

# spacingwire

---

APRIL 21, 2007

---

Let's all love movies about hating Toronto and about what terrible gentrifiers we are



Last night, a few Spacing editors had an opportunity to screen two, I would say, very important new documentaries about Toronto: *Let's All Hate Toronto*, which had its world premiere at the Hot Docs fest yesterday, and *Last Call At The Gladstone Hotel*, which will have its world premiere tomorrow through the same festival. While not always easy to watch, both of these (quite different yet related) films are essential viewing for people who live in and care about Toronto – or, as parts of these films make clear, what they *think* might be Toronto.

We started with the harder stuff first, viewing *Last Call At The Gladstone Hotel*. This heartwrenching doc is sure to generate heated conversation as it depicts a complex yet all too familiar story: poor people being ousted from the places they consider home at the behest of (this is where the conversation gets heated!) either market forces, social/community change, crumbling infrastructure, upper- or art-class obliviousness or all of the above.

The strength of the film, in many ways, is that it gives a wide berth for this debate about causes to happen while giving a strong first-person view of the individual impacts of much-vaunted “heritage revitalization” schemes.

We meet Marilyn, an incredibly caring and astute chambermaid at the hotel who uses her own money to provide residents with everything from “nice-smelling” vanilla scented garbage bags to yard-sale art and bedding. We meet Maryanne, a sweet, elderly longtime resident who pays \$1,000 a month for a small room – which, admittedly, she feels compelled to fill with hoarded mess – and who values the simultaneous sense of safety and independence the hotel staff and residents afford.

We also meet young developer couple Michael and Anne, who want to make the hotel into “ground zero” of trendy Toronto, full of “all the right people,” and Margie and Christina, developer sisters who want to keep the residents in their longtime home during an unprecedented “slow renovation,” but who ultimately choose to turn them out.

Filmmakers Derreck Roemer and Neil Graham film from a perspective that is likely similar to that of many Spacing readers: having been entranced with the old-timey feel of the Gladstone pre-reno, they still would seem to enjoy its new, upscale, more premium-beer styled incarnation. At the same time, they provide a valuable look behind the scenes as to what the human impacts of even the most well-intentioned, socially conscious or art-styled hotel renovations produce.

I’m sure (and I’m actually hoping that) others will add in their two cents on the matter, but for me the film really demonstrated the rift between economic and social classes that I skim over every day. Some artists may have just as little money as the people who lived at the Gladstone, but what they lack for that, they usually have access to many more resources of power – political and social connections, communications, medical resources, education and know-how – that the former Gladstone staff and residents lacked. I wonder what that community of people could have done had they had more access to or understanding of those kinds of resources. Others might accuse me of romanticizing here, but what those residents and staff had was community, a community that both physically and mentally likely helped them, as communities do, from going over the brink. And the dispersal of that community is, to me, the most tragic story here, both for its unquantifiable loss as a whole and for the individual losses and difficulties which likely followed.