

# The Runner

**A film by Amir Naderi  
Introducing Madjid Niroumand**

**RIALTO PICTURES PRESSBOOK**

# THE RUNNER

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Director

**Amir Naderi**

**Introducing Madjid Niroumand as Amiro**

Screenplay

**Amir Naderi**

**Behrouz Gharibpour**

Director of Photography

**Firouz Malekzadeh**

Editor

**Bahram Beyzaie**

Producer

**Alireza Zarrin**

Sound Designer

**Amir Naderi**

Sound Mixer

**Mohammad Haghighi**

Sound Recordist

**Nezamoddin Kiaie**

Subtitles (2022)

**Maryam Najafi**

**Bruce Goldstein**

An Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (KANOON) production

First release: 1984 (Iran)

Iran    Color    Mono    1.33:1    Running time: 94 min

**A RIALTO PICTURES RELEASE**

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## WHAT THE CRITICS HAVE SAID ABOUT *THE RUNNER*

**“A work of astonishing power and simplicity, reminiscent of the finest Italian neo-realist films...*The Runner*’s waterside setting allows Naderi full rein for his strong sense of the visual...One suspects that Madjid Niroumand is not a professional actor, yet his seemingly spontaneous portrayal ranks among the finest ever given by a child.”**

— Kevin Thomas, *Los Angeles Times*

**“In Naderi’s clever *mise en scene*, the omnipresence of ocean liners, planes, and trains—modes of escape unavailable to him—heighten Amiro’s sense of entrapment and hopelessness. Like Buñuel, Naderi shows a keen understanding of children’s camaraderie and determination...The plot and setting of Iranian director Amir Naderi’s *The Runner* are reminiscent of Buñuel’s *Los Olvidados* and early Pasolini.”**

— Ted Shen, *Chicago Reader*

**“Naderi is at his most evocative when he doesn’t spell things out completely, when he lets the powerful images of this handsome-faced boy speak for themselves...It stays with you...Amir Naderi’s *The Runner* hovers somewhere between poetry and documentary.”**

— Hal Hinson, *The Washington Post*

**“A SMALL JEWEL YOU MUST TRY TO SEE.”**

— Derek Malcolm, *The Guardian*

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## AMIR NADERI (Director, Screenwriter)

Born in the Iranian port city of Abadan (setting of *The Runner*<sup>1</sup>), Amir Naderi's career began in the 1970s in Iran, where he quickly became one of the major figures of the Iranian New Wave, with award-winning documentaries and features including *Waiting* (1974), *The Search* (1980), *The Runner* (1984) and *Water, Wind, Dust* (made in 1985, but unreleased until 1989), bringing Iran to the forefront of the international cinema scene.

Naderi moved to the United States in 1986, where he continued to work as an independent filmmaker in New York. His New York trilogy includes *Manhattan by Numbers* (1993), which premiered at the Venice International Film Festival, as well as *A,B,C... Manhattan* (1997), which premiered at Cannes, and *Marathon* (2003), which quickly became a cult classic.

Naderi's *Sound Barrier* (2005) had its premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival and won the Roberto Rossellini Prize at the Rome Film Festival. *Vegas: Based on True Story* (2008) was in competition at Venice, where it won the CinemAvvenire Best Film in Competition Prize and the SIGNIS Award.

In 2011, Naderi wrote and directed *Cut*, with Hidetoshi Nishijima (later star of Hamaguchi's *Drive My Car*), shot in Japan and entirely in Japanese. His 2016 film *Monte* was shot in Italy and in the Italian language. Both films had their premieres at Venice. In 2016, he received the Jaeger-LeCoultre Glory to the Filmmaker Award at the 73rd Venice International Film Festival.

Throughout his career, Naderi has been the recipient of many awards and accolades from major film festivals around the world. His work has also been the subject of a number of retrospectives at international museums, film festivals, and cinematheques, including Film at Lincoln Center (2000), the Pompidou Center in Paris (2018), and the Museum of Modern Art (2018).

