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- Office hours 10.00am to 2.00pm Wednesday & Thursday •

## Welcome to Winter !

### *Funded Project Update*

Recently one of our Jigsaw members Helen Riley was able to help Jigsaw Queensland receive Commonwealth Government funding to review and update our stationery and public information material.

Helen is a supervisor at 'Artrageous' at Beenleigh – a 'work for the dole' organisation who, through mutual obligation, enables the long term unemployed to give back to their community.

At the end of the Jigsaw project the Artrageous team will deliver a CD containing new designs for business cards, letterhead, with compliments slips, web design, posters design and other key public document images.

*Special thanks to Helen and her team for their creative ideas and enthusiasm throughout the project.*

Together we're working to ensure that more and more people affected by adoption can easily find us, and make contact when they are ready to find out more about their birth family history – and importantly, about themselves.

### **"Why wasn't I told...?"**

#### *Making sense of the late discovery of adoption*

From PARC (NSW Post Adoption Resource Centre) Research paper presented in 1992.

What do we know about late discovery adoptive families?  
Are they in fact radically different from those where adoption is open?

We would need to look at a comparative sample of adoptive families to be able to answer this question with any degree of accuracy. However, from our own sample of 40 people it is interesting to note that over a quarter of the participants in fact indicated that their adoptions were unhappy prior to the late discovery disclosure.

Could it be said that the keeping of the secret created an environment where guilt and blame flourished? Is the secrecy about adoption symptomatic of unresolved issues of the adoptive parents? These are confronting and controversial questions.

The following quote taken from a 1947 Women's Weekly advice column, written by a doctor, describes the attitudes towards adoption at that time.

"Should I tell the child of the adoption? She asked. You certainly should I told her. When old enough to understand, the child should be told of how the choice was made, and then never mentioned again."

"Should I inquire about the child's parents? The less you know of the child's biological parents the better. For your own peace of mind, they should not know anything of you."

Loyalty towards one's adoptive parents can override the strong feelings of anger and grief experienced by many late discovery adoptees. This loyalty may prevent the late discovery adoptee from ever feeling comfortable about disclosing their new knowledge to their adoptive parents. It may ensure that the legacy of secrecy continues. When adoption is talked about openly, it can become a source of great shame and stigma for some families.

*One of the most difficult aspects for late discovery adoptees is the sense that "everyone knew of the adoption other than themselves".*

We have been given examples throughout this research of ways that the discovery was made with the majority being told by a relative, spouse or other person who had held the precious knowledge and had, out of kindness, duty, guilt or malice, finally "told".

We have also examined the experience of 'things making sense now' described by many late discovery adoptees who have finally been able to understand the whispered comments of childhood friends or the throw away statement made by a relative at a family party. For some, the sense of conspiracy is tremendously difficult to cope with, and trust in other close relationships may be challenged or destroyed.

*Intellect comes from the conscious mind ...  
emotion is often unconscious.*

# Jigsaw Bits & Pieces

## **“Why wasn’t I told...?”** *continued*

There is no reliable evidence on the proportion of NSW adoptees who are unaware of their adoptive status. A small study conducted by PARC in 1992 revealed a significant number of adopted adults who had been contacted by birth family members and who had not been aware of their adoption until that point. Of the 27 adoptees who were found in this way, 6 had not known of their adoptive status (22.2%). It was thought this small sample could be indicative of a much wider group of adult adoptees.

Between July 1995 and February 1998, 99 people had contacted PARC because of late discovery. A sample of 40 agreed to participate in our research project, which was conducted by Shirin Markham, a NSW university social work student on placement at PARC.

The 40 participants (34 female and 6 male) were interviewed by telephone or in person using a questionnaire. The questionnaire took about one hour to complete and covered aspects such as the discovery of adoption, the initial reaction to the news, the effects on family relationships and contact with the birth family.

### Status of Participants

- 33 were late discovery adoptees
- 2 were birth mothers of late discovery adoptees
- 3 were spouses of late discovery adoptees
- 1 suspected she was adopted
- 1 was adopted by her birth mother and stepfather

### Age at discovery

Earliest age of discovery - 12 years  
Latest age of discovery - 65 years  
Average age of discovery - 38 years

## **Major Conclusions**

41% of the sample was told of their adoption by someone other than the adoptive family, relatives or birth family

62% of the sample never suspected they were adopted, but many felt that it made sense of their family relationships or because they always felt different from everyone else.

62% of the sample went on to have contact with their birth family after the discovery of their adoption.

