

Adoption: From severance and secrecy to connection and openness

In this Public History Talk, the authors of two recently published books discussed the profound impact of closed stranger adoption in New Zealand, and the drive for change. Closed stranger adoption under the 1955 Adoption Act, still in force today, has deeply affected thousands of New Zealanders.

In their recent book [*Adopted: Loss, love, family and reunion*](#) (Massey University Press, 2022), Jo Willis and Brigs (Brigitta) Baker shared the complexity of their reunion journeys, the emotional challenges they faced, and the ongoing impacts of their adoptions, with candour and courage. The stories of their birthparents, partners and children and the physical and emotional toll of adoption on them are also heard. Jo Willis joined us for this Public History Talk.

Anne Else and Maria Haenga-Collins's comprehensive new eBook is [*A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944–1974 and Adoption, State Care, Donor Conception and Surrogacy 1975–2022*](#) (Bridget Williams Books, 2023). It combines Anne's original 1991 post-war adoption history with seven new chapters giving up-to-date accounts of state care, donor conception and surrogacy, alongside the ongoing story of adoption. Anne joined us for this talk.

The conversation was led by Professor Bill Atkin, recently retired from Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington Law School.

It was recorded live at the National Library of New Zealand on 28 August 2023. Some questions were submitted by audience members in person at the talk, and others were sent online and read out by a Alexander Turnbull Library staff member.

SPEAKERS

Neill Atkinson, Bill Atkin, Jo Willis, Anne Else, Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library], plus in-person audience members

Neill Atkinson

Kia ora koutou, nau mai haere mai, ko Neill Atkinson toku ingoa. I'm Neill Atkinson, Chief Historian for the Ministry of Culture and Heritage. I'm delighted to welcome everyone here, joining us here at the National Library, and also online to tonight's presentation.

Now, in a moment, I'm going to introduce Professor Bill Atkin, who's going to chair tonight's session and he will introduce our two speakers - not quite the four originally planned but two very good speakers.

Bill Atkin is recently retired as professor of law at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington. His fields of teaching and research include family law, torts, health law, and social welfare law. He has written extensively on all areas of family law, including adoption and assisted human reproduction. He chaired the adoption practices review committee which the late Sir Michael Cullen appointed in 1990 when he was Minister of Social Welfare. So, I now invite Bill to come up and introduce Jo and Anne.

Bill Atkin

Thank you, Neil. Kia ora, everyone. Thank you for coming. And to those who are online as well. I actually recently became professor emeritus, which I think means 'past your use-by date'. But let's leave that there. I'm just going to do a little bit of an introduction first, then introduce the speakers and then leave it over to them, with time for some questions towards the end, hopefully, a reasonable amount of time. I should say yes two of our original speakers apologize, because unfortunately, they are suffering from ill health.

So, we are here to celebrate two recent and wonderful and important books. One of them is called *Adopted*. Jo and Brigitta Baker (who apologizes) wrote this, published recently. And then the other book is by Anne Else and her colleague who's unfortunately not able to be her either, Maria Haenga-Collins.

The second of those two books is based on Anne's classic book *A Question of Adoption*, which was published in 1991. And here's my copy. The new book is an e-book. And it includes most of this book. One chapter, which was sort of future looking has been changed and updated. But then the e-book has seven new chapters taking into account in particular some other developments, such as surrogacy. Surrogacy and adoption, as you may well know, have a number of significant links. So, we're going to hear from them on our theme on the central issues of 'secrecy and severance, giving way to connection and openness' in relation to adoption.

So this historical perspective is against the back drop of long overdue reform of adoption laws, because you'll probably all know that the Adoption Act 1955 was passed nearly seven decades ago and apart from some changes relating to adoption information - adult adoption information - and inter-country adoption, that 1955 Act still governs, even though so much has changed over time. The Ministry of Justice has published a couple of discussion documents. And the second one in particular pointed to the shape of a new statute. At the same time reform of the allied area of surrogacy is actually before Parliament through a member's bill which the government has taken over. And the subject has also been explored in a very good Law Commission Report.

What is happening to that legislation? Because the bill has a number of defects in it, and the Law Commission is the blueprint really, is that the member's bill will basically been rewritten. And there is a report - quite a long report - which came out last week, I think it was, which I've dipped into and haven't read fully yet. It shows the way. So, there's action on surrogacy, which will mean that probably the adoption laws might need to be used. And there's a bit of action not quite so far down the track in relation to adoption.

But of course, there's also the matter of the general election. And it's not entirely clear were all the parties sit, and what priority they will give to the topics of adoption and surrogacy. I mean, are they "bread and butter-ish" enough? There are lots of other balls to be juggled? Where does Te Tiriti fit into the reforms? What about the rainbow community and reforms? What about the Royal Commission on abuse in care? What about the people involved in adoption past and present, especially birth parents and their whānau, adoptive parents and their whānau, and above all, those people who were adopted as children, especially in an era, when adoption was closed? And so we're going to hear more about that. But I've given you just very briefly, the sort of backdrop and Anne will say more about that as well.

So, I just like to introduce you in particular to Jo Wills, who will speak first, she is an adopted person, a specialist in the field of adoption counseling, coaching and education. When she was young, she lobbied local and national politicians were amendments to the Adoption Act. In 1984, at the age of 21, she was reunited with her birth family and worked on the Adult Adoption Information Act which I mentioned fleetingly just before. She's had a career as a social worker, senior practitioner and supervisor and has worked with all facets of adoption and information. Based in Napier, Jo currently draws on her personal and professional experience to support adopted adults to understand process and integrate the adoption experience. And Brig's career and background is similar - adopted in the closed adoption era, uniting in 2008 with her birth family and she has also had professional experience in counseling and so forth.

Anne Else was adopted at birth in Auckland in 1945. Found her birth mother in 1984 which is the same year Jo, as you according to the notes, which is interesting. Anne is the author of many publications - not just ones about adoption - on the history of women in society in Aotearoa New Zealand, substantial number dealing with adoption assisted reproductive technology. She presented to the Royal Commission which I mentioned before, and the teams undertaking major reviews of adoption and surrogacy. She lives in Te Whanganui a Tara Wellington. Indeed, I say that we both actually live in Karori as well. And Maria Haenga-Collins was adopted as a young child - first fostered then adopted - into a Pākehā family. She had an MA thesis and then a doctoral dissertation, "Closed stranger adoption: Māori and race relations in Aotearoa New Zealand 1955 to 1985". She lives in Tamaki and works at the Auckland University of Technology. So, there is the background to our speakers and our two absentee speakers.

