

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 Services (FASS). If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please email us at support@jigsawqld.org.au.

In this edition we examine the adoption experience of fathers and announce podcast episodes featuring, Dr Gary Clapton - a social worker, researcher and father who lost a daughter to adoption. And we have a special interview with an adopted person about navigating special occasions.

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Fathers and the Adoption Experience

As Father's Day approaches it is timely to explore the father's experience of losing a child to adoption.

Fathers were often disempowered

In the past, fathers had very little say about the adoption of their child. In most cases a father's consent was not required for the adoption of a child and the father was not recorded on the original birth certificate. Fathers were often stereotyped as irresponsible and hospital staff and social workers saw them as irrelevant. Some

professionals saw fathers as a hindrance, banning or excluding them from participation in the arrangements. As they were not carrying the child or involved in the birth, they were seen as 'invisible parents' in the adoption process. Contrary to misconceptions, in many instances fathers were in stable relationships with the mothers of their children and believed that if they had the right support, they would have kept their children from being adopted.

Some fathers were not informed

In some cases, men were not informed of the pregnancy and may still be unaware that they have fathered a child. This can sometimes cause challenges during reunion as fathers may experience shock, anger and denial about not being informed.

A DNA paternity test is recommended and can be helpful in these circumstances. Sometimes an incorrect name or "unknown" may be recorded in the adoption files. DNA test results can therefore provide reassurance before you start building a relationship with the person you have found.



EDUCATIONAL VIDEO PROJECT

InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV) in partnership with Relationship Matters InterCountry Adoption Family Support Services (RM ICAFSS) will soon release a series of short, educational video resources for professional teachers, doctors and counsellors.

Featuring Australian intercountry adoptees, they aim through the video to share thoughts and experiences with these professionals so they, in turn can better support intercountry adoptees through the challenges they face. When released, you'll find the videos on the ICAV website: www.intercountryadopteevoices.com.



There have been legislation barriers for fathers and adopted people

In the past there have been legislative barriers to the release of birth father's names to adopted adults. Since the 2016 amendments to the Queensland Adoption Act (2009), the Department will release information about a putative father if there is a name in the records. This applies even if the father did not consent to the adoption and is not recorded on the original birth certificate.

Under past legislation, fathers had to have signed the consent form to obtain information about an adopted child. Under current legislation, fathers can now apply for information but will still need to provide evidence for the Department to determine "on the balance of probabilities" that they are the father of the adopted person.



Many fathers have experienced grief and guilt

Fathers also experienced grief when they lost a child to adoption. Fathers can re-experience the events of loss in their minds which may cause worry, depression or guilt.

Guilt may not only arise from being unable to keep the baby, but also from a perceived inability to support the mother during the pregnancy. Fathers may perceive that they abandoned both mother and child when it was their role as a father to be a protector and provider. Compounding the father's experience is the general reluctance of men to seek counselling and support. Men often feel they can 'tough it out', are reluctant to talk about feelings or don't realise their emotions have reached unmanageable levels.

Fathers can experience emotional triggers

Fathers identify a number of things that are difficult for them when they remember their son or daughter. These include birthdays, Christmas, Mother's / Father's Day, holidays and contact with people the same age as their son or daughter. This can trigger memories of loss and grief over relationships lost through the adoption process. Grief over the loss of relationship with the mother can also be a major trigger for many fathers, especially when contact or a reunion may be imminent.

The reunion between fathers and adopted people is important

All reunions are highly significant for both the father and adopted people, regardless of whether the reunion results in an ongoing close relationship. Guilt and shame are common hurdles for fathers to overcome when contact is made. The temptation may be to continue to keep the adopted person a secret from others, especially family members who may be unaware of their existence. Working towards openness is recommended with all involved and keeping things at a careful pace. Begin by writing letters and sharing photographs. This will also give you time and space to begin to accept that the adopted child is now an adult and may have formed their own family with children.

Some original birth certificates can be amended

Adopted people or fathers themselves may seek to have their names added onto original birth certificates. The first step is to talk through the process with Births Deaths and Marriages Qld. Jigsaw Qld can help you to find the best contact person to assist you.

