

Conversation

script, Strouse, who had one other movie to his name (2005's *Lonesome Jim*), earned his first directorial credit with *Grace Is Gone*, which was shot largely in Chicago. Once the filming was complete, the movie began "a really strange journey with wild ups and downs," he says. John Cooper, director of programming for Sundance, recalls that the response there was "amazing." But he suspected the film's postfestival life would be hard. "Once you mention the war, people run the other way," Cooper says. "I knew it was a huge marketing challenge."

When it did land in theatres, critics found strength in the "small moments" between Cusack and the girls (although a few lambasted the film's murky position on the war). But the movie came out over the holiday season alongside fantastical films such as *Enchanted*, and the promotion campaign was depressing. The trailer showed military personnel knocking on the door and telling Cusack's character that his wife has died. "I get why, over the holidays, *Grace Is Gone* won't be your number one choice," Loh says. She believes that if the film had been in theatres a little longer, it might have found an audience through word of mouth.

Grace's flameout has not deterred Cusack from wanting to comment on issues surrounding Iraq. His company's next project, *War, Inc.*, is an unapologetic satire about an assassin hired by a Halliburton-type company in a fictional Middle Eastern country. As for Strouse, he's pursuing a master's in creative writing at Columbia University in New York. Meanwhile, with the DVD release in May, he's wishing *Grace* will find its audience of people willing to watch and reflect on the movie in their homes. "I hope it will find its place at some point." ■



Carol Felsenthal

A SLIPPERY SUBJECT

BIOGRAPHER **Carol Felsenthal** has a reputation as a tireless reporter, but in Bill Clinton, she found a subject who tested her stamina. "Bill Clinton was the hardest subject, because every day he was in the news," says Felsenthal, a contributing editor to *Chicago*, who conducted more than 165 interviews for her new book, *Clinton in Exile* (Morrow; \$25.95). **BY EDWARD MCCLELLAND**

Q: Has Bill Clinton had a harder time letting go of the presidency than his predecessors? **A:** The only president to compare him to would be . . . well, there are two. One is Teddy Roosevelt. Of course, he came back and tried to get back in the White House. The second is Jimmy Carter, because they both went through a depression when they left the White House, and they were both humiliated. Clinton was a joke, because of his sex life.

Q: Does he see Hillary becoming president as a chance to vindicate himself? **A:** Totally.

Q: It's a long way into the book before we even hear about Hillary. It seems as though she's not much a part of his life now. **A:** That's how it is. Hillary [once] brought her 80-something-year-old mother onstage, and she said, "My mother lives with Bill and me." That was a bald-faced lie. Bill lives in Chappaqua, and [the mother] lives in what's referred to as Hillary's House in Washington, and he's barely there.

Q: Do you think it's a good idea to have the spouse of an ex-president as president? **A:** I think it would be more of a minus than a plus. This guy is just—one of his supporters de-

scribed him to me as "narcissistic and reckless."

Q: You talk about how the Lewinsky scandal tarnished his reputation, but then you say he might be dating again, now that he's out of the White House. **A:** Well, yeah. [Laughs.] That's why that description of him as narcissistic and reckless is a good one. He doesn't see consequences.

Q: Who talked to you about his personal life? **A:** I can't tell you who they are. Most of the people who talked about it were well-known names in his administration or friends.

Q: What did he learn from the Lewinsky scandal? **A:** To be more discreet.

Q: Not to stop, but to be more discreet? **A:** Oh, definitely not to stop.

Q: You talk about his lack of discipline. Do you think he'll ever be able to focus on one issue the way Jimmy Carter or Al Gore has?

A: I talked to all these doctors who are involved in the Africa AIDS crisis, and they always worry that they won't be able to keep Bill Clinton's mind focused. AIDS in Africa was an issue that got a lot of media attention. I think he'll stick to that, because it's kind of a cornerstone of his post-presidency efforts, but he'll move along and pick up other issues.

Q: You say he wants a Nobel Peace Prize. Why? **A:** Well, Teddy Roosevelt got one, Woodrow Wilson got one, Jimmy Carter got one, and I imagine that he had indigestion when Al Gore got one. He sees that as kind of a crowning achievement. In a way, he's campaigning for that. ■