Bill Atkin

And I'd like to first hand it over to Jo who's going to speak from the comfortable seats.

Jo Wills

Thank you, Bill. Tena kotou katoa, greetings, everybody. I'd first of like to acknowledge Brigs, who is unable to be with me in person this evening. But her health is improving. And she actually is with us on Zoom. So, hi Briggs! I'm going to be speaking about the impact of the legal provisions of the 1955 Adoption Act and the secrecy of closed stranger adoption - both as an adopted person and from three decades of working with adopted people. I'll then read you Brig's reflections that she sent through for me to read out on her behalf. And then lastly, I'll share the key changes that we both would like to see.

So, the legal provisions and close stranger adoption, unsurprisingly, impact upon those and the adoption constellation in varying in yet predictable ways. If you'd asked me about the impact, personally at various stages in my lifetime, you would have received the following account. But just before I tell you this, I might say you might be wondering about my sanity, particularly if you'd heard about it, listened to me in retrospect. However, if you're an adopted person, it may well make total sense. So, I was told by my - I was adopted in born and adopted in 1959 - and I was told by my adoptive parents at the age of three years old, which was the practice at that time. And apparently, according to them, I told every single person I possibly code from builders to whoever came to our house that I was 'dopted'. And I was proud as punch.

Then, at six years old, I was standing up in class, we were asked to talk about our families. And I said that I was born in Taihape. And the teacher stopped me and said, 'Oh, how long did you live there'? And I said, 'Ah, I didn't. I was adopted'. And in that moment, looking at the face of my teacher and those of my classmates was the first time I felt a sense of shame, and difference, and perhaps not belonging. From then on from six to 13 years of age, my school report said, 'she's a very good girl quiet and very compliant'. I promise you that is not my personality. From 13 to 17 years, those same reports, with different teachers obviously, said 'is easily distracted, angry, and at times rebellious'. In fact, I was suspended from school at the age of 13. At 19 years of age, if you'd asked me about adoption, I would have said, 'Oh, I've had a good adoption. I'm good'. At 21, reunited with all members of my birth family, I mean, how lucky was I felt incredibly blessed.

Then I went on to marry and have two beautiful children and was kind of living the life of what you'd deemed successful and then at 28 years of age, wracked by panic attacks, anxiety, depression, to the point of agoraphobia, I could hardly walk off my property I would tell you that adoption was the worst thing that could ever happen to me. In my 30s, early 30s I wished that I had grown up with my birth family. In my late 30s, after 16 years of reunion, I wrote a breakup letter to my birth mother, which I never posted. In my 40s, I did loads of personal development, counselling, therapy, processing, intense adoption-related pain, unraveling the many myths and stories that I've been told, plus the ones that I told myself in the absence of any information, due to the closed records. I grieved the many losses, the experience of being raised outside of my birth family, a sense of difference and not belonging anywhere - all with professionals who had absolutely no understanding about the impact of adoption at all. In my 50s, I started to feel more authentically me and loving a bit more in align with what I would call 'my own life'.

And I started doing things like yoga and meditation, anything to calm my nervous system, and keep me home in my body. And to keep me in my own skin, in my 60s, early 60s, I might add, you'll to wait for that. I'll tell you that a bit later. So how each of us live out the impact of our experience is unique, In the book *Adopted* that Brigitta and I co-authored, revealed that Brigitta pushed it aside until that was no longer sustainable in motherhood. And for me, that was the lenses that I saw myself in life through from the age of three. But what did emerge quite clearly is that there were core things that we both experienced, despite very different experiences with our adoptive families, 10 years apart in age, and many other differences. It also revealed how adoption impacted on our intimate relationships with our husbands, our children and our birth family, relationships.

You know, most adopted people do well. It's not about having had a good or bad experience of adoption. One can have a good adoptive home, and still feel a sense of not belonging, live with reactive patterns and the challenges of being oneself. It's clear to me that the impact is real, significant underestimated and widely misunderstood, even by adopted people themselves. I also work with non-adopted people in my clients will often say, 'oh, you know, do I wish I didn't have issues and I was normal like everyone else'. I reassure them that actually, every human being has issues. But the difference is, my adopted clients come in and they say, 'Jo, there is something really wrong with me'.

Now, why might that be? There are various studies published by the National Library of Medicine in the US, that found that being adopted in infancy actually doubles the odds of contact with mental health professionals, and that often there is addiction and substance abuse in the mix. One study done by the

American Academy of Pediatrics in 2013 revealed that adoptive people are four times more likely than non-adopted peers to attempt suicide. And also adopted adults who search and find their biological families are at even higher risk of psychological distress than those who don't search. Now, just like to precis here and say, don't be put off if you're thinking about it - there are things to put in place to support you through that process.

Jo Wills

So why might that be? Clinicians, theorists suggest that when an infant is separated from its mother at the outset of life, there is a 'primal wounding'. Nancy Veria first coined that term in 1995. In her book, *The Primal Wound Theory*, this severing that at the outside outset of life is preverbal, predevelopment of a sense of self as separate from the mother is not remembered, consciously, but the limbic system remembers it for sure, and it shows up in post-traumatic stress. And one of the byproducts of that is hyper vigilance, an early survival mechanism set up to protect the child from further abandonment, actually, at the same time, sets the child up to be at the mercy of cyclical, reactive and unconscious life-protecting patterns to prevent further abandonment or rejection. However, in adulthood, these influenced, and impacted upon intimate relationships and friendships so profoundly. The hyper-vigilance has the adopted person on red alert and to protect against rejection, in one of the responses is to reject before they themselves are rejected.

Now on the one hand, this does achieve perceived safety and control. However, the price is love and connection that adopted people naturally crave and then they're often left with saying, you know 'there's something wrong with me'. So, severance is the word that resounds through all the layers for me - severance from the bloodline is was any right to it from the original birth certificate, name identity, severance meant no information needed to develop in healthy ways along the natural developmental pathways that people develop in. While just a piece of paper, its impact from the outset is profound. Severance from one's origins means we need to self-abandon and graft on someone else's family tree - a term coined by Barbara Sumner in her book *Tree of Strangers* - is also severance from the authentic self to adapt and to survive.

