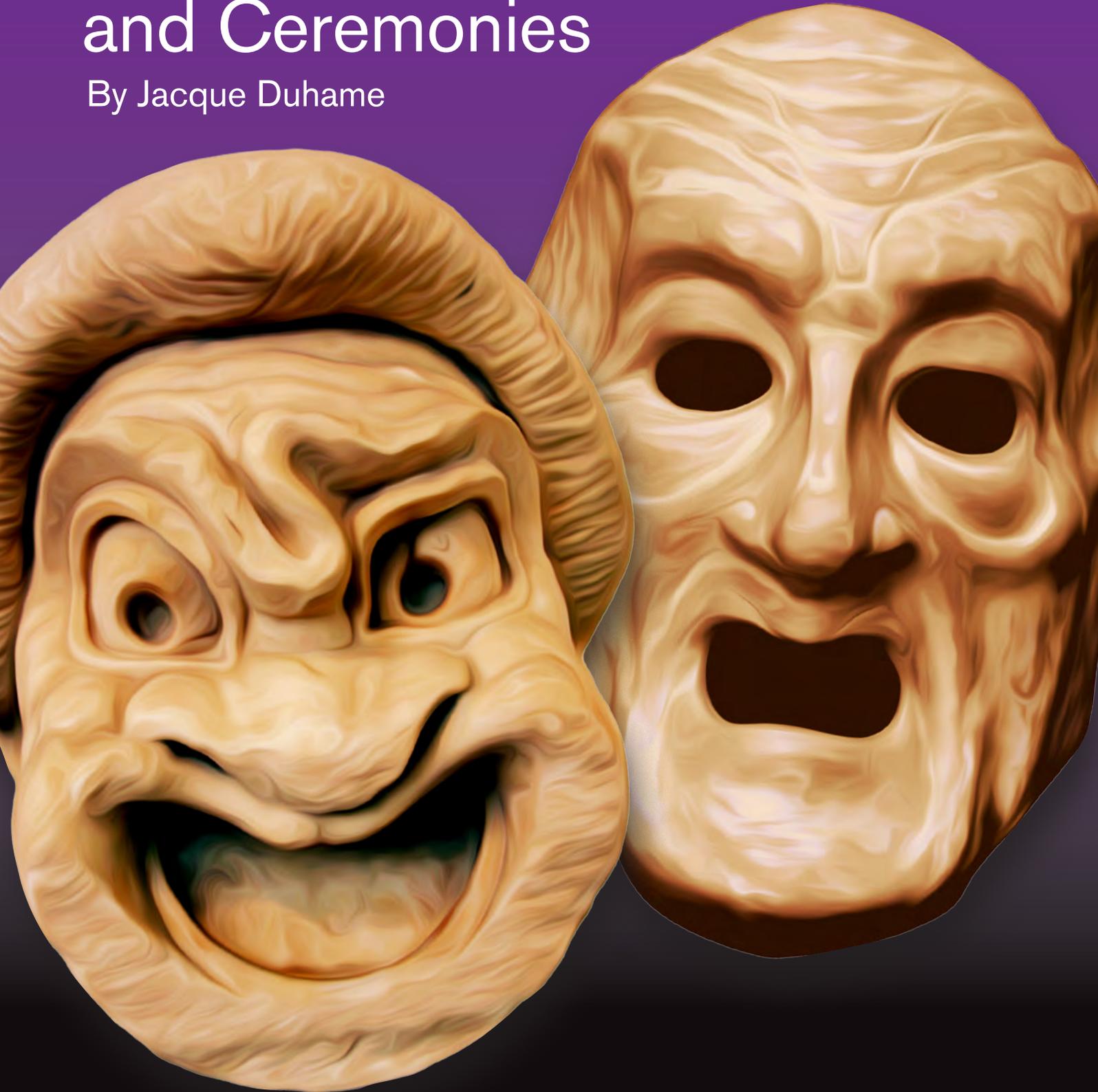


THE EVOLUTION OF EVENTS: Healing with Traditions, Rituals and Ceremonies

By Jacque Duhame



IT MAY HAVE STARTED WITH ARISTOTLE.

