

Changing History



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Helen McDermott, Vice President, ACWAP



Back in 1997 Christine Nixon agreed to be the Australasian Council of Women and Policing's inaugural president and for ten years she worked with us to realise our vision for the Council.

When we were forming the Council we had already come a long way; the first Australasian Conference of Women Police in Sydney in 1996 had happened, seven editions of *The Whip: the newsletter for women in policing* had been successfully published and now we had to get organised for the future.

Christine's support as an Assistant Commissioner in the NSW Police Service was critical to us holding the successful first conference and she was the obvious choice as the inaugural President. In fact, if she had not decided to devote her time and be willing to publicly support the Council, we would not have survived our few years.



Very few other senior women in policing were that brave. But in her typical style, giving women a voice in policing was something Christine believed in, so it was something she did.

Today, young women entering policing can't even imagine what a risky business it was establishing the Council.

Who on earth were these upstart women thinking that they can go off and try changing things without asking first?

But supported and encouraged by Christine, that was what we did.

She knew we could do it, and left us to do it.



Christine's leadership was essential and the style of leadership she demonstrated was critical to the Council becoming a sustainable organisation that is well regarded and seen to be important in improving policing for women.

She chaired our meetings, helped us plan our conferences, presented the Excellence in Policing Awards, and provided guidance and support. Probably most importantly she reminded us that we had every right to be working to improve policing for women and that in doing so that work is important and very necessary.

By stepping in when it got too hard, when we needed encouragement, when we needed reassurance, that what we were doing wasn't the problem but that the problem was with those who didn't want women to be equally regarded in and by policing, Christine kept the Council alive in its first few fragile years.

And gradually the mouse found its voice and roared!

The Excellence in Policing Awards became an important opportunity to acknowledge how policing is being improved for women.

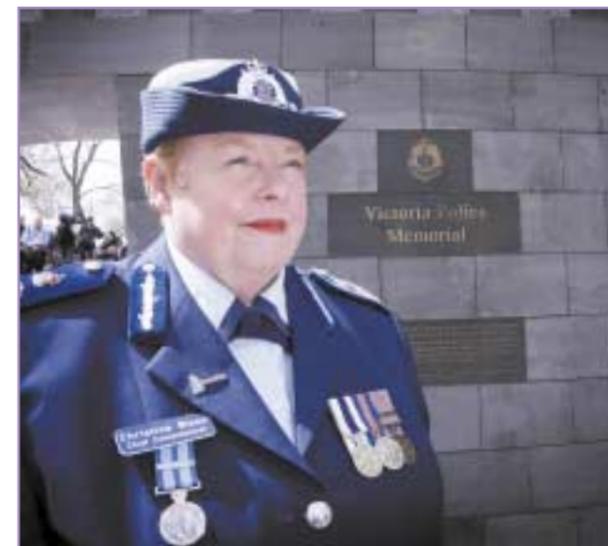


The Australasian Women and Policing conferences developed into an important international event attracting high profile speakers and delegates from around the world.

The Journal of Women and Policing grew and became a key channel for the discussion and exploration of issues of interest to improving policing for women.

Gradually, under Christine's watchful eye we became a voice for improving policing for women.

She demonstrated that taking the very risky stance of identifying as a feminist in policing and doing what you can to improve the opportunities and outcomes for women within policing, to improve policing services for women, and to be



part of the international network of women in policing is not a career limiting move. She showed that doing what you think is right, is the sign of a real leader.



A Commissioner Reflects

*John Avery, AO APM MA Dip Crim Hon D Litt.
NSW Police*

People are more aware of Christine's great achievements while she has been at the pinnacle of a brilliant career but it may be useful to reflect a little on how her career developed, on how she placed her feet firmly on the lower rungs of the ladder and reached for the heights.