His latest film, *The Magic Lantern*, was shot in L.A in 2018. Later, *Moon*, a film project in China, was canceled due to the pandemic.

Mr. Naderi currently divides his time between Los Angeles and Tokyo, where he is developing two new films.

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<sup>1</sup> Though set in Abadan, *The Runner* was shot elsewhere, due to the Iran/Iraq war. See page 8.

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## AMIR NADERI: IRRESISTIBLE FORCES, IMMOVABLE OBJECTS

Amir Naderi's journey as a filmmaker began in Iran, where he was born in the southern port city of Abadan in 1946. Orphaned as a child, he spent his formative years on the street (an existence dramatized in his 1984 feature *The Runner*). A job working in a movie theater led him to discover his true homeland—the cinema—and Naderi has remained a citizen of that refined world ever since, pursuing his passion for filmmaking around the globe with no regard for physical borders or language barriers.

Naderi made his first films in the 1970s at Iran's famed Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, working alongside Abbas Kiarostami. After *The Runner* and *Water, Wind, Dust* found critical favor on the international film festival circuit, Naderi relocated to New York. Themes of isolation and alienation, already present in his work, were amplified by his encounter with the city, and with *Manhattan by Numbers* (1993), Naderi began an extraordinary series of films — including *A, B, C... Manhattan* (1997), *Marathon* (2002), and *Sound Barrier* (2005) — in which characters map their desire for emotional connection onto the coldly rational structures of New York's street grid and transportation systems.

With *Vegas: Based on a True Story* (2008), Naderi again expanded his territory, moving first to the American West, then to Japan (for the 2011 *Cut!*), and back in time to medieval Italy for his most recent film, *Monte* (2016), the story of a poor farmer who picks a quarrel with no less a force than geography itself.

- Dave Kehr, curator of Amir Naderi retrospective, Museum of Modern Art, 2018

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## MADJID NIROUMAND (Amiro)

Born in Tehran, Madjid Niroumand, who plays the central role of the resourceful young street kid Amiro in *The Runner*, was accidentally discovered by director Amir Naderi when he spotted the boy on the front cover of a sports magazine, in a group photo of a winning track and field team. But it was 11-year-old Madjid who jumped off the cover.

Mr. Niroumand recounts, "Mr. Naderi was in the south of Iran trying to find a kid to be his main actor. He was looking in the south of Iran because that's where the film is set. But once he saw the magazine, he said "That's my Amiro!" He then traveled to Tehran to find me. He went to the magazine office and the track and field federation to get my address and came to our house. He was waiting for me to come home from school and, when he saw me on the street walking home, he knew then and there that I would be Amiro."

Niroumand's performance in *The Runner* was named #12 in a list of "The 25 Greatest Child Performances in Cinema History" on the film site *Taste of Cinema*. The *Los Angeles Times* called it "the greatest performance ever given by a child."

A year after *The Runner*, Niroumand played the lead in Naderi's *Water, Wind, Dust*. Prior to leaving Iran in 1987 at age 16, Madjid did voiceovers for a number of Iranian movies and TV series. In 2016, Niroumand's harrowing account of his escape from his native country was told in the documentary *A Boy's Own Story*, a film by Mojtaba Bakhtiari Azad. Now a resident of Southern California, Niroumand serves as the Vice President of Student Affairs at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, California.