Greek playwrights were teachers, using tales of comedy and tragedy to create community, provide information, present ethical and moral direction, send messages of unity to allies, and provide commentary about religious, political and social events.

The orchestra, a circular space in front of the stage, was the dancing space where The Chorus added to the story. The Chorus set the mood, was the occasional "laugh track," accented the consequences and highlighted and added to the moral and message of the story. Reacting, singing and dancing, the Chorus served as the intersection where actors and audience interacted. They created a sacred space where energy and participation in something greater was shared giving people a sense of place.¹

Today we call these festivals and events. They are celebrations with ceremony and they are ceremonial events with rituals and traditions.

Our electronic devices and modern-day ways of communicating give the illusion that we are connected to each other, our community or world, but sadly we are really disconnected personally, physically, emotionally and spiritually which affects health.

That, as we know, is where festivals and events play the greatest role: they create the connection. They are the town square of days past where people gather to be part of something larger; announcements are made, milestones of life are celebrated, votes are taken and the inauguration of leaders occurs, the dead are honored, people with common passions assemble and bond, where stories and history are told — much like the Greeks in the 5th Century BC.

Besides the gathering of people and our need for connection and celebration, each festival, meeting or event has its own rituals, ceremonies, customs, cultural meanings and traditions. Whether scripted and intentional by the organizers or grown organically by the attendees, they are fundamental and significant to each event.

Many years ago, I occasionally would work for my PR friends escorting book authors for signings and media appearances when they came to Phoenix. That is the only way I would have ended up sitting in a lecture hearing author, Carl A. Hammerschlag, M.D.,

talk about rituals, ceremonies and traditions and how they can heal us spiritually, emotionally, and physically, but more importantly, how to create them personally with meaning.

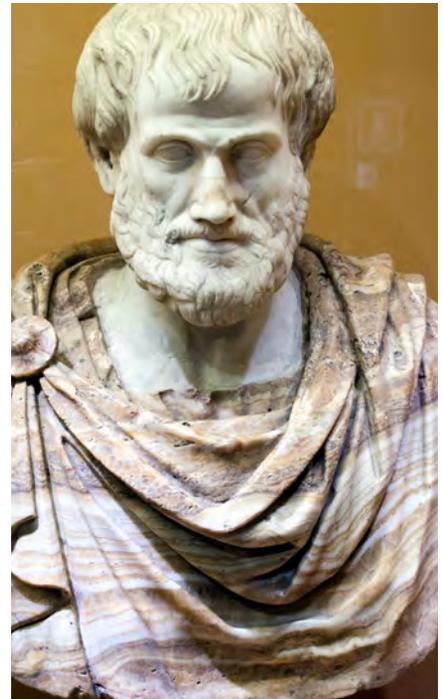
The numerous types of rituals, traditions and ceremonies is staggering. Think about how many involve events: the anthems and flags of the Olympics, what team enters the arena first, the protocols of meeting Queen Elizabeth, the order of speakers at a conference, the dress code for a gala, or the seating of the "bride's side or groom's side" at a wedding.

There are rituals and traditions, even rules, that are the business of events, such as security checking bags and running a metal detecting wand over each attendee. Checking in at a conference at registration to retrieve a nametag, credentials and course materials. The task of collecting RSVP's for a party or tickets at a play.

There are universal rituals, ceremonies and traditions such as drum circles, ribbon cuttings or ground breakings, a "coffee connection" or happy hour at a conference, the honorary first pitch or drop of the puck, the throwing of the bouquet, a henna ceremony, the reading of the Torah at a Bar Mitzvah or Scripture at a funeral, the count down at midnight, fireworks on the 4th or other patriotic holiday, walking the red carpet at the Oscars, the shot to start the race, the Grand Marshal leading the parade, playing Pomp and Circumstance at graduations or "The Chicken Dance" at Oktoberfest.

There are intentional traditions, rituals, and ceremonies created specifically for that event: The "gifting society" and acts of giving and the final burning of the temple structure at Burning Man. The decadence and celebration of Carnival, Fat Tuesday and Mardis Gras before Lent.

