

Bits & Pieces

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Welcome to Bits & Pieces Autumn 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.

The Autumn edition reviews 'Your DNA Guide: the book', explores AI and its use in finding adoption-related info, and introduces a writing opportunity called The Grieve Project by the Hunter Writers' Centre.

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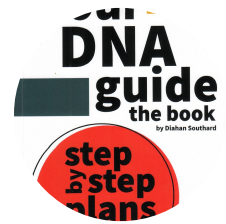
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Book Review

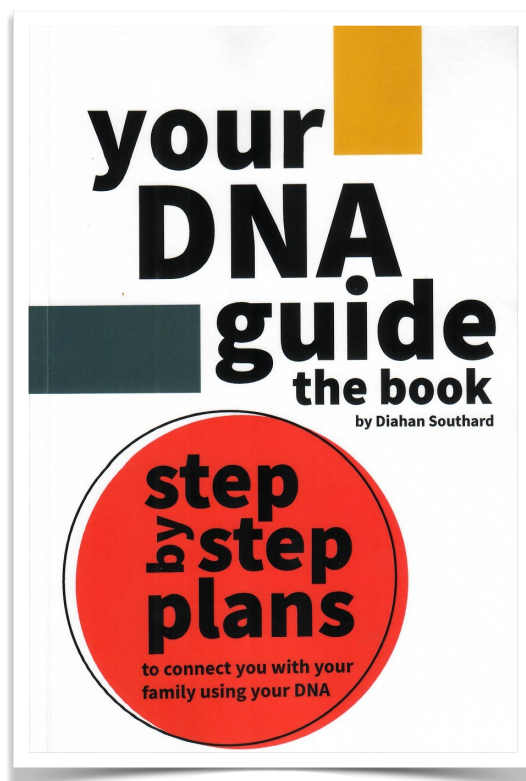
Your DNA Guide: The Book by Diahann Southard

Review by Dr Trevor Jordan

Most of us would not think of buying a car unless we knew how to drive, yet it seems that an awful lot of people are buying DNA kits without any idea what to do with the results.

Genetic genealogy (exploring the branches in your family tree with the help of DNA matching) has rapidly grown in popularity, particularly since DNA kits have been marketed directly to individuals in their homes.

Diahann Southard's book, available in paper and electronic versions, is a welcome and timely addition to an often confusing forest of information on using DNA to find relatives. The honest truth is that both DNA analysis and genealogy can be complex, requiring careful planning and methodical and time-consuming brainwork. It's not surprising that some of us throw up our hands and ask for help.

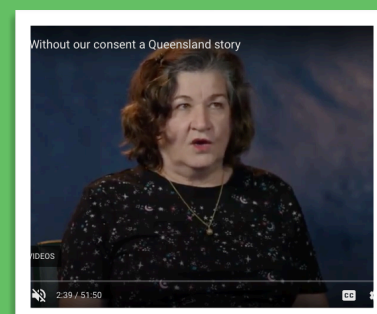


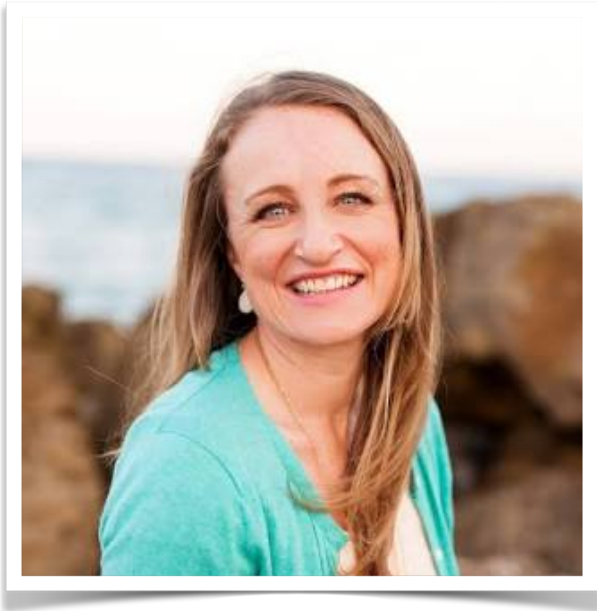
The book is attractively laid out in a choose-your-own-adventure style that keeps the reader moving forward on their chosen path while taking side roads to carefully explain concepts as they arise. The method is well chosen because we all approach DNA with different goals in mind.

