**Ideas for modern weddings**

**Why shouldn’t weddings be fun ?**

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# Chapter 1 – Introduction

We now live in times where we have almost complete freedom to decide who, and how, we will marry.

Up until recently many of us were restricted by our laws or religions, or by the religions of our parents, as to what form our weddings took (or, in fact, whether a wedding was even possible).

No longer, for most of us.

But having the freedom to decide how to marry is one thing, using it is another.

By the time you are ready to marry, you will have probably been to a number of weddings. Although hopefully every wedding you have gone to will have been a happy experience, as it should be a time of joy for everyone involved, it is pretty likely that most of the actual wedding ceremonies you have attended have been, to put it fairly brutally, boring.

That has certainly been my experience.

While the love and goodwill emanating from a wedding ceremony makes attending it an enjoyable experience, the nuts and bolts behind the ceremony are not something that usually withstands much scrutiny, particularly from an entertainment point of view.

But it doesn’t have to be so ! In my opinion there is absolutely no reason why a non-religious wedding has to be boring. Sure, there is also no reason why it has to be entertaining, but there’s a big area between boring and entertaining that’s not, in my view, being used at present.

But it should be !

A wedding should be an effusion of love, good feelings, fun and interest, and now that most of us aren’t shackled by the restrictions of religion, it can be.

So, that’s what this book is all about: ideas to make non-religious weddings more enjoyable and more interesting.

But how can a relatively old bloke like myself, particularly a self- confessed (and partner-certified !) non-romantic, credibly write a book on that topic ?

Good question !

## Exhibit A

I got married for the second time not all that long ago, and I therefore had a chance to put some of my theories on weddings to the test. Although I was subject to a few restrictions, I was given the freedom to create a pre-wedding ceremony that immediately preceded the actual wedding. The transcript of that ceremony is set out in Appendix 1. It’s identical to the transcript that is available on the website associated with this book, and hopefully you may have already read it.

Now, although our pre-wedding ceremony isn’t going to make any list of the world’s great ceremonies, it did all that I had hoped it would do. It set the scene for our wedding (which was a fairly traditional non-religious, but short, ceremony), it personalised the whole thing, it told our story, and it gave those present a few laughs. As an unintended side-effect, there were even tears.

Despite the tears, as I will mention again later in this book, I was told by the wedding celebrant that the pre-wedding ceremony created a happy “vibe” that carried through to the wedding ceremony itself, and then the reception afterwards. We got great feedback from those attending, and based on that I am confident in saying that even those who couldn’t understand much of it (my now in-laws) found it to be entertaining, and no one found it to be boring.

And when I say feedback, I’m not just talking about immediate feedback. Whenever we run into friends who attended the wedding, and who we haven’t seen in a while, a very common topic of conversation, completely uninitiated by us, is what a great wedding we had, and how enjoyable it was for our friends.

If a non-romantic relatively old bloke can achieve that, imagine what you can achieve, particularly with the help that you will find in this book. (In saying that, I’m assuming, of course, that non-romantic relatively old blokes are not likely to be reading this.)

By the way, I am well aware that my example is really cheating, in that I didn’t do anything to try to make the wedding ceremony itself more entertaining. Given the carry-over effect of the vibe that I described above, I am hoping that you don’t see that as a great problem. In any event, I do have ideas in this book in relation to the wedding ceremony itself.

## Exhibit B

Unfortunately Exhibit B is this book itself. The only way you can see for yourself whether I am talking through my hat or not is to have a bit of look below: suck it and see, as we say in Australia. (And in case my use of a common phrase may have given you the wrong impression, can I just clarify that I am not so old that I am a hat wearer.)

What you will find in this book is ideas. Ideas on all sorts of things to do with weddings. And the beauty of ideas is that an idea is an idea, regardless of how it was created, by whom it was created, or by how old or non-romantic the creator was. If you like an idea, none of that stuff matters. And if you don’t like an idea, maybe it will prompt you to think of your own ideas of what you might do for your own wedding.

