



Community Screening Toolkit

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COMMUNITY SCREENING AGREEMENT

ADOPTED: for the life of me is a Silver Tandem Production made entirely with the private funds. While there is no fee assessed for use of the film in public screenings, there is an fee-waiving obligation which includes the following items which must be provided to the filmmaker for public usage:

- 1) The filmmaker be provided with advance notice of the screening including date, time and location
- 2) The filmmaker be given an attendance list following the screening, including e-mail contact information from those audience members who have provided them
- 3) Feedback sheets from audience members
- 4) When appropriate, the ACTION handout will be provided to audience members in attendance who are interested in adoption reform.

Any use of the film in community screenings or on college campuses that does not conform with these expectations will negate the agreement to allow the public screening and will result in an exhibition fee of \$200.

As a reminder, any copying of the dvd for distribution is against the law. The film as is the private property of the filmmaker and is protected as such by copyright laws.

Acknowledgments

Portions of this guide were adapted from the "MADE IN L.A. Event Planning Toolkit" and the "SPEAKING IN TONGUES Event Planning Toolkit" and were based upon materials developed by Active Voice (www.activevoice.net) with funding from P.O.V. (www.pbs.org/pov). This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommerical-ShareAlike 3.0 License.



From the Filmmaker

I'm thrilled you are hosting a community screening or neighborhood broadcast gathering of *ADOPTED: for the life of me!* You are a critical part of the impact the film can have, providing important, often hard-to-have conversations in communities across the country about the issue of adult adoptee access to records.

The film speaks for itself, but I wanted to share the experience that led to its being made in the first place.

In 2005, members of New Jersey-CARE, an adoption reform legislative action group, asked me if I could make them a 60 second public service announcement film about their work. After filming a handful of triad members talking about the need for reform, I began to wonder how to better help non-adoptee citizens understand what the secrets inherent in closed adoption feel like. Could a film help legislators and community members better understand why adoptees and birthparents were calling for change in adoption laws?

Around the same time, an 86-year-old adoptee called me after hearing me speak at a senior citizen center. She asked, "Can you help me? I just want to know where I came from before I die." Her request affected me deeply. How could people think it was right that an elderly person be denied this human need? I asked colleagues to assist me in locating middle-aged or elderly adoptees on the cusp of learning their origins who might be interested in participating in a film about adoptee access. This is how I met Joe, a New Jersey adoptee. Then, during a cross country flight, I met Dave Kiley, a 52-year-old Massachusetts adoptee who was interested in learning his origins. His state was unsealing adoptee records in just five weeks.

Through the generosity (and courage!) of these two men, who let me follow them for over a year, a film evolved that invited audience members to step into their shoes and follow them on their journeys. Their experiences are the heart of the film – and highlight the impact of secrecy when it's imposed upon a lifetime.



About the Film

From the first minute of *ADOPTED: for the life of me*, audience members are immersed in an unfolding adoptee experience as Dave, age 52, travels to the Vital Statistics office in his state of birth on the very first day records are made available to adult adoptees. The audience is later introduced to Joe and a handful of other adopted citizens and professionals who are involved in the access to records debate.

The goal of the film is to explore the adoptee experience from the inside out, with the hope of encouraging debate about current adoption practices regarding access to records in the United States. This deeply intimate film provides powerful insights into the effect of secrecy, not only on an aging population of adoptees, but also upon the birthmothers who bore them.

Winner of the Audience Award for Best Picture at the Smogdance Film Festival, and the Sleeping Giant Award at Kent, *ADOPTED: for the life of me* premiered at the Cleveland International Film Festival and was a selection at the Sedona and Rocky Mountain Women's Film Festival, among others. In conjunction with National Adoption Month, the film will air on PBS stations November of 2010 and later dates. To find broadcast times in your area, visit the broadcast map on the film's website.

About this Toolkit & Community Screenings

This toolkit is designed for organizations, advocates, non-profits, and faith-based, generational, grassroots, and student groups working to draw attention to and create a dialogue about adoptee access to information in the United States. Think of the toolkit as a menu of ideas to pick and choose from to create the most effective event for your goals and audience.

Community screenings require the fulfillment of the outreach requirements (see page 2 of this guide). Universities, colleges, media centers, and other institutions are welcome to utilize our community-licensed DVD in the classroom without any additional educational licensing fees.