The development of the authentic self has weakened through the survival mechanisms and then denied, compounded by being denied access as we grow. An 80 year old woman who was adopted said to me years ago, 'Jo, do they have any idea what it's like to live with not knowing anything about your origins, your story or the blood that runs through your veins, but worse, much worse is I'm going to die shortly that I'm going to leave this legacy to my children and to my grandchildren'. Then there were the further layers that add to the fog confusion. Severance means secrecy, secrecy means silence and denial, very much part of that era was 'don't talk about anything. Push it down, push feelings away'. And if you're acting out, it's your fault. There's something wrong with you.

Look, I want to acknowledge that society at that time genuinely believed that it was in the best interests of everyone. And you could justify this because due to the social cultural attitudes at the time, all parties in the adoption constellation needed that - to be an infertile couple, there was shame attached to that, to the church very much influenced at the time having sex before marriage, so for the birth mother, that was extremely shameful. And apparently, us adopted people had bad blood. So, the legislation was to prevent further trauma for those involved. Then there's denial, so denial kept then, and still does keep adopted people, caught between two realities, their own internal experience, which

is not mirrored in society even today, through acknowledgement and validation of their experience. But as I quote one of my adopted clients says 'adoption is not binary. I love my family, but I hate adoption. I had a good life. But I wish I was raised by my biological family. I can see my adopting family had money, resources and opportunities my relinquishing parents didn't have. I feel guilty that I prefer my middle class and shame-free upbringing'. We need to have the impact acknowledged, don't we?

Then I talked about shame, the stigma. I remember when growing up I was told 'better be a good girl because they were orphanages in those days, and I was very lucky to be adopted' and 'that my mother was a slut' and that we that I came from the gutter. Then there was myths and confusing stories like 'your mother loved you so much. She wanted you to have two parents'. The truth is never [?] and even children can feel that sadness in their heart and the confusion of the conflicting myths and stories we were told.

Then there's the grief and loss. And there's many layers of that, there's complicated historic, conscious unconscious missed developmental stages and disenfranchised grief and loss that surface in different ways at different times along adult development, child development, which can be extremely confusing. It's either exaggerated and out of context for something that's happening. I used to cry for probably decades in sad movies it was always you know the lights are down and it was okay to let that out. But sometimes it was intense and very frightening for adopted people. Adopted people also talk about being outsiders not really belonging anywhere. That they're either victims, feel controlling or feel helpless, that there's a lot of striving to be perfect to prove one's worth and to compensate for the perceived lack of it.

Can you hear the incredibly conflicting and contrasting experiences that one is growing up with during this era. It's no wonder that a lot of people talk about living in the fog. How does one begin to navigate all this alone, without acknowledgement or education, adopted people may be actually unaware how adoption has influenced their life, whilst at the same time suffering from hidden challenges silently blaming and rejecting themselves for their issues, believing something is really wrong. And while they're stuck in the cycle, then they can't edit a lot of the untruths and myths and stories that they were told and that they told themselves.

It's estimated that around 80 to 90% of adopted people into counseling and therapy, without knowing that they, that their adoption issues or what's presenting has anything to do with their adoption. They go with relationship issues, anxiety, depression, not even thinking that it's adoption, because it's not talked about still, and the counsellor or therapist would likely collude with that as well. The extra thing I want to add here, you know, reunion, the impact of adoption is never fully healed by a reunion. It's not solved by the introduction of open practices either. If you lose an arm and an accident, you adapt and you live with it. As an adopted person, you lose the feeling of connection and belonging at the outset of life, and adapt and all the various ways one has to survive as infants and meet our basic needs for connection and belonging. In essence, severed from who we are, where we belong. We live lives through the lens of adaption, being who we think others want us to be. Another one of my clients, I quote, 'I built my life around disconnection, fear of rejection, aloneness, in subjugation of my own needs, values and authenticity, playing a role through unconsciously and consciously at times, colluding with social narratives'.

Well, it all sounds very bleak, I know I just want to say there is good news for adopted people - healing is possible and on our own, but it's a lot to hold in process. Adopted people need societal acknowledgement and validation about the impact and the offer of professional support at times when adoptive people ask for it or need it, so that they can hold these realities, these differing realities, to traverse and process the many layers of their adoption experience and return home to the authentic self. So here we are, I'm in my 60s just early, as I said before, so I'm going to answer that question about my adoption. I am the person I am today because I was adopted. I like, even love, that in me, in contrast to self-rejection and self-abandonment and hatred of earlier decades. The trauma triggers are wired deeply, but they are weaker. And there are gifts, I've processed the many layers of grief to now accept the many losses that go with adoption, I still have an ache in my heart, for not being mothered by my birth mother in for not really being and knowing myself until this late period in my life. I have found a place of secure belonging and connection within myself. Self-survival mechanisms, adoption patterns and cycles are mostly edited. And I have rewired these to true narratives and stories which are life enhancing and lead me to live more closely to and from my real self. I live in peace in the crevice of not fully belonging in either my adoptive family or my birth family. Then if you asked me after I've been triggered, I'll tell you that's shit, it still hurts. I'm still growing in learning and accept that adoption is a lifelong experience. Thank you.

Now I'd like to share what Brigitta has written for me to read out about her, the impact of adoption for her.

As an adopted person, I currently live with falsified documents under these laws. My post adoption certificate is described as 'legal fiction', yet legal it still is when I die. Despite knowing exactly who my birth parents are neither will appear on my death certificate. And my right to know anything about my natural family and whakapapa was legally severed when I was a baby. Even today, we have no legal right to access identifying information about ourselves if a veto is in place.

I absolutely recognize that there are some circumstances when it is not ideal for a child to be raised in their family of origin. However, establishing healthy attachment, wherever possible to the person who carried us for the first nine months of our lives, maintaining strong connections to kin, and having access to our heritage, are all critical for healthy human functioning. When biological parents do relinquish the children, we need far more education and support for them to maintain the relationship throughout the child's developmental phases, including their teenage years when the search for self is so critical.

So, the key changes that both Briggs and myself would like to see with regard to the past:

- acknowledgment and an apology for the inhumane practices under the 1955 Adoption Act. Acknowledgement and validation are the keys that opened the door to liberation and healing for all those impacted by these provisions.
- Acknowledgement that all adopted children and adults need to have a right to access all information so current provisions restricting access to identifying information be lifted. We don't need to protect people from shame anymore.
- Financing of professional support for all New Zealanders who've been affected by adoption, training made available so counsellors can be adoption informed in competent.