Fathers, adopted people and mothers who have added a father's name on to an original birth certificate state that this action has had an important effect on their sense of personal empowerment and justice for past wrongs.

An ongoing relationship after reunion can work

A number of factors affect the relationship between a father and an adopted person after a reunion. These include: similarities between parent and adoptee, good communication, realistic expectations, personality mix, support from family and dealing with identity issues. These can appear complicated but can also be worked through quite naturally if time is taken to develop the relationship one step at a time. Each reunion is unique and its outcome can never be predicted. The development of all relationships start with good communication.

Support can help

Support is available from Jigsaw Qld. Phone 07 3358 6666 or 1800 21 03 13 (from Qld only) or email: support@jigsawqld.org.au .

Adopt Perspective podcast interviews Dr Gary Clapton

In time for Father's Day, Jigsaw Qld's Adopt Perspective Podcast recorded two episodes with Dr Gary Clapton who is a father who lost a daughter to adoption and an academic

researcher who has explored adoption in general and the father's experience.

In episode one released on the 25th August, Gary spoke about his personal experience of losing a daughter, Jane, to adoption in 1970. He has since gone on to reunite with her and offers an insight into adoption around that time, how the loss impacted him and how they have navigated their "union" over the years since first meeting.



Dr Gary Clapton

On the 8th of September we release a second episode in which Gary talks about his work as a social worker and his research into adoption at The University of Edinburgh - with a particular focus on fathers who lost a child to adoption. Gary is also a committee member of the Father's Network in Scotland and an advisor to 'Birthlink'.

For more information about Dr Gary Clapton and his research, visit the podcast Episode Notes page at www.jigsawqueensland.com/episode-notes .

Adoption and Special Occasions

Special occasions such as Christmas, birthdays, weddings, funerals and other family events can

bring with them complexities for any individual impacted by adoption.

Because of this, we often receive phone calls from mothers, fathers, adopted people and other family members in anticipation of, or following such an event.

For adoptees, they may have two sets of families with different expectations. For mothers and fathers, they may not know exactly how they 'fit' in their adult child's life following a reunion. For all parties, such events can raise questions around 'belonging' as well as feelings of loss even on what would otherwise be considered the happiest of days.



It is impossible to provide blanket suggestions that will be appropriate for all parties affected by adoption in a range of situations. So, we decided to interview one adopted person about a recent experience of a family wedding and her suggestions to others who may face a similar experience in future.

How long ago did your reunion with your birth father take place?

Recently, it was the two year anniversary of us meeting for the first time.

How long after meeting your father did you meet other family members on his side?

Four months after meeting my father for the first time, I met four half-siblings (1 brother, 3 sisters), as well as an Uncle, Auntie and Nanna.

How did you feel in the lead-up to attending a special event (a sibling's wedding) with your birth father's family for the first time?

I was nervous. In particular, about what others might say because some people knew I was adopted. I was worried that something insensitive would be said about adoption, or someone would tell me about someone they know who is affected by adoption.

My experience has been that some people have no filter when talking about sensitive issues and I guess I was just bracing myself for that. However, I did feel grateful to have been invited to the event. It felt very special to be part of a family gathering.

What was your experience on the day?

It was such a hot day. I was travelling to the wedding with my birth father and his wife. We were running late to get to there so that just added to the anxiety.

When we arrived I felt awkward and hypersensitive to what others might be thinking. My younger sister sat in front of me but after saying hello she didn't really seem interested in engaging in conversation with me.

The other siblings were busy with their allocated wedding duties. I told myself 'you're just being sensitive'.

After the ceremony my Dad came to me and said 'C'mon, it's time for the photos'. When they called out names for a 'siblings photo' and I wasn't included, I just wanted to disappear. I felt

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.



pathetic and desperate for wanting to be included in a photo with my siblings and when I wasn't I felt completely exposed and so vulnerable in front of strangers. My Dad later ushered me into a bigger group photo that included sibling's partners.



As soon as I could, I walked away from the group to get some space and called a friend. I had a cry, smoked some cigarettes and then went back to the wedding. My Dad tried to reassure me, apologising saying he couldn't understand why I wasn't included. I did my best to put on a smile and make conversation but I felt like I didn't want to be there.

