Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5673

Pirie, Catherine

(1963 -)

Born	19630101, Cairns Queensland Australia
Occupation	Lawyer, Magistrate, Solicitor

Summary

In 1989, Catherine Pirie became the first woman of Torres Strait Islander descent to be admitted as a solicitor. She achieved another first in 2000 when she was appointed Magistrate; once again, the first Torres Strait Islander to hold the position.

Details

The oldest of six children, Catherine Pirie was born in Cairns, but the family soon moved to Garbutt in Townsville. Two of the six went on to be lawyers; Catherine and her brother, Kevin Smith. The children attended Catholic schools at both primary and secondary level; their fees paid through the assistance of their paternal grandparents, Arthur and Hannah Smith.

After high school, Catherine travelled to the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane to study law, although readily admits that the only knowledge she had of the discipline was what she saw on television. Adjusting to study and life away from home was a daunting experience and by third year, she was ready to give up her studies. Fortunately, she was offered work at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service by solicitor Paul Richards, where she worked for a number of years in a variety of roles. She returned to her studies and graduated with a Bachelor of Laws in 1988. She married David Pirie, another lawyer, in 1990.

Since then, she and her husband have worked in Queensland and Western Australia in offices of the Aboriginal Legal Service in Townsville and Albany. She was appointed a magistrate, working mainly in the Cairns region, in 2000, becoming the first Torres Strait Islander to hold a judicial position. It was a special day for her in July 2011 when she presided in the Magistrates Court at Thursday Island.

Published resources

Book Section
Catherine Pirie, Currie, Susan, 2005

Site Exhibition
Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016, http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers

Author Details
Nikki Henningham

Created 19 May 2016
Last modified 4 August 2025