She was a daughter of a police family and was drawn to policing as a career. Her father was a police officer who was often called to crime situations and scenes at all hours and she grew up in an atmosphere which was frequently dramatic. As his experience often related to violent actions and people, to the extent that he was wounded and subsequently decorated as the result of a police operation, he fiercely opposed her wish to join the police. It was not a job for his beloved daughter. Christine's determination to join proved to be greater than his determination to prevent it and it did not take long for him to change from adversary to advocate.

The police organisation she joined accepted women as police officers, providing that they performed duties suitable for females. Christine charmed the school children with the lectures and ably directed traffic at school crossings. She, and other adventurous souls, badgered the hierarchy to allow women to perform general police duties. In hindsight, they would have regarded their decision to allow this as having a touch of administrative genius rather than merely ridding themselves of the persistent importunity of these troublesome females.

Christine worked hard as a general duties officer, displaying her customary enthusiasm and independence. When a male officer held a car door open for her to enter, either flippantly or out of respect, he was succinctly told to depart and void his bladder, or words to that effect. Thereafter she entered police vehicles without offers of assistance.

Thirty odd years ago she came to the New South Wales Police Training Development Branch. Our



concern at that Branch was to provide educational material relevant to new pieces of legislation which flowed consistently from the parliament for police to enforce. Police needed to understand the intent of the new legislation and something of the methods police might use to enforce it. Christine joined other qualified and experienced police at the Branch and we drew in operational police who could make a contribution on particular issues because of the richness of their experience.

This environment allowed the younger Christine to flourish. She was intelligent and innovative and still going through educational processes. She was keen to prove the value of the contribution women could make, not merely to establish some form of gender balance, but because of her belief that society would benefit from properly using the wealth of talent that women possessed.

In our work at the Branch we also considered that if we stretched our capacities we would do more than merely process the dictates of those in the policy formulation area of government. We felt that with the range of abilities police have and use and also because of the key social role of police, plus the wealth of sociological data possessed by the police collective, we could positively contribute to government policy development.

Christine often thought outside the regular or traditional lines of thought and thrived on working with like minds from other areas of government or community. We helped develop new law and practice in social areas coming under the microscope of the government of that time. We worked with the Women's Coordination Unit of the Premier's Department on domestic violence issues, rape victims; trauma and child abuse. Caring paediatricians contributed wonderfully because of their experiences with abused children. Police who had considerable experience were drawn in with these social issues. They were also aware of the operational dangers for police dealing with domestic violence. The late 1970's were early days with these social issues and it was important to have legislation to deal with mandatory reporting of offences against children.

While working through a range of operational and policy issues we conferred closely with police and lecturers who had long been involved in the training and education of police. The programs were expanding and inevitably headed towards collaboration with tertiary institutions because of the increasing recognition that intelligent, educated police had a key role to play in society.

Christine had a prominent role in a matter referred from our hierarchy relating to the physical standards required for recruit entry into police organisations. An applicant may have a powerful physique and a keen intellect and the required passion for a police career, but be found to be a centimetre short. She collaborated with the Cumberland School of Health Sciences and through extensive inquiries and interviews identified some 300 forms of physical activity regularly used in police work. These included running, jumping, vaulting fences, carrying bodies or the injured down narrow staircases, subduing suspects, separating combatants and many others. A careful analysis of the data allowed the health scientists and Christine to recommend a

series of physical tests for potential recruits. Traditionalists were stunned that smaller people met the standards. Importantly, it meant that more of the population were eligible, thus offering policing a greater variety of skills and talents.

Christine had thoughtful but unbounded hopes and expectations. Like others she pursued university qualifications and these were generally relevant to her passion, policing. She also aimed for the stars. She applied for a prestigious Harkness Fellowship for education in the United States and was selected with a couple of scientists who were university gold medallists.

She also aimed high in applying for a university placement in the USA and was successful in gaining one at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University for two years. She completed a 2 year Masters Degree in Public Administration in 12 months and when she approached her Professor about beginning her doctorate he said he would prefer to have her as his Research Fellow. This was a wonderful opportunity because Professor Mark Moore was a world leader in the development of community based policing.