In regard to new legislation. We want new legislation that:

- reflects our current social and cultural values that is aligned with the principles behind the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including only separating a child from their parents in exceptional circumstances.
- Only one legal birth certificate with all information included. Child centered legislation, the child's best interests to be paramount.
- Legal counsel appointed for a child to uphold and protect these throughout childhood.
- All parties accountable for ongoing contact and information as the child grows up, and there is recourse in court, if not adhered to.
- Adoption as a social and legal construct, abolished in favour of some form of long-term guardianship.

He aha te mea nui o te ao. He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. If you were to ask me, What's the most important thing in the world? I would reply it is people, it is people, it is people.

Kia ora and thank you everyone.

Bill Atkin

Thank you, Jo and Brigs. It's almost as if Brigs is here. Thank you. As I read the book, I felt it was a great privilege really to enter so personally into your lives. It's very much a personal account from both of you. But then as we get to the end, we have accounts from your partners and children. And so we see actually that you're not on your own. But it's a book that I got a bit emotional about as I read it, actually. So, it hit me down here - it was probably the intention in a way. You know, I'm involved in the law and all that sort of thing, which is kind of head stuff most of the time, but we have to understand the personal realities. And I've read the book, some of you will have done so as well. But now it's so great to hear from you directly. Thank you.

And so now it is Anne's turn and Anne is going to focus on why we had the 1955 Act - you touched on that a little bit, Jo. And there's also going to be Maria. And she's going to talk about that idea of severance which you mentioned too Jo and the move to different approaches to adoption, closed, secret, severed adoption to other ideas which will have to be taken into account with whatever direction all goes on. So, I'm very happy to hand over to you Anne - to be Anne and Maria.

Anne Else

I have to say that Bill was an immense help to me and Maria writing the book it was just invaluable. So first, I'm going to be Maria - as best I can. She has written her own talk.

Tena kotou katoa. Māori experiences of closed stranger adoption will never be fully known as some adopted Māori remain lost to whakapapa, whenua and whanau and others have passed on. While whakapapa is inalienable and can never be lost because the ira tangata (the biological essence), remains embodied within the individual having an unknown whakapapa - results in the inability to foster any iwi hapu or whānau connections. This ultimately limits a person's ability to fully participate as Māori, for example, connect through whakapapa and pepeha to other Māori pass on knowledge of whakapapa to future generations and register with an iwi and access resources such as educational scholarships. There are also complications with inheriting land. Some iwi do not allow people adopted into their rohe to

succeed to land if they don't have the proper whakapapa blood connection, and the Māori Ture Whenau Act 1993 explicitly prohibits children legally adopted outside of their whānau and iwi from succeeding to land.

Now, it's not uncommon for Māori adoptees to be brought up with no knowledge that they even had Māori ancestry. This could occur through general lack of information, or through birth or adoptive kin not knowing or concealing that fact. Or from professionals concealing a child's Māori heritage deliberately, from prospective adopters, sometimes to secure a 'good' home for the child, or even any home at all, as long as it was a Pākehā home.

Many Māori kin especially grandparents tried to adopt their mokopuna only to be refused on the grounds that they were too old and too poor. Many Māori adopted into Pākehā families knew they were Māori, but had little to no contact with other Māori and often felt intense shame at not knowing where they came from because they didn't know their affiliations. And this was often coupled with feelings of not looking or acting 'Māori enough'. So, some remained uncomfortable in Māori spaces even while desperately wanting to belong and find connection there. They consistently speak a walking between two worlds, te ao Māori / te ao Pākehā, and not feeling grounded in either. As one woman explained – 'with Pākehā I'm too brown, and with Māori, I'm too white to be brown'.

Adoption is never a one-off event. It is one event with a series of lifelong repercussions. Many Māori adult adoptees feel invisible and unwanted as Māori unable to pass on to their children and beyond knowledge of their whakapapa. Dr. Annabel Ahuriri-Driscoll, who is also a Māori academic is adopted herself, has explained that adoptees learn that being acknowledged and accepted by racial ethnic group members requires more than racial heritage or use of racial labels. Some kind of socially-sanctioned kinship tie is also needed. And this is what adoption destroys.

Māori have had great difficulty using the Adult Adoption Information Act. Most Māori babies placed for adoption had Pākehā mothers and Māori fathers, but the father's name was rarely on the birth certificate. And case notes had little information. Finding him often depended on him or his family starting to search or a mother providing his details. Of course, most women knew who the father of the child was, and many had been in a serious relationship with him. But few knew anything about his Māori heritage. Familial and societal pressures on Pākehā women to not marry Māori men meant adoption was almost the automatic default position.

Journalist Aaron Smale was born in 1971 to a Pākehā mother and a Māori father, his whānau were not told of his existence, and he was adopted by Pākehā couple. He has shared his adoption story in a number of interviews and articles, including his 2019 article ["Yes, we are the Stolen Generations"](#). Now I [when I say 'I' now I'm being Maria] I had always thought that term 'Stolen Generations' [often used in Australia] was far too strong for the experiences of Māori adopted people. I no longer think so. I linked the closed stranger adoption of Māori

children with a systematic state-sanctioned removal of Māori children in general. And the chapter in our book on state care goes into that in detail.

A prominent example was the Hastings case documented by Melanie Reed, showing the pressure a young my mother was subjected to, as she tried to keep her seven-day old baby from being uplifted by Organa Tamariki. They have since been changes but reports of state abuse continue. Looking back almost 60 years before the Hastings case, my [Maria's] own experiences as a child removed from my Māori mother demonstrate that many removals of Māori children from their families were much more gradual and insidious. Assumptions and misinformation based in racism and cultural bias, further marginalized and continue to marginalize Māori women in general, and Māori mothers in particular. Māori kin and the support they have to offer has been not only actively discouraged by state employees but prohibited by way of deceit and mistruths.

Dr. Alison Green another adopted academic looking into adoption, speaking to the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care has highlighted how closed stranger adoption undermined the entire network and functioning of whakawhānaungatanga - that is the process of establishing and maintaining relationships - in ways that went far beyond simply keeping records secret.

She says, growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand without whakapapa, whenua and whānau was traumatic, painful, and at times accompanied by feelings of low self-worth. Although the Adult Adoption Information Act provided a mechanism for me to locate my father's whānau and build relationships, the time that I could have spent with whānau now could not be regained. I've spent the last 30 years building my relationships with my Ngati Awa and Ngati Ranganui whānau as much for my own wellbeing as for that of my children, and theirs. DNA testing has fortunately made it possible for some adoptive Māori to discover their connections - and they couldn't do it any other way. But this process too can be heart wrenching. Some people who have believed all their lives that they are Māori find out that they are not. Others have discovered their Māori heritage only in their later adult lives.

