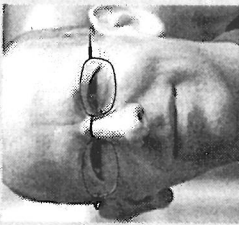


lawyer of the week



JAMES PIRRIE

JAMES PIRRIE, with Nicholas Mostyn, QC, was asked by the Labour MP Phil Woolas to act pro bono for a single mother, Helen Smith, who has had her child support increased under a subsequent ruling from £11.29 to £343.73 a week.

What potentially are the wider implications of the case? What will come next is, probably, the Child Support Agency reassessing 50,000 other cases; the Government rushing new regulations through Parliament to plug the

gap, paying dads rushing their schedule D businesses into corporate wrappers; and the accountancy profession realising that it must be able to advise clients on these issues.

What were the most surprising aspects? The Government insists that the agency operates a simple system around which ordinary mums and dads can orientate themselves lawyerless and with ease. The fact that it took the very considerable combined brains of, in particular, the [child support] commissioner and a QC to show that this was not so proves its underlying complexity. It is the absence of available advice and guidance from an independent agency that is responsible for a large part of the population's dissatisfaction with it.

What was your most memorable experience as a lawyer? Three days sitting in Chelmsford Criminal Court in about 1983 aged 23, when the client insisted that the court watch

seized videos to prove that, while he may have been distributing them, they were not pornographic. The days were interminable as the sentence faced by the client rose exponentially by the hour and some of the jury members went greener and greener, and spent increasing amounts of time looking at their laps instead.

Who has been the most influential person in your life and why? This would have to be many of the members of my firm, Family Law in Partnership, who really are, in their different ways, trying to offer the chance of the good divorce — to find the least bad of the paths — for their clients at the time of separation.

Why did you become a lawyer? Apart from the black sheep of the family who designed the watertight-ish decks on the *Titanic*, my family is a pretty much solid line of doctors stretching back to a nurse assisting Florence

Nightingale in the Crimea. However, as I was keeling over whenever I went into a hospital, the game seemed to be up. Like most other people, my major life decisions were accidents, what counts is then what you make of them.

What would your advice be to anyone wanting a career in law? You may also want to have another career lined up for when it becomes completely suffocating in your middle life — unless of course you are lucky enough to do something like family law, which is only about 10 per cent law and 95 per cent everything else, with a strong emphasis on mental arithmetic, which means that the learning is continuous.

Where do you see yourself in ten years? If I am really lucky, working in the same firm and doing the same job — but much, much better.

LINDA TSANG
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Dec 3, 6pm, Seminar: Topical issues in civil litigation. Speakers: Matthias Kelly, QC, and chairman of the Bar Council, and Doug Hall, head of litigation support at the accountants Smith & Williamson, Law Society Hall, 113 Chancery Lane, London WC2. Details: Elle Godlman, 020-7612 8772 or 020-7637 5377.

Dec 4, Conference: On the Right Track? The Future of the Community Legal Service. Speakers include: Lord Falconer of Thoroton; Clare Dodgson, chief executive of the Legal Services Commission. Details: Nony Ardill: 020-7833 7435

Dec 4, 1-2pm, Panel discussion: Terrorism, internment and human rights post-September 11: conflict or common sense? Speakers include: Professor Conor Gearty, Rausing

Director, Centre for the Study of Human Rights, LSE; Professor Christopher Greenwood, QC, Professor of International Law, LSE and Louise Christian, of Christian Khan solicitors. The Great Hall, King's College London, The Strand, WC2 Details: 020-7401 2712/ admin@bihr.org.

Dec 9, 6.30-8pm, Seminar: Ethical standards: enforcement, fairness and democracy. Followed by a question and answer session. Central London venue. Details: Joanna Rumbelow, Arden chambers, 020-7242 4244.

Dec 10, 1-2pm, Lecture: Mental Health and Human Rights: The British Institute of Human Rights; Speaker: Rabbi Julia Neuberger, Chief Executive, The King's Fund. The Great Hall, King's College London, The Strand, London. Details: 020-7401 2712/admin@bihr.org.

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