For most people affected by adoption, the goal is straightforward. They are seeking to identify a

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>





Author, Diahan Southard.

biological relative and have heard that DNA can help.

That's where it all starts going wrong and why this book is a timely antidote to 'quick fix' promoters. Using DNA to find family works. And it is more likely to work now than it did four or five years ago. Whether it will work for you, however, will depend on a lot of factors. As always, there are expectations to manage. We all know we are being marketed to when someone only tells you the upside and none of the downside.

There are limitations to DNA testing for finding relatives that need to be taken into account. Diahan Southard is always clear about this and as a scientist and a genealogist she reminds the reader at key points in their search that 'there are always multiple explanations of why two people share a certain amount of DNA'. That is why the testing companies always give you a range of possibilities.

DNA inheritance can be unpredictable. For example, the author states, using the example of her known relatives in her own tree, the DNA table prediction was wrong in about 50% of cases. 'Unless you can see a half-sibling or a

parent on your match list (now or in the future), your DNA match list may take you further down the track to discover your parents, but it will not be able to take you all the way... your DNA cousins are going to help you identify the family you are from, but without more testing, you likely won't be able to find out exactly who your father or mother was'. Sometimes, it will just take time and patience.

At other times, DNA results can provide immediate matches to parents and siblings. Everything can change in a day! If you are searching for biological relatives, don't even consider taking a DNA test without having supports in place; for example, friends, counsellors and peers who know about adoption.

Whether DNA will help you contact your relatives depends on how good you already are at establishing and maintaining relationships. DNA is no shortcut to avoiding personal responsibility for managing the boundaries between privacy and the right to know where we come from. Southard's sound advice: 'As long as you are working to build relationships you are heading in the right direction. When in doubt use the Golden Rule.'

Using AI to find adoption-related information

By Dr Trevor Jordan



In the past year, AI applications have become very popular for generating information about various topics, including adoption. Unlike a search engine, which just provides a list of links to websites, you can engage with the AI programs conversationally and they generate content in response. AI uses the power of computing and the content of the Internet to research and create content, both written and visual.

As an organisation that believes information and support changes everything for those affected by adoption, we keep an eye on these developments. As always, there are plusses and minuses.

The genetic genealogist Blain Bettinger expressed it very well when he said in recent YouTube video that AI can be useful so long as we remember that AI programs provide us with 'words not facts'. In their own disclaimers, the AI apps themselves usually say, in effect, 'use us but don't rely on us'.

The app user enters prompts in the form of questions or task requests and the app scours the available online information and renders a reply. In the case of ChatGPT, those replies come in written form, making it very useful for content providers, including students. ChatGPT composes very well, but it does not cite its sources. Gemini, the Google AI app (formerly Bard), is better at citing sources of information but not as good at composing a finished product.

A key part of the process is the user can provide feedback to the AI app allowing it to correct and refine information for future responses.

Does it work? Well, yes and no. As a person with a public profile, I asked Gemini for information about myself. While it was largely correct, it also contained some glaring errors. ChatGPT, on the

other hand, seems to be very wary of providing information about individuals at all.

When I asked ChatGPT to write an article about the psychological implications of DNA revelations in the context of adoption, it did a very good job (see below). But here's the rub. I know ChatGPT did a good job only because I have been involved in helping people navigate the adoption landscape for over twenty years.

DNA revelations: The implications (from ChatGPT)



The psychological and emotional implications of DNA revelations in the context of adoption can be profound. Adoptees who choose to undergo DNA testing may encounter a range of emotions and challenges as they uncover information about their genetic heritage. Here are some key aspects to consider:

Identity Crisis:

Positive Impact: DNA revelations can provide a missing piece of the puzzle for adoptees, filling gaps in their identity and offering a sense of belonging.

