

SAFE HAVEN: THE STORY OF A SHELTER FOR HOMELESS WOMEN

Rae Bridgman

Toronto: University of Toronto Press
Incorporated 2003

**REVIEWED BY SHARON
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MARIE TOVELL WALKER**

Rae Bridgman is Associate Dean (Research) and Associate Professor in the Department of City Planning, Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba. This book describes her research around Savard's, a housing model in Toronto for chronically homeless women with mental illness. At first it seems to read like a textbook: but when one becomes accustomed to reading over parentheses, page numbers, authors' names and numerous quotes the story transcends its presentation and captures the reader's attention. It is only 140 pages long, but in that length Bridgman manages to present the players, the politics, the initial visions and the changes over time in both the visions and the practical reality. Her ability to cover these various aspects and perspectives gives the account credibility. It presents as an honest account.

A core theme is the dynamic between non-intervention and intervention. The project planners and the staff were constantly engaged in an effort to accept the women as they presented and to provide a home for them without any expectations of change while balancing this with the need to maintain safety for all concerned. The meaning of non-intervention and whether it is even possible came up frequently; it may not be, but it's interesting to read about how choices are made regarding this dynamic.

The politics of providing shelter is

loom large, and funding creates the problem of who can be a resident and who can't and for how long. Funders typically expect results. The basis of making Savard's home, with no expectations that residents would be required to access other services, made the vision difficult to achieve. The author implies great admiration for Savard's as they continued to eschew entry requirements and regulations that allowed other shelters to access the homeless population. Savard's was designed to be there for those who were not functioning in other shelters. Changes did happen over the years, resulting from experience, long discussions and agonizing over the pros and cons of what they were doing. Bridgman gives the flavour of these soul-searching interactions non-judgmentally. Our understanding of the situation is enhanced by her inclusion of a chapter that is a direct quote from Savard's logbook. It is a touching account of life at this shelter. It describes how people come and go, who is in jail, who is in hospital, who has friends and who doesn't, how violence is managed and by whom, and what it means to have this place to come home to. The writer convinced us that life at Savard's is very normal in a way that might not be conventionally understood.

A societal issue dealt with in microcosm in this small shelter is the question of individual versus community needs and rights. A strong point of this book is its presentation of events over time. As a longitudinal study it covers at least three years with a postscript giving some details of what happened later. Shifts happened and Bridgman allows us a peek into the inner sanctum as policies changed. The changes were in both directions. Some were a loosening of non-intervention, such as the decision that staff would dispense medications. Others were an increase in inclusivity as the women at Savard's were gradually brought into meal planning, cleaning duties and decisions about household management.

As a study in the practical application of respecting homeless women with mental illnesses, it was interesting to see that the residents were only included in meetings about three years after the facility opened. Could it have happened sooner? Maybe not. Abused, alienated and frightened women can need months or years of safety before they risk being open. Women did come and go, but Savard's gradually became home to a core group who became able to take small steps towards self-determination.

Bridgman, by her absence of political posturing, challenges us to look at our assumptions and questions our complicity in all kinds of systemic oppression.

FIGHT OR PAY: SOLDIERS' FAMILIES IN THE GREAT WAR

Desmond Morton

Vancouver, Toronto: University of
British Columbia Press, 2004

**REVIEWED BY LINDA
PYGIEL**

In the past few years a good deal of discussion has been generated by historians on both sides of the Atlantic about war and its capacity to produce new social welfare policies. Desmond Morton's new book, *Fight or Pay*, fits neatly into this theme as he examines the effect the First World War had on the creation of new welfare programs for families left behind when Canadian soldiers went to war. Deftly written and meticulously researched, Morton's book is a "must read" for students interested in the growth of the Canadian welfare state, scholars of gender studies, and for anyone with an interest in popular social history.

Professor Morton's examination of the political discussions leading to