

# A STORY OF CARPEW

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*The Fighting Kentuckian (1949) John Wayne, Vera Ralston.*

Back then, in 1995, my homeland Serbia was in shambles. Brutal wars, sanctions and a collapse of economy made life very difficult for a 24 year old. Must I forever be a beggar, I thought. Would those golden dreams not come true? Through my phone pal (long story), Spiridion Mangion, I managed to get a seven-day visa to Malta with a hope that I'll make use of a week's time and find a job as a waiter, dishwasher or anything else that would bring bread on the table.



Refusals lasted for five days until I got a trial with Żebbuġ Rangers Football Club. With some luck and five goals scored on that game, I appeared the next day in a newspaper as the newly signed player with Rangers. Yellow and green emblem sat nicely on my youthful chest. Few days later I moved to the centre of Żebbuġ. Very quickly I became known to locals as a popular striker, who followed my every step, making sure to tip off the club committee every time I bought a Cisk - the local beer.

Żebbuġ is quite a big village for Maltese standards and its centre hosts nine bars: three religious, two political, one football and three independent.

My instant choice was one of the independent ones, The Golden Lion, or as locals called it – The Carpew.

It was in the mid 80s when a great visionary, Paul Farrugia, had built this place. Paul was a great film lover who had a collection of 1,600 films on 35mm reel. His collection was mostly made up of films about cowboys and indians. He adored John Wayne. The upper floors of his house were invaded by the reels and different types of projectors. I'm not sure if his wife Mary appreciated this much. The first thing on entering Carpew are the tears. An overwhelming joy that a place like this exists. Carpew was a nexus of passion and business, fantasy and reality, half a petrol station, half a bar, half a billiard hall, half a body building shop.

People from Żebbuġ never liked Paul much, they believed he was spiking the petrol with water. Since his petrol station was the only one in Żebbuġ, they'd always come back for more, but most of them refused to have a drink at his bar or buy protein cans from Paul's son, Sandro. Apart, of course, from the few alchies, my first friends from Żebbuġ.

The bar occupied an area of no more than 12 square metres. In the centre, there was a large billiard table that made it difficult to approach the bar. Not Paul nor Sandro, nor much anybody else, was ever interested in playing pool but it always stood there, in spite of everything.

Two tables with three chairs each were placed on each side of the room. The wall was packed with framed photographs of Nazi soldiers with some WWII original letters from the front, written in German, along with a couple of small photos of Mussolini.

Behind the lime wooden bar, stood Mary, unsuccessfully trying to balance whispering and screaming at customers. On her left hand side, hanging tough, was a life-size poster of Sylvester Stallone and behind her, looming large, a poster of Ronald Reagan.

That was my place to rest, regroup and have a quiet drink.

As it happens, dear reader, in the late nineties, Paul had to sell his bar to a young chap who modernized it completely, bringing DJs and sexy girls. Exotic, enigmatic and magnificently chaotic, Carpew was too strange to survive the wave of new trends.

Paul and his wife moved to Arizona, in United States, where today he runs a drive-in cinema.