Her experience as a Research Fellow was invaluable, both for the contribution she made to the American program, and to the early community policing developments in Australia. She returned to New South Wales and was later an invaluable advisor to the Commissioner.

Christine had disappointments. The glass ceiling inhibited her rate of promotion for some time. She is a caring person and she has always been able to smile when others would have been in flowing lamentation. Having considerable courage and wit she has often turned a disappointing set of events to her advantage. She was once moved from a key senior portfolio out to the general area of policing because she was seen as a threat. She swiftly saw that wider police management, if done well, could provide the greater opportunities.

And so it came to pass. We know that she will do well in the enormous task that the Federal and State Governments have given her in the wake of the Victorian fires. As I mentioned earlier she was always driven to show what a splendid contribution women could make. She has set the bar high for all the lassies and the lads who will follow her into a police career.

Thank You



Victoria is unique for all sorts of reasons but one significant one is that we have a Charter of Human Rights that govern the work of all of the public authorities in this state. As Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, Christine Nixon was a strong advocate for the adoption of a Charter during the consultative phase and then a strong supporter and promoter of a human rights based approach to policing in Victoria. This leadership has been significant in not only influencing the culture of Victoria Police but also in providing leadership across the public sector. This is an important and lasting legacy not only for Victoria Police but for all Victorians.

Dr Helen Szoke
Chief Executive Officer/Chief Conciliator
Victorian Equal Opportunity and
Human Rights Commission

For me, the main thing that Christine brought to Victoria Police was a connection that flowed from the top of the organisation down to the most junior member and out in to the community. Her eight years in Victoria Police saw our organisation break down the hierarchical structure and gain closer

engagement with the community than at any time in my 34 years in the organisation. Having Christine as the CCP taught me that it is very important to be the person you are and to be the best you can be at it.

The thing I admired most about Christine was her leadership style. She never asked her members to do anything she wasn't prepared to do herself. She was always out amongst the membership and the community and treated people with respect and dignity. However, I always knew when I was in trouble, as most days she would greet me with 'Ah the Good Assistant Commissioner' but if I was greeted with just 'Assistant Commissioner' I knew there was some questions coming that I needed to have a really good answer for!

I visited her office on a number of occasions and would often walk in on her singing to a tune she had brought up on her computer. One day I walked in to 'Girls just want to have fun' and then she turned to me and said, 'this song is not easy you know'. Now I know the reason she only had three songs in her repertoire – the others were obviously too hard!

Sandra Nicholson
Assistant Commissioner – Region 2 (West)
Victoria Police

For me, the main thing that Christine brought to Victoria Police (or Victoria) as our Chief Commissioner was the sense that the unsworn staff are equally as important to the organisation as the sworn staff. Having Christine as the CCP taught me that anybody can achieve whatever they want to achieve. Like vision impaired staff members like myself, women have to go to extra lengths to strive for the same opportunities as the mainstream.

Christine was very public on being transparent and

having integrity which are very important to an organisation like the one we work for.

Mr Natale Cutri
VPSG 4 Business Management
Department
Victoria Police

Christine, to me, is the consummate 'humanitarian.' She does so much more than just fulfil her professional role. In these days of 'IQ' and 'EQ', Christine has it all, and she has a way of reaching out to people, providing warmth and inspiration, and enabling absolute trust. Rarely is there a gathering of people where her name does not come up – be it in academia, where great leadership examples are discussed, or around a suburban BBQ where community issues are debated. Christine is interesting, approachable, inclusive and amazing. She has been a visionary for Victoria Police and so much more than that as a community leader. I will miss her dearly as our CCP, and I cannot wait to read her memoirs!

