



Mike Strobel

Neil Graham, left, and Derreck Roemer stand in front of the Gladstone, whose transformation from a flophouse to a boutique hotel is documented in their film *Last Call at the Gladstone Hotel*.



VERONICA HENRI/SUN

A different culture has taken over the Gladstone Hotel and film rookies document the metamorphosis in their gritty *Last Call*

Hump Day at the Gladstone Hotel.

"It's a queer dance party," the front desk tells me.

The Hump Day Bump, every Wednesday night.

"No cover, ever," says the bumph.

Allan Murphy, 69, one of the last of the old Gladstone barflies, does not want to know what they mean by "no cover."

Nor does he wish to risk a pinch on the bum.

Forty-eight years he has been drinking here, never been pinched on the bum.

So, he sucks back his Canadian Club and prepares to flee before night falls on Hump Day.

"I'm not prejudiced," he tells me, before he ventures out onto Queen St., "but the younger generation has taken over the place. And (whisper) they're all gay."

Well, not all, Murph. "Hip" might be a better word.

The Gladstone has gone

groovy.

Two ex-regulars have made a documentary about this remarkable remake.

Last Call at the Gladstone Hotel premieres Saturday at Hot Docs 2007. (hotdocs.ca). It airs on TVO May 9.

Buddies Neil Graham, 42, and Derreck Roemer, 43, got the idea over brewskies at the Melody Bar in 2001.

The Gladstone's owner had big plans then. Neil and Derreck got a camera.

The result, their first flick, covers five years of death throes and rebirth at this west end icon.

Last Call is gritty and unpretentious, the way the Gladstone used to be.

The hotel has stood, four storeys of glorious red brick at Queen and Gladstone, since 1889. It once had brass spittoons and "manly furniture" and catered to the old Parkdale railway station, says a book in the lobby.

After a century, it had settled into decay, its \$49 rooms home to some of the flotsam of Parkdale.

"It's a goddam dirty old hole," a maid told the camera.

A loveable goddam dirty old hole. At least, the Melody Bar.

"We started coming here because it was such a funky place," says Neil. "You'd see every imaginable person, all kinds of colourful characters."

Parkdale fixture

The star of *Last Call* is Maryanne Akulick, rest her soul. She fled Timmins at 15 to work in a Toronto cookie factory.

She roamed many streets, read many books. You can tell.

She was a Parkdale fixture, lurching about like Quasimodo.

When she got the heavens from the Gladstone, the filmmakers learned why she would talk to them only in the hallway or outside.

Her room was knee deep in

the debris of her life.

"I get attached to my stuff," Maryanne told them.

She moved to a rooming-house and died aged 78 last year.

The Gladstone's other "stays," longtermers, are gone too. Scattered or dead.

Their old rooms were gutted and now have names like Parlour of Twilight and Urban Voyager. Each was remodelled by a different artist.

Rates have, ahem, risen slightly from Maryanne's day: \$175 for a basic to \$475 for the Rock Star Suite.

Elsewhere are art studios and exhibits.

Flophouse no more. The Gladstone now bills itself as a "unique boutique hotel!"

Last Call covers a nightmare of legal feuds, evictions, roaches, leaks and other catastrophes.

In the end, Christina Zeidler and her family got the place, luckily.

The Zeidlers found new homes for the "stays," even helped with rent.

Without them, frankly, the place was doomed.

Did they kill it to save it? Depends what you like.

"There are certain places in your life that are really important to you," says Neil Graham. "You come in once and you're a regular."

"This is not the Gladstone we knew."

Says Derreck: "We came here to get away from the kind of bar that is all over Toronto. Now, it's become one of those places."

"A completely different culture has taken over this hotel."

But, hey, times change. The Gladstone is back.

Well, at least it's over the hump.

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