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Another beautiful waterside wedding. The couple love fishing and so a 'fish' featured tie was of course essentially worn



**To achieve success, we will continue to grow and do what we can to help each other grow.**  
*Let's be Celebrants Cheering for Each Other*



AUSTRALIAN  
**MARRIAGE**  
CELEBRANTS

# Saint Valentine's Day

**Love is celebrated on St Valentine's Day, on 14th February, but you may ask, why?**

The Catholic church venerates holy men and women who persevere in their Christian Faith through living extraordinary lives of virtue, often enduring great suffering or sacrifice and/or undertake great deed. They are regarded as incorruptible. It is believed that they are so holy that upon death, they immediately enter heaven. Holy days are proclaimed for the veneration of individual saints.

**It is Saint Valentine of Terni who is venerated on 14<sup>th</sup> February.**

Many churches in Europe display the 'incorruptible' bodies of saints, sometimes encrusted in gold and Saint Valentine of Terni is among them



Just to try to offer some clarity or perhaps add to confusion on timelines and story origins, Gallienus was the Roman Emperor from 253-268 and Emperor Marcus Aurelius Claudius "Gothicus" (Claudius II), was Roman emperor from 268 to 270.

It is recorded that when Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers, he outlawed marriage for young men but a priest named Valentine defied Claudius by performing marriages for young lovers in secret until Claudius ordered that he be put to death in Rome on

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- Stand Up for Marriage
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The Catholic Church however recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred but, as mentioned, it is actually Saint Valentine of Terni who is venerated on 14<sup>th</sup> February. He was the first Bishop of Terni at a time that Christianity was regarded as a cult.



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14<sup>th</sup> February however other data suggests that this occurred under emperor Gallienus (253-268) and that Valentine and was buried by a Christian named Sabinilla in her own lands at the foot of the Parioli hill.

Despite discrepancies in dates (and emperors), there is a strong argument that the priest named Valentine and the Bishop of Terni were one and the same man in that the priest was born in Terni, and upon his death, his body was purportedly taken back to Terni, where he was then referred to as Bishop Valentine.

Another story is that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape the harsh Roman prisons,

He was eventually imprisoned and was visited by a young girl, possibly his gaoler's daughter and he fell in love. It is claimed that he wrote her a letter signed "From your Valentine," an expression that is still in use today on love letters and cards.

At the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Pope Gelasius declared February 14 as St. Valentine's Day.

During the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed in France and in England that 14<sup>th</sup> February was the beginning of birds' mating season, which added to the idea that the middle of Valentine's Day should be a day for romance. The English poet Geoffrey Chaucer was the first to record St. Valentine's Day as a day of romantic celebration in his 1375 poem "Parliament of Fowles," writing, "For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day / Whan every foul cometh the to choose his mate."

Regardless of which story is correct, and whether the modern legend is of three men or just one, Valentine is regarded as the patron Saint of Young Lovers and not only is he venerated on 14<sup>th</sup> February, but love is celebrated

The oldest known valentine still in existence today was a poem written in 1415 by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London following his capture at the Battle of Agincourt.

♥ [What Is a Saint? \(And How Do You Become One?\)](http://learnreligions.com/What-Is-a-Saint-(And-How-Do-You-Become-One?))  
([learnreligions.com](http://learnreligions.com/))

♥ [St. Valentine of Terni, 14 February](http://italyheritage.com/m/topics/valentines-day/history-of-valentines-day-2)  
([italyheritage.com](http://italyheritage.com/m/topics/valentines-day/history-of-valentines-day-2))m/topics/valentines-day/history-of-valentines-day-2



The wonderful Barbara Bell is a regularly contributor to this newsletter. Full of life and laughter, she has retired from Celebrancy but with so many years of experience, she has happily and generously shares some of her knowledge, wisdom and a story or two. In this issue, we read about some of Barbara's 'boobos' reminding us that even the best are human afterall.

## CAT CRIES

by Barbara Bell

My cat cries to me to let it outside  
And let it be free  
But harm can come without any warning  
Day or night, evening or morning.  
My cat is a Ragdoll so beautiful and cuddly  
She's really so attractive and certainly not ugly.  
Her weight is a problem  
I am sorry to say, but she asks to be fed  
Morning, noon and night an day.  
She has this certain meow that says,  
"Mother, you haven't filled my plate full up  
I'm a cat but could eat like a pup"  
I try to keep her on a diet  
You'd have thought I was starving her  
And her asking meows are not quiet  
I say "sorry puss, I'm not a wuss and I don't want a riot"

## The Heart And The Mind

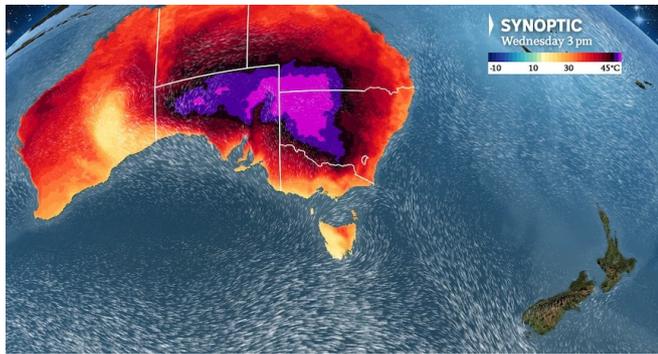
by Pravin Gupta

Those days will never return,  
They have gone away forever,  
When we could have shared many moments,  
Which can now return never.