Ally Howard
Sergeant Education Dept
Victoria Police

For me, the main thing that Christine brought to Victoria Police as our Chief Commissioner was letting us spread our wings and not be afraid to try new things. She changed our system so that it was OK to make a mistake, learn from it and get on with it. She also turned Victoria Police into a diverse organisation, reflective of the community and changed it from a militaristic style to a welcoming, professional organisation.

Having Christine as the CCP taught me how much fun the job is and how to stay strong during tough times. The funniest thing I remember about Christine as the CCP is when she and John were returning from a trip and they were travelling through far East Gippsland when they came across a log truck that had overturned. So what does any good CCP do? Get out and direct traffic! When the local TMU turned up they couldn't believe who

was helping them out. I think one of them even joked about the fact she wasn't wearing a hat and didn't have on a reflective vest ...

I'll never forget the time Christine marched with us in the Pride March in 2002. This was an unheard of event and bought some controversy but was, I believe, one of the most important symbolic gestures, all of the community could see that Christine cared about them.

I remember when Christine was appointed I had many men say to me, 'You'll be right now mate, promotion coming up?' I questioned them as to why that would be and it was always, 'You're wearing a skirt.' I can't put my reply in print ... But what I can say is that it could not have been further from the truth. Christine is a woman of enormous integrity and every process that was ever implemented during her time was fair to all.

Jill Wood
Inspector
Victoria Police

For me, the main thing that Christine brought to Victoria Police as our Chief Commissioner was a growing acceptance of diversity – both within the organisation as well as in the broader Australian context. The most telling illustration of this is a comparison between Christine's two Gay & Lesbian Pride Marches. Her first in 2002, was met with considerable internal as well as external (media) condemnation. Her last in 2009, was widely applauded and served as a fitting tribute to her success in achieving cultural change.

Having Christine as the CCP taught me it's OK to take risks and make mistakes. The organisation (and the public) will forgive you for being human, and perhaps respect you even more, provided you acknowledge your faults.

I'll never forget ... the look on her face when confronted by a troop of drag queens dressed as police at the 2002 St Kilda Pride March.

Mark Keen
Inspector
Victoria Police



For me, the main thing that Christine brought to Victoria Police as our Chief Commissioner was the very human face of Victoria Police. She was very approachable. Victoria Police became a modernised organisation achieving great results. People comment on how Christine is a champion for community engagement, but few know that it was me, Constable T. Bear, who mentored her and coached her. Having Christine as the CCP taught me that even the position of Chief Commissioner is no longer the domain of males only. It is a position I aspire to myself actually! Chief Commissioner T. Bear – sounds great, doesn't it? The funniest thing I remember about Christine as the CCP is the first time she got on stage in uniform with the police band and danced with me, Constable T. Bear! Once I got over my initial shock, I was the happiest and proudest member of Victoria Police. Over the years, I did have to teach her a few fancy dance steps to add to her repertoire, but she was a good learner.

I'll never forget the time Christine sang 'I am woman' with the police band for the very first time. The crowd went crazy. Afterwards it became a regular occurrence with both the Show Band and Code I. I was so proud of her performances, because with my encouragement and direction, she became quite a confident and outgoing person – I think she might even have a future on the stage.

On a serious note, the Board of the Blue Ribbon Foundation acknowledges that the success and extent of the Blue Ribbon Foundation's outreach into the Victorian community flourished enormously under the patronage of Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon, who truly deserves the title 'The People's Chief Commissioner'.

Constable T. Bear
Victoria Police Blue Ribbon Foundation

For me, the main thing that Christine brought to Victoria Police as our Chief Commissioner was real, unequivocal and absolute LEADERSHIP characterised by open communication and a focus on breaking down the barriers between higher and lower ranks. Having Christine as the CCP taught me:

1. to NEVER NEVER NEVER GIVE UP;
2. that expressing emotion – no matter what your rank – reminds people that you are human;
3. to admit mistakes, face the aftermath and just get on with it!
4. being able to laugh at oneself is a gift;
5. to maintain optimism and see negative experiences as blessings from which valuable lessons are learned.