In 1986, "[Puao-te-ata-tu](#)" - that's the renowned report written by the Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare - stated that virtually all policies concerning Māori welfare and development have been founded on Pākehā cultural prescriptions of what was best for Māori and virtually all Māori attempts to direct and shape the Māori future in ways reflecting Māori values and institutions were resistant, either militarily, legislatively, or by ignoring them. In almost 40 years, very little has changed. Closed stranger adoption is intrinsically linked to acts of violence and eurocentric beliefs and attitudes about sex, family and race. The adoption of Māori children than to non-Māori homes was not only the result of colonization, but it mirrors or reproduces the processes of colonization itself, namely, the manipulation of identity, the silencing and erasure of self to fit roles described and prescribed by others, the forced assimilation, the infantilizing, the expectation of gratitude and the intergenerational trauma.

I've been asked to speak on what key legal changes to adoption, including whāngai arrangements, I would recommend. There are people much more knowledgeable than I to speak on this. All I can say is that it is painfully clear that the systematic state-sanctioned interventions that removed so many Māori children from their families, whether by closed stranger adoption, placement into institutions, or out-of-kin care, or another violent racialised practice that has broken down Māori kinship ties. This breakdown has resulted in the displacement, marginalization and trauma of Māori across generations at individual whānau, hapu and iwi levels.

Ironically, state practices aimed at helping families and society's most vulnerable children have instead perpetuated harm and accelerated cultural dissonance. The colonization of indigenous peoples follows a well-worn pattern with the power to impose reality upon marginalized groups represents the ultimate form of oppression. While policies and practices instigated by non-Māori may appear benevolent, and progressive, the reality is that without a relationship with Māori at the center, all policies and practices are detrimental to and further marginalize and oppress Māori. Anti-racism demands that Māori are not decentralized from decision-making, that Māori are at the forefront of developing and implementing policies and practices affecting them. And that non-Māori join with Māori as equals - realizing that this means relinquishing power and control and ultimately trusting Māori. This has not been the case during the Justice Department's recent project of adoption law reform.

Finally, to those who have been removed from their whānau, whakapapa and whenua, and to all those who have asked "Ko wai au? Who am I?" that you too are a seed sown from Rangīātea and you are not forgotten. Even if you can't remember or don't know. You have a home and tipuna who walk with you. E kore au e ngaro, he kākano i ruia mai i Rangīātea.

Now, you will have hope all of you picked up the handout that I left in the foyer for you because it sets out a detail of how the records were legally closed. This isn't well known most people think it just happened in 1955. It didn't. It was a long process, which progressively tightened the people's ability effectively closed off people's ability to see their own records.

Pakeha law has defined three groups only as centrally involved in adoption. These groups are the original parents, the adoptive parents, and the children themselves.

From the 1950s to the late 1970s, experts, authorities and politicians were convinced that closed stranger adoption secured a 'normal' future for all three. An unmarried mother and her child could never achieve this, so had to be separated for their own good. The child should obviously go to a childless married couple. The original mother could then marry and have more children. Though an astonishingly high percentage of women did not actually ever have any other children.

The 1955 Adoption Act legally cuts off all birth family connections, but that was not sufficient. Securing this normal future also depended on strictly maintaining secrecy about the past, but there were two

exceptions. Adopters had the court order showing the names of the mother and child; and that children should be told that they were adopted. Of course, this was not always done – I'm still coming across people born in the 1970s who did not find out until they were adults.

Most adopters had only a few other bits of information, some of it wrong, about the child's 'background'.

As for the unmarried mother, it was firmly believed that ensuring a 'fresh start' for both her and her child would work only if she never knew anything more after the birth and carried on as if the child had never existed. Secrecy would also stop her 'causing any trouble' later.

By the late 1960s, this neat solution was clearly not working well enough. The baby boom, the steadily falling average age of marriage and first birth, and the 1954 law banning contraception – or even advice about contraception – for anyone under 17, all combined to produce a flood of pregnant teenagers and a surplus of babies available for adoption.

Lists of hard-to-place children were soon circulating to all Child Welfare district offices. A hospital nurse summed up: "It was mostly race, or any physical deformity, such as cleft palate ... nobody wanted them, when you could have perfect white babies of whatever sex you chose." If children were not suitable for adoption, "we all saw placement in the department's care as the next best thing."

Inevitably, growing numbers of children, particularly Māori children, were 'left over'. But the surplus also helped to bring about a crucial shift: single motherhood began to be seen as a possible alternative, making it easier for some women to resist adoption.

By 1970, the number of children kept by single mothers almost equalled the number adopted. They and their supporters began speaking out about the immense difficulties they faced. Pressure grew for some form of government support, achieved in 1973 with the Domestic Purposes Benefit.

From the start the DPB was highly controversial. As the 'surplus' turned back into a 'shortage', attacks on it increased, along with renewed efforts to promote adoption. But as contraception became more efficient and accessible, the numbers of stranger adoptions continued to fall.

Lifelong severance and secrecy began to be effectively undermined only when a broad cross-section of adopted people, who were by that time adults, and birth mothers and families, together with some adoptive parents, started to reveal the massive, lasting impact of closed stranger adoption, which Jo has talked about so well.

To counter this, a form of open adoption, pioneered by Mary Iwanek in the early 1970s, became more widespread, though it had no legal backing. Then in 1978 Jonathan Hunt introduced a Bill on access to original birth certificates, supported later by Fran Wilde. It would take another seven years to pass as the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985. The dissension in the House was incredible.

Now let's fast forward to 2023. The long campaign to reform adoption law has heated up, thanks to a surge of work by activists and experts and the growing use of donor conception and surrogacy. Of course, with surrogacy, at the moment, you have to adopt the child.

True to its word, in 2020 the Labour government initiated work on adoption by the Ministry of Justice, and on surrogacy by the Law Commission. We're still waiting for Justice's final adoption report, but we do have proposals. And we have a detailed blueprint for drafting new surrogacy law in the Law Commission report, and it looks as though their proposals are broadly going to be taken on board.

Both projects strongly emphasise the vital importance of legally recording the child's origins, widening access to information, and supporting connections to whānau.

The most significant proposal for adoption is about separating legal parentage and guardianship. After an adoption order, the birth parents would remain the child's legal parents, but would no longer be the guardians. The adoptive parents would be both additional legal parents and the guardians, and that gives them all the associated rights and responsibilities, including providing day-to-day care and having financial responsibility for the child.

