



Shelter

Sarah Stonich

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"One midnight when I was about sixteen and watching the late movie with Dad, I started to nod off. He rocked my shoulder. "Listenup," he said, pointing to the screen. I propped up to peer past the bowl of old maids to see Mr. O'Hara, redder than usual, lecturing Scarlett.

"... land is the only thing in the world worth workin' for, worth fightin' for, worth dying for, because land is the only thing that lasts!"

Sarah Stonich's family had once owned land—an island in Lake Vermilion that was lost after the Depression—and while her father still managed to give his daughters the quintessential Minnesota cabin experience, it was on a patch of leased land.

Long after her father passed away, a newly divorced Stonich finds herself yearning for a piece of land to call her own, that perfect spot on a lake, tall pines, a sense of permanence, a legacy for her son, and a connection to her paternal heritage.

"Perfect" turns out to be roadless, raw wilderness near where her immigrant grandparents settled a century before and where the family name is now a postscript. Stonich recalls stories of her relatives, meets admirable and remarkable characters in the community, considers another go at love, and, finally, builds a small cabin. But when "progress" threatens to slice her precious patch of land in half, she must come to terms with the fact that a family legacy is no less valuable with or without a piece of earth.

Sarah Stonich is the author of the internationally acclaimed novels *These Granite Islands* and *The Ice Chorus*.

Shelter Details

Date : Published March 1st 2011 by Borealis Books (first published February 15th 2011)

ISBN : 9780873517751

Author : Sarah Stonich

Format : Hardcover 224 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction

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From Reader Review Shelter for online ebook

Julie says

I picked this up in Ely last week because Vacationland made me forever a fan. It was a fun read about her cabin experience and you really can't beat her absolutely perfect descriptions of the area.

Colleen says

I was born and bred in MN and my family goes back nearly to the beginning of the state. We weren't "cabin" folks--my people stayed more to the central part of the state, the "lake country." They understood fishing and farms.

So I really enjoyed Sarah's insights into the pleasure--the passion even--of having a cabin. The value of that chance to get away and just "be" with yourself, with family is illustrated beautifully.

I especially enjoyed her descriptions of her family--sisters, aunts, father.

Lori says

Lovely book about northern Minnesota.

J.j. says

Definitely a 3.5, definitely worth the reading.

I read about this book while Up North last summer, though not at all close to the North that Sarah Stonich writes so beautifully of. Her writing is so picturesque that I held on just waiting for the answer to my question about why you would ever take on a seemingly uninhabitable piece of land. The answer came in the second to last chapter: "...the places like our little cabin are sometimes necessary, that time spent in nature can tuck in the frayed ends of the soul."

Even a not-really-nature-loving person like myself appreciates and understands that.

Kathryn says

I loved the fluid, conversational structure of this book: none of that post-modern-creative-nonfiction-let's-chop-it-all-up-into-small-chapters for Stonich. She deftly writes the history of the land and people near Tower and Ely, Minnesota, while weaving in her own history, particularly her longing for her father and how it brought her back to the wilderness she had known as a child. This is a story of a mother who is not afraid

of hard work looking for peace in a piece of the northern boreal forest. It is a story of a romance, a few small cabins, innumerable rocks, and one beloved son. The tone of the book is relaxed and humorous, honest and captivating; Stonich is never snobby or self righteous in her back-to-the-land aspirations. This is a fun, calming, and easy memoir to read. Like sitting down with a good friend who has a good story to tell, you'll want a cup of tea to go along with this fabulous book.

I says

For more reviews check out my blog, [Thoughts of a Fashionista!](#)

Sarah Stonich's? memoir, *Shelter*, is all about her struggle to create a house and a home for her family in the Minnesota wilderness. She initially does it for her son, Sam, fearing he might miss out. Stonich is like most parents wanting to give their children everything. But what happens when outside forces begin to threaten the sanctuary Stonich has built?

While Stonich's memoir seems very raw and real. It takes a very brave person to share their story with the world. Judgement isn't easy but when it's personal, it's even worse. But while I applaud Stonich on her bravery, this book's subject matter creates a very limited audience. While Stonich easily relates to her audience as a woman looking for love and as a mother, there are a few spots where it is a bit hard to relate.

Stonich's memoir is about how she struggled to buy and upkeep a second home. She worked hard to accomplish this goal by being smart economically but in these tough economic times, when people are struggling to keep their first homes, it is a bit hard to sympathize with a woman who has two. There are also long moments in this book when Stonich takes time to reflect on her family's history and Minnesota's colored past. This is interesting--an very educational--in small doses but for readers who don't hail from Minnesota, this can detract from Stonich's journey.

Stonich shines when she's talking about her son. It so obvious that she loves him and that truly shines through in her writing. Her antics in love are honest and--let's be honest--more a little funny. Stonich has no problem sharing her failed attempts at love with the world. Like I said, brave woman. The heart of this story is good--maybe even great--but with too many distractions it falls a little flat.

