

full circle

Life's milestones are infused with conscious awareness through the practice of celebrancy.

Yoga teacher Donna Belk plants her feet on the hard earth and spreads her toes, allowing herself to feel the larger ground that connects us all. As she stands in Tadasana, she is a mountain, knowing herself from the ground up while at the same time locating herself in the sky. Belk is not leading an outdoor yoga practice; she's graveside, about to officiate at a funeral.

As one of more than 400 life-cycle celebrants nationwide, Belk creates ceremonies that acknowledge transitions and rites of passage, including births, adoptions, funerals, commitments, divorces, and animal tributes. Founded in Australia 30 years ago and now an emerging trend in the United States, celebrancy offers people, particularly those who are not connected with a religious tradition, meaningful options for observing life's milestones. Guy Walton, owner of Johnson-Walton Funeral Home in Milford, New Jersey, says, "I direct my clients who have no ties to a church or clergy to a funeral celebrant, because I know their loved one will be memorialized in a significant way."

Each ceremony is individually tailored to the participants' needs. When planning a funeral, for example, a celebrant works closely with the family of the deceased to choose readings, music, and words that will honor their loved one's life and nourish all who gather to pay tribute.

In her role as a celebrant, Belk draws heavily on lessons of consciousness learned both on and off the mat. "When I create a ceremony, I am in a state of relaxed focus," says Belk. "It's the same as when I teach a yoga class: I am creating a container where people feel safe and can open up to their feelings."

Anywhere a family chooses to hold a ceremony, whether it's a funeral home, park, beach, or gravesite, can become a sacred space. Joyce Otto Prapuolenis held her dad's memorial at a restaurant in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania. "Having a life-cycle celebrant perform the service for my father was personal and healing for all of us," she recalls. "We had more laughs than tears, just as my father would have wanted it." DORRY BLESS



OBSERVE WITH CEREMONY

Celebrancy can help commemorate many of life's less traditional transitions and milestones, including coming of age, career transition, moving into a new home, recovery from illness, and new parenthood. Visit the Celebrant Foundation & Institute (celebrantinstitute.org) for more information.