This would effectively bring about the central change that has been so consistently called for: it would finally do away with the 'legal fiction' which deems that the adopted child becomes solely the child of the adoptive parents, 'as if born to them in lawful wedlock'.

Adoption would no longer legally cut off all relationships between adopted people and their birth whānau. These would remain in place, with adoptive relationships added. The child could inherit citizenship from both birth parents and adoptive parents.

The law would finally recognise that everyone is permanently connected with their forebears and their descendants. It would also encourage everyone to accept 'the difference of adoption', instead of denying it.

[The Ministry of] Justice says this is more consistent with tikanga Māori, whereby "childcare duties may be shared but the connections to birth family and whānau never change". But it must ultimately be Māori who decide on what is best for Māori in terms of new legislation.

Finally, Justice's discussion documents have troubling gaps. They give no statistics, past or present, so they do not show that domestic adoptions of unrelated children have now fallen to well under 20 a year.

Many of us would prefer to see legal adoption removed completely. But that option was never considered by the Justice team, and they did not ask people about it, although some respondents did bring it up. They also rejected considering redress for the injustice and damage done through adoption in the past, saying that is up to the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care.

And so, I hope that that will give some of you a greater interest in what happens next as Bill said, especially after the election, this is an extremely important reform, but we have to show that it is needed and keep pushing for it and take part in the various discussions on the draft bills which will follow - so please do that.

Bill Atkin

Thank you, Anne (and Maria, if she is has joined us remotely), I think you will see from the way in which Anne did her presentation so succinctly how much expertise, both personal and intellectual, she brings to this whole area. And she she's able to look at the way ahead with eyes that many of the rest of us don't have. And Maria is able to remind - especially those of us who are Pākehā - that there are a whole lot of other issues for Māori that don't necessarily arise in quite the same way for Pākehā, they might arise for Pacifica, perhaps, in some other cultures. And we need to be very alert as we think about law reform, to the ways in which Māori address these issues. And again, you know, just mention the election and some of the undercurrents in the debates more broadly about some of those things that quite frankly worried me a little bit. So, thank you. Thank you both very much.

My question, which is a general one, really, because I mean, there's a history focus to this session, delving into the past, but also looking to the future, and the past helps us think about the future. So, my question, really, to both of you is, is there one main thing about the past, about the history, that should inform us as we move into law reform into a new era? Well, I'm saying new era, lots of things have changed already. But as we do think about law reform, in particular.

Jo Wills

My initial response to that Bill is, you know, learning from the past and the mistakes that were made and ensuring that future legislation ... ensuring that the learning is bought, I always say, you know, we look to the past, to understand the present to inform the future. And so let the voices of the people inform us greatly about what not to do.

Anne Else

Yes, I think that that's why this session was focused on secrecy and openness. Because that has actually been, if you asked me to say the absolutely key thing that has caused so much trouble it is that and my position for example, on all of this - adoption, surrogacy and donation - is that everybody ideally knows everybody else. You don't just get a test tube with some sperm in it. Tell the child that they didn't have a father they had a sperm donor. The human relationships among the people creating the child are extremely important to everybody's future, but particularly to the child's future. And we do see that now - we are starting to get ... (just as we had to wait till adopted people had grown up to hear what was really going on, because birth mothers on the whole were far to repressed and ashamed about the whole thing to speak up at that stage. But once we got what the children were, how they felt, then we knew what was going on). And the same goes for surrogacy and donation, we're starting to get the voices of donor-conceived people. And so far in New Zealand, I haven't really seen any of surrogacy-born people, but they are actually just becoming old enough to do that. And this year, by the way, is the first year that people conceived through clinics under donor conception, whose donors are on the register, are able to access that information because they turn 18 this year. So that, that the human relationships of creating and parenting children should mirror the relationships, you know ... they should all know each other and should have relationships, and then the child will pick up that this was a human endeavor. It wasn't a question of legal rearrangement at all.

Jo Wills

I agree wholeheartedly. We understand how important connections and belonging are today, and they need to be fostered.

Audience member

I'm quite surprised to read, to hear, how much the objection has been ongoing to repealing the legislation. And I wonder, first of all, what sort of reasons have been given for those objections? And secondly, if any of that has been led by any of the institutions that were involved in acting as de facto adoption agencies, orphanages, etc.

Anne Else

I don't know where they are now, but when I did the [first] book, I was able to see all the submissions on the Adult Adoption Information Act, courtesy of Jonathan Hunt, which was fantastic. I assume they are still accessible somewhere, but I'm not sure. But that showed that the major opponents at that time were male lawyers, who were also MPs and adoptive parents. The line was that 'she [birth mothers] had signed a contract agreeing never to have anything else to do with the child'. In fact, she didn't, that's not in the law at all. And 'that she was breaking that contract, that any sane mother who had given up a child for its own good would never want to know what had happened to it'. And 'that any adoptive child who had been brought up properly would never want to know what had happened to it either'. I might say there is a historical note: Muldoon was strongly opposed to the legislation. And Wellington rumour has it this is because of an experience in the past that had been the experience of one of his, shall we say, 'extracurricular lady friends'. And that that was what driven him to be so opposed. Because there was a lot of play made with people turning up on doorsteps and upsetting families, that sort of thing. But from the institutions, I'm not sure I don't. By the time that bill was going through, they had all close down. Adoptions were handled by Social Welfare, we do still have private adoptions. It's possible for a doctor say to arrange one with people he knows or something like that. But we don't know how many, there are probably fairly few these days. But people do still go overseas as well. I wouldn't be surprised if when it comes up, finally, a draft law comes up, that we got a lot of opposition from various groups like Family First and Christian groups (I shouldn't say Christian groups - fundamentalist groups), who strongly advocate adoption, and are, of course, opposed to abortion and peddle the line that adoption as the answer, not abortion. So, I wouldn't be surprised to see a surge of that sort of opposition, this time around as well. And also, a lot of those groups are violently opposed to surrogacy and donor conception, too. So, it's going to be very interesting. But on the whole, thanks, in large part, to Māori and Māori custom, the idea that everyone should know, is pretty strongly entrenched now in New Zealand, as the two reviews have conveyed. So, I can't see there being any opposition to that, in particular, especially.

Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library]

[speaking on behalf of people who have submitted written questions] I've got a few questions from out in the world. So, is it easier to get information about adoptions where all parties are now deceased? What does one still have to jump through a whole lot of legal hoops?

Anne Else

Do you mean people who have been adopted or a birth parent and want to find out now what happened?

Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library]

I have the information that I read you Anne so I could say yes, but I don't know exactly,

Jo Wills

Yes, they're also constrained, I think, by the Privacy Act and the Official Information act. And so there were three pieces of legislation that are keeping information-giving very tenuous and very difficult. And that still happens just if people are deceased as well.

Anne Else

I would imagine that that has been most adoptions arranged now are technically open, everybody knows. It's still you can get a certain amount. You get your original birth certificate, which may or may not contain your father's name. In my case, my court papers came from my parents. And as I say, we've talked about secrecy. But all along, adoptive parents had a copy of the court papers, which showed the mother's name and the child's original name. The situation over Social Welfare records is still a bit ambiguous that they have actually said they have to be released. I think, Bill, haven't they? There's a letter we've seen about that? No, it's still a bit ambiguous and some of the records are missing or destroyed anyway. There's no guarantee that there's still there. What else? Social Welfare still, I think helps you or gives you advice on how to find your birth parents. Is that correct Jo?

Of course, it's still the case that it is only the birth parents and the adopted person who is legally entitled to find out anything. People want to know, on behalf of their parents who may know had a child at some point, or siblings. None of that is legally possible at the moment.

Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library]

Thank you. I have another couple of comments or questions – “ ‘moving forward’ to me as an adoptee should include the right to receive my whole Oranga Tamariki file without redactions. Also, I would expect to be given free counseling with an adoption trained counsellor.”

Jo Wills

Yeah, well, that's, that's the ideal. Yes. And many of us are working towards that. We'd love it to be the case.

Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library]

[Another comment] “Thank you so much to the panelists for their powerful and informed and articulate korero. There were so many thousands of us adopted out during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. We have a lifetime of adapting and following the societal discourse of 'grateful' and 'silence'. What are in in Jo's thoughts regarding where are all of these adults today? How can their voices be invited and heard? Other than from within academia?”

Jo Wills

Yes, yes, various organizations, people speaking out. And I think there are Facebook, there's a lot more channels for adopted people's voices to be heard today. There are support groups around New Zealand. Now there are Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch adoption support groups, Facebook pages. There's a lot more korero happening and it's just tapping into that and then adding one's voice. To that, and the more we have the greater impact we will have.

Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library]

[Another question] "Do you feel the time has come to look at removing all current vetoes altogether is in Victoria, Australia."

Anne Else

In effect, that is almost the situation now. I can't quite remember the details. But I don't think you can place a new veto now can you Bill? No, you can't place any more vetoes and the situation with existing vetoes - they lapse after a certain time if they're not really in effect, I'm not even sure they can be renewed now.

Bill Atkin

Can an adopted person still impose a veto?

Anne Else

No, I'm not sure. But what an adopted person can do, which a birth parent cannot is that if an adopted person is informed that the birth parent is looking for them, they can refuse to have the details. They're identifying details given out. So, and that's not the case for birth parents. They don't, there isn't that sort of second line of ability to say no, it's only for adopted people. So that is still there.

Audience member

Yes, kia ora - inter-country adoption you haven't touched on. And of course, with your excellent proposal that there is complete knowledge. How would you suggest the legal system deals with that issue?

Anne Else

That's an extremely good question. That's a pity that [Ministry of Justice] team haven't really looked at it. They've more or less said we want to hear your proposals. Well, this is ridiculous. This is an extremely complex area of law. So, we haven't really got any particularly clear steers. Bill might be good at commenting on it.

Bill Atkin

The whole area of inter-country adoption recognition of overseas adoptions, which have been made overseas. That is, I think one of the really tricky areas. For instance, a couple might have adopted a child in accordance with the overseas law where it's still more or less closed adoption, but it's a valid adoption, the child, they might want to come to New Zealand, they might be migrating to New Zealand might be coming for five years or so forth. Do we in New Zealand, recognize the adoption? Well, we've got to think of the child and that situation, the child is not to be left sort of orphaned, if you like. And so, there's a very strong reason why we while we would recognise that sort of situation, a number of these situations arise with Pacifica people too. And the children are often - Anne in your writing, you cover this point really well - we've got to be just a little bit diplomatic here because our relationships with our Pacifica peoples and nations are really important ones when New Zealand Aotearoa point of view. So, there are all of those sorts of angles. In addition to ordinary New Zealanders who go overseas, looking for a child, for instance, you know, I think that happens a little bit less than it did a few years ago. But it can happen in the surrogacy context, because some folk want to have a child through surrogacy, and it's not always that easy in to do it domestically within New Zealand. And I mentioned the rainbow

community before - that's where their interests sort of add another angle to this because quite a number of might go to...

I heard of a friend who's now living in Australia, who was off to Colombia, and they were going to arrange for a child that way. You know, it's a different perspective. And one of the really hard things for, say, New Zealand or Australia for that matter, to say is, you've got to keep a connection with the surrogate mother, the surrogate mother's partner. I mean, it can get a lot more complicated than that with technologies these days. But yes, I think it's a really good question. And it's a hard one to juggle all the different interests there. But it's one of the reasons why we've got to get our adoption law reform, right.

Anne Else

Yes, exactly. And in our book, we've, we've pointed out that there are two major reasons that people go overseas for surrogacy or even donor conception which they can do, or the two combined. The first reason is availability of eggs and sperm and embryos and surrogate mothers. Because New Zealand, quite rightly, does not allow people to be actually paid for providing those things. The law will probably make it clear that you can cover expenses, but that's not the same thing as actually paying people for that sort of service or material. Whereas overseas, of course, you can do that. You simply go and pay for it. So, it's no problem.

The other reason people appear to be going overseas, some of them is to avoid New Zealand's identifying legislation which applies by the way, in the case of sperm and egg donors, only to procedures that take place for our clinics, people who do it and there are quite a few, we have no idea how many informally as it were, are not captured currently by the Donor Register legislation. And of course, they're not captured by... well, in theory, they are captured in that if they use surrogacy, they have to adopt the child, but it seems almost certain that some don't, they do other things instead. So, in a way, the most straightforward thing at the moment is reforming close stranger adoption. After that, it gets a good deal more complicated, but we do know as I said, from people speaking up, that donor-conceived and surrogacy-born people do not actually want to be created by being bought. And secondly, that they very much want to have all the information about the people involved in their creation.