So, one way or another it is very much my hope that you’ll find, or be prompted to come up with, at least one idea that you can use to make your wedding a better experience for you and your guests than it otherwise would have been.

And as for this book being written by a non-romantic, perhaps it may not be such a bad thing after all – hopefully clear-eyed level- headedness trumps gushy romanticism when it comes to the nitty- gritty issues to do with weddings (and, in any event, you shouldn’t believe everything you read – you will find some almost gushy romanticism in Section 8 of Appendix 3, or, at the very least, an attempt at creating it, and all of it my own work !).

## What’s in this book in more detail

This book is a bit strange in that the main bit of the book is completely overshadowed by the Appendices. That’s deliberate. The Appendices contain detail about things that may not be relevant to what you decide you would like to do.

As for the main bit of this book:

Chapter 2 is entitled “Goldilocks and the wedding ceremony”. Don’t worry, it’s not a follow-on from the famous story – that would be a bit too mind-blowing. Instead, it’s an exploration of the issue of how long, time-wise, a wedding ceremony should be – in particular, I suggest that there is a Goldilocks length of time that a wedding ceremony should take – not too long, but, much more importantly, not too short.

Chapter 3 looks at possible rituals that you might want to use in your wedding. These are put forward as a way of fleshing out a wedding ceremony, but also because they can add significance and meaning to a wedding, and can be quite culturally and spiritually important to both you, your partner, and those close to you.

In Chapter 4 I put forward my main idea: the idea that there should be a pre-wedding ceremony that sets the scene for a wedding by telling the story of those about to be married.

Chapters 5 and 6 set out a step-by-step guide as to how to go about organising a pre-wedding ceremony. Chapter 7 is a short summary of those steps.

And that’s that – that’s the book – 115 pages !

But if I had been successful in getting you interested in having a pre- wedding ceremony, and if I had left things there, I wouldn’t have achieved much. In fact, I would have left you high and dry. That’s because what really matters is what you put into your pre-wedding ceremony, and it’s a fairly daunting prospect to come up with that content from a standing start.

Given that I’ve been there, and done that, and have lots of other ideas to boot, the only sensible thing for me to do then was to take the next logical step and to also give you my ideas about what specifically to put into your pre-wedding ceremony.

But first, I thought it would be useful to give you some idea of what we are aiming to finish up with. And the best way to do that was to set out the transcript of an actual pre-wedding ceremony. So in Appendix 1 I have set out the transcript of my pre-wedding ceremony, which is the only such transcript that I am aware of. Given that I will be referring to it frequently in Appendices 2 and 3, it’s also not a bad thing to have a copy of it relatively handy.

Appendix 2 does most of the heavy-lifting of this book. First, it gives you lots of ideas as to what you should put into the story that will be the centrepiece of your pre-wedding ceremony. It then gives you very detailed guidance as to how to put the story together. In doing that I am even brave enough to make suggestions as to how you might be able to inject some humour into your story (of course, that comes with absolutely no guarantees !). This Appendix then goes on to provide detailed advice as to how you can actually tell your story yourself at your pre-wedding ceremony, if you feel so inclined. If you are not so inclined, it provides advice on alternative ways that you can have your story told.

I should also mention that I have included in this Appendix various illustrative stories. The stories are imaginatively titled “Story 1”, “Story 2” etc.. Most of them relate to me, and are basically true, so even if you aren’t otherwise interested in what’s in this Appendix, you might like to have a quick look at the stories – although none of them are funny ha ha, some of them are funny peculiar, and hopefully all of them are at least vaguely interesting. They will give you the definitive answer to the question: “Who’s the world’s most unromantic man ?”

Appendix 3 does the rest of the heavy-lifting that this book needs. It aims to help you create or find readings of the sort that I used to break up my pre-wedding talk. It also answers 2 rarely-asked questions: how ugly do things get when a non-romantic tries: 1) to analyse love poetry; or 2) to write anything that is vaguely romantic ?

