

**Automat Pictures
Presents**

**MINESHAFT
The Cruising Murders**

A Film by Jeffrey Schwarz

USA / 85 min. / 2026

OFFICIAL SELECTION
Tribeca Festival 2026 (World Premiere)

[The Film Collaborative website](#)
[Automat Pictures website](#)

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LOGLINE - short

The untold story of the controversy surrounding the making of William Friedkin's 1980 thriller, "Cruising," the fierce protests around its production, and the real life murders that inspired the film.

LOGLINE - long

"Mineshaft: The Cruising Murders" peels back the layers of controversy surrounding the making of the 1980 thriller, "Cruising." Directed by William Friedkin, the film triggered fierce protests from the LGBTQ+ community for its portrayal of a serial killer targeting gay men in New York's leather bars. Friedkin drew inspiration from the brutal murder of Variety reporter Addison Verrill, blurring the boundaries between cinematic fiction and real-life tragedy.

SYNOPSIS - short

In the summer of 1979, director William Friedkin began filming "Cruising" on the streets of New York's West Village. The film starred Al Pacino as a cop going undercover to catch a serial killer targeting gay men in leather bars. When the shooting script was leaked to Village Voice reporter Arthur Bell, he was horrified, fearing the film would portray gay men as dangerous and pathological, as well as fuel discrimination at a time when the community was fighting for visibility and dignity. Bell encouraged his readers to protest the film, and thousands heeded his call. Protestors swarmed the streets, disrupting production and demanding Hollywood stop exploiting queer lives for sensationalism.

But behind this controversy was a series of real murders that inspired Friedkin's film, including the 1977 killing of Addison Verrill, a respected entertainment journalist and reporter for Variety. Addison was drawn to the underground world of leather bars like the notorious Mineshaft, where one night he went home with someone and was murdered in his own bed. The identity of his killer - and the shocking connection to William Friedkin himself - remain startling revelations, even today.

In recent years, "Cruising" has undergone a critical reevaluation, with a new generation embracing it as a rare document of a vanished pre-AIDS world. Yet as the film's reputation has been reconsidered, the real murders that inspired it have faded into the background. "Mineshaft: The Cruising Murders" explores how Hollywood fiction has overshadowed real tragedy, and unravels the mystery of who killed Addison Verrill.

SYNOPSIS - long

In the heart of 1970s New York City, the West Village thrived as a sanctuary for the LGBTQ+ community - a place where gay men, having fled small-town oppression, could live openly, cruising the streets, bars, and piers in pursuit of freedom, sex, and connection. But beneath this liberating nightlife lurked a sinister undercurrent of danger. "Mineshaft: The Cruising Murders" unravels the story of Addison Verrill, a respected journalist whose brutal murder in 1977 shocked the city and reverberated through the gay community.

A rising star in New York's media scene, Addison was drawn to the underground world of leather bars, including the notorious Mineshaft, a secretive space where pleasure and risk coexisted. On the night of September 14, 1977, he was found murdered in his apartment. His killer, Paul Bateson - an alcoholic radiology technician - confessed months later. Bateson, who had appeared as an extra in "The Exorcist," hinted at involvement in a string of unsolved "bag murders" - dismembered bodies found floating in the Hudson River - though these claims were never proven. When Bateson's photo appeared in the Village Voice, director William Friedkin was shocked to recognize him as the technician from his own film.

"Mineshaft" explores the investigation into Addison's murder and the media's response, which sensationalized the crime and reinforced dangerous stereotypes about gay men at a time when they were already fighting for visibility and dignity. Through interviews with Addison's partner and family, the film explores the painful aftermath of his death, and how his loved ones grappled with the complexities of his secret life.

As the documentary unfolds, it examines how Addison's murder became entangled with the making of "Cruising," William Friedkin's controversial 1980 film about a serial killer preying on gay men in New York's leather bars. Inspired in part by Bateson's crimes, "Cruising" ignited fierce protests from the LGBTQ+ community, who feared its portrayal of gay men as dangerous and pathological would fuel further discrimination. "Mineshaft" revisits these protests, placing them within the broader fight for gay representation in media and the lingering impact of the crime on the community.

The film also reflects on the dawn of the 1980s, when the rise of the AIDS epidemic cast an even darker shadow over the once-thriving gay scene. The very spaces that had symbolized freedom - like the Mineshaft - became sites of fear and mourning as the disease spread. "Mineshaft" captures the shift from the sexual liberation of the 70s to the devastating loss of the 80s, showing how a generation that had fought for freedom was now battling for survival.

