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**THE MAINE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
2005 DIARY**

By Laurie Meunier Graves

RUNNING IN HIGH HEELS

USA, 2005; 115 minutes; video; in English

★★★

As it happens, all the movies we plan to see today are documentaries, and as Joel Johnson, the journal's film reviewer, noted in his "Scouting Report," this year's film festival is heavy with documentaries. This comes as no surprise. These past few years have seen the rise of the documentary, and their abundance at this year's film festival is a reflection of the upswing in their popularity.

Running in High Heels starts with a basic question. Why aren't more women running for office? Here are some statistics, taken from the festival guide's description of this movie. "52 percent of the population is female; 14 percent of Congressional seats are held by women; 95 percent of all foot surgery is done on women to correct damage done by wearing high heel shoes. Director Maryann Manelski asks: How far can women go running in high heels?" How far indeed?

In examining this question, the movie tracks the political campaign of Emily Csendes, a twenty-nine-year-old math teacher who is running for a state Senate seat in New York City's 29th district. Csendes,

attractive, engaging, and energetic, immediately wins the audience's sympathy. We can't help but root for her as she tries to pass out leaflets to uninterested passersby, eats too much pizza, and struggles to find time to grade papers as well as campaign for office. However, early in the film, we learn that Csendes is a Republican, and this fact certainly puts this liberal Democrat in a quandary. On the one hand, I admire this hard working young woman, even when she nags her parents and whines at her campaign manager. On the other hand, as a staunch Democrat, how can I want a Republican to beat a Democrat, even if that Republican is woman?

Was this a clever tactic that the director deliberately employed? She must have known that most of this film's audience, men and women alike, would be liberal feminists. Everyone I talk to after the film feels the same way as I do, torn between wanting Csendes to win and not wanting her to win.

Mixed in with Csendes's campaign are the director's interviews with women who are both liberal and conservative. Phyllis Schlafly, stiff, coifed, and unabashedly conservative, says every regressive thing that you would expect her to say, and the look on the director's face as she struggles to hold her tongue makes the audience laugh. Especially fine is how the film cuts from Schlafly's diatribe against cold, angry, and unhappy feminists, to the feminists themselves, who are upbeat, energetic, and even radiant. Clearly, the movie stacks the deck against Schlafly, and it couldn't have happened to a better person.

This terrific little film explores the various aspects of women, politics, feminism, fashion, and tradition. By following Emily Csendes, it posits a challenging question. Should feminists vote for women, regardless of the candidates' politics? One of the views put forth is that women, regardless of their political affiliation, are the ones who initiate policies that will benefit women and children. Therefore, it is always good to vote for a woman, whether she is a Democrat, a Republican, or an Independent. I'm afraid I can't quite agree with this philosophy, and I would not have voted for Emily Csendes. However, *Running in High Heels* shows how a good documentary can raise issues that are provocative, even if one doesn't necessarily agree with all the views expressed in the film.