The experiences of being told of their adoption varied greatly among the sample. Some were told by ‘well meaning’ relatives and others were told by spouses or adoptive parents. A small number of the sample’s spouses had known of their partners’ adoption for years and kept it a secret until the disclosure. Some adoptees discovered their adoption papers, or were teased by other children at school about being adopted.

The initial reactions to finding out about their adoption was overwhelmingly that of shock, and ranged from feelings of disbelief, anger and relief to devastation. Feelings of relief were experienced by those who had difficult adoptions.

Anger towards those people who had known of the adoption was commonly expressed. Some also experienced feelings of loss that their family was not their biological family, and questions of ‘who am I’ overwhelmed them.

## **Initial Reactions**

“Shock, but I had a great need to tell my adoptive mother it was okay, because I was worried about her. Then I just got angry. It was like feeling shock, concern, sadness, anger – it was a process of feelings.”

“Anger, I felt isolated and alone. I felt I didn’t belong to anyone.”

“Happiness, I was a victim of child abuse and there was a sense of relief that I wasn’t blood related.”

## **Informing the Adoptive Parents of Discovery**

24.8% informed their adoptive parents that they had discovered they were adopted

22.2% did not inform their adoptive parents.

28.2% did not need to inform their adoptive parents because the information had come from the parents  
24.8% adoptees’ parents were dead

The group who told their parents had mixed feelings. Some told their parents the same day they discovered they were adopted, others took months, even years before they told them. Some found that their parents became quite defensive and would say things like ‘you should be grateful’ or ‘I don’t want to talk about it again’.

Some of the adoptees chose not to tell because they felt their parents were too old and it would ‘kill them’. Others were protective of their parents and did not wish to hurt them in any way.

Half of the sample felt that the discovery of their adoption had affected family relationships and they described different experiences. Many found they became a lot closer since the disclosure, whereas for others, trust was secretly strained, and some broke off contact altogether. Some adoptees of older parents expressed understanding that they were adopted in a different era when secrecy might have been encouraged.

More than half went on to have contact with their birth families and 45% of those initiated the contact. The majority experienced a positive initial response from their birth family. A much smaller portion were contacted by the birth family (17%). Those who had not had birth family contact felt they were not ready to search but would probably search eventually.

*It’s natural to want to know more about your birth history.  
Just remember that not everyone becomes ready to know at the same time.*

# Jigsaw Bits & Pieces

## *"Why wasn't I told...?"* *continued*

Two of the forty people searched for their birth mothers only to find they had died.

Many of those who felt that the reunion had impacted upon them found that the reunion had a positive effect on their lives, they now had the satisfaction of knowing the why's, and answers to 'who am I?'

A small number felt the reunion had destroyed their adoptive family relationships, because their adoptive family would not accept the reunion. Some partners of the adoptees who search felt threatened by the contact and found it hard to understand the identity issues involved.

75% of the participants felt they did not require counseling to deal with issues of late discovery. What helped the majority of those to cope was the support of their partners, extended family and friends.

Only 25%, a quarter, had undertaken counseling – primarily from PARC. This was seen to be helpful. Dealing with the ongoing issues surrounding late discovery was something the majority was still grappling with.

Trusting others was difficult, and this affected the ability to participate to form new relationships. Feelings were close to the surface and could be easily triggered by reading an article on adoption, or watching something on television. For those participants who had experienced rejection from birth families, frustration and anger were commonly felt.

Issues around identity confusion were more prevalent in the groups who had not made contact with birth families. The samples acknowledged how difficult the impact of late discovery had been, not only on them but also their partners and extended family.

The late discovery of adoption forced one to confront deep-seated identity issues and to grieve for the person who one thought one was. Many felt it was a journey of self-discovery in finding roots.

In closing, this quote comes from one of the participants in the study (J. Martin). She says "I am not a social historian and I cannot imagine society as it existed then. I can, however, believe that most adoptive parents felt that they were acting in the best interest of their adopted children by not revealing their status. In a way, they probably felt that they were protecting us from ourselves. But the very issue is one I have the most difficulty accepting – that our existence was fundamentally flawed in some way, that somehow we were also blameworthy. We were, after all, bastards, the unwanted mistakes.

I had the best of parents, however at the end of the day, I still don't know fully who I am and I do not know at all where I came from. Earlier acknowledgement, explanation and acceptance of my origins could have been celebrated rather than hidden and denied the reality of my existence."

.....ooOoo....