For information, please contact us at: adoptedforthelifeofme@gmail.com



Getting Started

Consider your organizations goals and needs:

1) IDENTIFY OBJECTIVES

Why are you screening the film? How can it benefit and support your group or organization? Here are some ideas:

- **Raise awareness** about the impact of sealed records laws upon adult adopted citizens and discuss the policies and legislative action in your state.
- **Help create 'the watering hole'**. A chief problem of access legislation is locating and empowering triad members on a local and national level. Through community and broadcast screenings you can help with generate a national action list of individuals who are willing to write letters, sign petitions, and be involved in simple, easy ways.
- **Heighten visibility** of your organization(s) and local/state policies.
- **Build bridges** between the stake holders in adoption, bringing together adopted citizens, parents, social workers, physicians, psychologists, and legislators in a productive environment to achieve understanding.
- **Educate** parents, adoptees, legislators, and community members about policies in your state and about the process of reforming state laws.
- **Create coalitions** with other organizations and inspire the development of new legislative action.
- **Engage general audiences** about the issue of access to personal records.
- **Prompt local decision-makers** to examine antiquated adoption policies, seeking common ground and ways to find solutions.
- **Fundraise** for your organization using the "Fundraising Screening Kit".

2) TARGET YOUR AUDIENCE

Who are you trying to reach? Triad members only? Or a wide range of people in your community (leaders, partners, legislators, professionals in the adoption field, students, teachers, etc.).

3) FRAME YOUR EVENT

The most effective screenings use ***ADOPTED: for the life of me*** to engage audiences in a targeted way. There are many possibilities:

- **Panel discussion:** set up a post-screening panel with speakers who can attract the audience you most want to reach. This could be a range of triad community members to legislators. Keep the panel comments short to allow for interactive discussion.
- **Keynote speaker:** bring in a keynote speaker to talk about post adoption issues. For a list of possible speakers, visit the 'Tools' page on the film's website at www.adoptedforthelifeofme.com.
- **Town hall meeting:** create a forum for members of the community to learn more about the history of adoption in your state and the experience of constituents. Invite legislators in your district to attend. Reserve as much time for community interaction as possible. *NOTE: An event like this should be held in a neutral space so that community members feel comfortable expressing their opinions, such as a public library.*
- **Invite the filmmaker.** Depending on availability, the filmmaker may be able to come speak about the film and to lead discussions. For more information about availability and fees, contact us at: adoptedforthelifeofme@gmail.com
- **Partner with other local organizations** to sponsor the event. Including other organizations in your plans helps you broaden your outreach and can foster new, potentially long-term coalitions. Allied organizations can get involved in a range of ways including getting the word out about the film through newsletters, flyers, websites, etc. Groups might include triad support groups, retirement centers and local AARP, genealogists, church groups, universities and colleges. Provide opportunities for co-sponsors to display information about their organizations and the services that they provide.
- **CAMPUS SCREENINGS:** consider inviting departments, research centers, and student organizations that might have an interest in the film. For example, an English department recently screened *ADOPTED: for the life of me* because of the powerful impact poetry has in the conclusion of the film.
- **Reception:** plan a special meet-and-greet with refreshments to allow opportunities for networking and sharing either before or after the screening. Depending upon your budget and capacity this could be open to the public or invite only.

4) ACTION!

A successful screening inspires audience members to take action. Print out the 'TAKE ACTION' page from the website. Create a mailing list of the people who attended the screening. Give audience members an immediate and simple way they can be involved. If legislative action is currently going on in your state, consider providing postcards pre-addressed with the address of their legislator. People have very busy lives these days – helping them take one single action is a measure of a very successful screening!



Event Planning Checklist

Once you have defined your target audience, objectives, and framing, begin planning your event. A checklist can be a useful tool, both for planning and for the actual running of the event. The timeline listed is the ideal – if you have less than 6 weeks, don't worry – just get as much done as you can to make your event a success...

1) PRELIMINARY PLANNING – at least 6 weeks prior

- Book the venue and date for your screening. Recruit local organization partners to broaden your reach and help identify roles for each one, such as publicity, panelist coordinator, reception planning, etc.
- Determine speakers, panelists, moderator
- Begin to make a list of who to invite. Include triad members, legislators, special guests, agencies, churches, anyone who you think might be interested in the film and a discussion of the issue.