The funniest thing I remember about Christine as the CCP is her ability to rattle off any rendition of 'It's Raining Men' and move to every beat in absolute rhythm – she is one hip woman!!

Christine is a true LEADER who shaped my thinking and that of so many – both within Victoria Police and externally. A woman of strength and resilience who has inspired me to reach for the stars and never lose sight of the bigger picture. Working with Christine Nixon was an absolute honour and blessing. I am proud to have followed her leadership.

Jenny Pavlou
Principal Solicitor VPSG-6
Victoria Police (Office of Chief Examiner)

Christine Nixon has been a memorable and inspirational leader. Publically standing against populist opinion, supporting those in whom she had confidence and always knowing that in doing so she had to contend with those that wanted to cut her down to size. She demonstrated this in two police organisations and successfully navigated the uncertain political and union milieu to the benefit of her team.

Her leadership comes from the heart. Not copied but honed by building personal relationships and trust through actions that attest to her sincerity, loyalty and intellectual capacity to vision and deliver a better environment.

Carlene York
Assistant Commissioner Parramatta
NSW Police

Christine's community appeal is quite amazing; she is able to communicate simply, and is always open and generous. In 2006 I was responsible for the policing of the 'Public Domain' of the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. I went for a walk with Christine along the South Bank of the Yarra, which is the heart of the CBD. It took us an hour to travel 500 metres one way, and 500 metres back. We would walk five paces and be stopped by a group, or a family or an individual, wanting her autograph, or her photo; walk another five metres and be stopped by people telling her that she had inspired them, that she was the subject of their leadership thesis, or was a role model for their daughters, or just thanking her for what she was doing for the Victorian community.

I attended a Commissioners' conference in New Zealand as her Chief of Staff; New Zealanders recognised her! She was stopped by a man in a shop in Perth 'I know that voice; that's a voice I like ... you're Christine Nixon'.

Sometimes the results can be amusing; in her early days, a woman stopped her at Tullamarine Airport – 'Dear, you look just like Christine Nixon; oh but you're much younger and prettier.' Sometimes the results are a little alarming; she was sitting with her husband John in a café in country Victoria, when a

woman came in, placed an envelope on Christine's table, and left; with some trepidation Christine opened the envelope to find a Thank You card. At the same time she is particularly determined and holds people to account for performance; never dictating how she wanted things done, but always very clear on what she wanted done. People have criticised Christine for being 'soft on crime', yet Crime dropped 20 per cent in five years!! She has laid a strong foundation for a very different police force, and a very much closer relationship with the community that we serve.

What she has achieved in eight years is quite amazing.

Tim Cartwright
Assistant Commissioner
Region 3 Victoria Police



For me, the main thing that Christine brought to Victoria Police as our Chief Commissioner was integrity. This filtered through to both members and the community who felt they could put their trust in the Chief Commissioner. Having Christine as the CCP taught me to be open and accountable and take responsibility for my actions. The funniest thing I remember about Christine as the CCP is her laugh which is truly infectious. I'll never forget the time Christine dropped in unannounced to the Whittlesea bushfire relief centre to spend time with survivors. She sang with the police band and handed soft police dog toys to the children. I will never forget the smiles on their faces during such a devastating time. Everywhere I went with Christine people would come up and praise her for the work she was doing.

She was always very modest, thanked them and said that she had a good team behind her.

Chloe Jones
PR & Marketing Officer
Victoria Police



For me, the main thing that Christine brought to Victoria Police as our Chief Commissioner was maturity. The funniest thing I remember about Christine as the CCP is at the Pride March 2009. Christine had been asked to address the crowd after the event on the main stage along with other dignitaries. Christine received 'rockstar' treatment from the large crowd with people wanting photos, to chat or just thank her for being there.

