

A Night at the Zoo

As a Civil Marriage Celebrant for over 20 years, I have been privileged to have been asked to conduct many wedding ceremonies. Many of the ceremonies have taken place in Reception Centres, Parks and Gardens, peoples back gardens and even on sandy beaches around the Bay. But there is one venue that clearly stays in my mind.

A couple requested their wedding ceremony be held at the Melbourne Zoo in a section close to the elephant enclosure in the middle of the Zoo grounds. There is an ancient held belief by many Asian people that if a marriage takes place in close proximity to elephants, good fortune and luck will go with the bride and groom throughout their married life. I recall the day of the ceremony was a particularly cold and wet winter's day, but the inclement weather held off during the ceremony.

Following the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom, and guests made their way to the Reception Centre close by in the Zoo, where the celebrations continued. I had been invited to attend the reception and after enjoying a delicious meal and listening to the many speeches I looked at my watch and saw it was close to midnight. I could hear the sound of rumbling thunder in the distance, so I thought it was time to say farewell to the bride and groom and endeavour to get back to my car before the rain arrived.

Once outside I looked up at the grey sky and felt moist drops of rain dribble down my cheeks. I pulled my overcoat closely around me and started to quicken my pace, hoping I could find the exit before the first spatter of rain turned to a downpour. I looked for lights along the pathway or overhead, to guide my way to the exit but to my surprise there were none. Nevertheless, I had a rough idea of the direction to follow which would lead me to the exit gate.

I started walking slowly feeling my way along the fence line but after a short distance I felt I wasn't making any progress. The paths seemed to be going in different directions and I could hear rustling in the bushes and heard the sound of lions roaring. I thought of returning to the Reception Centre to enquire about borrowing a torch but because of the darkness, I was unable to find my way back. Great! Here I was in the middle of the Zoo in the middle of the night with no idea which way to go and rain was just starting to fall. Bravely I decided to press on praying I was heading in the right direction.

As I rounded a bend I saw a faint light in the distance. I slowly made my way towards it. The next minute a bright light suddenly flashed in my face and a gruff voice called out, "What are you doing in the Zoo at this time of night?" I replied, "I'm looking for the exit." The grumpy voice replied, "I'm getting tired of finding members of the public in the Zoo grounds late at night. The animals get scared when they hear unusual noises. You never know what they may do. What's your excuse?"

"I'm a Marriage Celebrant and I conducted a wedding ceremony earlier in the day. I just need to find the way out." There was a heavy sigh, "In that case follow me."

After walking a short distance, we came to the exit gate. I thanked the security guard for his assistance and made my way to my car, vowing never again to be without a torch when conducting wedding ceremonies in the evening.