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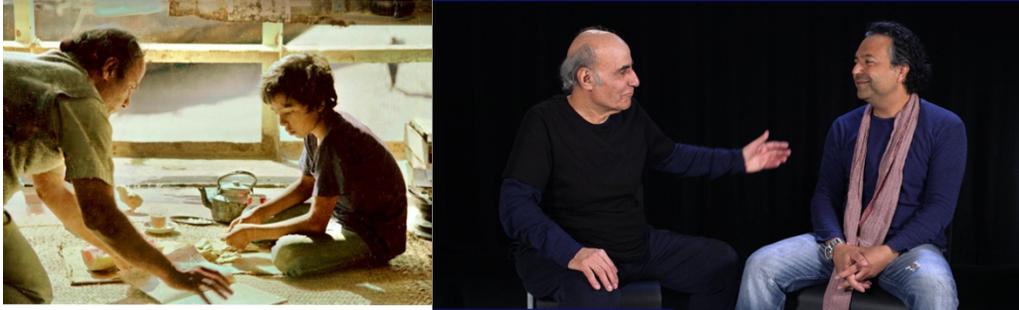
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## AMIR NADERI

Interviewed by Sakiko Kageyama

November 19, 2012

Since filming *Cut!* (2011) with Hidetoshi Nishijima (later star of Hamaguchi's *Drive My Car*), Amir Naderi has made himself at home in Japan<sup>2</sup>. We interviewed him before the Japanese theatrical release of his autobiographical film *The Runner*.



Amir Naderi and Madjid Niroumand on set, 1984, and at Pompidou Center, Paris, 2018

**You mentioned that you first saw Madjid Niroumand, whom you later cast as Amiro in *The Runner*, walking down a back street and immediately thought, “oh, that’s me!” and ran after him. What about him made you see yourself in him?<sup>3</sup>**

It was just my gut reaction. I can’t explain it, but I knew he could play me. He was walking around whistling, looking relaxed and happy. I felt like he was waiting for me. He was a smart kid and ate his meals sitting properly on a *sofreh* (cloth for eating), meaning he was raised in a proper family, and he was well behaved... I grew up in a *kucheh* (alley), but I think I had something deep inside of me. I grew up on the streets, but I wasn’t a delinquent. I played around a lot, but I was strictly disciplined by my aunt growing up.

**Did *The Runner* have a script, or did you and Madjid improvise the lines on the spot?**

I don’t write complete screenplays when working with amateur actors. I tell them about a specific subject and have them talk about it in their own words while giving them small hints called *shahed* (plot points). The children were amateurs and had southern accents, so they wouldn’t have been able to say the lines from a prepared script.

The key to filming kids is to let them be free. The camera must work around them.

**The film depicts fishing out bottles from the sea, chasing each other around, putting coins on railroad tracks, living on an abandoned ship... all personal experiences?**

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<sup>2</sup> Since this interview, he has moved back to the United States.

<sup>3</sup> Madjid’s own recollection of their first meeting differs from Mr. Naderi’s. See page 6.

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Let me tell you a little about the coin episode. There's a saying, "Iron is iron whether it's melted down or not", which means that a person must have a strong core. But after I realized I could no longer use the two *rial* coins (worth less than a penny in U.S. currency) after they got crushed on the tracks, I knew I had to develop my own strong core so that I wouldn't be crushed, even if a train ran over me. I learned that I needed to be useful no matter the hardship. Amiro vows never to go in the ocean again after encountering a shark, because he knows that he'd no longer be able to use his legs if they were eaten by sharks. The coin incident, picking up bottles, and living on an abandoned ship are all personal experiences. The film is still fresh, because they're all real events. I didn't add anything fake. The children's races and bike rides were all things I did as a kid. Children in Junub [southern Iran] lived like that, although it may be different in other areas like Shomal [in the North, near the Caspian Sea].

**You were no longer able to film in your hometown of Abadan because the Iran-Iraq War was intensifying. Instead, you managed to make eleven different filming locations look like one town. Talk about the power of editing.**

It's not so much the power of editing, but how you choose the locations that make it look like one town that's crucial. You should tell me my location selection abilities are good! Abadan is a hot, dry, and naturally harsh region. I think it's different from other parts of Iran. We had to move from place to place, because we couldn't continue filming in Abadan due to the ravages of war. We had to move around, but I knew we couldn't shoot where there were any green trees. I had an image in my mind of what places could work and really struggled to choose them. The scenes in the film are all collages of myself. We shot the film over a period of five to six months under the difficult circumstances of the ongoing war. The children were getting bigger, so I chose the locations accordingly and shot various scenes. In the beginning, the children were still young and filled with romanticism. The more the kids grew into society, the more the locations became harsh, to reflect the increasing violence they faced. Transportation slowly increased in size as well, from bicycles and small planes to jumbo jets.