Appendix 4 is only of relevance to anyone who would like to have a ceremony of the sort that I advocate in this book, but who intends to have the ceremony as something that happens after the wedding. It provides advice on how the steps I recommend in relation to preparing a pre-wedding ceremony should be modified for the purposes of a post-wedding ceremony. (By the way, I explain later in this Chapter why this situation might apply to you.)

Appendix 5 is intended to allay any concerns that anyone might have that a pre-wedding ceremony of the sort I advocate in this book will suck the oxygen out of wedding reception speeches. It makes it clear that there will still be a lot that such speeches can cover.

Appendix 6 is a document that is also available on the website associated with this book. It tells the fuller story of my wedding to Thi, and, in particular, how the pre-wedding ceremony, and its various components, came about. I have included it here because I refer to some of the material in it several times in this book.

Appendix 7 arose because I realised that parts of this book might be of use to people other than those about to marry. In particular, it might be of use to the following people:

- those who are going to publicly celebrate a wedding anniversary

- those who have been married for a while, and whose marriage might need a bit of a pep up

- those who would like to try to gauge their feelings towards their partner.

This Appendix explains in greater detail how this book (or parts of it, anyway) might be of use to those listed above.

Appendix 8 is titled “Shameless cross-promotion”. This book is my second book. This Appendix describes my first book to those who might be interested. To save you time, I can tell you now that that book is only going to be of possible interest to a very narrow group of readers: those who live in Sydney or Melbourne, Australia, and who are thinking of buying a house at auction, or who know someone who might be. What’s the connection between weddings and buying houses ? Well, it’s not uncommon for newlyweds to need somewhere new to live, but in fact that’s just a happy coincidence from my point of view – in reality neither book was written with the other in mind.

## What’s not in this book

If you were hoping that this book was a one-stop guide to everything to do with modern weddings, I’m afraid you will be very disappointed. There is almost nothing in here about the sort of stuff that is the bread-and-butter of a wedding planner, other than a discussion of things to include in a wedding ceremony. Instead, the vast bulk of this book is devoted to advocating for, and then describing how to create, a pre-wedding ceremony of the sort that is set out in Appendix 1.

But in me doing that, please keep in mind that I will suggest all sorts of ideas that can stand by themselves as part of a “normal” wedding ceremony, so it may still be worth your while to have a quick look at pretty much everything, but Chapter 3 and Appendix 3 in particular. I might even be able to coax a wry smile or 2 out of you here or there (particularly if you look at my attempts at writing ‘romantic’ stuff).

I also note that there is almost nothing in this book about wedding vows. That’s because I haven’t got anything interesting to say about them, and also because there’s lots of stuff about them on the Internet that can be easily found.

## Anything new ?

You might be wondering if the ideas in this book are anything new. The answer is, with respect to most of the material in this book, I don’t know. Certainly most of the ideas with respect to rituals are not new, but hopefully that’s sort of a given. Although I have some ideas for new rituals, in general by definition a ritual can’t be a ritual unless it’s been done many times by many people.

With respect to my central idea of a pre-marriage ceremony, everything in this book is original in the sense that the idea comes from me, rather than from anything I have seen, read or heard about. I have set out in Appendix 6 exactly how this all came about, and there is nothing missing from that account in terms of some unacknowledged source or inspiration.

However, in terms of whether anyone else has ever had a pre- marriage ceremony of the sort that I advocate, I would be amazed if it hasn’t been done many times before. But as far as I know, and it is a difficult thing to research, if someone else has done the same thing, no one else has written a guide as to how you can do the same thing yourself. That is what is definitely new in this book.

## Too burdensome ? Too adventurous ?

I am absolutely certain that the main idea that I advocate in this book, a pre-wedding ceremony that sets the scene for the wedding, is something that will be a step too far for most of the people who read this book.

Who in their right mind would take on something that will add considerably to the already considerable burdens involved in organising and participating in a wedding ? And particularly if I am recommending that you do a substantial bit of public-speaking ? (although that’s not a necessary part of my main idea)

I know, not many people.

So why have I written this book, or having written it, why am I selling it ?

