

## Q&A with 'America 1979' director Lila Yomtoob

When an Iranian American girl is teased at school for her ethnicity, her family must come to terms with how world politics is affecting their lives in director Lila Yomtoob's short film "America 1979" which screened at the [Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival](#) this week.

Bijan (Ali Reza Farahnakian) consoles his son Bobby (Nico Pollak) in the short narrative film America 1979 directed by Lila Yomtoob.

Courtesy of Lila Yomtoob

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Yomtoob recently answered a few questions about her film:

### Tell us what inspired you to make America 1979.

The Iran Hostage Crisis is a taboo subject matter amongst Iranian Americans, because it was such a difficult time. Many Iranians came to this country to pursue the American dream, and before the crisis, were part of the melting pot. The Hostage Crisis hit, and overnight discrimination ran rampant. As a whole, people wanted to be accepted and wanted to move on with life, so negatives were buried. When I realized that the crisis had affected me even as a young child, I wanted to dig deeper. I started talking to people, and I couldn't believe the stories I heard. I wasn't the only one that had to deal with this! So I was convinced that this was an important story to tell, not only for Iranian Americans, but for all immigrant groups that struggle with discrimination and assimilation.



### How did your own life experiences influence the story?

I took my own experience, and stories of others I heard to create the emotional backdrop of the story. I drew from my relationship with my brother to create the dynamic between the siblings in the film. The actual events in America 1979 are fabricated - I wanted the story to be visual and powerful so we played off of an image of Mickey Mouse flipping the bird and saying "Fuck You Iran!" This was a popular bumper sticker at the time, if you can believe it.

### What were some of the challenges you faced in recreating the 1970s?

Making a period piece on a limited budget is dicey. If the details aren't there, it ruins the story world. The home we filmed in hadn't been renovated since 1978, and it had wonderful shag carpets and wood paneling. We made a very American home feel like an Iranian American home with Persian rugs, silver antiques and peacock feathers. The classroom was a similar story, it hadn't been renovated and they even had the old school desk chairs. Our production designer Guy Kozak did a wonderful job researching the set dressing and made the film come to life. Finding the right color profile was a fun challenge, but nothing that our DP Adrian Correia couldn't handle. The colorist, Shanna Maurizi and I looked to "Dirty Harry" films to give it a hard 1970's look. I didn't want anything romanticized or sentimental looking.

### Tell us about your cast?

Solya Spiegel and Nico Pollak, who play the children in the film, are non actors. I met them at a casting call that I did at the Great Neck Arts Center in Long Island. We had a lot of fun during an 8 week rehearsal process, so we could get comfortable with one another, and as a result, we got great performances from both of them. Ali Reza Farahnakian, who plays the dad, is an improv veteran. He founded the Peoples Improv Theater in New York, is on television quite a bit, and wrote for SNL. Soraya Broukhim, who plays the mom, is a staple of the New York theater scene, who works with the Living Theater. Sondra James, who plays the teacher, is a character actor whose been featured in films like "Sleep Walk With Me" "The Dictator" and "Putzel." They were all so wonderful to work with.

### **Where can audiences see the film?**

We've got some screenings coming up but are not allowed to say quite yet. To find out about screenings please sign up on our mailing list at [www.America1979.com](http://www.America1979.com) or follow us on Facebook or Twitter. Eventually we will have the film available on line for those who can't make it to a festival screening.