### **Jigsaw recommends that initial contact is made by letter, and not by telephone or in person**

On your behalf, Jigsaw Queensland can write an anonymous letter on plain paper with no letterhead to the person you are searching for. Jigsaw's post office box and office phone number is given along with specific days and times for contact.

A second letter can be forwarded after one month without response, this time using Jigsaw letterhead and includes a little more about current legislation and access to information. It is sent 'person to person' and can only be collected by the person it's addressed to.

While turn-around times are definitely not predictable, the success rate of this type of contact is high.

## **Department Details**

To help you with your external journey, contact the Department to apply for identifying and non-identifying information and access to birth certificates.

*Department of Child Safety  
Local & Post Adoption Services  
GPO Box 806*

*BRISBANE Q 4001*

*Phone: (07) 3224 7415*

*Toll Free: 1800 647 983*

*[www.childsafety.qld.gov.au/families/adoption](http://www.childsafety.qld.gov.au/families/adoption)*

## **Registrar General's Office**

To obtain copies of birth certificates and to conduct a search for change of name by marriage, contact this Office. It's possible to download application forms from their website.

*Registrar General  
Births, Deaths & Marriages*

*501 Ann Street*

*PO Box 188*

*ALBERT STREET, QLD 4002*

*Phone: 3247 9203*

*Internet: [www.justice.qld.gov.au](http://www.justice.qld.gov.au)*

## **NSW PARC -**

**Post Adoption Resource Centre**

Established by The Benevolent Society in 1991, followed with Government funding that provided for a counseling and information resource for those affected by adoption in New South Wales.

*Scarba House, 24A Ocean Street,  
PO Box 239, Bondi, NSW 2026*

*Phone: (02) 9365 3444*

*NSW Toll Free: 1800 024 256*

*Email: [parc@bensoc.asn.au](mailto:parc@bensoc.asn.au)*

*Internet: [www.bensoc.an.au/parc](http://www.bensoc.an.au/parc)*

*Jigsaw's helper model is collaborative.  
It does help with information, but importantly,  
encourages and empowers you to find your own solutions ...*

# Jigsaw Bits & Pieces

## Lifelong Issues in Adoption – 7 Core Issues

The last of the 7 core issues are covered in this edition of Bits & Pieces – from Deborah Silverstein & Sharon Kaplan, *Working with Older Adoptees: A source of innovative models.*

### Mastery / Control

Adoption alters the course of one's life. This shift presents triad members with additional hurdles in their development, and may hinder growth, self-actualisation, and the evolution of self-control.

Birthparents, adoptive parents and adoptees are forced to give up control. Adoption for the most, is a second choice. Birthparents did not grow up with romantic images of becoming accidentally pregnant or abusing their children or surrendering them for adoption.

In contrast, the pregnancy or abuse is a crisis situation whose resolution becomes adoption. In order to solve the predicament, birthparents must surrender not only the child but also their volition, leading to feelings of victimisation and powerlessness which may become themes in birthparent's lives.

Adoptees are keenly aware that they were not party to the decision which led to their adoption. They had no control over the loss of the birth family or the choice of the adoptive family - the adoption procedure with adults making life-altering choices for them. This unnatural change of course impinges on growth towards self-actualisation and self-control.

Adolescent adoptees, attempting to master the loss of control they have experienced in adoption, frequently engage in power struggles with adoptive parents and other authority figures. They may lack internalised self-control, leading to lowered sense of self-responsibility. These patterns frequently passive/aggressive in nature, may continue into adulthood.

For adoptive parents, the intricacies of the adoption process lead to feelings of helplessness. These feelings sometimes cause adoptive parents to view themselves as powerless and perhaps not entitled to be parents, leading to laxity in parenting.

As an alternative response, some adoptive parents may seek to gain the lost control by becoming over-protective and controlling, leading to rigidity in the parent/adoptee relationship.

### Summary

The experience of adoption can be one of loss, grief, guilt / shame, rejection, diminished identity, thwarted intimacy, and threats to self-control and to the accomplishment of mastery.

These 7 core or lifelong issues permeate the lives of triad members regardless of the circumstance of the adoption. Identifying these core issues can assist those affected by adoption and professionals in establishing an open dialogue and alleviating some of the pain and isolation which so often characterise adoption.

Some may need professional assistance in recognising that they may have become trapped in the negative feelings generated by the adoption experience. Armed with this new awareness, they can choose to catapult themselves into growth and strength.

