

Cindy Matchett :: Celebrant

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Cindy Matchett, a registered Celebrant, and her business, **Meaningful Celebrations**, based out of Boxborough, Massachusetts, is helping to redefine how couples celebrate their love and commitment to one another. A Celebrant is meant to help a couple or family "bring meaning to special moments in time through unique ceremonies that most people don't think to recognize, like honoring a new business or recognizing a divorce, besides weddings,

birthdays, showers, renewal of vows, and graduations." While the concept of Celebrancy came about in Australia in the 1970s, it arrived in the United States in 2001 when the Celebrant USA Foundation began training individuals to become Celebrants all over the country.

EDGE was fortunate enough to speak with Ms. Matchett, and her warmth and absolute joy for what she does came across tenfold. She says she truly feels this is what she was meant to do, and every job or project she did previous to her work as a Celebrant has been useful to her in her current occupation.

After graduating from Smith College in Northampton, Mass with a B.A. in Psychology, she worked as a project manager for a web design company which involved working closely with clients as to what they wanted for their websites, and therefore, good listening skills were a must. Although she enjoyed working with people, she felt her creative side was not being utilized as it should, so she moved on to the Massachusetts College of Art to get her B.F.A., and worked as an installation artist there. This, she says, gave her a sense of perspective. Questions like "How does the viewer see this space?" help her today while crafting ceremonies and using spaces to tell a story.

Her own wedding also helped fuel her future work. She never thought she would get married, but as she began to plan her wedding, she started thinking about the meaning of ceremony and realized the potential of such events. This was around the time she found the Celebrant Foundation.

She got her certification as a Celebrant after applying and being accepted to the Celebrant program, then completing eight months of course work in myth, ritual, rites of passage, multicultural tradition, and public speaking. Trainees can choose a specialty while training: weddings and commitment ceremonies, ceremonies of the funeral variety, or rituals of family, (baby blessings, adoptions, and things of that nature).

Matchett was a double major, focusing on commitment ceremonies and

family blessings. She also enjoyed the Foundation so much that she now teaches for the Celebrant Foundation, teaching the Fundamentals course in the fall semester, and two certificate track courses in the spring: "Wedding And Other Ceremonies For Couples," which deals with weddings, vow renewals, and commitment ceremonies, and "Ceremonies For The Families, Children, and Other Life Transitions," which involves baby namings, coming of age, house blessings, and community events.

Matchett truly loves what she does, and the rewards of her job seem endless. She spoke of how great it is to be around people during such positive, special times in their lives. She really gets to know the couples she is marrying, as she meets with the couples several times to craft an individual, creative ceremony that is unique and personal to the couple. She also gives the couples questionnaires to fill out so that she may get a better understanding in terms of what they might want in their ceremonies, what marriage means to them, as well as giving the couple a chance to explore what they love about each other and what they want their ceremonies to mean and represent about them.

People write beautiful things when filling out the questionnaires, Matchett says. She does not work from templates, either, as each ceremony is individually crafted for the couple. The couple is in complete control of what they want the celebration of their union to involve.

Matchett, of course, has endless wonderful, heartwarming stories about the ceremonies she has presided over, and I was lucky enough to have her share a few with me. One of her favorite celebrations concerned a lesbian couple that met in film school. This couple elected to have their wedding at the film studio where one of them worked. This studio, which Matchett described as more of a warehouse, had huge white walls where a stained glass window image was projected. While neither woman was affiliated with a particular religion, they both loved the "symbolism of the canopy, like a Jewish chuppah", which represents home. And so a chuppah, or four poles with a canopy, was erected to symbolize the home they were building together. Their ceremony also included "hand fasting", where a ribbon is placed around the couple's wrists before the vows are said. This is where the expression "tying the knot" comes from. In this case, the father of one of the women was Scottish, so they used his family tartan to wrap their wrists.

Another couple Matchett married made their own dresses, plus a matching jacket for their beloved dog. The rings were tied to the dog's collar.

A gay couple's ceremony that Matchett presided over involved renting a house for the weekend in Buzzard's Bay near Cape Cod. The ceremony was held in the backyard, and Matchett and the couple planned it so that the twelve attendants formed a semi-circle behind them, facing the guests, as the ceremony was taking place, therefore bringing everyone together in a sense of community. "It was so beautiful", says Matchett.

Matchett makes a point of making the guests at these ceremonies feel like a part of the ceremony, rather than as just witnesses. At her own wedding there was a point where various guests stood up from their seats to offer the couple wishes of love and happiness.

There is a "basic assumption" of acceptance in Celebrancy towards gay marriage. Matchett says planning the union of a gay couple often brings about healing and understanding concerning the couples' families, if the families had any reservations about the unions. These ceremonies can therefore really help a family understand the couple's love for each other. One lesbian couple originally said they did not want "big bride thing" to happen, but while planning their ceremony with Matchett, they came to realize that they did want more of a traditional wedding. They both wore dresses, their baby was there, and friends spoke about the couple's love for each other. This couple found that choosing to make the day of their union big, traditional, and important was quite the affirming and wonderful experience.

Matchett remarked that it is interesting how people always say what a

discovery the planning of these special events is for them. The journeys people go through with Matchett provide elements they can bring to the ceremony, and carry with them for the rest of their lives. Usually people look forward to the reception after the ceremony, but when working with Matchett, people truly cannot wait for the ceremony itself. It is the fruit of such an intense, creative process, with couples researching with Matchett cultural and religious traditions to incorporate into their ceremonies.

Matchett also says that she would love to follow couples throughout their lives and perform other ceremonies for them, such as baby blessings and renewal of vows. A Celebrant is generally meant to perform important rituals throughout the life cycle. Matchett says it is "an honor to work with families, using their own unique symbols and images to create truly meaningful events which support them as they grow and change". One can only hope that Matchett and others like her will practice Celebrancy for decades to come.

Kent McGroarty is a frequent contributor to EDGE's Style, Travel, Health & Fitness channels.