2) LOGISTICAL PLANNING – 3-4 weeks prior

- Create mini-posters and flyers to publicize your screening. Use the templates on the website and customize them with your screening information. Be sure that the screening date, time, and location, as well as contact info are listed.
- Confirm you have the right equipment to screen the dvd. You'll need a DVD player and a large screen tv, or a dvd player (or computer), an LCD projector, a screen and speakers. Many libraries, community halls, and campus auditoriums will have this equipment available.
- Secure food for the reception (if applicable).
- Draft an agenda and vet it with partners.
- Contact community calendars about your event.

3) LOGISTICAL PLANNING – 2 weeks prior

- Create an e-mail blast to publicize your event electronically. Template emails are available on the website. We suggest sending one announcement two weeks prior and another several days prior, then a final blast on the day of the event as a reminder.
- Contact community calendars again about your event.

4) MEDIA OUTREACH – 10 days prior

- Send out press releases to media outlets (template releases are available on the website. Be sure to customize them with your own information.
- Make calls to local television and radio programs.

5) FINAL PLANNING – day(s) prior to screening

- Test the DVD in the equipment that will be used for screening advance of the event to make sure there aren't any glitches.
- Be sure that the screen is high enough so that everyone can see.
- Send out second and final rounds of e-mail blasts.
- Follow up with any press who conveyed interest in the story.
- Finalize the agenda.
- Make copies of all handouts, including literature about your organization, partnering organizations, and other information about adoption issues in your local community.
- If its appropriate, download and photocopy the "ACTION – how you can help" handout from the website, www.adoptedforthelifeofme.com
- Print out the attendance sheet provided online.
- Print out feedback sheets on the film off the website for audience members online.

6) AT THE EVENT

- As people arrive, ask them to sign up to receive updates from your organization.
- Before the discussion, let people know that they can purchase copies of the dvd online. Print out the 'how to get a copy' sheet. If you want, you can order a screening kit so that you can use this as a fundraiser for your organization.
- Pass the *ADOPTEDforthelifeofme sign-up sheet* around at the event (either right before the screening or immediately following it) so we can add interested attendees to the film and reform community mailing list.
- Have a timekeeper so that panelists/speakers/audience members keep comments brief so everyone who wishes to participate can do so.
- Announce a call for action and have materials available (ie: the AFTLOM ACTION handout from the website) which audience members can take home.
- Encourage participants to spread the word and let them know they can learn more about the issue at the websites listed on the ACTION handout if you choose to distribute it.



Getting the Word Out

People will come to events they feel relevant, important, and timely. Since *ADOPTED: for the life of me*, covers many sensitive issues, from the impact of secrets to privacy issues, sexual mores, generational differences, legal impediments to change, women's rights, abortion, and a number of other concerns, there are many possible 'hooks' for media outlets and community interest. And because the film is an award-winning film, you can reach 'beyond the choir' to engage general audiences interested in a rich, emotional, cinematic experience as well.

Not everyone uses email and not everyone hangs out in local coffee shops.

Be sure to send us your event information so that we can publicize it on our website and Facebook page. Mail all correspondence to: adoptedforthelifeofme@gmail.com

1) VIRAL WEB OUTREACH

For audiences using the web, this is one of the most effective tools for publicity, but since attention spans are short, it works best when used in conjunction with other strategies. In all electronic outreach, be sure to include a link to www.adoptedforthelifeofme.com so people can view the trailer, or better yet, embed the *ADOPTED: for the life of me* on your website so people can see a preview!

- Newsletter or e-mail announcement: You can use the downloadable flyer template available at www.adoptedforthelifeofme.com/tools as the basis to create an email announcement to spread the word about your event. We recommend you send out these emails at least twice: two weeks before, and then a reminder a few days before your event.
- Blogs: reach out to bloggers interested in access to records legislation and adoption reform. Even a brief mention with a link to the event is helpful.
- List serves, Yahoo, and Google groups: Post announcements with a link to the trailer on e-mail lists that serve adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents, social workers, academics, and other members of the adoption reform community.

- Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter: these sites can provide enormous outreach for you in both letting people know about your screening or gathering, and about what's going on regarding adoption reform in your community and state.

