

“Deep Changes”

*By Julie Scrivener
With contributions
By participants*

“Anonymous 1”

For 20+ years he’s performed his art;
Now his art is the political
Talk in his heart,
It is a question of survival.
With community and clarity, his goal: We unblock,
In the hope that the City will amend its walk,
As those living precariously have had enough balk.

On ODSP and dehousing himself—
It takes 15+ years to get off the wait shelf—
Many funding agreements all too soon spent;
If providers make RGI units private market rent,
20,000 units could become what went.

The term social housing doesn’t even appear
In any housing strategy, let’s be clear;
Their “supportive” is coercive, “affordable” not affordable,
Meaning we are dispensable, forgotten, absorbable.
They force us to believe we’re not equals with their babble.

We’ve got our backs, view City acronyms, stats.
As if we should have to calculate that!
We’ve discussed together the City’s options,
And focussed on things we’d like for adoptions,
It is hard to dream of equality with caution.

For the safety of a home, we advocate, we call
For freedom to move: We’re not objects that fall;
For affordable basics, nonexistent now.
No renovictions, evictions, much more to endow.
We are 70 and 79% not in RGI stress with no real vow.

“Anonymous 2”

70 filled me in and thus I learned
The ways in which they feel so burned:
When it comes to housing here,
Truly affordable has disappeared,
And rent to income is not enough geared.

Most important in the ideal home,
Rent I can afford on my own.
Artists wrote in me their self-IDs,
And that half of them are on ODSP:
Not an acronym for affordability.

(Fear of) infestations: Why our mantle?: Darkest sign of the shaming of the poor, we
Need, too, a sense of safety, security.
Respondents: a roof under which to sleep, shower, and cook.
Many jobs won't cover it, we're forced elsewhere to look:
The system failed, us it forsook.

A respectful landlord, and not most dollars to rent;
Enough healthy food 'fore all money's been spent.
RGI/COHB would change lives where we dwell,
Would transform Toronto from our housing hell
And for ours without homes, they all seemed to yell.

RGI, “supportive”, co-op, or none;
When one of us loses, none of us has won.
Artists—like any!—need home, humble abode;
Independence from nets that could one day explode...
No more living in constant survival mode!

“Anonymous 3”

Sculpture's what I'd like to study;
Art school's on COVID's hold, it's muddy.
My building got some extra floors,
But cheaper units still close doors.
5 years here, 5 max to go, then I guess back to the horrors.

On Housing Corp's list about 15 years...
Do they see me, did I disappear?
My disability you can't see.
Yes, I'm receiving ODSP,
I'm waiting, waiting patiently.

Buildings offer lower rent
Till the time limit has been spent.
If the City negotiates with them deals,
RGI should not be repealed
So people have a chance that's real.

New condos going up all the time;
Each one needs space for RGI.
In future I want to lend support
Through activism of some sort
To stop just living from being a blood sport.

Yes, I'd like to live with those
Who dress like me in artist clothes.
Inspiring is their company,
And every day we each would see
A kind of hope and harmony.

“Anonymous 4”

To Toronto from my Venezuela
Into a new kind of living hell.
I lived in 8 places in only 6 years;
Landlords, City, giving me the gears.
How to pay rent, yet create...my never-ending anxious fear.

14 plus in a rooming house,
An unsafe place I could not espouse:
One bathroom, partitioned rooms overnight,
A scary place with no respite.
But supportive housing triggering, quite.

Rules reminded me of being in prison,
So moving had to be my decision.
Uppermost in my mind's debate:
How to pay rent and still create.
Seeking safety in my most vulnerable state...

Renovation, renoviction,
They don't care about my addiction.
It's my second year of sobriety,
And in so-called society,
My mental health is in jeopardy.

So-called sales and different owners,
Driving by, no change, they've blown us
Out of stable homes we need, compromising recovery.
An artist multidisciplinary with depression, anxiety, complex PTSD,
If I could live with other artists, I'd have peace, not constant anxiety.

“Anonymous 5”

Renoviction:
Toronto’s diction.
I will fight at the end of May;
I won once and saved the day.
Do you know what it’s like to live this way?

12 years ago to Toronto I moved
To do my MFA, at Ryerson, which proved
A challenge, but not nearly as adverse
As attempting to move forward under the curse
Of possible homelessness. Situation: perverse.

My third N12 in half a year, hence an EPIC hunt unseen, unclear.
House sold twice, worth \$1.75 mil after empty nesters avidly peered.
I’m seeking housing at breakneck pace—
And they’ll ask my income and where it’s based—
On ODSP: read reject, disgrace.

And so what I can afford
Is ignored by the Toronto landlord.
They even said, “10 months’ rent up front!”
This itself is an affront.
And so I am now on the hunt.

RGI, or just below market rent,
These would make some kind of dent.
Artscape list took a year to get on, on the centralized list since 2016.
Artists with disabilities need housing to mean
Understanding, empathy...still wait for a worker to enter the scene...artists living together, of this I dream.

“Anonymous 6”

John sister did all the paperwork
To come to Canada
John run away from the family
As there was a lot of misunderstandings

Toronto police intervened for Johns help
He come to Maxwell Megan
Via North York General Hospital
He begins a new life with all supports.

Sister and family finds guilty for what they did
She and his mother work hard
Earn money and buy him a condo.
Lives good in the community where ordinary people live.

“Anonymous 7”

Just before COVID, got an N12,
Which the Housing Board sat on, held.
A man without home, 68, I house,
As they evict my father, 89, I scout
For good housing he can afford...it takes its toll on me, no doubt.

The building the landlord once again sells.
I need to, I'm trying to first care for the self.
I try to flow with the chaos and feel.
The alarm, shock, surprise can be all too real.
I need the sense of self's boundary so I can keep my integrity.

I appreciate all the units being built, with more on the way,
But affordable it's not, job or not, OK?
It so irritates me that supports are so closed,
When supports we should find right under our nose.
It's not user friendly, not even close.

Forced to go through a worker you never hear from
To access supports; many can't, they succumb.
City Housing website no one can navigate;
Required Access Map confusing, a sorry state.
Give transparent services we know how to act on, we've no time to wait.

So I will facilitate for us a debriefing
Where emotions and thoughts are released, any beefing.
2 years, no home, the one I house surfed,
On sofas, wherever...all a human is worth?
For my father, our (un)loved ones, no more hell on earth!

“Anonymous 8”

I hear on the radio something Canada lacks:
The only G7 with no inheritance tax.
A superrich millennial: Tax us 10%!
Establish a wealth tax, to share we're hell-bent.
Our little club's saying, tax us a bit: Let us help the poor people who rent.

Compared to many I'm a little like him:
I've a roof, good food, a small treat on a whim.
I hear the wailing, dying in the streets
I call Streets to Homes, they'll send someone to meet
From a distance, then City rolls over and sleeps.

Do I actually have compassion?
Have I ever acted, or only after a fashion?
What is connection, are we all moving mouths
Syncing “How are you?” till pain dips too far south?
I want to be there till I pass right out, to awaken into the scathing drought.

I want no one, nothing to bail me out.
Then I might know something of what it's about.
I once willed myself to die;
Felt the gears grind, and by and by
My terror stopped me...left to sigh.

No home is a greater fear in hearts of lions, near and dear;
No one's really in the clear
(Maybe a certain 1%
Unless they gamble, stash all spent).
But maybe we can make a dent.