Negative Impact: On the flip side, conflicting or unexpected genetic information may lead to an identity crisis, forcing adoptees to reconcile their preconceived notions about their heritage.

Ambiguous Loss:

Positive Impact: Reconnecting with biological relatives can bring a sense of closure and diminish the ambiguity associated with the unknown.

Negative Impact: Ambiguity may persist, especially if reunions are incomplete or if the newfound family relationships are challenging to navigate.

Family Dynamics:

Positive Impact: DNA revelations can expand one's family network, providing adoptees with additional relatives and a broader understanding of family history.

Negative Impact: The integration of biological family members into an adoptee's life may strain existing family dynamics, causing tension or confusion.



Grief and Loss:

Positive Impact: Reuniting with biological family members can alleviate feelings of loss and grief

associated with being separated from one's roots.

Negative Impact: The discovery of biological relatives may also trigger grief over what might have been lost during the years of separation.



Emotional Rollercoaster:

Positive Impact: The process of DNA testing and subsequent reunions can be emotionally rewarding, providing a sense of completeness and connection.

Negative Impact: Emotional highs may be accompanied by lows, especially if relationships with newfound family members are strained or if the information uncovered is emotionally challenging.

Reconciliation of Dual Identities:

Positive Impact: Adoptees may find joy in embracing both their adoptive and biological identities, weaving a narrative that incorporates both aspects of their heritage.

Negative Impact: Balancing dual identities can be a complex process, leading to inner conflict and a sense of divided loyalty.

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 or go to www.jigsawqueensland.com/adopt-perspective to fill in the podcast prospective guest form.



Need for Support:

Positive Impact: Support from adoptive families, friends, and professional counsellors can help adoptees navigate the emotional challenges associated with DNA revelations.

Negative Impact: Lack of support or understanding from those close to the adoptee may exacerbate emotional distress.

In conclusion, while DNA testing can offer valuable insights and connections for adoptees, it is essential to recognise and address the psychological and emotional complexities that may arise. Providing emotional support, counselling services, and fostering open communication can contribute to a more positive experience for adoptees undergoing DNA revelations.

The Grieve Project



Research shows that writing can be powerful tool in healing. Exploring our experiences, thoughts and feelings on paper can help us

process, construct identity, navigate our grief and loss, and ultimately rewrite our stories. The act of sharing our stories can also break the barriers of silence and disenfranchisement surrounding adoption.

With this in mind, we share with you a writing opportunity offered by the Hunter Writers' Centre called The Grieve Project.



About the Grieve Project

The Grieve Project commenced in August 2013 during Grief Awareness Month as a local writing competition hosted by Hunter Writers' Centre. It aimed to provide an outlet for individuals to explore the often-overlooked topics of grief and loss through the written word.

In Australian culture, grief is frequently brushed aside and left unacknowledged. The inception of

the Grieve Project struck a chord within the community, inspiring people, whether they identified as writers or not, to attempt to articulate the ineffable, to give shape to complex emotions surrounding loss.

Following its impactful debut, the Grieve Project expanded its reach nationally, and from its modest beginnings in 2013, it has since grown into a nationally recognised initiative.

Submissions open Friday 1st of March

In 2024, following a hiatus in 2023, the Hunter Writers' Centre is thrilled to announce the reopening of the Grieve Project. They invite writers and storytellers nationwide to participate in the Grieve Project, which will commence in March 2024. This year, they are expanding the scope of storytelling genres to include prose, poetry, and a variety of multimedia formats such as film, audio, graphic storytelling, and visual imagery.

The competition will culminate in the creation of an anthology that captures the diverse voices and experiences of grief and loss. Additionally, a public event will be hosted in the Hunter region and streamed online, providing a platform for participants to share their work and engage with the community. They are excited to see how this expansion will enrich the storytelling landscape of the Grieve Project and further amplify the voices of those touched by grief and loss.