Through the lens of Addison Verrill's life and death, "Mineshaft" tells a larger story of sex, violence, media representation, and identity in a pivotal era of LGBTQ+ history. Blending true crime with cultural analysis, the film offers a sobering reflection on the dangers of living in the shadows - and the resilience of a community that fought to step into the light.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

by Jeffrey Schwarz

My first encounter with "Cruising" was as a 13-year-old in suburban Queens, watching a special episode about gay films on Siskel & Ebert's "Sneak Previews." The clips they showed of a dark and violent gay world disturbed me deeply, but I couldn't look away. I didn't have the language to understand why the film both terrified and fascinated me, but those images burned into my memory.

When I came out in the early 1990s, I discovered Vito Russo's "The Celluloid Closet" and devoured his history of LGBTQ+ representation on screen. I set out to watch every film he discussed, hungry to understand my own community's complicated relationship with Hollywood. Russo described "Cruising" as a film where "the monster is homosexuality itself." Gay men were portrayed as both predators and prey, feeding into dangerous stereotypes at a time when the community was fighting for survival.

When I finally saw "Cruising," I understood why it had sparked such fury. Released in 1980, in the wake of Harvey Milk's assassination, and as gay men were being murdered in the streets, Friedkin's film felt like a betrayal. Yet "Cruising" also captured something real. It was filmed on our streets, in our bars, and featured many of the men who inhabited the late 1970s gay world. It was a document of a moment that would soon be erased by AIDS and gentrification.

Throughout my career as a filmmaker, I've been drawn to stories about the collision of entertainment and activism, so the backstory of "Cruising" fascinated me. I wanted to tell the story of its turbulent production and the fierce protests it inspired. In the summer of 1979, thousands of protesters took to the streets, disrupting production and demanding Hollywood stop exploiting our lives. For them, this wasn't just about one film - it was about survival.

But as I researched the production, I discovered something that had been almost entirely forgotten - the real murders that inspired Friedkin's film. In 1977, Addison Verrill, a rising young entertainment journalist, went home with someone he met at the Mineshaft, a notorious leather bar. During the night, he was murdered in his own bed. His murder, along with a series of unsolved "bag murders," became the foundation for William Friedkin's thriller.

Finding Addison's partner Bob and his sister Pamela took some detective work, and when I finally reached them, they were understandably hesitant. They'd spent years seeing Addison reduced to a footnote in true crime history, defined only by the way he died. Their decision to participate in the film was motivated by a desire to reclaim his story and show who he really was - a talented, ambitious young man who loved film and was carving out a life for himself in New York. Someone who deserved to be remembered for how he lived, not just how he was killed.

For years, "Cruising" was a notorious "bad object," reviled as one of the most harmful films ever made about us. But in recent years, it has undergone a critical reevaluation, with a new generation embracing it as a rare document of a vanished world decimated by AIDS. Many of the men visible on screen would be dead within a decade. Underground bars like the Mineshaft

were shuttered. And the entire area where the scene once thrived has been so thoroughly gentrified that almost no trace remains of what existed there.

Yet as the film's reputation has been reconsidered, the real stories behind it have receded into the background. This film is my attempt to bring them back into focus and to reckon with a chapter of our history that deserves to be remembered.

CREDITS

Director – Jeffrey Schwarz
Producer – Jeffrey Schwarz
Producer – John Boccardo
Executive Producer – Alan Eichler
Executive Producer – Gerald Herman
Executive Producer – Robbie Rogers
Executive Producer – Ron Nyswaner
Co-Producer- Aimée Flaherty
Associate Producer - Adam Baran
Associate Producer - Jeff Nelson
Associate Producer - Tienielle Oldham
Editor - Jeffrey Schwarz
Music – Makeup and Vanity Set
Cinematographer – Brian Wengrofsky
Cinematographer – Jesse Dana

KEY INTERVIEWEES

Dan Savage – activist, author and podcaster, “Savage Love”
Michael Musto – journalist, former columnist, The Village Voice
Randy Jurgensen – former NYPD detective, “Cruising” technical advisor
Don Scardino – “Cruising” supporting actor, played Ted Bailey
Robert Geary – partner of Addison Verrill
Pamela Verrill Walker – sister of Addison Verrill
Andy Humm – activist and journalist, co-host of “Gay USA”
Charles Kaiser – author of “The Gay Metropolis”
Dennis Dermody – author and film critic, West Village resident
Frank Henenlotter – filmmaker and West Village resident
James Polchin – author of “Indecent Advances” and “Shadow Men”
Jim Hubbard – activist and participant in “Cruising” demonstrations
Matt Foreman – activist and former exec. director, NYC Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project
Richard Berkowitz – activist and participant in “Cruising” demonstrations
Richard Goldstein – author and former editor, The Village Voice

