# Ruth E Hegarty

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Ruth was born in the *Royston*Private Hospital at Mitchell, Western Queensland, on 16 August 1929. Her mother Ruby and grandparents George and Lizzie Duncan (deceased) were descendants of the *Gungurri* People of the Maranoa District.

In 1930, at the time of the Great Depression, Ruby’s parents volunteered to migrate to Barambah Aboriginal Settlement. On arrival at Barambah the family was separated in keeping with Government policy of the time. Ruby was immediately identified as a single parent and, with Ruth, was placed in the women’s dormitory. After twenty-one years of dormitory life Ruth married Joe Hegarty Jnr who was also a resident of the Settlement. They left Cherbourg (formerly Barambah) in 1966 with their eight children to settle in Brisbane.

After many years of working in partnership with her husband to support their large family, Ruth was challenged to take a leadership role with projects that would help to improve the way of life for local Aboriginal families. She formed a committee of Aboriginal mothers in 1975 to establish *Koobara* Aboriginal & Islander Family Resource Centre and retained her position as president of this association for eleven years. In 1989 Ruth was honoured for her outstanding contribution to families and children by being made a Life Member of the *Koobara* Kindergarten and Preschool. Many more projects have been undertaken over the intervening years.

Undaunted by a huge commitment to empowering her community, at the age of 70 Ruth wrote and published her memoir “Is that you Ruthie?” which won the 1998 David Unaipon Award and followed it with a sequel “Bittersweet Journey” published in 2003. More recently Ruth has written the life story of Jack Moffatt, a “Cherbourg Dormitory Boy”, a fiction story “Suffer the Children” and stories for children.

Now, in her eighty-sixth year, this respected Aboriginal Elder continues to volunteer her time to the *Binambi Barambah Aboriginal Organisation* cultural camps started by the Hegarty family 18 years ago and is in constant demand as a public speaker and educator. In 2010, Ruth was recognised for her achievements when her name was added to the list of *Queensland Greats* for her tireless campaigning for a fair go for her people. In 2014 she was awarded a Doctor of the Australian Catholic University (*Honoris Causa*) in recognition of her service and advocacy for the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, from kindergarten to university, and for her unfailing belief that it is through dialogue that we achieve reconciliation.