

# Bits & Pieces

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## Welcome to Bits & Pieces Spring Edition

Bits & Pieces is a quarterly newsletter produced by Jigsaw Qld. In each edition we aim for a mix of stories and information encompassing various perspectives relating to adoption. It also includes stories & information about our Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS). If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please email us at [support@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au).

The spring edition explores how we can be distracted from our emotional journey by the search process, Secrets We Keep podcast, spreading the word about adoption and Season 4 of Adopt Perspective podcast.



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## DNA Distraction

*With DNA lifting the veil on the secrets at the heart of the closed adoption era, many people are finding themselves absorbed by the mechanics of the search, but is it at the expense of what is perhaps the more important journey? DNA searching is a dynamic and often in-depth process, not unlike becoming the Sherlock Holmes in your own story, so it is easy to see how this happens. Let's explore what is involved in DNA testing and the important emotional work that coincides with it, but is often placed on the back burner.*



DNA tests have played an increasingly important role in the lives of adopted people. In the past decade, as testing has become more financially

accessible and our ability to understand and use the results has increased, more people are taking the tests and using them to fill gaps in their family tree.

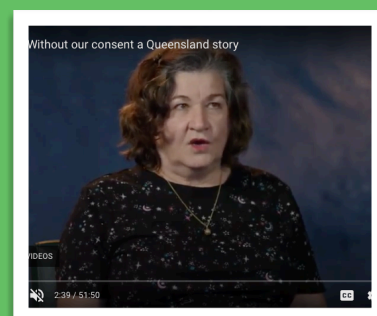
Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) testing is the most accurate paternity and family relationship testing method currently available. DNA is a molecule that carries the genetic information for each person. Every person has unique DNA information or DNA 'fingerprint'. We all inherit on average half of our DNA from our biological father and half from our biological mother. DNA testing tries to discover the fifty per cent match between the child's and the parent's DNA profiles to prove or disprove the blood relationship. DNA parentage testing is considered to be 99.9 per cent accurate. A DNA test can be obtained from saliva or blood sample.

For adopted people DNA testing can knock down genealogical brick walls, however, it also requires a sensitivity to the complexities of adoption and issues that may arise.

Fathers were not required to consent to past adoptions and it has been estimated that fewer than five per cent of original birth certificates

Have you watched the *Without Our Consent: A Queensland Story* oral history yet? The interviews feature a mother who was forced to give her child up for adoption (Anne), an adoptee (Jo), and a father who was coerced into placing his son for adoption (Alan). It also includes interviews with representatives of post adoption organisations and Queensland politicians.

This video is a must watch for anyone affected by adoptions between 1950 and through the 1980s. You can watch it here: <https://www.jigsawqueensland.com/without-our-consent-a-qld-story>



for past adoptions record a father's name. A father's name was sometimes obtained during an interview process with a social worker at the time and for various reasons the name recorded may not have been accurate. In some circumstances the father was also not made aware the mother was pregnant or that an adoption happened.

A lot of sensitivity is required throughout the process of trying to obtain a DNA test from someone. Requests for DNA tests can sometimes be interpreted as being intrusive or mistrusting. If a mother has disclosed the name of the father she may feel she is not being trusted. Requesting DNA tests sooner rather than later in the reunion relationship is advised. DNA tests give peace of mind when someone is unsure about the information provided. It is also important to know that whilst a DNA test may be able to establish biological paternity for adopted people, it in no way creates legal paternity.

We'll be discussing two types of DNA tests – a laboratory DNA test and a genealogical test.



*There are many genealogical testing companies to use, but don't forget to use your waiting time wisely and consider your endgame. What would you ideally like to see come out of this search?*

A laboratory DNA test uses blood or saliva samples and can establish paternity. They are often called a 'peace of mind' test. These tests specifically answer if the people who provide

samples are related. These starts at around \$300 (for a 2 person test).