However much we may want to,  
However much we may pray,  
We could have laughed together,  
As we would walk the life's way.

The heart does not see like the mind,  
Which says forget the bygones and look ahead,  
The heart tugs at those memories silent now,  
Through those fading streams, it would wade.

The eyes do not know to side with whom,  
Whether to dream of the past or of the morrow,  
They decide not to gleam as mind would say,  
A few tears drop down, feeling the heart's sorrow.



# It's a Scorcher

With record temperatures in January and February to be the hottest yet, the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) has warned that there will be more record stretches of days or weeks with temps at over 46°C. As Celebrants, we need to prepare to ensure safety and equipment protection. Let's look at some options and precautions.

## Preparations before summer

### Keep food safe

### Manage your medication

### During and after a power failure

### Actions when hot weather is forecast

### After the heat has passed

### For more information and advice

## Preparations before summer

- Check that air-conditioners (car, home, venue), fans, refrigerators, and freezers are working properly.
- Check equipment condition and develop a means to shade the equipment, especially the battery, using a sunshade, cover, or umbrella
- Store batteries in insulated containers.
- Learn about safe food and medicine storage during hot weather, and especially during and after a power outage.
- Check weather conditions and alternate venues for heat and storm safety
- Make sure you have the contact details for people who may be able to help if you are in need.
- Make a plan with family, colleagues, friends, clients and neighbours to keep in contact during hot weather.
- Make sure you have contact details for your general practitioner, pharmacist, or other source of good health advice such as [healthdirect](#).
- Speak to your doctor if you have chronic health conditions or are on regular medications to discuss what to do during hot weather.
- Know where in your local area you may be able to go to get relief from the heat. Places that may be cooler than your home include air-conditioned public buildings such as libraries and shopping centres, parks with plenty of vegetation and shade.
- If you can, consider any changes you might make to your home, office or a venue, to help keep it cooler in hot weather. More information is available at [AdaptNSW](#) and [Your Home](#).



This article is largely based upon advice from:

**NSW Health**

Changes you can make include:

- installing curtains or blinds on the side that faces the sun to keep it cooler during hot weather
- considering external awnings, gazebos, shutters, umbrellas, or other shading to reduce or eliminate direct sun and sun glare
- insulating your home to help reduce the indoor temperature when weather is hot and to maintain warmer temperature when cold.
- Suggest to your couples that they might consider a misting fan and ice-cooler with water.

## Keep food safe & drinks cold

During hot weather, food can spoil more quickly and become unsafe to eat. Bacteria and other pathogens can grow and spread easily at room temperature. Soft drink cans can expand or explode if left in the heat of a locked car.

Eating contaminated food can make you very unwell. Depending on the cause, symptoms may include diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, aches and pains, and can sometimes be fatal.

To keep your food safe during hot weather:

- make sure you properly store any food that needs to be refrigerated
- defrost frozen foods in the fridge, not on the kitchen bench
- clean up food preparation areas after use to remove pathogens
- avoid over-crowding your fridge with leftovers as this can affect the temperature and increase risk of spoilage.

Visit [Food Authority of NSW](#) for more information about keeping food safe during hot weather and their [handy checklist about safe](#)



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**food preparation.**

**Manage your medications**

- Most medications should be stored below 25 degrees Celsius.
- Only store medicine in the refrigerator if the label says so, or if your doctor or pharmacist has told you to.
- If you need to go out in hot weather, consider just taking the medicines you will need while you are out. Think about how you will keep these cool and dry.



If unsure, ask your pharmacist about how your medication should be stored.

For information on managing medications in the event of a power outage see [Staying safe and healthy during extended power outages.](#)

**During and after a power failure**

A power failure could result in your battery-operated equipment failing to charge and erratic charging could even damage your battery or the equipment. Surge protectors on leads can help prevent damage and find an alternate way of charging or powering your PA.



If a power failure affects your refrigerator or freezer there is a risk that some foods and medicines may become unsafe.

If you experience a power outage, make note of the time the power failed and keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible..

For more information visit [Staying safe and healthy during extended power outages.](#)

It can be useful to keep a torch, radio (and batteries) and a first-aid kit handy.



**Actions when hot weather is forecast**

- If you have air-conditioning that is used for both heating and cooling, make sure it is set to cool.
- Stock up on food and drinks for your household and pets, and medicines to last the period of forecast hot weather so that you can avoid going out in the hottest part of the day.
- Fill ice trays in your freezer or put some cool-packs in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Use an esky or cooler in your vehicle to keep drinks cold and protected from excessive heat.



- **Check in with family and friends** who may be more at risk during hot weather to see if there is anything they might need to help them prepare.

- Consider how changes in weather might impact planned daily activities and exercise routines.



- Check alerts for roads and transport during extreme weather events and bushfires.

- Wear a cooling scarf and clothing that protects you from the heat e.g. a woollen coat and a hat can block ultraviolet and sunrays, whereas you can still burn when wearing a light shirt or blouse.



- Carry a damp towel to cool yourself and to wipe away perspiration. Spinning a damp towel in the air can cool it quickly.



- Determine if mist sprays might be made available at the venue or procure a portable misting fan which can operate from a connected hose or a water tank operating for up to 12 hours.



**After the heat has passed**

The strain of heat exposure, including disrupted sleep, can be felt after the hot weather has passed.

- Stay aware of your health in the days following hot weather and seek medical help if you feel unwell.
- Continue to drink plenty of water.
- Take time to rest and recover.
- Check on family and friends **who may be more at risk** of the health effects of heat.