Some may repeatedly do and undo their adoption experiences in their minds and in their vacillating behaviours while striving towards mastery. They will benefit from identifying, exploring and ultimately accepting the role of the seven core issues in their lives.

The following tasks and questions can help explore the role of the seven core issues in adoption:

- List the losses, large and small, that you have experienced in adoption.
- Identify the feelings associated with these losses.

- What experiences in adoption have led to feelings of rejection?
- Do you ever see yourself rejecting others before they reject you? When?
- What guilt or shame do you feel about adoption?
- Identify your behaviours at each of the five stages of the grief process. Have you accepted your losses?
- How has adoption impacted your sense of who you are?

*First published in Working with Older Adoptees: A source of innovative models. Edited by Coleman, Tilbor, Hornby and Boggis.*

## The Grieving Process

There are five stages to the natural and normal process of grieving. They are:

- |                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Denial</i>     | - numbness           |
| <i>Anger</i>      | - act out grief      |
| <i>Bargaining</i> | - if this, then that |
| <i>Depression</i> | - sadness            |
| <i>Acceptance</i> | - resolve own issues |

### Please be aware ...

*It's quite possible that you may feel disturbed or troubled, or even angry as a result of reading something in this newsletter.*

*Perhaps you've been able to identify with a particular phrase or comment ...?*

*Maybe you have questions that you'd like to ask ...?*

*Jigsaw welcomes your call or email or attendance at one of our support groups.*

*We're here for you ...*

***Even far along the path toward resolution there will be moments of renewed grief – some predictable and some unforeseeable.***

# Jigsaw Bits & Pieces

## I'm fine ... and other lies!!!

Russell Friedman & John W James  
of The Grief Recovery Institute

There's a lot of misinformation that we're all subjected to about processing the normal emotions caused by loss. We do not want to create any new loss by blaming our parents in particular or society in general for having passed on ineffective ideas, skills and tools for dealing with loss. All we want to do is help establish that what we have been using to process our sad, painful or negative feelings hasn't worked, and that we need to acquire more effective tools for dealing with loss events.

Much of the incorrect information we learned and practiced may have convinced us not to show our REAL feelings at any cost. We were taught to bury any feelings that dealt with sadness.

We were taught: "Laugh and the whole world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone". This and hundreds of other clichés about dealing with sad feelings taught us to lie about how we felt. And even the lying was protected under other misinformation like: "Don't burden others with your feelings."

When we make public appearances we often ask a large audience this question: "Do you like being lied to ...?" Of course no one says yes. Our next question is: "How many of you have ever said 'I'M FINE' when you were feeling terrible ...?" Every single hand in the audience goes up. Conclusion: Nobody likes being lied to ... and everybody lies about their feelings.

If this were a physical illness it would be an epidemic and the Centre for Disease Control would be granted billions of dollars to find a cure.

*Every time we lie to others, we lie to ourselves. Our subconscious mind hears the lie and continues to bury the feelings generated by the initial event. Unresolved losses are cumulative, and cumulatively negative. Time does not heal the pain caused by loss and neither does lying about our feelings.*

It would be impossible to cure such a massive problem in a single column, but let's try for a little bit of recovery. Allow yourself to believe that the subconscious will take actions based on conscious commands. When we lied and said we were fine we told it that there was no problem so it need not search out a solution. The net effect is to allow the cause of the problem to go unattended and re-bury itself. The next time it attacks, we may not be able to recognise the cause or source of the attack.

A major key to recovery is to process every feeling in the moment you have it. It does not require any skills to tell the truth about what you are feeling.

For example: "How are you?" ... "I'm having a tough day, thanks for asking." Notice that the answer is truthful but does not invite any help or advice. It also has the capacity of serving notice that you are not on your game and the other party can respond accordingly. When you say "I'm fine", but you're not, you have sent a very confusing message.

QUESTION: Sometimes I tell people 'I'm fine' but they don't believe me. Why not?

ANSWER: Approximately 20% of your ability to communicate is verbal, leaving about 80% as non-verbal. Non-verbal communication includes tone of voice as well as facial and body signals. When our verbal and non-verbal signals do not match most people will respond to the non-verbal.

So when you lie, most people can SEE it !!

