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WISCONSIN FILM FESTIVAL

Being Innu and Testing Hope at the 2008 Wisconsin Film Festival

Linda Falkenstein on Sunday 04/06/2008 9:30 am , (5) Recommendations

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Another day, another documentary double feature. These two that screened in the Memorial Union Play Circle on Saturday, though, are in no danger of being mistaken for mockumentaries.

Being Innu chronicles the lives of the native Innu teens of Sheshatshiu, in Canada, which suffers from a tremendously high suicide rate. Each of the six teens on camera knows a handful of people who've committed suicide; some have tried it themselves.

The film fest's blurb paints a too-plucky picture of this group of young people, as if they long for the days, pre-white man, of the caribou hunt. Onscreen, even the most ambitious of them seems to be suffering from flat-out clinical depression. Gas sniffing out of plastic bags is the main activity, and although if they wanted to go to college, they'd have their tuition taken care of, most of Sheshatshiu's teens drop out of high school.

In contrast, the South African teens of *Testing Hope* are vibrant and striving to pass their Matric (grade 12) exams, without which they cannot go to a university. Even with a passing grade, many cannot afford to attend, and are ill-prepared compared to their white counterparts. Yet there's a buoyancy among all the film's subjects. A pre-test "pep-rally" featuring the whole school chiming in and dancing to township jive seems purely joyous.

The pairing of these films brings up the inevitable question: why does one society's group of dispossessed kids battle onward, while another's seems to have given up hope?

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