Ceremony, rituals and event culture can grow organically with attendees, such as doing "the wave" in a sports arena. Throwing Kraft Mac & Cheese at the stage during "If I Had a \$1,000,000" at a Barenaked Ladies show evolved to having the boxes collected at the door and donated to a local food bank due to volume. Red spoons are thrown at a Cowboy Mouth concert during "Everybody Loves Jill". Organic reactions to song lyrics have become rituals for the shows.



The best example would be the followers of The Grateful Dead. Friends of mine, one a musician for a Dead tribute band, explained:

"Deadheads" would follow the band on entire tours from city to city to be with their 'family'. Grateful Dead parking lots were referred to as 'home.'

Then there were the 'The Tapers'. The Dead were one of the first bands that allowed fans to bring in tape machines and record live shows. Those tapers would then distribute the shows through a new medium called 'cassette tape'. It was considered bad form to ever sell a tape so people traded them. Now most folks in the industry at the time thought this was crazy for a band to allow, but it worked to the bands advantage as the music flowed out from tapers to the public. It only served to raise their profile and draw more people to get on the bus."

The ritual of the Deadheads and the Tapers provided purpose, connection and a shared mission. Family provides security, safety and love. Being part of something bigger, outside yourself, being with family by blood or choice, having a sense of home, heals.

Last year at the IFEA conference, I sat in the front row of the "#IFEAMillennialConversation: First-Person Insights on Working with and Marketing to Millennials" a panel of six college students, millennials, discussing themselves, events and what made them tick.

Although there were many takeaways,

“We need more storytellers.” Stories transform the ordinary events in our lives into lessons, and ordinary objects into links with the extraordinary. Stories that come with a ceremony and/or special objects connect us even more passionately with the loving message, and that’s always healing.⁵

the couple that stood out were based on rituals and traditions. The first being how they experience an event.

In the case of Millennials, they want their friends to attend events with them and if they can’t be present, they post updates on social media to include the greater circle of connects and encourage others to join them. More than a group of friends attending together, it is the experience they want to share in its entirety. You may think it is the same as any other group of friends, such as you and your friends, going to an event together, it’s not. The emotional and spiritual reach is, in their minds, global. Giving is uplifting, creates peace and heals globally.

When you combine the tradition of attending events with family, friends or other likeminded individuals and add the potential for viral sharing through social media, many local events find a global audience and a new way of participation that the ancient Greeks could not have anticipated.

Remember the “Experience Economy?” It’s still in play and why events are important. The Millennials are the “Sharing Economy.” Think Airbnb, Uber, renting clothes instead of buying them, flash mobs, pop-up’s, sharing music, sharing experiences. As Blake Morgan terms it, this is “access over ownership”.²

Today’s Millennials want to have as many experiences as possible. Events and experiences make them feel connected. Not just to the event and their friends, but the global community. They love recognition, thus the popularity of Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. Millennials capture the experience and moments, then share it via a variety of social media platforms to celebrate their happiness and inclusion in events and causes.

It is very easy to see the ritual in experiencing events; the new ritual is so much more than attending. The new ritual is taking pictures, claiming your interests, documenting your life’s events and sharing it digitally. Documenting the events via social media, IS the new ritual of Millennials.

There is also ceremony and it is organic and personal. That was the second take away. My generation saved the ticket stub. Most tickets today are electronic or printed from a home

computer, they have lost the sentimental value, the memento we clung to.

Today it is the wristband. Branded, of course. And they carry far more sentiment than our paper ticket stubs.

What I learned was, Millennials wear those wristbands until they are falling off, months after the event is over. One member of the panel described when they cut off the RFID wristband from an event. She described a sadness, a finality to the experience. She described how she did it. She described a ceremony.

There is something about an event, a meeting, a festival, a party where, along with every other attendee and participant, you agree to suspend beliefs, set aside the problems of the day and collectively participate in what will be presented in a chosen and dedicated space. An area and time set aside for an experience, staged theater like the Greeks, with an expectation that something special, possibly spiritual, is about to occur.³

According to Hammerschlad in *The Dancing Healers*, “Rituals allow us to attach ourselves to the sacred. They help us separate the sacred from the profane and ordinary.”⁴

That is why the ritual of getting the event pin, T-shirt, wine glass, art poster or RFID wristband is significant. Tangible items represent the experience with others, extend the life of the event, make people happy. And when someone is having a bad day, remembering a great day through what was captured in memories, can heal.