Battery operated Water spray fans





## Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages

### CHANGING OR REGISTERING A NAME

Information from the NSW-  
BDM webpage.

#### Registering a name

If married in Australia, you can take the surname of your husband, wife or partner or add their surname to yours, without registering a name change. You can use your official BDM marriage certificate which is a proof of marriage and identity, to prove your new name.

After a name change, you will need to notify the following:

#### State government

- NSW Land Registry, for home owners
- NSW Rental Bond Board, for renters
- NSW Pet Registry, for pet owners

#### Federal government

- Australian Electoral Commission
- Australian Passport Office
- Australian Taxation Office
- Centrelink

#### Other businesses

- Banks and building societies
- Insurance and superannuation providers
- Utility providers
- Mobile phone and internet providers

**The names that parents choose to register for their child** – or that people choose for themselves – must be consistent with the rules set out in the [NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1995](#).

It is important to choose a name carefully as it will appear on the NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages Register for life. A person's name establishes their legal identity and also appears on all important documentation such as Medicare cards, Passports and Driver's Licenses.

Under law, names that fall into one or more of the categories below may be considered prohibited.

- Names that are obscene or offensive e.g. swear words, names that include sexual, alcohol or drug references, racial or cultural slurs, or are otherwise likely to insult or offend.
- Names that are too long—The maximum number of characters for each of the family, given and middle names is 50.
- Names that consist of or include symbols without phonetic significance e.g. names such as 1st, Snr, include Roman Numerals, or random punctuation.
- Names that cannot be established by repute or usage

for some other reason. These names may be impractical for daily use in the community or for some other reason.

- Names that include official title or rank. You cannot register a name that might be confused with a title or rank that has been given through an official process, descent or inheritance. e.g. Doctor or Duke of Edinburgh.
- Names that are contrary to the public interest including those that cause social disharmony, use trademarks, or refer to administrative processes. e.g. Adolf Hitler, the Soccerroos, or Passport.

If it is determined that the name you chose may be prohibited, the Registry will contact you to understand why you have chosen the name and whether the name has specific relevance to you, your family or culture. In making the decision whether to register the name, the Registry will also consider:

- how the name is currently perceived in the community
- how the name is spelt and how it sounds when spoken
- suitability of the name for legal identity and administrative purposes
- cultural or religious reasons for choosing a name
- its legal obligations.

#### Who can apply for a change of name

You can apply to change your name if you are over the age of 18 and:

- your birth is registered in NSW, or
- you were born overseas and have been a resident in NSW for 3 consecutive years when you apply, or
- your birth is not registered in NSW and a protection order has been made to protect you and/or your children from domestic violence.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

**The *Married Women's Property Act* enabled married women to hold property of their own, sue and be sued, enter into contracts, be subject to bankruptcy laws, be liable for the debts contracted before their marriage, and for the maintenance of their children. Victoria passed legislation in 1884, New South Wales in 1879, and the remaining states passed similar legislation between 1890-97.**

<https://timeline.awava.org.au/archives/21>

# NSW Gvt Business Assistance



Set yourself up for success this new year. The NSW Government has multiple programs designed to help you expand and grow your business in 2025, including:

Fee-free short courses in digital or construction. Free local, independent advisory sessions, events and resources on business planning, marketing and cash flow.

Get in touch with the **Service NSW Business Bureau** to take advantage of these and many other valuable government programs.

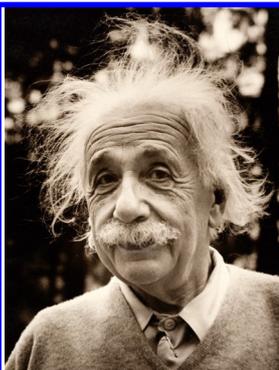
Financial incentives to electrify your fleet  
It costs **70% less to run** an electric vehicle (EV) and **40% less to maintain**. Now the **NSW Government** is helping you reduce the upfront costs too.

If your business has a fleet of at least 3 vehicles, you may be eligible to claim **\$5,000** to put towards the purchase of an EV passenger vehicle, and up to **\$20,000** per EV truck.

You can also claim **\$4,000 to \$8,000** for the **supply and installation of smart chargers at your premises**

Contact the Service NSW Business Bureau to get support

Call [13 77 88](tel:137788) Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm.



## Quoted in Peter Michelmores's Einstein (p. 20)

“Einstein wore sweatshirts that grew rattier over the years because wool sweaters made him itch. When his wife, Elsa, “urged him repeatedly to dress up for important company,” wrote one historian, “Einstein quipped that if the important visitors were coming to see him, they’d see him as he was; but if they were coming to see his clothes, Elsa would show them to his wardrobe.”

Nobody talks of his dress sense but his contribution to humanity”

# TRADITIONS?

## MARRIAGE TRADITIONS

Ever wondered why most marriage traditions go back just 500 years? According to the *How Things Work* website, it was not until the 16th Century, during the period of the Protestant Reformation, that Protestants introduced marriage rules that prohibited marriage when of the same blood or to someone in your spouse's family.

The Catholic church then claimed that true marriages required a priest and two witnesses.

This was it seems, the beginning of the church ceremonies for marriage, prohibition of marrying relatives and the introduction of the requirement for two witnesses we still have in use today.

