Gallagher.

characters Mick

great

of the city’s

Power

Year Bishop Pat

Citizen of the

2009 Canberra

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portraits of

In a series of

In the seventh

features

and represented the union in the interest of his

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related how these events shaped Mick’s life.

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Toogoolawah and Cooroy (Queensland) faced

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Gallagher, one of Canberra’s great characters

It is not altogether clear how Augustine

Albert Gallagher was transformed into Mick

one of Canberra’s great characters who contributed mightily to our city for 62

years of the centenary we are about to celebrate.

Leading up to his time in Canberra, there

were many transformations in Mick’s life from

a childhood in a family of 10 children in

Toogoolawah and Cooroy (Queensland) faced

with the Great Depression, enlisting in the

RAAF in World War II, there plying his trade

as an electrician and giving expression to his

prowess as an athlete.

At Mick’s funeral in 2008 his son, Michael,

related how these events shaped Mick’s life.

“He maintained an undiluted allegiance to

the Australian Labor Party and its ideals and

aspirations for a free egalitarian society. He

maintained his allegiance to the Catholic

Church and became a tireless worker for the

advancement of Catholic schools in Canberra.”

I first knew Mick Gallagher while he was

working in the Department of Customs and

Excise. I recall at one point during a power

struggle in the Public Service Union, both

the contending parties were vowing to have Mick on

their ticket because everyone saw him as a man

of great integrity and beyond reproach.

Mick Gallagher and Gwen Raftery were

married in Sydney in 1943 and at the end of

World War II, first Mick, then Gwen

and their son, began life in Canberra

in a pre-fab government house in

3rd Street, Narrabundah. Alan

Foskett’s recent book highlights

the significance of this part of

Canberra’s history and social fabric.

Eventually, their much­loved

home became too small for a fam­

ily which had grown to six children

with Margaret, Eileen and their

four brothers. So the Gallaghers

moved to their new home in

Telopea Park, Barton in 1954. Ten

years later, the family witnessed

nearby a milestone in Canberra’s

history with the filling of Lake

Burley Griffin.

Mick’s contribution to Church

and community was very much

“hands on”. In fact he had very

little patience for people who were

“all talk and no action”.

His skills as an electrician saw

him much in demand in an honorary capacity.

Son Michael recalls, “Mick was volunteering

his services to string the lights along the run­

ning tracks (at Manuka Oval) for the St

Patrick’s Day Sports Carnival – a large event

on the professional athletic circuit and a major

fund-raiser for the Church and its schools.

Little as we were, both under 10, Brian and I

were seconded as apprentices in clicking the

light bulbs into the bayonet sockets.”

The year the Gallaghers moved from

Narrabundah to Barton was also the year that

St Edmund’s College opened. Michael

Gallagher was a foundation student and until

youngest son, David, graduated in 1970 there

were never a year without at least one Gallagher

at the college.

There is a splendid photo on the cover of

the 1979 St Edmund’s Annual with Mick and

a group of other proud hard-working fathers

striding across the main oval. St Edmund’s was

hailing the contribution they had made to the

life of the college in its first 25 years.

As Mick’s boys began taking an interest in

Australian Rules football, their good father,

preparing boys for an interschool carnival,

Mick was impressed by a young lad who

kicked the ball over Mick’s head. Mick asked

“And what’s your name?” The response was

“Alex”. He is now best known by his surname,

Jesaulenko.

Mick’s two youngest sons, Terry and David,

rewarded their father’s coaching deeds by

becoming outstanding first grade players for

Manuka. It is generally agreed that Terry, who

kicked 11 goals in a game on three occasions,

would have risen to greater heights if he had

accepted offers to play in Melbourne rather

than pursue his university studies in Canberra.

One of Mick’s many acts of kindness was

to take Wally Wright to Australian Rules

games. Wally, father of Fr Tommy Wright, had

been a goal umpire in his day, but was by then

stricken with blindness.

Mick used to give Wally a running commen­
tary on the game and was amazed how at the

post-mortem at the Manuka Club, Wally was

able to describe the highlights. It was ironic that

Mick was to lose his sight in his last years.

In October 1993, I had the joy of celebrat­
ing Mass in St Christopher’s for Mick, Gwen

and their family marking their 50th wedding

anniversary. It was not long afterwards that

Mick lost his sight. Gwen’s devotion to Mick

was total until she developed cancer which led

to her untimely death.

Mick spent his last years in Villaggio

Santu’Antonio in Page. Always interested in

current affairs, he was then constantly up-to­
date with the radio as his constant companion.

His neighbour just across the corridor was his

old friend, Bishop Alo Morgan. After the

evening meal and the news, they recited the

Rosary and had a whisky together.

God called Bishop Alo to his eternal reward

in May 2008 and Mick the following September.

Within a few months, Canberra had lost two

of its most loved and admired citizens.