

Christine Cuskelly

Civil Marriage Celebrant

I have been looking (waiting) for this book since I first knew I wanted to become a celebrant – it offers so much more than the practical celebrant ‘tool kits’ and resource manuals. This beautiful book full of heart and soul goes to the essence of celebrancy and the transformative and connective power of ceremony. Anna’s gentle, loving, listening spirit inhabits every page as she steadfastly puts ceremony, ritual, spirit and meaning at the heart of what we, as celebrants, aspire to do in our secular, multicultural, multi-ethnic communities.

Each part of this notebook gives inspiration to celebrants, aspiring or practising, and awakens in any reader a new or deeper appreciation of the need for, and rewards of, ritual and ceremony in all our lives. Part 1, with its honouring of the beginnings of civil celebrancy in Australia (indeed the world) and those whose vision brought this new idea to fruition, celebrates the ethos at its core – a civil celebrancy practice offered to and inclusive of all, one to lift hearts and spirits as “our human journeys through the passages of birth, puberty, marriage and death are paid their proper due.” Part 2 evokes a wonderful infusion of spirit and community, of outer and inner lives, their meaning and above all their connectedness. And gives such insight into the essential practice of heartfelt celebrancy. “Each time I meet with new clients I still myself to listen as carefully as I can with all my senses.” In this part Anna captures the intensity and the intentionality (unique and personal) of the ceremony-making process. Part 3 is a poignant and moving illustration of what Anna has been telling us – that the gifts of ritual and ceremony have enormous transformative and uplifting power, especially so when they are co-created to enrich and inspire a deeply personal (yet often also strongly communal) rite of passage. And central to this power is storytelling – when people’s stories are listened and responded to with the whole heart, soul and mind they shape and reveal the ceremony that is waiting or needed to work its metaphoric magic. But above all we learn from Anna’s vignettes that “ceremony requires community, of whatever kind, whether human, spirit or nature as participants in sacred witness.”

This book is a treasure and should be part of the treasure chest of any celebrant. Anna describes it as a “learning note book” but it is more than that – wise in experience, Anna is open-hearted in sharing what she has learned, so that she also teaches us as she continues to learn during her own “self-apprenticeship”.