*Betrothed Through the Centuries: A Timeline of Marriage | HowStuffWorks*

## BUSINESS CARD TIP

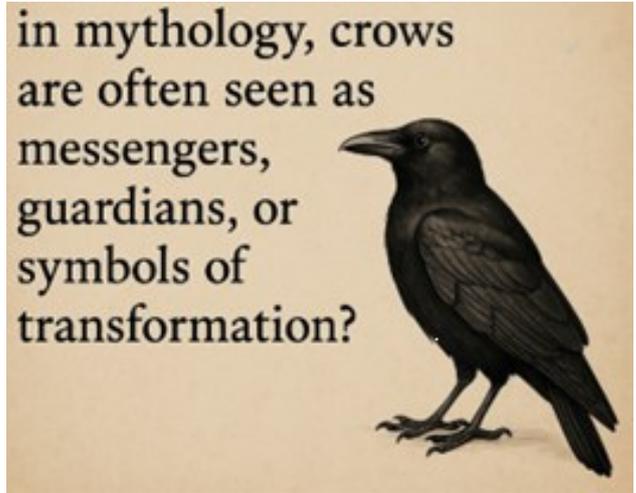
Business cards kept in a wallet or purse, tend to fade or suffer bent corners but if laminated, seem to last forever.

I've had a few items requiring lamination lately and rather than waste a full sleeve, if there is space, I fill that space in the sleeve with business cards and can then trim both the laminated item and the individual business cards to leave just a small laminate edge around each. The cards last significantly longer and there is less waste overall. Also, the laminate sleeves themselves can be purchased at bargain stores for a fraction of what you will pay in a stationery store. My current pack of 100 sleeves cost me about \$12. **NB: Never laminate BDM certificates as they have imbedded heat sensitive security and limitations destroy the security, and so actually invalidates the certificate.**

Sometimes people don't need help or advice. They simply just need someone to care without expectation, listen without judgement, and see them for who they truly are.

- Kristen Butler





# The Death of Crows

Described by some as sleek, black and beautiful and by others as evil incarnate, there is no doubt that Crows and Ravens are intelligent birds and we will often see videos of them using sticks and rocks as tools or solving problems. In some mythologies, crows are seen as a bad omen but in others are considered to be messengers of the gods. In early artwork, the Norse God, Odin, was depicted as being accompanied by two black birds, Huginn and Munnin which translates to “thought” and “memory,” and they served Odin’s by bringing him news each night from the land of men.

A gathering of Crows is a ‘murder’ of Crows, probably because historically crows were present at the gallows and at slaughters on the battlefields.

In England, the presence of Ravens is traditionally believed to protect the Crown and the Tower (of London) to the extent that the strongly held belief is “if the Tower of London ravens are lost or fly away, the Crown will fall and Britain with it”

Researchers explain that crows have at least 20 distinct vocalisations, some like the “caw” are public but most occur between individuals, and it is the editor’s observation that crows from different towns or regions will make different but distinctive, common vocalisations e.g. crows in Western Sydney have a distinct, low, long drawn out call that suggest depression while crow calls on the south coast are higher pitched, shorter and perhaps joyful sounding.

Mike Cahill, at Creepy Basement says, *“Seeing just a single crow is considered an omen of bad luck. Finding two crows, however, means good luck. Three crows mean health, and four crows mean wealth. Yet spotting five crows means sickness is coming, and witnessing six crows means death is nearby.”*

In Egyptian mythology, Nephthys, who oversees funerary rituals, is often depicted as a woman with falcon-wings but also appears as a crow or the crow is her companion. Nephthys represents part of the life cycle that is death, while her twin sister Isis represents

birth, so that death and life are never separated.

Referred to as “unclean” in the Bible, in Genesis, after the flood waters receded, it was a raven that was the first bird Noah sent out from the ark to find land while in the Hebrew Talmud, and in the Qur’an, when Cain slew Abel, it was a raven that taught Adam and Eve how to bury the body because they had never done so before.

So, we are already seeing hints of interest for celebrants but there is more in an article by Alice Lipscombe-Southwell of the BBC, published 21<sup>st</sup> May 2022 and another from Birdlife, published 24th June 2025, which delved into The Crow Funeral – Why *These Birds Gather Around Their Dead*. Those articles, and others, explain that when a crow dies, other crows gather around their fallen comrade for about 15 or 20 minutes or so, in what appears to be a mourning ritual.

It should also be mentioned that Crows mate for life with both parents actively engaged in parenthood, caring for their young for a period of up to five years with the help of “aunts,” siblings, and older youngsters who protect the youngest birds after hatching (3 or 4 eggs).

According to Dr Swift, most animals have really robust responses to their dead, particularly elephants, primates, whales, and dolphins.

In an article titled ‘Elephants Grieve’, from 2018, Brigitte Ganger reported that Elephants are some of the most emotionally intelligent animals on the planet. They are highly social creatures, living in communities with hierarchies, families and demonstrating self-awareness while able to use tools, mimic sounds, solve problems and even play to amuse themselves and others and they also participate in funeral rituals at which they may cry at the death or body of another elephant.

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Researchers have observed elephants examining the bones of other elephants with their trunks. in a quiet, deferential process. They do this with the bones of relatives and non-relatives alike, even when the bones are old. Elephants also bury bodies. They also mourn the loss of humans. [Wild elephants congregated for a two-day vigil](#) when “The Elephant Whisperer,” Lawrence Anthony, passed away. Wild elephants that knew him travelled great distances to stand guard (vigil) outside his house.