Once we got to the stage Christine was the fourth speaker. Once on stage she had to tell the crowd to shush, as they were just screaming her praise, no one could hear her. She abandoned her prepared speech and spoke from the heart to rapturous applause. Christine then tried to leave the stage only to be called back for an encore. Who ever heard of a Chief Commissioner performing an encore! I was standing next to the Deputy Premier of Victoria Rob Hulls who commented, 'I thought Elvis was dead'.

Scott Davis
Sergeant, Manager of the Victoria Police
Gay and Lesbian Advisory Unit
Victoria Police

For me, the main thing that Christine brought to Victoria Police as our Chief Commissioner was compassion, understanding and acceptance of diversity in all shapes and forms. Having Christine as the CCP taught me about leadership. The funniest thing I remember about Christine as the CCP is when she was skipping down Fitzroy Street in the 2002 Pride March. I'll never forget the time

Christine led Victoria Police in the Pride March and hosted an inaugural meeting between the Victorian GLBTI Community Organisations.

Melinda Edwards
Acting Senior Sergeant
Northern Territory Police

For me, the main thing that Christine brought to Victoria Police as our Chief Commissioner was compassion, openness, honesty and hope. For women she showed that the glass ceiling can be broken. She made everyone feel as though their problem was her problem and that she was listening. It was the little things she did, as well as the big things that made her stand apart from her predecessors. That smile, that hand shake, that nod of approval or acknowledgement. She would walk across a room to say hello. She gave a human face to the position like it has never been before. Having Christine as the CCP taught me to be strong in the face of adversity. To be determined, forgiving and to see the good!

The funniest thing I remember about Christine as the CCP is when I was invited to her office before the Queens Birthday awards were announced. I was told by her Personal Assistant it was about having a photo taken for a recent ACWAP award. It was all a bit vague, so I turned up in full uniform with my little award tucked under my arm. I said, 'Here I am for the photo.' She pleasantly smiled and we stood with award in hand and her 'driver' took photos. It was then I became a little suspicious. Then the driver disappeared and she said, 'Sit down'. She said, 'I have got you here under a false pretence.' I thought, 'Oh I must be in trouble.' Christine then advised me I had been awarded the APM. I think I said, 'Thank You' about 25 times before I left.

I'll never forget the time Christine sang 'I am woman' at her retirement function. That was the gutsiest thing I have seen from someone of her standing. Not a bad voice either!

Joy Murphy
Senior Sergeant
Victoria Police, Diamond Creek
Sexual Offences & Child Abuse Unit

The Women Leading Change Initiative

Dr Susan Harwood



Women Police Officers, Santo Island Vanuatu December 2008 with Consultant Susan Harwood at a Women Leading Change workshop

In 2005, in her former capacity as the President of ACWAP, Christine Nixon initiated **Women Leading Change** – an innovative, community engagement project that brings together women in policing with women in policing on a leadership development program. As the consultant contracted to develop this program I was delighted to find that Christine was keen to ensure that the course design and delivery reflected contemporary, feminist theory and practice. Christine's own contributions to the course content included a section on the importance of women stepping up from 'second in charge' to take on leadership roles, and, another that highlights the 'imposter syndrome' (some women who win leadership roles believe that they do so by 'fluke', rather than on the basis of their skills). Christine's leadership and support from the top ensured the successful implementation of the pilot program in Victoria; when and where obstacles appeared we could count on her quick, effective response.

Women Leading Change continues to generate interest whenever leadership development for women is discussed; this program has the potential to improve the lives of women living in a range of communities, including those where women's voices are rarely heard. We are currently seeking further funding to move *Women Leading Change* into the Pacific. The women in the photo below are keen to have this program on their island, Santo, in Vanuatu – where women in policing and community leaders are fighting very similar issues to those women who participated on the Australian program: local problems include domestic violence, kids at risk, drug use and mental health issues. Several of the women police expressed the hope that the program might bring Christine to their country. Congratulations Christine – *Women Leading Change* is still pushing boundaries for women.