2) POSTERS & FLYERS

Putting up poster and flyers around your community in the right coffee shops, libraries, laundromats, and community bulletin boards can be incredibly effective at reaching people who aren't already active but will be interested. Downloadable posters and flyers are available on the film website. All you have to do is add the date, time, and location of your event, as well as contact information should anyone need more information.

Ideas for distributing posters and flyers:

- Leave a stack of flyers at appropriate local businesses and ask if you can place a mini-poster in their window. Try video stores, coffee shops, restaurants, community centers, churches, synagogues, campuses, libraries, and anywhere else that seems appropriate.
- Be sure to send (or e-mail) flyers and posters to any co-sponsoring organizations so that they can distribute them to their members.

3) LOCAL MEDIA

Think about who is most likely to understand and appreciate your screening. Is there a story about a local adoptee or birthparent or ongoing legislation that might generate even more interest? Don't hesitate to call local papers and radio and tv stations to alert them to your screening and to stories that are occurring which local media will want to focus on.

- Use the template **press release** on the website as a guide to create your own. Interesting details to add would include a list of co-sponsoring organizations, a summary of adoption policies in your state, local human interest stories that help educate the community about the need for reform, the summary of the E.B. Donaldson report (a link to the report is located on the [adoptedfortheLifeofme](#) website), and other material that will help members of the press come up to speed on the issue. Be sure to mention if your screening is going to feature any special guests (a key note speaker, local legislators, etc.)
- Ten days before the event, issue the release to a wide range of mainstream, alternative, community, and specialized media (radio, tv, print, web). Make sure to send it to reporters who have covered adoption stories in the past as they may have the strongest interest in highlighting the film and the issue locally. Compare notes with any co-sponsors to make sure that relevant press members are only contacted **once** about the event.

- If press ant photos or a press kit about the film itself, you can direct them to the website where there is a press kit and downloadable jpegs on the tools page.
- Get the event on calendar listings in your city’s weekly publication(s) and on the web.
- Make calls to local radio and television programs. Let them know about your screening and be prepared to give them contact and title information of local experts or advocates that are available for interviews. Pay particular attention to local programs that have focused on adoption issues or adoption reform legislation in the past. This is an easy topic to pitch because it carries a great deal of emotion and human interest. Such programs frequently need guests and may be very happy to promote a local event! Some suggested contacts are:
 - Local tv news assignment editors
 - Public affairs or magazine programs producers
 - Talk radio and/or localradio producer and hosts

A couple days prior to your event contact the people you snt press materials to and encourage them to attend the event. Pitch the value of this unique screening and remind them of local angles, as well as the importance of educating people about the issues addressed in *ADOPTED: for the life of me*.

FOR CAMPUS SCREENINGS:

- Post information on websites, in newsletters, on Twitter, and in blogs at your school and any nearby campus.
- Create a Facebook event and encourage students to forward it widely.
- Send the press release you’ve created to on-campus newspapers and publications and on-campus radio or tv.
- Place flyers around campus, on tables in student mailrooms, make tents for cafeteria tables (if its allowed), and do chalking.
- Ask professors to offer school credit for attending the screening – this is a great way to get students to attend your event and they’re never disappointed afterwards!
- Ask relevant departments to ask their professors to announce the event in classes. Departments that have expressed interest in screening *ADOPTED: for the life of me* include Social Work, English, Psychology and Political Science.
- Ask all organizations and departments involved to include information about the event in their newsletters.
- Many campuses have a daily online announcement that goes out to students, faculty, and staff – a great way to alert people about the screening and to remind them on the day its happening!



THE SCREENING: Before and After

Introducing the film sets the stage for what will happen in the discussion afterward. Not everyone in attendance may be comfortable with the issue and how its presented. Not everyone may be interested in adoption reform or think that legislation should be passed which will allow adult adopted citizens access to the record of their birth. Make everyone feel safe and welcome. Everyone has a right to their opinion. Its only through listening to each other and respecting that we all come from different life experiences that we can have a reasonable debate about the issue. Below is a sample "introduction to the film". You may use it if you wish or alter it in any way you see fit.

ADOPTED: for the life of me was four years in the making. It began when the filmmaker, Jean Strauss, was contacted by an 86 year old woman who asked: "Can you help me? I just want to know where I came from before I die."