According to *Whale and Dolphin Conservation*, Scientists have observed seven species of whales and dolphins mourn their dead pod mates and relatives in their own ways. A team of researchers reported seeing dead calves or juveniles being carried by adult Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins, spinner dolphins, orcas, Australian humpback dolphins and sperm whales, in some instances for a long time after the youngster had died. Perhaps the most heartbreaking story is the one of Tahlequah, an orca mother who carried her dead newborn around for an astonishing seventeen days until she finally let it go, having travelled over 1600 kilometres.

Non-Human primates, notably gorillas and chimpanzees, are known to display distinct mourning and grieving behaviours. Chimps are known to groom



and care for the dying and then defend the bodies of the deceased.

Crows, as one of the most intelligent bird species on the planet, exhibit

complex behaviours that challenge our understanding of animal cognition and social awareness. Their funeral-like assemblies around deceased members of their kind represent one of the most sophisticated behavioural responses to death documented in non-human animals, thereby offering insights into crow intelligence, social structures, emotions and communicating information.

Dr Kaeli Swift of the University of Washington

published research in 2022. Later, John Marzluff and his team, also at the University of Washington also observed that when crows encountered dead members of their species, the first crow made a loud & distinctive alarm call that differed from their normal vocalizations and this rapidly attracted dozens of other crows to the scene to typically circle above the deceased, creating a cacophony of calls before gradually descending to investigate the body more closely. Some birds may approach and retreat repeatedly, while others perch nearby and observe the scene.

The congregation can last anywhere from a few minutes to over an hour, with the birds showing visible agitation throughout the gathering. Unlike scavengers that might be expected to feed on carrion, the crows rarely attempt to consume their dead peers, instead focusing on observation and vocalization.

Studies have shown that crows can remember locations where they've seen dead crows and avoid the area for months or even years and it's not unusual for crows to live for 14 to 17 years.

Research has demonstrated in controlled experiments that crows largely ignored dead pigeons, robins, or other non-corvid birds placed in their territories, but reacted intensely to dead crows, suggesting a level of self-awareness not commonly attributed to birds. Even more remarkably, some studies indicate that crows may respond more strongly to familiar individuals than to strange crows, suggesting they might recognise specific members of their community even in death.

One remarkable aspect of crow funerals is how the behaviour appears to be culturally transmitted rather than purely instinctual. Young crows learn funeral behaviour by observing adults, gradually incorporating the appropriate responses into their behavioural repertoire.

- [The Crow Funeral – Why These Birds Gather Around Their Dead - bird-life.com](#)
- <https://www.sciencefocus.com/nature/raven-crow-funerals-intelligence>
- <https://www.learnreligions.com/the-magic-of-crows-and-ravens-2562511>
- <https://sarawrightnature.wordpress.com/tag/crow-mythology/>
- <https://us.whales.org/whales-dolphins/do-whales-and-dolphin-grieve-for-their-dead/>
- <https://us.whales.org/whales-dolphins/do-whales-and-dolphin-grieve-for-their-dead/>
- <https://whalescientists.com/grief-dolphins-whales/>
- <https://oercommons.org/courseware/lesson/103320/student/?section=3>
- <https://www.discoverwildlife.com/animal-facts/birds/why-is-it-called-a-murder-of-crows>
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# AFP

# FORCED MARRIAGE

**Schools urged to play a frontline role in protecting children against forced marriage**

The questions we ask couple's regarding their consent have purpose and necessity.

The editor is not aware of any reports of Civil Celebrants conducting forced marriages but at least two Civil Celebrants have been approached in the past few years and of course declined to proceed and it is understood that those were reported to authorities however we all need to be aware and alert.

Back before the 1970's when children born out of wedlock were shamefully called 'bastards', forced marriages were more common in Australia as couples were sometimes forced to marry by their own parents, to avoid societal 'shame'.

The alternative was that a pregnant but unmarried young woman or girl might have been scurried away to a 'home for unmarried mothers' for the duration of the pregnancy resulting in the newborn being given or taken away for adoption, or the young woman's parents would claim the newborn as their own.

The trauma caused by such events was incalculable.

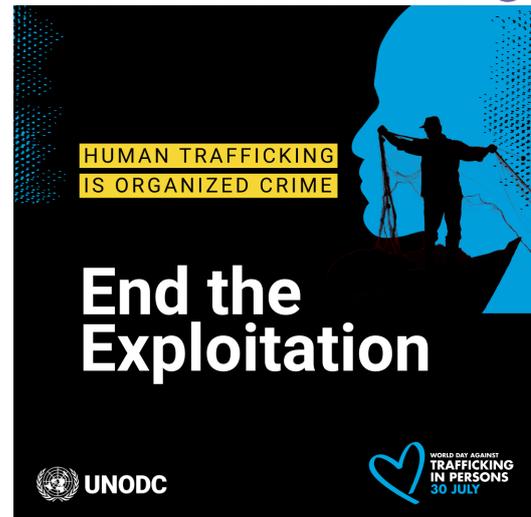
Whilst it can therefore be argued that the introduction of the contraception pill, legalisation enabling abortions, and the introduction of a single parent pension, dramatically reduced forced marriages and children born out of wedlock as is supported by statistics from that era.

The 'shame' factor is all but gone but gone forced marriage still exists however is now identified as human trafficking & exploitation.

A Media Release on 28 January 2026, tells us the AFP-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) has called on school communities to help identify and protect vulnerable children amid a growth in reports of forced marriage.