**In the scene where Amiro rides his bike in front of a jet plane, it looks like he's going faster than the plane.**

The most important thing for me was that his knowledge was as fast as a jumbo jet. I made him practice and perfect the *alefba* (32-letter Persian alphabet). He practiced it whenever he could, so that he'd be able to recite the whole thing before the plane takes off. We shot it with no cuts, in one take. That's why it's so powerful. If there was a cut, you wouldn't be able to tell if he was actually saying the whole *alefba*. It would be a lie. The plane looks like it's crawling up out of the mud when it's taking off, just like Amiro.

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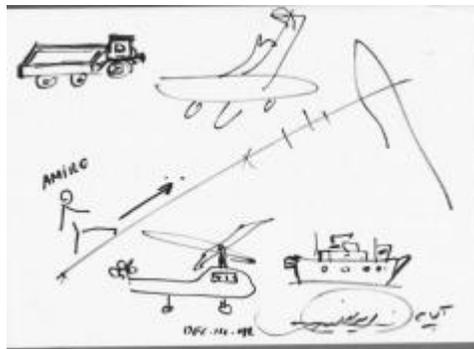
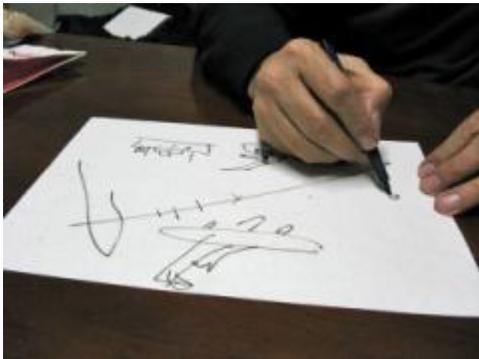
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## **It seems that everything has a meaning.**

Watching it now, it feels like there are different meanings to each scene, but I didn't think it at the time. It wouldn't have been properly conveyed to the audience if I had thought about symbolism while making it. Everyone has different experiences, and fake stories don't translate. Let me tell you why I made this film. At the time, we were at war with Iraq. The town of Abadan, where I was born and raised, was destroyed, and everyone moved to other towns. More and more children were without parents, and many became street kids, because they could no longer go to school. Many of them were orphaned. I wanted to show them my own childhood experiences, and what it meant to "fall down but stand up" through hardship. War is a battle between countries, but children were also fighting every day back then. This movie was about hope. It was a huge hit at the time. People who saw it were energized. Some parents even named their newborn children Amiro.

## **Translated from the Japanese by Mimiko Goldstein.**

*During this interview, Mr. Naderi drew pictures of planes, trucks, ships, and helicopters, while energetically talking.*



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## **A CONVERSATION WITH AMIR NADERI AT THE TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL, 2015**

**There's a strong symbolic dimension in your films. For example, planes. What drives you to symbolism? Is it in response to censorship issues?**

No, I don't think about those things. I'm not a political person and I don't want my films to be. No, the planes are to show how he feels sorry for his fate and the fate of his country. I'm just trying to draw parallels between this young, driven boy who is stuck in a place, in a situation and the moving elements of modern life: bicycles, trains, trucks, whatever. That is how I try to put things in perspective. If you persevere, if you want something, if you fight to get what you want, you can get it. That is what the whole film is about.

