



Graham Sharp and Jacqui Clarke at Surf Air Resort are interviewed by Jo Wilson (left).

PHOTOS: WARREN LYNAM

CELEBRATING MARRIAGE

EXPERIENCED MARRIAGE CELEBRANT JACQUI CLARKE AND HER HUSBAND GRAHAM SHARP SHARE A PASSION FOR MAKING A COUPLE'S SPECIAL DAY PERSONALISED, INTIMATE AND MEMORABLE, FORGING LIFETIME FRIENDSHIPS ALONG THE WAY

WORDS: JOANNE WILSON

Who better to feature in my Relationship Influencers series than a Marriage Celebrant and Regional Coordinator of Australian Marriage Celebrants Inc. (AMC) with her husband. The gorgeous Jacqui has been in the coordinator role for seven years and facilitates meetings, networking and mentoring to support celebrants on the Sunshine Coast. Jacqui's music-loving, retired finance director husband Graham, enjoys being her 'Roadie' looking after the PA and music side of the ceremony.

Civil celebrants oversee the majority of marriages in Australia since 1999 with now 76.4 per cent of all marriages as stated in the last Australian Bureau of Statistics research. It is a statutory requirement of the Marriage Act 1961 that celebrants inform couples about the range of information and services available to them to enhance and sustain them throughout their relationship. For this reason, I have enjoyed an alliance for many years with AMC supporting couples with

pre-marriage counselling which is a worthy investment in their future! Enjoy my chat with Jacqui and Graham:

How did you meet and how long have you been married?

Jacqui: We met in 1995 through a mutual acquaintance in Melbourne and have been legally married since 2000. I say legally, because we had a small registry office wedding, which was not a good experience for a lot of reasons, and I never felt 'really married'.

Graham: We had a 'renewal of vows' a few months later in our home conducted by a female Anglican priest. It was a meaningful and beautiful ceremony with our closest friends and family and we had a lot of input into this ceremony. Jacqui now makes the most out of having two wedding anniversaries!

What is the highlight of your career so far?

Jacqui: I would have to say that my journey to becoming a celebrant has been

the best career path I could have wanted. I became a celebrant in 2007 and I cannot tell you the joy I experience when I know a couple are happy with their ceremony. Hearing a couple tell me that their wedding day is 'all about the ceremony' is an added bonus.

As successful parents and "Relationships Influencers", who have been your mentors or people you admire?

Jacqui: Without a doubt, my Mum and Dad first and foremost, each in different ways. Although I never met Graham's dad, his family were an amazing example of what a happy family looked like. Over the years I have been influenced by many strong people, from teachers and friends to environmentalists. I am especially proud of my three beautiful daughters and the way they have excelled in their own personal achievements and overcome so many challenges in their lives.

Graham: My dad was my best friend, a huge influence on my life and always

involved in my sporting activities. We were like mates.

Jacqui, we all have those days when we're not the best versions of ourselves. How do you overcome those sub-standard ones to fulfil your role as a celebrant?

Jacqui: When I am in my role as a celebrant, I try to be 100 per cent professional and present for the two people I am marrying or the ceremony I am conducting. It's a matter of staying focussed and putting everything else on the backburner.

What is the most challenging aspect of being a marriage celebrant?

One of the big challenges to being a marriage celebrant these days, is cost. Celebrants do not make a lot of money and it is rare for a celebrant to rely on their earnings to make a decent wage. Outgoings such as initial and ongoing training, professional development, annual registration, advertising and marketing, legal documents etc. are considerable. Sadly, many