**According to the latest figures, reports of forced marriage into the ACCCE jumped almost 30 per cent last financial year, from 91 in 2023-24 to 118 in 2024-25.**

AFP Commander Human Exploitation Helen Schneider said while the figures didn't necessarily represent a



growth in offending, they did highlight why it was so critical for Australian school communities to understand their role on the frontline of defence.

*"As Australian school communities prepare to ring in a new year, it's an exciting time for everyone involved, from teachers and principals to parents and guardians,"* Commander Schneider said.

*"But, in among that excitement, it's also timely to raise awareness of the role these communities have to play in helping to tackle the very real risk of forced marriage."*

*"It's a crime people often assume doesn't happen here in Australia. But it can and it does - it could be happening in your neighbourhood and your street."*

*"And, with potential victims often being school-aged, this makes school communities – from educators and parents through to fellow students – a key partner in awareness."*

Forced marriage describes when a person is married without freely and fully consenting, either because they have been coerced, threatened or deceived, or because they are incapable of understanding the nature and effect of a marriage ceremony, for reasons including age or mental capacity.

The legal age for marriage in Australia is 18. While a child aged 16 to 18 can obtain permission from a Court to marry, the person they wed must be an adult.

According to Commander Schneider, forced marriage has historically been an under-reported crime in Australia, in part because of a lack of recognition of the warning signs.

It's here school communities can come into play, building on the proximity and insight that come with being in a classroom.

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*“Because educators interact with their students day in and day out, they get to know them at a fundamental level and build up an authentic picture of their personalities,” she said.*

*“This uniquely positions them to identify any changes in behaviour that could seem incredibly subtle to an outsider, but may actually indicate a school-aged child is at risk of forced marriage.”*

Warning signs included children who have very limited independence and privacy, are constantly monitored by a family member, have expressed concerns about planned family travel overseas, or have flagged a sudden change in domestic circumstances.

Other indicators include:

Sudden withdrawal or isolation from their school friends;

Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, self-harm or panic attacks;

A sudden drop in effort or performance in schoolwork;

Expressing concerns of physical or psychological violence for not fulfilling family or community expectations;

Older siblings who left education early or married young.

Commander Schneider said forced marriage was a complex crime because it often involved family members as victims and perpetrators, so young victims might be reluctant to involve police or not know where to seek help.

*“People may not report this crime due to a lack of awareness of their rights, a distrust of law enforcement, and a fear of retribution, especially when the perpetrators are from their own communities or families,” she said.*

It’s something the ACCCE continues to address through its Human Exploitation Community Officer (HECO) program. Based around the country, these officers engage with at-risk areas of the community, including schools where concerns have been raised about forced marriage, to provide advice about people’s rights and how to seek help.

Commander Schneider said while most reported victims were young women and girls, anyone could be a victim of forced marriage, regardless of their religion, ethnicity or gender.

*“If you suspect you, or someone you know at school, is being forced, threatened, coerced or deceived into marriage, please do not hesitate to seek help,” she said.*

*“If you do not feel comfortable speaking to police there are other services and agencies that can provide support.”*

Forced marriage has been illegal in Australia since 2013, with the laws tightened in 2019 to extend protection to children under 16.

It can apply to legally recognised marriages, cultural or religious ceremonies, marriages which occur in Australia or where a person is taken overseas to be

married, and can include the conduct of those involved in facilitating the forced marriage.

Forced marriages are different to legally arranged marriages which are entered into with the full knowledge and consent of all parties.

If you suspect that you, or another person, has experienced, or is at risk of, forced marriage or human trafficking, call 131 AFP (237) or use the [AFP’s human trafficking online information report](#).

If you have immediate concerns for your safety, the safety of another person, or there is an emergency, dial Triple Zero (000).

[My Blue Sky](#), an initiative of ACCCE partner Anti-Slavery Australia, delivers specialised advice and support to individuals and communities affected by forced marriage.

Life Without Barrier’s [Forced Marriage Specialist Support Program](#) (FMSSP), funded by the Federal Government, is a national program supporting people at risk of, or experiencing, a forced marriage.

[Schools urged to play a frontline role in protecting children against forced marriage | Australian Federal Police](#)

<https://search.informit.org/doi/pdf/10.3316/informit.752050445889848>

## MAIL ORDER BRIDE SCAM

Romance scams are well publicised. gullible men and women develop online relationships with their ideal partner who is independently wealthy but somehow needs a few dollars urgently because all funds are tied up in a trust or transactions. Flights are paid for but somehow the fiancé’ is falsely arrested while in transit and so needs funds to pay a fine, a bribe, or for a



Continued next page.....

# STAND UP FOR MARRIAGE

## A MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE IS MORE THAN A PIECE OF PAPER.

Many couples tell of how marriage has strengthened & enhanced their relationship and how wonderful it feels to be married. They experience confidence and security in knowing that the partnership is real, permanent and loving.

When my wife and I married just over 48 years ago I think we were both surprised at just how beautiful it was to step forward knowing that the joy we brought to each other would be there forever.

Some couples who have lived together for years without marriage have not realised that the legal rights for a couple in a defacto relationship are not quite the same as for a married couple, especially if there is no Will or Medical Directive. When they hear that if you have been together for two years, you have equal rights to that of a married couple they don't always realise that in reality it may not be as simple.

**With a marriage, you are immediately the next-of-kin, and with that, you are given protection under the law with regards to property, assets, inheritance, insurances, medical care and so much more.**

If not married, you may not be accepted as the *'next of kin'* in an emergency situation even if you have been together for many years.