Find out more here: https://hunterwriterscentre.org/2024_grieve_project/

Self Care When Writing

Writing about your adoption experience can be therapeutic and it can also stir up emotions. Experiencing emotions is not a bad thing unless you are being overwhelmed by them.



Before you start: Consider thinking about your current level of general well-being and if this is a good time to do this writing.

Once you start: the process, if you find you are feeling overwhelmed you should consider;

Seeking support - someone to talk this over with such as a counsellor or another support service such as the Forced Adoption Support Service at Jigsaw Qld. Phone 1800 21 03 13 (from Qld only) or 07 3358 6666 or email support@jigsawqld.org.au

Deciding if you need to take breaks and space out the writing over time.

Think about what aspects of your experience you want to write about – uncovering very traumatic material may not be wise if you do not have the support of a therapist. Putting the project aside for another time.

Where do I start?

Freewriting (a tool to get you started)



"I sit down to write and nothing comes out! Help!"

Sound familiar? Freewriting is a possible solution.

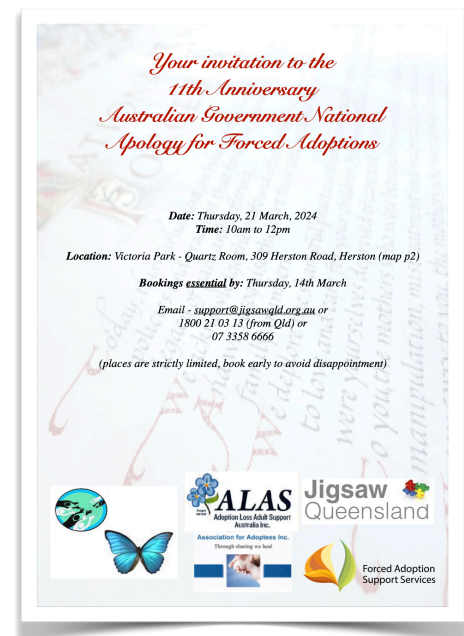
What is freewriting? In a nutshell, it is when you sit down with a pen and paper in front of you and just let your thoughts flow unhindered (you can do it on a computer, but pen and paper works even better...something to do with how the brain works, trust us!).

Don't worry about how it looks or reads, punctuation or grammar. No one will ever read it, this is strictly to help you get unblocked. Don't try to steer your thoughts in any particular direction, just let them flow. Write for between 10-20 mins. Don't stop to think, just keep writing! Sometimes you will find some gold in what you have written. Even if you don't, you will most likely find yourself unblocked and some ideas may have taken root.

11th Anniversary of the National Apology

A morning tea for the 11th Anniversary of the Australian Government National Apology for Forced Adoptions will be held at Victoria Park (Quartz Room), 309 Herston Road, Herston on Thursday, 21 March, 2024 from 10am to 12pm. Bookings are essential and numbers are strictly limited, so RSVP early to avoid disappointment. RSVP by 14 March - support@jigsawqld.org.au or 1800 21 03 13 (Qld only) or 07 3358 6666.

The event is organised by the Forced Adoption Support Service (Jigsaw Queensland) in association with ALAS Australia, Association for Adoptees, Origins Queensland and You Gave Me A Voice. It is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Find the flyer here: https://www.jigsawqueensland.com/_files/ugd/07d682_b0fb27886f14457d96b8cc1a4c66498a.pdf



2024 Events

The below dates are our scheduled meeting dates for 2024.

To keep up with the latest information or changes, please keep an eye on our website and Facebook page.

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.

Open Support Group - (1.30pm to 3.30pm)
13 April, 8 June, 10 Aug, 12 Oct, 14 Dec.

Adoptee Support Group - (1.30pm - 3.30pm)
9 Mar, 11 May, 13 July, 14 Sept & 9 Nov.

Mothers' Morning Tea - a regular morning tea from 10am to 12 noon (address above) 20 Mar, 15 May, 17 July, 18 Sept & 20 Nov.