always defined by a wicked sense of humour, sitting alongside a sometimes brutal honesty, in these troubled times of political correctness such refreshing attributes.

His passing is a loss, above all to his family and also to this great institution of ours, but his legacy, is a gift which will endure.

Thank you Louis.

**MR J NEISH KC:**

May it please your Lordship. May I thank you for convening the Court today to honour the memory of our friend and colleague Louis Triay KC. I am sure that Louis would have been delighted with the honour that this represents and by the presence here of so many colleagues, both on the Bench and Bar. Undoubtedly, this is testament to the high esteem and affection in which he was held.

I am also grateful to your Lordship for giving me the opportunity to say a few words about Louis. Having worked with him for nearly 44 years and, in effect spending more hours under the same roof with him than with my wife, I got to know Louis as closely as his private nature would allow. He loved telling me about his early life at the Bar and about his experiences generally. It soon became clear to me that he had three loves and interests in his life; his family, sailing – racing not cruising and his profession.

I do not propose to catalogue Louis' achievements. These have been well documented and everything that can be said about him has been said in the many tributes already paid to him. We all know Louis and am sure can agree that he was an extraordinary one-off person the likes of which we are not likely to see again. He described himself as “un bicho raro”. Louis was gifted in many ways. He was charming, charismatic, intuitive, intelligent, astute and highly competitive. He had a winning mentality and a restless mind. He was self sacrificing and highly disciplined. He embraced innovation and he would never accept second best. He had great fighting spirit. It was these attributes which enabled Louis to forge a successful career at the Bar spanning over 70 years, build a wide network of friends, many of them hugely

important and influential, be a many times sailing champion and generally succeed in everything he turned his hand to.

In every aspect of his life Louis was a self-made man who succeeded through sheer determination, hard work and personal ability. No one could begrudge him his success. He became a barrister in difficult circumstances. His schooling in Gibraltar was interrupted by the war and he was schooled at the British school for Gibraltar Children in Madeira where he was evacuated. It was there through conversations about law with a Portuguese judge who was residing at the same hotel that he decided to become a lawyer. On his return to Gibraltar there was only one government scholarship available, which was awarded on merit. Louis won it! He went to read law at UCL. He left a sheltered life in Gibraltar totally inexperienced at the age of 17 for post war London. He took to London life like a duck to water and built a wide circle of friends both British and Spanish, many of whom would become successful in later life and prove to be a source of work and influence.

Life for a young Barrister setting up practice on his own in 1950 would not have been easy. Although there was only a handful of lawyers at the time, there were concerns expressed that there were too many lawyers and not enough work for all of them. Louis loved to recount how he met the challenge by setting up Chambers on the ground floor of his house in Main Street armed only with a desk, chair and a copy of Stone's Justice's Manual which, knowing him, was probably out of date. Louis soon made a reputation as a criminal lawyer and was admired by his clique of followers for his oratorical skills and cross-examining ability. Louis was particularly proud of his early cases. Two of his favourites were the SS Alpha he pacified a mutinous crew and arrested the vessel and, another, the SS Almoana when he appeared in a Consular Court in Tangier and succeeded on a technicality in releasing a vessel arrested for smuggling.

Louis' practice developed. Through his friend, the late Prince Hohenlohe, owner of the Marbella Club, he was introduced to many British clients who required advice about acquiring property in Spain and tax. He had an office in Marbella which he closed when he was elected to the Legislative Council. With the passing of the Companies (Taxation & Concessions) Ordinance, which was his baby as Minister for Trade and Economic Development and which was the seed for the present Finance Centre, his association with the late Milton Grundy, a distinguished tax barrister who was his friend for many years and predeceased him by a few

months, and his membership of the International Tax Planning Associations, he developed an offshore tax planning practice.

When I joined Louis in 1979 his offshore work constituted the majority of his practice and he had retained only a select number of local clients. He was highly strung and after one week I was wondering what on earth I had let myself in for. However, we soon discovered each other's space and I can say that we never ever had a serious falling out or argument. Despite his individualistic streak he moved with the times. The practice grew successfully. We were joined by Louis (Jr) and Charlie Lavarello, merged with Stagnetto & Co., took over the practice of Denton Wilde Sapte and over the time increased our numbers.

