

# INTERVIEW

## Parvati Erikson

Parvati has been a popular Registered Marriage & Civil Union Celebrant for over eight years and is well known and respected for her work as a Ritual Maker, preparing personal ceremonies for the significant events along life's pathway, including marriages and recommitments.

### How did you come to be a marriage celebrant?

It was quite a journey. I was brought up in a Presbyterian orphanage in India, the child of a British father and an Indian mother. My life changed over 50 years ago when I was brought out to New Zealand. I worked as a hairdresser for some years then flight attendant for Air New Zealand until I married. In those days, married women were unable to continue flying, so I settled down to life in the country. I worked in different occupations after raising my two children and was very heavily involved for some years with the Waiuku support network counselling services. That included marriage guidance, helping people in crisis, with death and dying. I found my space there, helping people deal with emergencies in their lives. It was extremely privileged work, getting right inside the personal side of people's lives. It was while working in crisis intervention that I realised that I wanted to truly make a difference in the lives of people. I had studied four years at Manukau Tech, but suddenly the rules were changed at the end of my 4th year, making the papers I had completed null and void, this proved to be a terrible shock and disappointment.

While I was in India in 1996 to search for my roots, I was sitting high on a rock in Rajasthan in deep contemplation, it was then I felt I was at a crucial point in my life, and knew without doubt, that I would find my specific pathway. I love the elderly, I love people and had no fear of dealing with death and dying, but I also love the joy and celebration of marriage, naming, recommitments and so many rituals that are all a natural part of the circle of life.

I believe that life is all about timing, the right time, right place, and the right people. On my return after 4 months in India, I was given the name of a woman who had begun a Celebrant School as a Tech course in Auckland. I enrolled and after the first lecture, I had a smile on my face a mile wide, thinking "yes, yes, yes!"

It was so right – I just slid into this work, and while travelling through India I realised that this was part of me – my Indian part. I know that all the things I had done in my life were building blocks to a very rewarding career as a Ritual Maker and Registered Marriage Celebrant.

### Why do couples seek a Marriage Celebrant for their weddings?

Times have changed, and where once the church was the centre of the community, people now have a choice as to where and how their marriage will be performed. Couples look for a meaningful ceremony that is sacred and unique, marriage is such a special event in people's lives. At the first interview, I gather all the relevant details and then at the second, the ceremony is discussed. Some couples know exactly what they want, while



others don't have a clue, but as we talk, something evolves and there is such a lovely atmosphere. I tell all my couples, this is the ONE day in your life when you can have whatever you want. Parents can be honoured during the ceremony, but there are no "dos, don'ts, should or can't."

Once couples realise that they can design a truly unique marriage ceremony to reflect who they are and to express their deep love for each other, they relax and enjoy planning their special day. The only important rule is to keep the ceremony between just the 3 of us. It is precious and personal and on the day, all is revealed as a lovely surprise and delight for the guests to enjoy.

### Why is ritual for a marriage so important?

Every aspect of the ceremony is meaningful, every candle and flower, the choice of ring holder. Everything on the altar is there for a reason, with very special meaning for the bridal pair. For example, a couple may choose to symbolise their union by the binding of their hands in a soft scarf, reflecting the bonds of love and commitment. Binding ceremonies are an ancient symbolism used in many cultures and religions, where they didn't have rings and instead used vines or string. I am the facilitator, and together, we create the perfect ceremony for each individual couple.

### Some of your most memorable marriages?

They are all so special and so wonderful! I love bi-cultural marriages, with the opportunity to bring aspects of the different cultures into the ceremony – Korean, Brazilian, Scottish, Welsh and Japanese. The marriage of a British groom and Indian bride was very special for me personally, bringing together in such a joyous way, the two branches of my own cultural inheritance. Then, there was the marriage in the little church at Pollok, where the bridal party dressed in 1930s fashion as were all the guests.