FILMMAKER BIOS

Jeffrey Schwarz - Producer / Director / Editor

Jeffrey Schwarz is an Emmy Award-winning producer, director and editor based in Los Angeles. Prior to "Mineshaft," his latest feature documentary is "Commitment to Life," which chronicles the city of Los Angeles' response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Previous work includes "Boulevard! A Hollywood Story," "The Fabulous Allan Carr," "Tab Hunter Confidential," "I Am Divine," "Wrangler: Anatomy of an Icon," "Spine Tingler! The William Castle Story," and the Emmy Award-winning HBO Documentary Films' "Vito." Schwarz has also been a producer of Blu-ray and DVD features, profiling the work of directors such as Martin Scorsese, David Lynch, Jonathan Demme, John Waters, Wes Craven, Rob Reiner, Paul Verhoeven, and the Coen Brothers. Schwarz was the recipient of the 2015 Frameline Award, which honors those who have made a major contribution to LGBTQ+ representation in film, television, and the media arts.

John Boccardo - Producer

A practicing architect and real estate developer, John Boccardo produced "The Fabulous Allan Carr," "Tab Hunter Confidential," and "Boulevard! A Hollywood Story," also directed by Schwarz. A graduate of USC Film School, Boccardo worked as a screenwriter and script analyst in Hollywood prior to becoming an architect. John also executive produced "Won't You Be My Neighbor," directed by the Academy Award-winning Morgan Neville, as well as "Art for Everybody," "Invisible Beauty," "The Thief Collector" and "Where's My Roy Cohn?" directed by Matt Tyrnauer. John is actively involved with the Sundance Institute in Park City, Utah, where he lives part time.

Ron Nyswaner - Executive Producer

Ron Nyswaner is the creator of the acclaimed limited series "Fellow Travelers" and the screenwriter of the iconic AIDS drama "Philadelphia," recently selected by the Library of Congress for the National Film Registry. For these works and others, he has received two Peabody Awards, two Emmy nominations, a National Board of Review Best Adapted Screenplay Award, Critics Choice Award, two GLAAD Awards, nominations for the Academy, BAFTA, Writers Guild, Golden Globe, and Spirit Awards, and the WGA East's Walter Bernstein Award that honors writers "who have demonstrated with creativity, grace, and bravery, a willingness to confront social injustice in the face of adversity." Other credits include "Ray Donovan," "Homeland," "Soldier's Girl," "Mrs. Soffel," "Murder on Middle Beach," "Loan Wolves," "My Policeman," "Freeheld," and "Smithereens." He is the author of "Blue Days Black Nights: A Memoir of Desire."

Robbie Rogers - Executive Producer

Robbie Rogers is a former professional soccer player turned film and television producer. After his retirement from the game, Rogers transitioned into entertainment production, bringing his unique perspective as an out gay athlete to projects exploring LGBTQ+ stories. Rogers has served as executive producer on several high-profile projects including the CW's "All American," the Amazon Prime film "My Policeman" starring Harry Styles, and most recently the Peabody Award-winning Showtime limited series "Fellow Travelers."

Alan Eichler - Executive Producer

Alan Eichler has been a longtime publicist, talent manager and producer, representing plays by Terrence McNally, Tom Eyen, Charles Ludlam, Paul Zindel, and many others. His management and publicity clients have included Patti Page, Anita O'Day, Yma Sumac, Johnnie Ray, Maxene Andrews of the Andrews Sisters, Hadda Brooks, Ruth Brown, and LaVern Baker. He co-produced the original productions of Tom Eyen's "Women Behind Bars" and is executive producer Jeffrey Schwarz's "Boulevard! A Hollywood Story" and Mark Saltarelli's "Studio One Forever." He is currently in production on "Mamie Exposed! The Life and Loves of the Last Blond Bombshell," about the life of actress Mamie Van Doren.

Gerald Herman - Executive Producer

Gerald Herman has had a fifty year career in theatre, film and television across the USA, Europe and Asia. From 1993-2017, Herman was based in Asia, producing and directing features, shorts, and documentaries, as well as establishing southeast Asia's first "art house" cinema - the Hanoi Cinémathèque. As producer, documentary features include "Finding Phong" (2015), "Film Hawk" (2017), "Making Montgomery Clift" (2018), "Circus of Books (2019), "No Straight Lines" (2021), "Boulevard! A Hollywood Story" (2021), "Beyond the Aggressives" (2023), "Desire Lines" (2023), "I Was Born This Way" (2025) and "Adam's Apple" (2026).