Essentially 3 reasons:

1) For those few of you not in your right mind, or who are otherwise feeling a bit adventurous, I think the effort I have gone to will not be wasted – those of you who follow through with my pre-wedding ceremony idea will achieve something that is different, that is unique to you and your partner, that is meaningful, and that you and your partner will appreciate for the rest of your lives together, and that your guests will also appreciate.

2) I am very much hoping that even if my main idea is too much for you to run with, some of the incidental ideas that I have will be something that you can use for your wedding. The various rituals that I mention are the most obvious example of that. But also, for instance, in Appendix 3 I set out all sorts of ideas for readings that can be used in a pre-wedding ceremony. However, there is absolutely no reason why those ideas can’t be used instead in your wedding ceremony if you are not going to have a pre-wedding ceremony. And one of those ideas for a reading brings into play all of the ideas that are set out in Appendix 2.

3) As I explain elsewhere in this Chapter, my main idea is also something you can use if you are having a big-event anniversary, and things will be much more relaxed for that, so I am hoping it will be of use to lots of people in that situation.

## How burdensome ?

As for what you might be up for if you do decide to be adventurous, all I can do is to give you a rough idea of the time it took me to prepare our pre-wedding ceremony. Unfortunately at the time I did that work, the thought that I might write a book like this was still out in the depths of an alternative universe, so I kept no record of the time I spent on the work.

Based on memory, I took somewhere between 12 and 15 hours to write the talk, another couple of hours to try to find readings, perhaps 3 or 4 hours writing the readings I wrote, and another few hours to rehearse and refine the talk. That was for a 40 minute talk with 5 readings (4 of which I wrote).

I should note that I did not follow all of the suggested steps that I recommend in Appendix 2 with respect to rehearsing a talk (in my defence, Appendix 2 did not exist at that time, but the main reason was that I was under a bit of time pressure). If you follow those steps you might need an extra couple of hours. I note that those steps, and the other advice I give in relation to public speaking, are based on my experience in giving, and the usual preparation that I do for, talks that I present from time to time at conferences.

If you are not going to write your own readings, you could easily spend a lot more time than I did looking for readings. There is a lot of stuff out there, and, of course, it is very easy to distract oneself, and eat up hours, when looking for material on the Internet.

As for writing time, much depends on how readily the things you will write about come to mind. In my case I was fortunate that everything pretty much suggested and wrote itself. As for the actual writing, I am confident that if you take advantage of the suggestions that I have set out in Appendix 2, that won’t cause you any problems at all, regardless of whether you normally do much writing or not. (By the way, if you can text or tweet, you can write, despite what some of my fellow fogies might think !)

So, all things considered, you will need a fair chunk of time. However, if you can spread it over a few weeks you will find that it’s not as bad as it might at first sound. And then when you compare it with the amount of time you are likely to remain married, really, it’s nothing.

To put it another way, looking back, I now have no idea what I had to sacrifice, in terms of what else I would have done in the time that I used to prepare my talk, but I am pretty confident that it was nothing significant. But looking back, I have very fond memories of our pre- wedding ceremony, and I suspect that those memories are going to hang around for a good while yet. In other words, I consider the preparation time to have been time well spent.

## Geographical note

I live in Melbourne, Australia. This book, and the ideas in it, should be of interest and relevance to you wherever you are in the world, as there is nothing in it that depends on anything that is unique to Melbourne, or to Australia. The only qualifications to that are if you live somewhere where you do not have access to civil marriage celebrants, or if you have no say in the actual form of the civil ceremony.

But even if one of those 2 restrictions applies to you, it may be possible to adapt some of my ideas. For instance, it is my understanding that in Germany the actual wedding ceremony has to be a government-mandated civil ceremony in a registry office. However, it is also usual to have a celebration of the wedding that resembles what we call the “reception” in Australia. With various bits of tweaking (see Appendix 4) there is no reason why my suggested pre-wedding ceremony can’t be morphed into a post-wedding introduction to the post-wedding celebration.

## If you are having a religious wedding

That last thought prompts me to mention one more thing.