*Russell Friedman was just one of the presenters at the American Adoption Congress 2005*

## Editorial

*I'm feeling very relaxed right now as I've just returned from a 5 week holiday in USA and Canada that included attending the 4 day American Adoption Congress held in Las Vegas. And what a great experience that was! Such an excellent program and a far broader range of topics than I'd encountered before on the subject of adoption – and over time I'm certain will be shared in future Bits & Pieces editions.*

*Being an advocate for birth sibling reunion, I presented a workshop called 'completing the jigsaw puzzle' and my brother and Jigsaw President Trevor Jordan presented two papers on ethics in adoption – one for professionals and the other for anyone affected by adoption.*

*One thing I've unexpectedly returned with is a sense of gratefulness for our adoption system in Australia. Both USA and Canada have embraced the private agency adoption system which many find extremely frustrating and heart-breaking when they're ready to gain access to their birth history.*

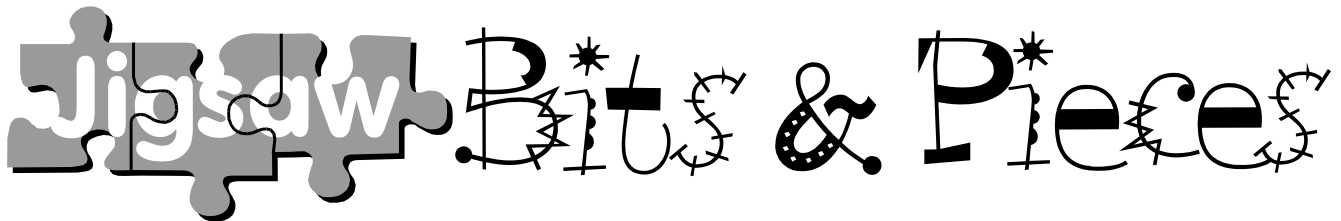
*There was stunned silence and disbelief when I responded to a question about how long it took to receive a response from my initial application for birth information – and I replied 6 weeks. I even added my discontent for the present situation where it could take up to 3 months ...but they still longed for a similar system!*

*Closed records are a huge issue in a lot of American States, some Adoption Groups having continued their battle to open records for 25 years or more. I sense our Australian experience gives them some element of hope.*

*And rather than feeling complacent, I've returned with renewed enthusiasm to keep educating and asking for changes that best suit all those affected by adoption in 2005 and beyond.*

**Happy Reading  
Collette Glazebrook**

*Time does not heal the pain caused by loss ... and neither does lying about our feelings.*



## Welcome to Jigsaw Queensland

Jigsaw is a non-profit, member based organisation relying on trained volunteers to provide a range of services to all those affected by adoption. We rely on membership and donations from individuals, business and government to achieve our objectives. Membership and donations help us provide ongoing services to our members and the community at large via:

- ▶ Jigsaw Queensland Guide for 'Putting the pieces together' (New edition now available)
- ▶ Registration on the Jigsaw Contact Register
- ▶ 'Bits & Pieces' bi-monthly newsletters – Connecting for support
- ▶ Monthly support groups - 1) Open Group (all welcome), 2) Adoptee Group, 3) Birthmothers Group
- ▶ Assistance with your search
- ▶ Telephone helping service
- ▶ Email helping service
- ▶ Access to sensitive and caring mediation / facilitation service
- ▶ Access to book and tape library and other relevant printed material

Initial full Membership is \$50 for the first year with ongoing renewal \$25 annually. Separate subscription to 'Bits & Pieces' is available for \$25 per annum. Any donation amount is welcomed and appreciated. Please complete the form below, attach your cheque and return to our office – with a stamped self-addressed envelope if you require a receipt.

Title.....Surname .....Given Names .....

Address ..... Suburb.....Post Code .....

Home Phone .....Work .....Mobile ..... Email .....

Adopted Persons Date of Birth ..... State Electorate (if known) .....

Signature ..... Date .....

**Mail to – Jigsaw Qld Inc, PO Box 912, New Farm Qld 4000**

Thank you for your contribution

### *You're Invited! - Brisbane Support Meetings*

<u>Open Group</u> (all welcome)	1 <sup>st</sup> Tuesday Monthly (except January) 7.30pm to 9.00pm
Contact:	Jigsaw Office: (07) 3358 6666
<u>Adoptee Group</u>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Wednesday Monthly 7.00pm to 9.00pm
Contact:	Angela: 0407 024 805 Monday to Wednesday 6pm – 7pm
<u>Birthmother Support Group</u>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Saturday monthly Commencing 1.30pm
Contact:	Jenny: 0418 771 109 between 9am-4pm weekdays
<u>Venue for Brisbane groups</u>	SANDS House, Ground Floor meeting room 505 Bowen Terrace New Farm