This heartbreaking request brought to the forefront the fact that adopted citizens who desire access to information about themselves can carry that desire and need all their life. Since the vast majority of domestic adoptions today have some degree of openness (where both the adopted parents and birthparents know each other), the adoptees who do not have access to their origins represent an aging population.

The film you are about to see allows our community an opportunity to stand in the shoes of an adoptee. Each of us will see these stories through the lens of our own life experience. We welcome diverging points of view. Let's educate each other with a goal of finding common ground.

After the film screens, we'll have a wrap up conversation about the issue of adoption reform and what's going on right here in our own state. We're so glad that you have joined us. There is an attendance sheet being passed around. If you're interested in being involved in helping folks like the ones in the film, please be sure to include your email address. Also, we have other materials about organizations involved in adoption issues at the back of the room. Many thanks.

AFTER THE SCREENING

ADOPTED: for the life of me can provoke strong emotions as well as questions and concerns from the audience. The post-screening discussion provides an opportunity to address these concerns and to motivate the audience members to take action.

The goals and structure of your screening will guide your post-screening discussion. If you have a keynote speaker or a panel or co-sponsors, they will most likely lead the discussion. If you are guiding the discussion yourself, you will need to think through in advance how you are going to moderate the post-screening talk. You may have members of the audience who are upset and disagree with adoption reform. They need to be included respectfully in the dialogue. Every person is entitled to their opinion. Think through in advance how you will field questions or concerns from someone who might feel threatened by adoptee access.

Controlling the Discussion:

- **What's the goal of your screening?** If its just to have people see the film, and to then talk about their personal stories, that's fine. But this film is an advocacy film, made to get people talking about adoption reform in the states that have not had the benefit of the reversal of sealed records laws. A community screening should raise the question: what are the policies in our state? Everyone in attendance should know a simple action they can take before they leave, if they are interested in helping with reform. Simply signing the attendance sheet and providing their email address is a powerful step forward. Those leading reform need to know how to reach supporters.
- **Keep the group on target.** Often people watching *ADOPTED: for the life of me* will want to relate their own reunion experience. Let folks know that they should keep such comments brief and to try to relate them to the issue of adoption reform. You can assist this with questions like: how did it feel when you were denied access to your birth certificate? Let's focus on the policies we're dealing within our state.
- **Know your state.** It can be very helpful to know about policies in your state and community before moderating a discussion about 'what to do'. Find others in your area that may have expertise in this. If possible, have a legislator in attendance who can answer audience questions about how to enact social change. The American Adoption Congress can help you through tools on their site, and the maps on the film's website should help link you to people who are educated about your state.
- **Be prepared for criticism.** A neutral moderator can help make sure that the conversation remains productive and that all perspectives can be heard.
- **Find common ground.** Guide any comments or concerns to a positive end that applauds the benefits of sharing information in an open forum. Encourage critical audience members to think about how the film might be a helpful way to address the tensions that they are feeling.



Sample Q & A

It's very useful for a panel, a keynote speaker, or a moderator to have questions on hand to generate the initial discussion following the screening. Here are some suggested questions to get things going if your audience feels a bit shy.

Question: If you have a panel, what's their take on the situation in your state. What is the history of adoption law where you live? What actions have taken place in the past or are currently underway?

Answer: Information about current state statutes can be found on your state website. Google "(your state name) adoptee access to birth certificate". The Child Welfare Handbook should come up on the first page of hits, as well as a state legislative list. Many states have not yet had any legislative action – while some have been fighting for access for decades. Contact the American Adoption Congress to see if there are individuals to contact about what the history has been in your state.

Question: Who is the opposition and what are their concerns? Is there a way to find common ground?

Answer: The opposition has traditionally been from adoptive parents who fear that access to information can affect the bonds within their adoptive families, as well as from organizations whose members make money off adoption (ie. state bar associations, and adoption agency lobbyists like the National Council for Adoption). In addition, other interesting groups have opposed legislation in specific states, like the ACLU and state Right-to-Life groups. People can be dug in on both sides of access legislation and access is a highly emotional issue, so it can be a challenge for a moderator to help audience members seek common ground. New questions can help:

- If the film made you angry, where do you think the anger is coming from? If you're angry, who are you angry at?