Hopefully it is clear from what I have already said that if you are planning to have a traditional religious wedding ceremony, I don’t think you’ll find much of interest in this book, unless you have a particular interest in my relationships, deficiencies and failings.

However, the last thought in the previous section could possibly also apply to you. As with someone who has no ability to change the contents of a civil wedding ceremony, you also have the option of perhaps having a pre-wedding-like ceremony of the sort that I advocate in this book as a post-wedding introduction to your reception (assuming that you will have a reception). This is particularly something you might want to consider if one of you (or your parents) is religious (hence the religious wedding ceremony), and the other of you is not. A pre-reception post-wedding ceremony gives the other of you a chance to put your own stamp on the day.

Of course, practical considerations need to be taken into account. This idea is not a great idea if your wedding ceremony will be long and exhausting. It also requires that you can use the reception place for this purpose, and that the reception place is suitable. Ideally you would have the pre-wedding-like ceremony before food is served, so that also requires that the timing will work out okay (so that there is enough time for the post-wedding activities plus enough time for everyone to get to the reception venue, and that no one risks starvation or dehydration while you have the ceremony).

I should also mention that later in this book when I provide arguments as to why you should have a pre-wedding ceremony, I list a number of reasons why it is not appropriate to present the sort of material I recommend should be in that ceremony at the reception. I do not resile from that. However, I note that most of the reasons I give do not apply to having a post-wedding ceremony as a lead-in to the reception. So long as the ceremony is a separate proceeding to the reception, I see no problem with having it precede the reception.

Finally, if you are having a religious wedding ceremony that is only half traditional, so that there might be some scope for you to add in your own readings, you might want to check out Appendix 3.

## Those who will not find this book of interest

I should also mention that there is a category of person who will almost definitely find nothing of interest in this book (unless you like unfunny stories). You fall into that category if you are intending to marry, but do not love the person you are about to marry.

Yes, one of the advantages of being a non-romantic person is the fact that I have no trouble imagining that not everyone who marries does so because they love the person they want to marry.

Surely I am joking ? Afraid not. And it is not necessarily an uncommon thing. For instance, if you are entering an arranged marriage, and you might be surprised at how many of those still occur, you are about to marry someone you basically don’t know. Sure in most arranged marriages love will arise after the marriage occurs, but for most people it can’t really be there at the time of marriage.

And marriages of convenience are not something that are confined to the pages of novels – they happen in real life, and for all sorts of reasons. The marriage might not involve any love or romance, but it can still be a good thing for the partners (assuming that they are both on board with the idea, of course).

So, there can be lots of good reasons why you might marry someone you don’t love, but if you are in this category, and regardless of the reason why you are in this category, or what your post-marriage intentions might be, this book will be as useful to you as a bicycle is for a fish (in fact, feminists and others take note, that’s not a great analogy, as here in Melbourne we know from experience (an ill-fated bike-rental scheme that saw many of the bikes deposited in our Yarra River) that bikes that have been in the water for long enough become mini-artificial reefs that can be quite useful for fish). The problem for you with my book is that pretty much everything in it is predicated on the weddings in relation to which it provides advice being the formalisation of a love-match. I know there is a terrible irony in that fact, given that I am a non-romantic, but it is so – the advice in this book will not work in any way, shape or form if those to be wed do not love each other at the time of the wedding.

## Those who will only find this book of limited interest

Sadly there are a couple of other categories of people who will only find this book of limited use or interest.

First, if your wedding is next week, I’m afraid my idea of a pre- wedding ceremony is not for you. Such a ceremony is something that needs a fair bit of time to organise. You might still find something of use in Chapter 3 (Rituals) and Appendix 3 (Readings), but otherwise I’m afraid everything else needs a longer time-frame to have any hope of being useful.

Second, my idea of a pre-wedding ceremony requires not only time to organise, but, as I have already mentioned, also a fair bit of effort. If you are having a relatively small wedding, like a total likely attendance of less than 20 people, you will probably not want to put that effort into something that can only be appreciated by such a small number of people. But, then, I’m a non-romantic. Again, you might still find something of use in Chapter 3 and in Appendix 3.