

*a centenary of canberra's catholics*

**In the 11th in a series of portraits of significant Catholics of the national capital, Bishop Pat Power pays tribute to Giuseppe Cataldo**

# Hairdresser who helped shape his adopted home

No account of Canberra's 100-year history would be complete without acknowledgement of the many post-World War II European migrants who began a new life in the developing national capital.

Giuseppe Cataldo is an outstanding example of a "New Australian" whose hard work and decency helped shape his much-loved adopted city.

But it wasn't easy, especially in the beginning. There must have been times when Giuseppe Cataldo felt like the fictional Nino Culotta in *They're a Weird Mob*. Part of the attraction to Canberra on Giuseppe's part was that it was the capital of Australia.

Giuseppe had served in the police force in Rome and, while not expecting to find "La Bella Roma" in Canberra, he was shocked to find the Bush Capital more akin to a large country town when he arrived in 1957.

Not that Giuseppe was averse to country life. He was born in Chiusano San Domenico in southern Italy and enjoyed living and working on the family farm. But his sense of adventure got him thinking about emigrating. No hasty decisions were made.

After serving 2 ½ years in the police force, he returned to the farm, married his beloved Ida in 1952 and rejoiced in the birth of two sons, Emilio and Angelo.

The time seemed right in 1957 when he set off for Australia to prepare for Ida and the boys to follow.

By then he had begun to hone his skills as a hairdresser, but it was as a carpenter that he was allowed to migrate to Australia.

He arrived with just a suitcase in hand. Son Emilio describes his beginnings in Canberra: "Dad spent his first night camped beneath a makeshift tent at the upper Cotter Dam.

"His first night fright was mistaking a wombat for some type of wild hairy pig. At smoko time his entrepreneurial skills came into play.

"The labourer would turn a dynamite box upside down to



ABOVE: The Cataldo family (from left): Emilio, Angelo, Giuseppe, Anna, Ida and Aldo.



LEFT: Giuseppe Cataldo ... left a thriving hairdressing salon.

those years – missing his family (to whom he wrote twice a week no matter how tired he was), working hard at his day job, doing house-calls after hours on his push bike all over Canberra cutting hair and attending night school learning English.

But from Emilio's account it was all worthwhile. "In March, 1961, when Dad felt he had saved enough and was certain of Australia as his home, he sent for his family and had a house in Yarralumla waiting for us.

"What a wonderful place to start for Mum with friendly Australian families around and a large community of Italians where they forged long and lasting friendships."

Ida and Giuseppe were blessed with another son, Aldo, in 1963 and daughter, Anna, the joy of their life in 1966.

In 1965, the Cataldo family hairdressing business, catering

for both men and women, began in Marcus Clarke Street in Civic.

Giuseppe was determined to give it a distinctive continental character and with his warm and engaging personality he built up a wonderful rapport with his clients.

As the children got older they grew into the business. Emilio and Angelo began by taking turns in sweeping-up the salon and went on to become national champions in their profession as hairdressers.

Aldo used his accountancy skills supporting the business and Anna not only worked in the salon but taught hairdressing at a tertiary level.

In 1984, another salon was opened in Northbourne Avenue, eventually subsuming the Marcus Clarke Street operation.

Giuseppe Cataldo's eminent skills in his profession, his great love of his work, his personal interest in his clients, his goodness and fairness to his staff and his simple love of life guaranteed success.

Among his clients were four of Canberra's Archbishops, Eris O'Brien, Thomas Cahill, Edward Clancy and Francis Carroll.

All of them had a great fondness for their trusted barber, enjoying his wit and wisdom and gaining some valuable practice in the Italian language.

The same could be said of the politicians, lawyers, members of the police force and a whole cross-section of Canberra's population who were among his appreciative clients.

In the late 1990s, Giuseppe Cataldo gradually eased into retirement, enjoying the family home in Forrest with Ida and the company of children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren until his death in December, 2010.

He left not only a thriving hairdressing salon but a proud legacy for Canberra to celebrate as part of its 100th birthday.

do haircuts. He also bought tobacco, chocolate and alcohol in Canberra and re-sold it at the camp for an extra shilling for additional income."

From the Cotter, Giuseppe Cataldo moved to Capital Hill Hostel which provided very basic

accommodation for other men in a similar position to himself.

Little did he or his mates imagine that their hostel would be the site of Parliament House from 1988.

There were lots of sweat, blood and tears for Giuseppe in

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