

## National

# New President has link to Russia's royal family

Kristina Chetcuti

Saint Gorg Preca is her husband's great-great-uncle but President-elect Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca has some fine lineage of her own in her family tree.

According to a genealogist, she is related to a Russian Romanov princess.

Charles Said-Vassallo, who has been studying Maltese genealogy, particularly that of nobility, for more than 15 years, said that Ms Coleiro Preca was the first cousin, twice removed of Edgar Tabone who was married to Princess Nathalie Poutiatine, a member of the Russian royal family.

"I don't know if the President-elect is aware of this herself," Mr Said-Vassallo told *Times of Malta* from his base in Sydney.

**"Her family came to Malta as refugees after the Bolshevik revolution"**

Ms Coleiro Preca's great-grandfather, Salvatore Coleiro, married Teresa Tabone, Edgar's aunt.

"Princess Nathalie and Edgar never had children themselves but Ms Coleiro Preca is connected through lineage," he explained.

The Poutiatine family can trace its origins to ninth century Russia. Their familiarity with the imperial family was to play an important role during the Russian revolution in 1917.

"Her family came to Malta as refugees after the Bolshevik revolution and it was here that the princess met her future husband," he said.

In her book, *My mother Princess Olga*, Nathalie Poutiatine recounts how the Grand Duke Michael, successor to Czar Nicholas II, had taken refuge in their home when she was only a teenager.



From left: Princess Nathalie; performing the dying swan; her husband Edgar Tabone. Photos: tanyabayona.com

It was in the Poutiatine residence that the leaders of the Provisional Government made it clear to the duke that the crowds wanted to overthrow him. The historical abdication document, which brought an end to the 300 years of Romanov rule, was signed on the school desk of the 13-year-old Nathalie Poutiatine on March 17, 1917.

As a result of the subsequent upheaval, the Poutiatine family, together with another 600 refugees, escaped on a small merchant ship to Romania, then to Constantinople and, finally, to Malta.

Princess Nathalie and her mother remained in Malta for two years before travelling to France to meet Prince Paul and finally settle in Paris. During her short stay in Malta, the princess fell in love with Edgar Tabone who, coincidentally, shares the

same first name as Ms Coleiro Preca's husband, Edgar Preca.

In Paris, the 17-year-old princess resumed her ballet studies but Edgar "remained devoted" and visited the family regularly until they got married in 1929 and the two settled in Malta where she lived until her death in 1984.

In 1934, the princess gave one of the most outstanding performances at the Royal Opera House, where she performed the Dying Swan. She then went on to found the very first ballet academy on the island, which is today known as the Tanya Bayona Princess Poutiatine Academy of Ballet.

Perhaps with the knowledge of a trace of blue blood in her lineage, Ms Coleiro Preca, who has publicly stated she was "not fond of ceremonies", will be more open to them.



Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca.

## Maltese quest to scale Mount Everest

Kim Dalli

Four climbers are leaving today for a two-month expedition in an attempt to become the first Maltese to summit the highest mountain in the world from the north ridge route in Tibet.

Apart from battling the extreme conditions and surviving in one of the most inhospitable environments on Earth, the team is also attempting to raise €1 for every foot they climb.

The target sum is €30,000 as Mount Everest is 30,000 feet high (8,848 metres) and the proceeds will go to *Id-Dar tal-Providenza*.

Leading the expedition will be experienced mountaineer Gregory Attard, who had already successfully summited the mountain four years ago by taking the south-east ridge route from Nepal together with Robert Gatt and Marco Cremona.

The 37-year-old medic admits he was shaken by the news that a sherpa (a member of a people who live in the Himalayas and who are often hired to help guide mountain climbers and carry their equipment) recently died of



From left: Douglas Barbaro Sant, Matthew Xerri, Gregory Attard and Raphael Fenech Adami at a charity dinner held in aid of *Id-Dar tal-Providenza*.

altitude sickness at base camp (5,300 metres in altitude).

"I knew his brother well. I can't believe he died of altitude sickness. He was extremely experienced - and he has lived his entire life in a village which is at 4,300 metres above sea level."

He explains there is a very fine line between pushing on and knowing when to turn back: "Summit fever tends to blur reason. I hope we summit as a whole contingent - that's my greatest wish."

At 52, Raphael Fenech Adami is the eldest member of the

expedition but has climbed a number of mountains, including Island Peak in the Himalayas and Mount Elbrus.

He reveals that the Everest challenge was the one he had on his mind since 12 years ago.

"I finally got my chance. You need to know your own body and gauge how it is responding.

"It's all about endurance - physical and mental as you have to train yourself to march along for hours on end.

"I hope that physically I'm up to it. I'm used to being the oldest though - in the 2005 Lifecycle challenge, they called me 'dad'.

"In the 2012 one, they called me 'granddad!'"

Twenty-six-year-old Matthew Xerri is the youngest member.

He has trekked in the Alps and Mount Kilimanjaro.

"I feel very well prepared - we've trained hard in the last couple of months. I think that my strength is the fact that I pay attention to detail - in fact, I'm packing extra materials just in case the others would run out of something.

"My weakness is that this is my first climbing experience at such a high altitude.

"I don't know how my body will handle it. However, I'm used to being exposed to harsh environments and spending time away from home."

Douglas Barbaro Sant, 37, has participated in a number of endurance tests, having scaled Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the Americas and having run the Marathon des Sables, a gruelling six-day race across the Sahara desert.

"I'm an adrenaline junkie. What inspired me is the thrill of adventure. I believe that my strength is the ability of working with a team and bringing people together.

"My weakness is the fact that I haven't been anywhere close to over 7,000 metres in altitude.

"I'll also be missing my family, especially my three young daughters, very much."

The Maltese expedition will be independent of other expeditions. The team will attempt the 15-hour climb to the summit during the first opportune weather window during the first week of May.

To donate, go to [www.everest14.com/charity](http://www.everest14.com/charity).