Paternity DNA tests that are admissible in the family court or to change details on a birth certificate start at around \$600. Check with your local Births, Deaths and Marriages to see if this is required to add or change a father's name on an original birth certificate. Usually if the birth certificate has no father listed (a blank space appears) a father's name can be added without a DNA test with the mother's agreement. If the word "unknown" is recorded or another man's name, a legal DNA test may be required to change this information.

Discussion needs to take place as to whether the DNA test costs will be met by one party or both parties. The costs are usually met by the one requesting the test or the one needing peace of mind about the blood relation.

A genealogical DNA test uses only saliva and looks at a person's DNA and compares it to a DNA database obtained from specific locations. Results give information about genetic connection and personal ancestry and can be useful in developing and confirming a family tree. In general, these tests compare the results of an individual to others from the same lineage or to current and historic ethnic groups. For example, a person can order a DNA test from 23andMe, Family Tree DNA and Ancestry.com for about \$100-150 per person. You may also upload your results to GEDmatch to widen your possible connections. The power of these websites is that many people have shared their genealogical information which may potentially increase the likelihood of finding connections. There has been varying reports about the accuracy of these tests and their ethnicity estimates. They are dependent on the populations they have taken DNA samples from. However when other methods of searching have not succeeded, some people have used genealogical DNA testing to successfully find

relatives including parents. Confirming that a family member is the father (or mother) of the person can bring a lot of assurances to both parties. This can also come as a shock to a father who has not been told about the pregnancy. Anger can result when this information has been deliberately withheld from him. It can be embarrassing for a father if he has moved on to marry and have further children. It can also come as a shock to fathers when they find out they are not the father of a child.



*Artwork by Teresa Jordan (we forget to thank you enough and owe you so much for allowing us to use your beautiful art).*

One case occurred when a father was reunited with an adult son. The father consented to the adoption with his girlfriend. During the reunion they developed a connection and their families met one another. After the reunion they undertook a paternity DNA test which revealed that he was not the father and he felt devastated as he had believed he had been the father of the child for 27 years. This can trigger huge amounts of grief, not only for a child that was lost but for a relationship that was formed on false grounds. It can also lead to the adoptee feeling disappointed as they thought they found their father but had not and now must keep on searching.

There is a lot to consider when using DNA in an adoption-related situation, but the most important thing is to find support during the process and in the aftermath of DNA testing. Sometimes tests raise as many questions as they answer and a third party as a sounding board can help you during the process.

We have found over recent years that people affected by adoption can get caught up in the mechanics of their DNA search just as easily as they have been when applying for identifying information, compiling paperwork, searching electoral roles, and applying for Births, Deaths and Marriage Certificates. This can become a major distraction to what is happening emotionally - our inner journey.

A lot is going on inside the minds and bodies of people affected by adoption when they undertake DNA searches and potential reunions. It is usual for people to feel anxious and fearful of rejection as they move closer to an answer. For many parents, the decision to search may bring traumatic memories to the surface. Adopted people may experience a mix of emotions, including anger and resentment.

While you are waiting, make contact with a support organisation to speak to someone about what is bubbling up, or that you are afraid might bubble up during this process. It is important to read, talk and seek support and guidance.

Read as much as you can about search and reunion, especially personal stories. Our Adopt Perspective podcast can be a great resource if reading isn't your thing.

Talk about your feelings and ask questions. Great support can help you moderate your expectations and look at different perspectives, especially from the found person's viewpoint.

