

Film chronicles adoptees' plight

By CHRIS JORDAN
STAFF WRITER

Joe DiGeronimo of Edison was so close, yet so far.

His search for his birth parents, which began 30 years ago, culminated with learning of his birth father's identity six months after he died and five years after his birth mother died.

"That's the worst part," DiGeronimo said. "That's crazy to know that at least I could have said 'hello.'"

DiGeronimo's search is depicted in the new documentary "For the Life of Me" from filmmaker Jean Strauss. It will be shown at 7 p.m. Sunday at Voorhees Hall on the campus of Rutgers University in New Brunswick as part of the New Jersey International Film Festival.

The film follows the plight of adopted children, now adults, in states where laws restrict them to birth information.

New Jersey is one of those states, according to the film.

"After a long time searching, I got a decree and they could show me all the paperwork but the original name was blacked out," DiGeronimo said. "It's very unconstitutional."

"Try to put yourself in my shoes," he said. "I have just as much right as anyone to find out who I am. The Legislature has to vote (to allow adoptees to see who their birth parents are). They have my life in their hands. It's crazy."

An open-adoption bill, in which adoptees would have access to their original birth certificates and the names of their birth parents if the parents wish to be contacted, in addition to the adoptee's medical, cultural and social histories, was approved by the state Senate and is now in the Assembly.

The Assembly Human Services Committee will hear testimony on the bill Monday afternoon in Tren-



PHOTO COURTESY OF JEAN STRAUSS

Joe DiGeronimo searches for his birth parents in "For the Life of Me."

ton.

DiGeronimo, 70, did track down his half-sister and the two had a reunion in a Toms River diner in the film.

"We talk to each other, and she's been to my home," DiGeronimo said. "She's a nice woman."

The film also follows David Kiley in Massachusetts, where the state recently made birth certificates available for adult adoptees. It also features impassioned testimony from Darryl McDaniels of the hip-hop group Run-DMC on restrictive adoptee-rights laws.

The film won the Best Documentary award at the Smogdance Film Festival in Los Angeles and the Sleeping Giant title at the

IF YOU GO

"For the Life of Me" and "Voices From Inside — Israelis Speak," 7 p.m. Sunday, Voorhees Hall, Room 105, 71 Hamilton St., College Avenue Campus, Rutgers University, New Brunswick. \$8 to \$10. 732-932-8482, or www.njfilmfest.com.

Kent Film Festival in Connecticut.

DiGeronimo is a long-time Edison resident who has a wife, two sons and grandchildren.

His wife was all for his finding out who his birth parents are.

"She's happy I found out," DiGeronimo said. "She's like me. She can't understand why we can't see these records after all these years."



FOOTBALL

New Brunswick coach John Quinn leaves for Elizabeth after eight successful seasons.

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DOCUMENTARY

Edison man's search for his birth parents detailed in film.

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