I sat at a table with my siblings while speeches and other formalities were happening. When the mingling started I spent a lot of time taking cigarette breaks away from the venue and mostly talked to the waiting staff who kindly supplied me with a steady stream of drinks.

Looking back on this experience, is there anything you'd suggest for somebody who faces a similarly challenging family event?

Speak to trusted members of your birth family before the event. My birth father had assumed that I would be included in photos and had set up this expectation. These can be hard conversations to have, but it would have been much better to clarify with him before the event how my siblings felt about me being included in a photo with them, rather than just assuming it would happen.

If you can, go with a partner or a close friend. Even if they can't come to the event with you, see if they can be available to spend time with you afterwards or to travel with you to the family event if it is in a different city. Talk to others who may have had a similar experience – these can be common experiences for those affected by adoption and it may help you to feel less alone.

Gene Genie

Poem by an anonymous client

Fallen far short of the answer t'was once thought
to be

There were so many factors you've simply failed
to see

Was it your ignorance, blindness or just plain
hate?

Your ill-thought decisions sealed the innocent's
fate

Remove your Rose Glasses non-adopted people
& you'll see

Removing Baby's Mother did not set them free
In truth we don't all start life from the same
place

Yet everyone should have the right to know their
Mother's face

Adoptive Parents everywhere have been put to
the test

Though kind & hopeful hearted, they are ill-
equipped at best

Those in-built genetic cues that come so
naturally

Are missing from your put together 'Instant
Family'

Baby bonds with Mama while safe within her
womb,
spends nine months in her tummy, just born &
then so soon,

Baby is given to a stranger who can never be
Baby's Mummy

Because Baby's never spent any time within her
tummy

Yet you've decided it won't matter coz baby will
still grow

Baby will never miss what Baby 'doesn't know'
You made her Mama go away - She doesn't
realise that

Baby waits & waits & waits, but Mama's never
coming back

Innocent newborn babies were handed out like
lollies

A Smoker's clear lung X-ray could secure living
dollies

'Adoptees are lucky!' say the ignorant society
bubble

But breaking up families only feeds emotional
struggle



What we've judged to be your Mother's sin
Made us decide you must have new kin
You'll never know your Mummy's name
Just you be grateful for this adoption game

With your family comes a new family tree
We're substituting your genealogy
All these secrets may perpetuate lies
Because your total truth is now in disguise

It's the only truth you'll ever know

Coz puzzle pieces we'll not show
As the cat must be kept within the bag
Sealed files will provide the perfect gag

Now I'm no longer that little babe, now it's time
I have my say.
You had no right to do what you did to me on
my BIRTH DAY
You've stripped me of all information; You've
taken everything I had away
You changed the names on my birth certificate &
removed me on that day

You just sent me off with strangers - Doesn't that
sound strange?
Without knowing if they truly cared, & no
follow-up arranged
You can try to break all the bonds; Those things
that tie me to my Mum
But there's still one thing that's linking me at the
going down of every sun

One unseen thing that remains unbroken & can
never be undone
It forever links me to my family, & it links me to
my Mum
What makes me who I am, my identity, my
blueprint, if you will
It's in every cell of my body & it's something you
can't kill

There was so many wrongs - life changing
things, that broke my heart that day
But you have failed to change the facts or break
our bond, try as you may
Muddled up my life you did; I still feel the
heartache to this day
But still you couldn't break the link ...
Because it's in my DNA!!

Save the Date for the State Apology Anniversary

Post Adoption Support Queensland (PASQ) and
the Queensland Post Adoption Working
Committee invite you to save the date for the
**9th Anniversary of the Queensland
Government's Apology for Forced Adoption
Policies and Practices** to be held on Friday,
26th November from 10am. Bookings will open
in September and you can follow updates about
the event at [www.facebook.com/
QLDapologyforcedadoption](http://www.facebook.com/QLDapologyforcedadoption)

2021 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.**

**Meetings are held on the ground
floor of SANDS House, 505 Bowen
Terrace, New Farm from 1.30 -
3.30pm.**

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

Open Information Events - TBA.

Adoptee Support Group - 11 Sept, 13 Nov.

Mothers' Morning Tea - 15 Sept, 17 Nov.