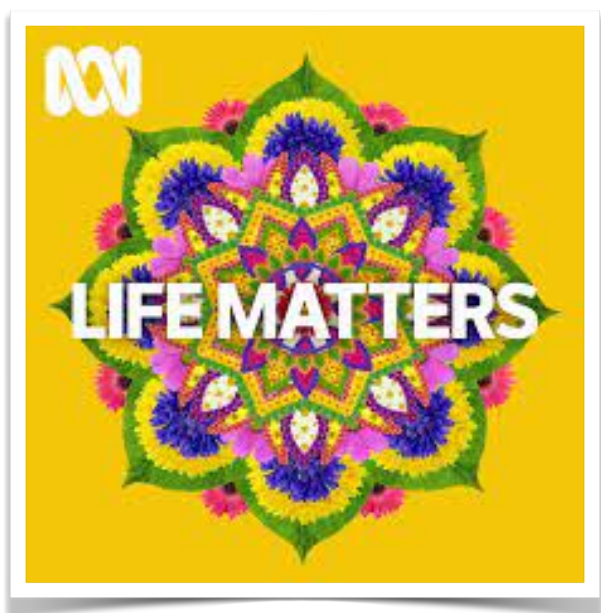
When approaching a reunion, do it carefully, thoughtfully and respectfully. Be aware of the impact on those around you. Take your time and consider the other person's situation.

Yes, the process of searching and finding can be a great distraction from looking inward and feeling the feels. Remember what the search is about though, and invest as much time in the emotional side of your journey.

## Spreading the word

An important part of Jigsaw Qld's services is letting people know that help is available now. To this end we regularly reach out to seniors and community groups and counselling services across Queensland to talk to them about the history of forced adoptions and our Forced Adoption Support Service (FASS). We also speak to media organisations on occasion.

Jigsaw's President, Jo Sparrow spoke to the Forest Lake Over 50s Club recently and was interviewed on ABC Radio National's Life Matters Program. You can listen to the interview here: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/lifematters/the-dark-legacy-of-forced-adoption/102614598>



Our FASS team reached out to regional community centres and the Burdekin Neighbourhood Centre has offered to support anyone in their region who needs to access our services and requires access to the internet, set up and accessing email, scanning documents and signing and sending documents. This community assistance is greatly appreciated!

Jigsaw Queensland took the new step of securing a booth at the 2023 Care Expo held at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre held on 1 & 2 September.

The expo is an opportunity for us to speak with many care organisations who might have contact with people affected by adoption and who may not know about our Forced Adoption Support Service and peer support groups. The public are also able to attend the expo and we are able to connect passers by with the services we have on offer.



## DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL?

Do you have a story to tell? If so, we'd love to hear from you. We regularly feature personal stories, poems and articles in our newsletter and on the website, or you can submit a form to be interviewed on the podcast. Email us at [support@jigsawqld.org.au](mailto:support@jigsawqld.org.au) or go to [www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective](http://www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective) to fill in the podcast prospective guest form.



## Secrets We Keep: Shame, Lies and Family - a podcast

By Dr Jo-Ann Sparrow - President Jigsaw Qld



Most readers likely won't know (or care) that the majority of my education / career background is in journalism and PR. Communication is the strength I bring to my work within the adoption community. Getting the word out about the dark history of adoption and that help is available now is always forefront in my mind.

Media coverage is one way to achieve this, however, it comes with prickles. I have enough experience with media to know that while journalists mostly reach out with good intentions; time constraints, lack of research and

understanding of the impacts of trauma can lead to challenging interviews. And once you give consent to an interview, you generally lose control of the narrative. Many in our adoption community who have shared their stories with media outlets will understand this tradeoff. Because of this, I am picky when considering interview opportunities on behalf of Jigsaw Qld. We say 'no' far more than we say 'yes'.

Earlier this year we were approached by the production team of a new podcast that was exploring the history of forced adoptions as part of a personal exploration by Brisbane journalist, Amelia Oberhardt.

Amelia thought she knew her Mum...until she died. It was then that she discovered a photo revealing her mother, a teenager, with a wedding ring, an apparent husband (not Amelia's father), cuddling an unknown baby. Determined to find out more, Amelia's journey took her into the secrets of 1950-1970s Australia —Shotgun marriages, hushed abortions, and forced adoptions. It's the story of what happens when young women are put in impossible situations, and where this messy knot leaves families decades later. While Amelia's personal story didn't lead to adoption, her wider research did.

