

Waylon Johnston

Retiring judge recalls best and worst moments



Judge Joseph Filletti yesterday bid farewell to a 32-year career on the bench and recounted how one of the worst incidents in his life was when he was interrogated during the scandal of disgraced chief justice Noel Arrigo.

The judge, who spent seven years as a lawyer, five as a magistrate and 27 as a judge, spoke off the cuff and opened his speech by joking: “Don’t expect me to cry.”

The multilingual judge – he speaks Maltese, English, French, Italian and Chinese – looked back on his long career with satisfaction but singled out the traumatic experience of 2002.

That was the year the police discovered evidence that Dr Arrigo and former judge Patrick Vella were bribed for an appeal judgment. Judge Filletti was part of the panel.

Dr Arrigo was jailed by Mr Justice Giannino Caruana Demajo in November 2009 for having reduced the jail term of drug trafficker Mario Camilleri, also known as L-Imnieħru, receiving a bribe and exerting influence on other judges, among other charges. Dr Vella had admitted to similar charges and was jailed for two years in March 2007.

Although he was interrogated, Judge Filletti was not implicated but receiving the phone call to go to the police headquarters was “equally traumatic”.

The judge also recalled a landmark judgment he handed down 30 years ago in which he ruled that the police could not re-arrest a person moments after being released from 48 hours of detention. He had ruled that the person had to be effectively released for a period of time before being arrested again.

In a lighter moment, he recalled how in the last months of his law course the students had received an invitation to the inauguration of the court house.

Once the event was over he had sat down in a judge's chair, in the very spot he was speaking from, when all of the sudden a court usher walked up and told him to get off unless he wanted to be reprimanded.

Little did he know he would be sitting in the same chair years later as a member of the bench.

At the end of the speech he thanked his family for being behind him and all the staff he had throughout the years.