During my 44 years association with Louis, I saw him mature from a highly strung individual intolerant of errors into a kindly patriarch at TSN much loved by the staff, especially, as ever, the ladies. What remained constant was his pride in being a barrister. He impressed on all the young lawyers, including me when I started, the need to be respectful to the Bench and to our colleagues, to uphold professional standards, to be properly attired for court, to act with courtesy and fairness towards our adversaries and above all that our prime duty was to the courts. He was never too busy, to his dying day, to take an interest in how new lawyers were doing and to offer them advice and mentoring. He never lost his sense of fairness. Above all he never lost his strength of will. This was evidenced by his attendance in full ceremonial robes at the opening of the present legal year and, shortly after when he moved the motion for the admittance of Mr Trinidad for the Inner Bar when he spoke magnificently. This must have been very difficult and entailed huge effort and discomfort. Louis continued to go to Chambers daily until the Friday before his death. Right to the end he told me that he longed for the opportunity to do a court case and cross examine. He would simply not let go. His last notable achievement was becoming the longest serving practitioner in the whole world and being registered as such in the Guinness book of records. He had long eyed covetously that status but the then incumbent doggedly held on to his position.

Louis' passing marks the end of an era of great Gibraltar lawyers, all of whom had different qualities and strengths. Unencumbered by pre action protocols, skeleton arguments and the like, oratory and personality were more crucial than they are today.

Other aspects of his life were as successful as they were extraordinary. In sailing who would have thought it possible that a Gibraltarian in Franco's nationalist Spain would crew for his lifelong friend, the late Duke of Arion, and win the Spanish Snipe Sailing Championships in 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961 and 1962, gaining fame and appearing in Cinemas in Nodo, the Spanish equivalent of Pathe News. Or that a Gibraltarian commoner would sail in a Fastnet race with the Spanish pretender to the throne, Don Juan, and his son, Don Juan Carlos, the future king, with whom he maintained contact throughout his life. Or who would represent Spain in the World Sailing Championship in Porto Alegre, Brazil and only fail to win because their mast broke in the last race within sight of the finishing line. His successes locally were too numerous to mention but perhaps the most meritorious successes and ones which gave him immense pleasure was winning two regattas last year at the age of 93, when he was already in a frail physical state and in declining health. He proved he could still do it. During the last 20 years or so of his life he derived great pleasure and enjoyed some success in offshore sailing with his beloved Trumpeter of the Rock. Sailing was his pleasure. As he once said in a local magazine "at sea I feel alive."

Louis was a Gibraltarian patriot. He served as an elected member of the legislative council and minister during a very difficult period in Gibraltar's history. He was vice chairman of the Bar Council, served in numerous committees and never failed to press Gibraltar's cause whenever the opportunity arose. As an elder statesman he was generous and honest with advice to politicians of whatever party who sounded out his views.

As to family, Louis had a colourful bachelor life but his run was ended when he fell for the charm and beauty of Valerie, who became his wife. They had a son, Louis, and a daughter, Sophie, and 7 grandchildren. The sun shone out of his eyes for all of them although I suspect he was not always fully demonstrative of this. He has left behind a loving and beautiful family. Another one of Louis' achievements.

It goes without saying that the loss of such a big personality has left a big gap in our lives and has been felt by us all with profound sadness. However, we can be comforted by the fact that he lived life as he wished, he worked until the Friday before his death, he spent a wonderful last weekend with his family and he died at home in the arms of his dear wife. If there is a good way of dying Louis died in the best way possible, and as usual, on his own terms. Many years previously Louis had had a life after death experience as a young man during an

operation. He went through a tunnel of bright light, heard celestial music, appeared before a divine presence of light with no shape and experienced extreme wellbeing. The presence wisely sent him back and told him that he had unfinished business on earth. Writing about that experience years later Louis wrote – I quote verbatim –

“If the experience which I went through was anything like the real thing there is no fear in dying”

I hope that the real thing was like that experience and that Louis is now in eternal peace in heaven.

**DUDLEY CJ:**

Finally, may I ask you all to stand for a moment of silence.

Thank you.