Audience member

Hi there, you were saying earlier on in this sort of taking the conversation back a bit, because you're talking about surrogacy and that you were saying earlier on that people have a lot easier access to information, I found myself it was very difficult, I got as much information out of OT as they called, Oranga Tamariki. But then, when I started inquiring about questions about my adoptive parents who are both dead, I had to be referred to [Section 26 of the Family Court](#). And it took about two years, maybe even longer actually, for information to come through, surrounding their qualification to adopt, you know, all the questions that were asked. Because my adopted mum had mental health issues, alcohol and drug issues. And I believe she had had a child taken off her way before we were adopted. So we were sort of wondering, and no disrespect to my dead mum, were wondering what sort of processes were taken place because my sister and I were Māori who were adopted by Pākehā and whether it was a bit of a easy ride for adoption, because we were Māori, and we were [considered] better off for Pākehā parents anyway. So it isn't that easy, you still got to go through that section 26,

you got to reply to the Family Court. And then I believe they must go backwards and forwards between the judge and the Family court, to OT [Oranga Tamariki], to find out what sort of information they would like to be handed out, you haven't got an open doorway to get anything that's available.

Anne Else

You're exactly right, finding out about how your adoptive parents were approved to adopt is a sort of an area that isn't really dealt with, they would have had a report from Social Welfare. And that report would have been presented in court at the adoption hearing. However, we do know that even on the very rare occasions when Social Welfare actually opposed the adoption because they thought that these were not suitable people to adopt. That was almost always overridden by the judge in the case. It was extremely difficult for Social Welfare to stop people adopting if they had gone ahead and applied anyway. What you were seeing happening near with your adoption was what's called "matching for marginality", the "marginal children", other words, anything but the shiny white perfect white ones tended to be matched with the marginal adopters, people that they knew were not top drawer, but they wanted the child (and goodness knows they had a lot of children wanting homes) so that's what they would do. They would do that. And of course, that could lead to quite serious problems as you can imagine, it wasn't a good thing. So yes, your chance I don't know how you are all you could probably find was the original report, if it still exists, and that quite probably wouldn't have said anything much anyway.

Audience member

Just a testimony from a justice of the peace or someone in the community who would say this is a good person - it didn't look like there was any research. I worked with a lady who was very knowledgeable, she worked for Barnardos, she worked part time where I used to work, and part time for Barnardos for adopted children who were adopted from overseas to repatriate them, especially in England, and she said to me, she said, "Well, look, I don't mean to say this, but she said, it was almost like these were car sales people. You know, giving descriptions of children are net that weren't really honest descriptions of where they come from, including, she mentioned, one case of a young man who was very dark featured, but he actually come from a Romanian family, and he was adopted as a Māori to a couple of Canadian anthropologists". Yes. Amazing. She said to me, she said, "look, you've got no idea what it was, like". She said the pressure was on to get these kids adopted out to anyone they could get they weren't costing the state any money. Anyway, thank you.

Anne Else

Yes, yes, that's exactly right. I have a good friend who adopted a little boy and was told he was Pacific I think he actually was Greek. On the other hand, that's a well-known and genuine thing, that quite a lot of parents who had part Māori children were either told that they were possibly Spanish or were told to tell the child they were possibly Spanish. I myself have a "Spanish" relation in my birth family as it happens. So that as soon as a child became available for adoption, it actually entered a market. And as soon as adoptive parents stepped up and said they wanted to adopt children, they entered a market- that is what happened. I mean, children will flow 'sight unseen' to adopters, in the country who sometimes sent them back.

Bill Atkin

Just a couple of minutes more, I think there's something online.

Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library]

I have several questions or some of them are just comments. "Adoptees have endured some years of legal review, promised law reform and general lack of political will to address the need for legislative change. There's been little communication from the Ministry of Justice letting us know where reform is at. Can someone confirm that what is happening, please?"

Anne Else

The last communication from the Ministry of Justice - given not only the forthcoming election, but the fact that they got a new Minister of Justice - is that the report is now going to be presented 'in due course'. That's the best... before that it was the 'middle of the year', then it was kind of 'coming soon'. And now it's just 'in due course'.

Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library]

Thank you. And somebody else asked, "am I correct in hearing Anne say adopted parents had court papers with birth parents' name on them when child was adopted?"

Anne Else

Yes, that's correct. I have my own because my parents gave it to me. But adoptive parents went to court of course to get the adoption order and they get a copy of the actual order Bill. Yes. And that has the names on it.

Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library]

Thank you. [another question] "Will DNA testing be free for adoptees still looking for their father and siblings? I am a relinquishee at birth and adoptive person in 1959 under closed adoption law"

Anne Else

I have never thought about that before. Have you had people ask for it Jo?

Jo Wills

I think that's something that adopted people are wanting, to have access to. But currently, there's no funding for that.

Anne Else

Yes, I've just done my DNA actually, to prove that my first cousin whom I know is my first cousin, that's complicated, I won't go into all that. But it does cost a couple of hundred dollars. So, it's quite expensive. We haven't seen any indication much that government's going to pay for anything much to do with any of this.

Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library]

I have several more, if we've got time.

Bill Atkin

For one more.

Joan McCracken [Alexander Turnbull Library]

The last one on the list is "Can an adoptive parent ask for the records?"

Anne Else

No, I don't think so, can they Bill? I think they might be able to ask for the donor record, but not adoption.

Anne Else

There certainly are provisions for the donor situation under the Human Assisted Reproductive Technology Act, a mouthful. But I don't know that there is any similar provision in relation to adoption. But worth was checking that one out.

Anne Else

Well, in theory, you see the official information they will have that in their court papers, and their solicitor would have had that as well. So, in effect, they already had that information. But it's an interesting question.

Bill Atkin

Well, I think the level of interest both from in the room and from beyond indicates how important this topic is, and how really valuable it has been the help of the ministry to have this session, which is going to be available on a recorded basis, we understand quite soon. And we've heard about the past, we've often known about the past, we've had two wonderful speakers, giving a lot of themselves, actually, in terms of, of our session today. But drawing on also their fellow authors who were kind of made present in many ways. And thank you, too, for sort of working at so that we could hear the four voices coming through your two literal voices.

So, first of all, I think we should thank the Ministry for arranging this, and doing the technical stuff, and so forth. And that's been really, really valuable. So, I hope that you feel as though it's been a good occasion and something worthwhile for you. And thanks to National Library, but thanks, especially to our two speakers, plus two. So, I'm finding it hard to sort of, say, four speakers, but that we really have had four speakers on this important topic. And I think that the questions go on, and let's hope that we see the resolution of some of the issues in 2024. I'm a bit hesitant [to say that]. We've been saying that things will happen for so long. Let's hope after the election, we might see a pathway forward.