**You once said that you were doing "narrative cinema," but later you switched to an anti-narrative framework, as in *The Runner*. How can you explain this change?**

My first three films were all big productions with big stars. However, I soon realized that I had to go back to my own personal experiences, my own experience of the city, my own experience as an individual within a group, etc.... things that really matter to me, things that get lost in big productions, because they're only concerned with "how" something is done not why and where it is coming from. A film like *The Runner* comes from the heart, from my soul. It is a totally different kind of cinema. Since I made that switch, I have not changed my way as a filmmaker. During the shooting of my first three films, I learned how to use technical and visual tools, how to tell a story and how to use a camera. And it was only after I understood all that, that I was able to achieve what I wanted: to see characters like myself on the big screen. I think this approach and these children's stories were what caused the emergence of a new cinematic wave in Iran.

**There's a certain style of diegetic American music in your work. How deliberate is that?**

I grew up with these sounds. I love Jazz and you know, for the longest time I was obsessed with playing the trombone. At the time, places other than Tehran, the capital, were much more traditional and you couldn't really see much of the "west" and "western influences in them. But, the south of Iran, which is where I grew up was totally different. It was almost like living on another planet. The Marlboros, the music, the jeans, the boots, the oil, the ships... that sort of thing was all around you. I just chose this music because it matched the environment I wanted to create and it is what I remember.

**Bahram Beyzaie was the editor. He's also a very well-known director.**

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After discovering the French New Wave during my travels, I was very motivated to have my own circle of creative collaborators. That is why I wrote the screenplay for Abbas Kiarostami's *The Experience*, worked with Mohammadreza Aslani, and that's also why Beyzaie helped me as an editor. We were all trying to work together and learn from each other at that time. I was lucky, because he's a very good editor!

**The main character of *Harmonica* is also named Amiro, like in *The Runner*. Are both Amir Naderi?**

Yes, they're both me. I've never made a single film without a part of me in it. Even in my U.S. films, or in my last film in Japan, or my new film in Italy. Everything stems from my experiences as a person, and then of course there is a bit of imagination involved!

**Where did you shoot *The Runner*?**

That is a very interesting question. I made this film in the middle of the Iran-Iraq War. Wherever we set up the camera, the war was going on less than a mile away. After the revolution, I realized that there were so many children who had lost their families or their fathers and were trying to get to Tehran or other cities. I thought, "Should I do something?" I owed that to my city. I owed it to those kids who were growing up that way.

I went to Kanoon (Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults) and told them that I wanted to make a film with their backing. I wanted to show that these street children were heroes and give them back the crown they deserved. One of the executives, Mr. Zarrin, who ended up producing the film, told me that he grew up watching my movies and said, "Let's do this." So I went to Abadan, but it was destroyed and burnt. The city I knew no longer existed. I found myself facing war and corruption at the same time. I ended up shooting the film in no less than eleven cities. Everybody said to me after the movie, "What city is this? This is not in Iran." [laughs] This is the magic of cinema: it's a cinematic collage that represents my city. I was obsessed with Godard's editing and Orson Welles' *Othello*: he did it that way. There's a take in Spain, then one in Italy, a bit of this, a bit of that...at the end, it's a creation from the heart.

**Translated from the French by Adrienne Halpern.**

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## RIALTO PICTURES

**“The gold standard of reissue distributors”** (Kenneth Turan, *Los Angeles Times*), Rialto was founded in 1997 by Bruce Goldstein, when he realized that so many important classic films had no distribution in the U.S., with prints either impossible to get or unavailable to repertory theaters and arthouses.

In 1998, a year after the company’s founding, Goldstein was joined by partner Adrienne Halpern, an entertainment attorney and cinephile. In 2002, Eric Di Bernardo, a seasoned repertory film booker and classic film aficionado, became the company’s National Sales Director. Dave Franklin is the company’s marketing and distribution manager.

Since its founding 25 years ago, Rialto has reissued over 100 films in new 35mm prints or digital restorations, with fresh new marketing (trailers, posters, etc.) and, in the case of foreign language films, brand new translations and subtitles.