I will give you some hypothetical examples based on real events (names changed):

- ◇ John who was estranged from his family, and Mary had postponed their marriage though they had four teenage children. John got sick but Mary discovered that any member of John's extended family with whom there was no communication, and not Mary, was legally the next of kin able to make medical decisions about John's care while Mary could even be removed entirely from the situation. After John's death, Mary had to sue for her share of the estate.
- ◇ A couple were in defacto relationship for many years when John suddenly died without having specified Mary on insurances and so Mary had to go through a protracted & expensive legal battle to prove entitlement to the estate which included their home, his superannuation and life insurances.
- ◇ John & Jane married young but they separated within a few months with no assets. They both moved on but didn't bother filing for divorce. Years later, John fell in love with Mary and planning a future together, bought a house, but John suddenly died with no Will and so Jane, the

first partner long forgotten about, was still the legal spouse and entitled to claim his entire estate and could even control his funeral.

- ◇ John's parents threw him out of the family home at 14 when he told his parents that he was gay. John had no contact with his parents from that point on but later in life, he found Brian, the love of his life, and they were together for almost 20 years. They never married though they bought a house together making it their home from where they ran a business. Their lives were totally intertwined. John suddenly took ill and was rushed to a hospital. Fearing the worst, Brian phoned John's parents from the ICU though he had never met them, and they rushed to John's side where they took over as *'next of kin'*. They threw Brian out of the ICU and Brian could only look through a window as his love died. At John's funeral, the parents didn't even acknowledge Brian. At first they refused his attendance but relented, allowing him to sit in the back row. The eulogy included mention of John's girlfriends at high school but there was no mention of his love for Brian. As there was no Will, John's estate was automatically granted to his next of kin (his parents) and the parents immediately took possession of all of John's assets, including his share of the home he and Brian had built. They tried to evict Brian and charge him rent. A distraught and grieving Brian had to sue for his share of the estate and to continue their business.
- ◇ John and Mary and their baby were in a car accident. Mary and John could each make medical decisions about their baby as parents/next of kin, but not of each other, as they were not married and so were not next of kin to each other.



So the suggestion is:

- i) If you plan to be together for ever, get married. It is worth it.
- ii) Make a Will, whether you marry or not, noting that when you marry, it voids your previous Will and so you should make a new one.
- iii) If not married but together and you want your partner to make medical decisions in an emergency and not your ex-partner or parents, see a solicitor to create an Advanced Care Directive
- iv) Live happily ever after

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lawyer. The fiancé' never arrives at their destination and in fact never stepped away from their computer as they are eventually determined to actually be a scammer in a smoke filled computer room somewhere in Nigeria. Another scam is where the perfect partner asks for



intimate photos and then blackmail the victim lest the photos be distributed.

There are other scams though. This next story outlines one.

When we conduct ceremonies, Celebrants are often approached by guests who like to share their stories.

One man on his 30's related his unfortunate story of a failed marriage, or rather what he described as him being scammed.

He explained that he began a relationship online with a beautiful Hungarian woman. He even flew to Hungary to meet her family and visit her village so he was convinced that all was genuine.

There were various expenses assisting her family (or so he thought). He eventually paid for her travel to Australia where they married. It was only when they completed the NOIM that he discovered she had Russian birth certificate and her place of birth was not the village he had visited but at the time that seemed unimportant. The marriage took place and they settled into the home he had purchased. He believed they were very happy, especially when their child was born. He had a great job and though not high paying, he worked hard to provide for his happy family however he came home one day to an empty house. Unable to find his wife and child, he went to Police and to his horror was arrested and charged with assault after his wife had attended the station earlier with obvious signs of a severe beating. She had identified him as the offender.

She filed for divorce and a property settlement the next day. He said that he couldn't prove his innocence, After all there were the medical records of the beating and her statement to Police.

He went to a men's group to find solace but to his surprise, he met others with identical stories. At their



AI generated photos of Russian brides.



urging, he did photo match search and discovered that images of his 'bride', like theirs, had appeared on prostitution web sites run by the Russian mafia. He continued his investigation and even went door to door speaking with his neighbours who told him that suspicious looking Eastern European men had visited the house while he was at work and it was the same men who accompanied her when she left the house uninjured, to attend the Police station but the men did not enter the station, and as mentioned, she was severely beaten when she attended the station.. The men waited outside. He said Police did not believe him but told him they had a series of similar cases.

His summary was as follows:

- Teenage girls are taken by criminal gangs and their families threatened to keep quiet.
- The girls are forced into prostitution.
- Eventually the young women have their photos posted (or an AI image) as Eastern European brides.
- Once a 'match' is secured, money is requested for the family.
- The family he met in Hungary were not related and the bank accounts he sent funds to were the same accounts the other men had sent money to. *(The woman's family were actually in Russia in the same village nominated on her birth certificate).*
- The young woman, are instructed to marry and remain with the new husband for two years during which time she should become pregnant (boosts financial settlement).
- After two years, the bride is expected to be a joint signatory on a bank account which will then be drained.
- She will be escorted to a Police station to report physical abuse. She is to either injure herself or be injured to validate the allegations.
- Once a divorce settlement is achieved a portion is handed over to the controllers. The husband is left with little.
- The woman secures a single parent pension and may be allowed to remain in Australia but might also be pushed back into prostitution in Australia.
- The husband ends up with a criminal record for assault, reduced employability because of that record, a loss of 60% of his assets, a drained bank account, and is distrusted by colleagues who find his story implausible.