Events bring us family, community, connectedness, security and more. Within those events, meetings, social gatherings, celebrations and festivals, are rituals and ceremonies. Look at your event from that perception and see it with new eyes. Look for what the attendees are creating or have created over the years, organically. Can it be enhanced without losing the intent?

Ceremony and rituals can be created in already established events and first-time events. Create a space. Make the ceremony or ritual intentional with clear purpose, keeping in mind ways to get people, recharge, connect; heal and in touch with their hearts.

Give them a place to tell the story of your event.

Jacque Duhamé has been in the events and festival industry for more than 30 years. Jacque is a current member of IFEA, International Live Events Association (ILEA), Meeting Professional International (MPI) and Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI), formerly was Past President of Arizona Festivals and Events and served on the board for many years. Duhamé recently launched Duhamé Events Group and is looking to produce her own festival. In addition, Jacque is an Adjunct Faculty Member of Scottsdale Community College teaching Event Management.

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2. “NOwnership, No Problem: Why Millennials Value Experiences Over Owning Things”, Forbes June 1, 2015, By Blake Morgan <https://www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2015/06/01/nownershipnoproblem-nowners-millennials-value-experiences-over-ownership/#1ccb6db15406>
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4. “Healing Ceremonies Creating Personal Rituals for Spiritual, Emotional, Physical and Mental Health”. Carl A. Hamerschlag, M.D., June 1997.
5. Carl A. Hamerschlag, M.D., Healing Ceremonies Creating Personal Rituals for Spiritual, Emotional, Physical and Mental Health” June 1997.

15 IDEAS FOR CREATING A RITUAL AND CEREMONY AT AN EVENT

1. If you don't have an event collectible such as a pin, cup, T-shirt, hat, or poster unique to the event; create one. Then make the process of how they are collected and purchased unique.
2. Create a "meeting space" within the event for reunions for the families, high schools, clubs and groups that come every year. Find a bit of real estate and let them know about it. Create that "home base".
3. Have a "blessing ceremony" or moment just for those working the event.
4. Have staff and volunteers randomly distribute sticks (the ones you get from Home Depot to stir paint), paint them different colors and write a word on each; joy, laugh, peace, love, sing, dance, home, family, honor, smile. Have volunteers give out two sticks to a person; one they keep and one they are instructed to give to a stranger. Create a garden place. Instruct them to plant their stick in the garden. Have volunteers with markers so those planting can write a message before letting it grow in the garden.
5. Hire someone to write an event theme song, choreograph a quick dance, or create an event hand sign, greeting (even just a Hi-5 team at gates) or welcome slogan, then have volunteers teach the attendees. Repeat each year.
6. Even if not a patriotic event, involve the color guard, singing of the National Anthem or raising of the State flag at the event.
7. Have a "christening" of the golf carts, food trucks, and buses the first day of an event.
8. Like an "autograph wall" for entertainment, create one for volunteers.
9. Create a "7th Inning Stretch" moment, give a toast for your event or create a "closing ceremony" that happens the same time every day. A drum or musical procession, a mini parade, a bagpipe playing or Native American flute send off. Get everyone to buy in; vendors, sponsors, entertainment, staff, attendees.
10. Capture an event group picture each year and begin to display them at future events.
11. Design and place a wishing well (a great idea from ESI in Scottsdale) with cards to write a wish or resolution.
12. Make the one event job that no one wants, fun. If you have horse mounted police, assign an Official "Sea Biscuit" Captain and crew. Give special shovels, let them sign and date the shovel each year. (Also from ESI in Scottsdale.)
13. Make it cause related. Ask attendees to bring a tennis ball with the name of a beloved pet on it. Store in a visual place and a clear container. Donate the balls to the local pet shelters every year.
14. Design a ribbon wall or event rope. Provide colorful strips of fabric, allow attendees to write their name and date on the fabric then tie it to a structure, filling the wall or tying them together and stretch it through the event. Add to it each year, see how long it gets.
15. Set up a video area where people can tell their stories. Stories of their family history, how many times they have been to the event and why, the best part of their day at the event, the new thing they experienced or learned.