- What life experience has framed your point of view?
- If there are really very small numbers of birth parents who seek privacy (as statistics show) is there a way to protect these individuals yet still serve the much larger number of adoptees who seek information?
- If adoption laws were written to protect children who had no say in the sealing of their records, should amendments to their laws favor those adult children or the parents involved in the birth/adoption of that individual?
- Since there was no statutory promise of privacy in most states, should the discussion of amending laws be affected by this premise?

Question: Those involved in adoption reform seek what's called 'clean legislation'. This is legislation in which the adult adoptee gets their original birth certificate without any impediments (restrictions). In some states, clean legislation is proving difficult. What about compromise legislation? If not all adopted citizens can have full unrestricted access, does that mean that the legislation should be dropped?

Answer: This very question has created great discord within the adoption reform effort. While all advocates desire unfettered access, as has been achieved in states like Oregon, New Hampshire, and Maine, other states have found it impossible to move legislation forward without compromise. A vocal and often contentious situation has evolved, with reform members actively trying to destroy any legislation with compromise, often making very personal attacks on those who are seeking to open records. Every person is entitled to their opinion. But it becomes counterproductive to the access effort nationwide to have disunity. Those seeking to destroy compromise bills are in some ways playing the same role as the legislators who sealed the records in the first place – by taking an 'all or nothing' stance (which is unachievable in so many states) they are advocating that citizens, particularly elderly citizens, who could receive their records will not. Larger states in particular have legal barriers which make access legislation like New Hampshire's model impossible. This question could lead to a lively debate! Knowing about your state laws and any legal impediments to access legislation is important.

Question: What's a 'sandwich' or 'partial access state'?

Answer: Dave Kiley, the 'man with the dog', is from Massachusetts. The law that allowed him to have access to his birth certificate did not provide access for everyone who was adopted in that state. Those who were adopted between July 14, 1974 and January 1, 2008 still cannot access their record. This occurred because Massachusetts did not seal the

records until that date in 1974, and there are legal issues for the state in unsealing those records. This makes Massachusetts what's called a 'sandwich state'. Should laws be equitable? What could states do which have legal impediments to provide a remedy for citizens who are 'stuck' in the middle like in Massachusetts, Colorado, and Montana (among others)?

Question: What if the film doesn't represent 'your life' and makes you angry? What if you're an adoptive parent or an adoptee and feel that the film doesn't reflect your stance on access to records? If you or your daughter doesn't need their birth record, should access legislation be pursued? If you're a birthparent and want privacy, what about your rights?

Answer: *ADOPTED: for the life of me* tells the story of a handful of middle-aged and elderly adoptees who have had questions about their origins that have bothered them their whole lives. The goal of the film is not to communicate that *all* adoptees will want to have their original birth certificates – but to inspire a debate about the fact that those who do need this information for closure are denied access. The film strives to provide audience members with moments where they can stand in the shoes of Dave and Joe, and hopefully have insights into how secrecy has affected them. Not every adoptee is going to want to have their OBC. Not every birthmother is going to be like Isabel, who speaks from the grave about her desire to find her son. But by allowing adoptees access, as states like Maine have done, those adoptees who do not seek their OBC are not impacted by having the information available to their fellow adopted citizens. The reverse (sealed records forever) does have a negative impact.

Question: Do you think the film was about adoption? Or was it about secrets?

Answer: This is something for audience members to decide. A discussion about access to records can lead some people to the conclusion that adoptees who seek the beginnings of their story are suggesting that adoption is bad. But adoption is not the problem highlighted by the film. Secrecy is the issue. If adults had access to information about themselves, this film would not have needed to be made.



CONTACT and RESOURCE INFORMATION

To reach the filmmaker, email:
adoptedforthelifeofme@gmail.com

To purchase the film visit the store at:
www.jeanstrauss.com/store

To get more information about the film and its broadcast dates on PBS visit the home page at:
www.adoptedforthelifeofme.com

For more information about adoption reform, visit:
www.americanadoptioncongress.org

Before your event, we highly recommend you read **FOR THE RECORDS II**, the report on access to records released by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute:
http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/research/2010_07_for_records.php

If you have an emergency related to a screening (ie: a dvd with a glitche) you may contact us at 909-261-2012
(please check your dvd well in advance of a screening)

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