Rialto’s past releases have included Renoir’s *Grand Illusion*; Carol Reed’s *The Third Man*; Fellini’s *Nights of Cabiria* (for the first time in its “director’s cut”); Jules Dassin’s *Rififi*; Godard’s *Breathless*, *Contempt*, *Band of Outsiders*, *Pierrot Le Fou*, *Masculine Feminine*, *Le Petit Soldat*, *Alphaville*, and the U.S. premiere of his *Made in U.S.A.*; Kurosawa’s *Ran*; Jacques Becker’s *Touchez pas au Grisbi*; Bresson’s *Au Hasard Balthazar* and *Diary of a Country Priest*; Resnais’ *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*; the Ealing classics *The Ladykillers* and *Kind Hearts and Coronets*; the U.S. premiere of the original, uncut Japanese version of *Godzilla*; the U.S. premiere of the complete, uncut version of Jean-Pierre Melville’s *Le Cercle Rouge*; the U.S. premiere of Melville’s *Army of Shadows*, which became the most critically acclaimed film of 2006 (and winner of the New York Film Critics Circle Best Foreign Language Film award, 37 years after it was made); the U.S. premiere of Claude Sautet’s *Max et les Ferrailleurs*; and the U.S. premiere of the complete, uncut version of Francesco Rosi’s *Christ Stopped at Eboli*.

Current and recent releases include Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Conversation*, in new 35mm prints personally supervised by the director, and new 4K restorations of Joseph Losey’s *The Servant* and *Mr. Klein*; Fellini’s *Nights of Cabiria*, Buñuel’s *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*; Mike Nichols’ *Carnal Knowledge*; Godard’s *Breathless*; and Jacques Deray’s *La Piscine* (starring Alain Delon and Romy Schneider), which became a post-pandemic repertory sensation. The enormously successful 2021 revival of *La Piscine* in America was covered by the *New York Times* “Style” section, *The Times* of London, *Le Figaro* in France, and French public radio.

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Following the theatrical success of Rialto's reissue of *The Conversation*, director Francis Ford Coppola granted Rialto theatrical distribution rights to films in his Zoetrope library, including *Apocalypse Now: Final Cut*, *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*, *B'twixt Now and Sunrise*, and *Dementia 13: Director's Cut*.

In 1999, Rialto received a special Heritage Award from the National Society of Film Critics, and in 2000 a special award from the New York Film Critics Circle, presented to Goldstein and Halpern by Jeanne Moreau. The two co-presidents have each received the French Order of Chevalier of Arts and Letters.

In 2013, Goldstein became the first person to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award for Film from George Eastman House. He has also received career awards from Anthology Film Archive and the San Francisco Film Festival (Mel Novikoff Award).

Most recently, Rialto received the 2019 Film Heritage Award from the National Society of Film Critics "for distributing beloved classics like *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and for presenting neglected work by international masters, such as Fellini's *The White Sheik*, and Rosi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, with restored prints and upgraded subtitles."

Goldstein and Halpern take an active part in the subtitling of Rialto's foreign language films, working alongside such collaborators as Lenny Borger, Jerry Rudes, and Michel F. Moore. Goldstein has lectured on "The Art of Subtitling" and created a 20-minute film on the subject for the Criterion/Rialto Blu-ray release of *Panique*.

For its 10th anniversary in 2007, Rialto was honored with a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and similar tributes were held at George Eastman House in Rochester, the AFI Silver Theater in Washington, and the SIFF Theater in Seattle. The Criterion Collection also issued a special gift box set. Rialto's 15th anniversary was observed in 2012 with a Film Society of Lincoln Center series entitled "15 For 15: Celebrating Rialto Pictures." Rialto celebrated its 20th anniversary at the Museum of the Moving Image and the American Cinematheque with a selection of its reissues.

Since 2012, Rialto has been the main U.S. theatrical and non-theatrical representative of the Studiocanal library of 6,500 international titles, one of the world's most important film catalogues.

In April 2023, the Museum of Modern Art in New York will host its second tribute to Rialto, in honor of the company's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

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**Pressbook edited by Bruce Goldstein, Adrienne Halpern and Dave Franklin**