**‘Which Brings Me to you’ is a 2023 romantic comedy available on Prime.**

It stars [Lucy Hale](#), [Nat Wolff](#) and [John Gallagher Jr.](#)

We know that many couples meet at wedding and that is where this movie starts. Celebrants will of course be interested in the wedding which opens the movie but all we see of

the ceremony is the unusual exit in that the entire Bridal party and all the guests are already lined up on and below the stairs leading from a beautiful looking church . The doors fling open and the newly married couple excitedly come forward as guests throw an incredible amount of confetti (petals). It’s actually quite a long scene but we get to see some great images and might stimulate some ideas about ceremony exits. I can reveal that much without a warning as the movie promos include that very scene.

What follows is, as described in the promo: *“two romantic burnouts meet at a wedding and almost book up in the coatroom before putting the brakes on. They agree to exchange candid confessions about their pasts on the off chance that this might be the real thing.”* and so the viewer is taken on a somewhat humorous but very modern but touching rollercoaster journey of romantic discovery.

- [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3468380/?ref\\_=mv\\_close](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3468380/?ref_=mv_close)
- <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/feb/06/which-brings-me-to-you-review-mostly-charming-romcom-is-worth-puckering-up-for>

This is a little 2002 gem from the UK that will offer a bit of fun and perhaps some ideas, to the funeral celebrants among us. It is available on Tubi and on Prime under the name *‘Plots with a View’* but was retitled for the American market as *‘Undertaking Betty’*, hence the two titles.

What Celebrant wouldn’t like to perform a ‘Star Trek themed funeral’ complete with a torpedo! We see, tongue in cheek, what could be done.

*Plots with a View*, is a British romantic black comedy film written by [Frederick Ponzlov](#), directed by [Nick Hurran](#), starring an impressive line up with [Brenda Blethyn](#) of Vera fame, [Robert Pugh](#), [Alfred Molina](#), [Naomi Watts](#), [Lee Evans](#) and [Christopher Walken](#).

Boris Plots is director of Plots Funeral Home in the fictional Welsh village of Wrottin Powys. His rival is Frank Featherbed, an American, who is determined to revolutionise the undertaking business in Britain through the innovation of *“themed funerals”*.

Boris dreamed of only two things as a young boy: dancing and Betty Rhys-Jones while Betty secretly loved Boris, but could not fight her father's wishes, so she was married off to an untrustworthy gold digger.

It is light-hearted fun as only the British can do, including infidelity, murder plans, unrequited/resumed love, and even a bit of ballroom dancing along with some Jerry Springer (remember him?) The film was nominated for a Golden Hitchcock at the 2002 Dinard British Film Festival, and won a Cymru Award at the 2003 [BAFTA Awards](#), Wales. Worth a watch.

- ◇ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plots\\_with\\_a\\_View](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plots_with_a_View)



# CELEBRANT SNAPSHOT

## Karen Ambrose

For 16 years, dancer, Karen Ambrose was also a Celebrant in the Nowra area and comfortably connected her two careers. We wish her well on her retirement from Celebrancy.



She wrote that *"It's been a great 16 year journey but it's time to say goodbye due to many aspects that don't sit well with me. The industry is changing and becoming too challenging so it's time to focus elsewhere."*

With decades of experience in the Dance industry, Karen Ambrose found the transition to being a celebrant in 2010 an easy one! Her dancing and teaching career had given her the confidence and know-how to deal with creative people, organize programmes and engaging "audiences" of all sizes". She promises her couples that their ceremony will be choreographed and rehearsed for a seamless 'performance' on the day while adhering to the legal requirements.

Living and working in the Shoalhaven, just outside of Nowra, she is an AMC member and uses the business name of Designed Ceremonies. Her celebrancy training 14 years ago was face to face, in a classroom. Karen encountered a delay in securing her authorisation on a technicality as her first references didn't



meet the criteria and had to be reissued. Hence the process took three months and she was successfully appointed on January 13<sup>th</sup> 2010.

She still teaches dance and sometimes incorporates those skills assisting couples prepare for their reception, especially for local couples who are able to attend lessons regularly.

Her first ceremony was just two months after authorisation and despite the couple being her dance pupils whom she knew well, her leg was shaking right the way through!!

Karen conducts some of her ceremonies at her home but wherever she goes, she always has her signing table with fitted covering and her PA... and her larger ceremonies are assisted by her husband/roadie.

Her favoured ceremonies are Weddings and funerals, procuring bookings via her Karen believes that we currently have too many Celebrants as the numbers inhibits growth of existing Celebrancy businesses and that if there was a cap on numbers, all Celebrants could thrive.

Karen also believes that dancing is like your feet are dreaming.



*"Dancing is like your feet are dreaming".*  
Karen Ambrose

**Karen, Wishing you every success in your journey**

# DANCING IN PENRITH



Dancer, Karen Ambrose has retired from Celebrancy but continues with dance. By sheer coincidence, Pravin Gupta, poet & lawyer who regularly contributes to this newsletter, has taken up dance and asked that his teacher gets a mention in case couples might like lessons for their first dance in the Nepean area. He even secured a discount for our readers.



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At Penrith Ballroom Dance, Therese helps all ages - children to seniors - to enjoy ballroom dance. Group classes and private lessons are available to all. Along with school children, Therese has trained adults for proficiency awards and competitions. Her Senior's classes have helped older adults to enjoy their golden years, giving them a gentle, low-impact, social, aerobic exercise, set to music, to keep their mind and body active.

*Therese Walz*

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