



BOOKS

BY U OF M STAFF AND FACULTY

THERE IS A SECRET WORLD WHOSE GATE can only be reached by way of a two-storey house in Winnipeg's Exchange District. The historic Kelly House is most notable for its decorative white boards at the verge of the roof, but its brick veneer, main floor bay window and raised stone arches also distinguish it as a modest example of Queen Anne style. By inserting a key into a mural on the back wall, the characters in Rae Bridgman's young adult novels are transported to the magical city of MiddleGate.

The Kelly House is just one of many Winnipeg landmarks featured in the series of novels. The Manitoba Legislative building, Union Station, Fort Garry place and Portage and Main also play important roles in the books. In *Kingdom of Trolls*, the fourth and latest in the MiddleGate series, the cousin-protagonists travel to Iceland. Vivid descriptions of the landscape were inspired by time the author spent at a writers' retreat in Skriduklaustur in East Iceland.

The fantasy books include pen-and-ink illustrations by Bridgman, who is also a practicing visual artist; her full-sized drawings are shrunk down for the book. Illustrations from *Kingdom of Trolls* were exhibited in the Dr. Paul H.T. Thorlakson Gallery in the Elizabeth Dafoe library from February to August of this year.

The novel's interest in Winnipeg architecture is not surprising given that Bridgman is a professor of city planning in the Faculty of Architecture. Along with her husband, she is co-director of BridgmanCollaborative, an architectural and planning firm whose projects have included the Dalnavert Visitors Museum, Assiniboine Park duck pond shelter and the accessibility ramp for the Manitoba Legislative building.

Bridgman has also published studies in her area of research in city planning. Issues of homelessness, child-friendly cities and literary tourism are addressed in her books *StreetCities: Rehousing the Homeless*, *Safe Haven: The Story of a Shelter for Homeless Women*, *Braving the Street: The Anthropology of Homelessness* and *Feminist Fields: Ethnographic Insights*, the latter two of which she co-authored.

The writer and woman of many talents has plotted out nine books in total for the MiddleGate series. Like the characters in *Harry Potter*, which she admits are an influence on her work, the characters in Bridgman's books will grow older as the novels progress.

Though Hogwarts is a long way from Winnipeg, MiddleGate may be within reach. Next time you find yourself in the Exchange, take a closer look at the Kelly House and you may end up someplace completely unexpected.

— Toby Cygman