The production team shared that when they began their research, they came across Jigsaw Qld's website and Adopt Perspective podcast and it had led them down the rabbit warren that is forced adoptions. By the time they reached out to us, they'd already recorded interviews with

mothers and an adopted person who were impacted by these policies and practices and researchers of this period, and wanted to add an interview with a support organisation.



*The photo that started Amelia's search.*

My interactions with the production team demonstrated how much research had gone into the series and the care and attention they showed towards those impacted.

The other thing that tipped me towards agreeing to be involved was that so much of our community's communications is funnelled into an echo chamber. It is often short form journalism that is resonating with the same audiences all of the time - those who already understand and are impacted. I believe that to gain support, we need to be reaching a wider Australian audience, who, whether they understand it or not, are all impacted by adoption. A serial podcast story such as *Secrets We Keep* is more likely to be absorbed by this audience than a news article or short broadcast segment. It is more relatable. Through story we can change minds, open hearts and find ways to educate people about forced adoption in Australia's recent past.

*Secrets We Keep* opens with Amelia's personal mystery and desire to understand and connect with her mother. And, as so often happens in life, her explorations ultimately led her in a different direction. She could have chosen to

stop the podcast when she had her own answers, or go in another direction entirely, however, Amelia and her production team saw an injustice that somehow wasn't resonating with Australians and couldn't understand why. They sought to shine a light on it and have done a great job of it.

At the time of publishing, five episodes have been released and myself and FASS team member, Rachel Bell are interviewed in episode 8 in a few weeks time.

You'll find the podcast on all the usual podcast apps and here: [Secrets We Keep](#)

## Adopt Perspective Season 4

Anyone else think it's been an overwhelming year thus far? Adopt Perspective took a breather in the middle of the year, but we are back on track. Since last issue we have released 3 new episodes.

Di Riddell is a Queensland mother who lost a daughter and a son to adoption. She is also a rape and domestic violence survivor, who has dedicated her life to helping others find their voice and is the author of three books; *Beyond Abuse*, *Speak Out* and *Knowing You*.



**Di Riddell**

**A podcast for  
anyone affected  
by adoption.**



Peter Capomolla Moore is a family genealogist who stumbled across his adoption via a DNA test at the age of 59. The father of five, grandfather of many and foster carer is also a committed advocate for adopted people through his work as President of Adoptee Rights Australia.



**Peter Capomolla Moore**

A podcast for anyone affected by adoption.



and how writing a memoir is helping her to process it.

The podcast is hosted, produced and edited in-house by Jigsaw's President, Dr Jo-Ann Sparrow.

Adopt Perspective can be listened to on all great podcast apps including, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Amazon Music, Deezer and [here](#).

## 2023 Events

Support groups are adhering to current government recommendations and directives. To get the latest information, please keep an eye on our website and Facebook page. The below dates are our scheduled meeting dates - restrictions allowing.

**Adoptee & Open Meetings and Mothers' Morning Teas are held on the ground floor of SANDS House, 505 Bowen Terrace, New Farm.**

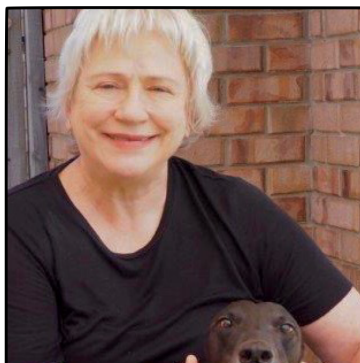
Participation at the groups is free for members (suggested \$5/head donation for non-members).

**Open Support Group - (1.30pm to 3.30pm)**  
14 Oct, 9 Dec.

**Adoptee Support Group - (1.30pm - 3.30pm)**  
9 Sept, 11 Nov.

**Mothers' Morning Tea - a regular morning tea from 10am to 12 noon (address above)** 20 Sept, 15 Nov.

Helen Weder was born in Brisbane in 1955 and adopted just six days later. She has since met her mother and more recently her father via an AncestryDNA test. Helen shares her experience



**Helen Weder**

A podcast for anyone affected by adoption.