Nancy Simon says

Memoirs of a woman growing up in northern Minnesota. A Minnesota Nice kind of book.

Becky says

I was chosen to receive this book for free through Goodreads First Reads. Thank You!

This past term in my writing class we were required to review our peers' essays. I hated it. However, I learned that reviews are only beneficial if they are given with 100% honesty. I learned this after receiving what I thought was a pretty harsh review. This required me to trash my entire paper and begin again. In the end, my final product was far superior to the initial paper. With that being said, my honest opinion follows.

I grew up spending time each summer at my grandparents' cabin. I loved that cabin, I loved the experiences, and I still savor the memories. To this day, I find myself retreating into the forest when I need an escape. Because of that, I so wanted to love this book. I felt that the author and I might be two souls sharing parallel stories. Unfortunately, I didn't love the book. There were moments of true brilliance, moments when I was completely transported into the story. At other times I found myself scratching my head and asking, "What?" I never completely understood who the author was trying to be.

I felt the book was a contradiction. There were times I felt the author was trying very hard to be down to earth. Two examples of this would be when she uses "Just wait till you see the crapper," (130) and the description "farting garbage trucks" (146). At other times, I felt as if she were trying to impress me with her vast vocabulary. From pages 118 – 122 we have the words homburg, temerity, haberdashery, purloined and ennui. Half way through the book I started writing down and underlining vocabulary words that I couldn't outright define. The last book I read where I felt the desire to create a glossary was *Les Misérables*. I appreciate having my vocabulary expanded. However, when I start underlining the words just so I can count them, there are too many. Normally such vocabulary is accompanied by elegance and refinement. That was not the case.

Additionally, the religious digs were gratuitous; some of the examples were crass; the profanity, though not extreme, was unneeded. Off the top of my head, I can come up with four different examples of religious bashing. One such example is on page 78 when she says, "Even in the face of irrefutable science, I feel woefully outnumbered by those who are certain that after death they are bound for heaven—a better version of here with fewer mosquitoes—or hell—a much shittier version where every month is February." What is the purpose of this, other than to give the impression that the author has a chip on her shoulder?

An example of the crassness can be found in the following thought she is giving her son, on page 197, "If I say the name of the thing, the one with breasts will give it to me!" (197) I'm sorry, but no infant is going to think "the one with the breasts." I am not asking the author to be something she is not. I never expect writers to handle their subject manner as I would have. However, while reading I couldn't help feeling that some of these things might have been added to make the author appear more relevant or tough. I was reminded of the teacher that swears in the classroom to be seen more as a peer than an authority figure to his/her students. I'm not saying this is the case, I'm just saying this is how I felt.

Now, don't get me wrong. There were some things I really enjoyed. I really enjoyed Chapter 11. When the author began storytelling about her family the tone changed. It made me ask if, perhaps, I might enjoy her fiction. Memoirs are tricky. I didn't come away from this feeling like I knew the author. However, I did come away feeling like I knew her grandparents.

I also loved reading about the hummingbirds. Our cabin had a porch swing. We loved to sit on that swing and watch the hummingbirds, chipmunks and squirrels. It was easy to vividly see and relate to the author's description and experiences with these birds. My own memories came flooding back as I read the words "We watched from our lawn chairs as they dive-bombed the feeder..." I remember ducking a few times, at my grandparents' cabin, thinking I might end up with a beak speared through my own eye. Great writing not only helps us live within the words of the book, but also helps us recall experiences of our own. Bravo!

I wanted so much more from this book. I wanted to really know the heart and soul of the author. Isn't that the point of a memoir? Her final paragraph tells what she has learned. I would have liked to have learned that along with her.

margothere says

Actually 3.5 stars. I enjoy Stonich's writing. This memoir was engaging - the land, the cabin, Stonich's progression. When the story ended, I wanted to know more, yet was satisfied with the journey shared. I had read Stonich's Vacationland first - which for me was just about perfect - and then These Granite Islands (loved it too). Reading "backwards", it did seem her skills were sharpening with Shelter, but I was not let down at all. It was actually kind of nice to note.

Elizabeth of Silver's Reviews says

Lots and lots of information magnificently conveyed.

Shelter is a love affair with the land....a land filled with nature's beauty.

"Pristine, undeveloped.....that description had an almost whimsical ring to it....page 58.....Sarah loved her emergent forest.

Ms. Stonich's writing style is impeccable. Learning about the wilderness and "cabin living" couldn't have been described better. You will feel her love of the land and also her little cabin along with the hardships of living without electricity and running water. The descriptions of the untouched wilderness was so good you could visualize the land in detail.

Her family stories were great, and the interaction with the townspeople was delightful. She will also let you in on the secrets of living in a small town and living with no luxuries.

Not only will you have great descriptions of landscapes, but you will thoroughly enjoy the descriptions of the generations of the Stoniches and their delicious food and family traditions. Weaved into the book are touches of Sarah's personal life.

Shelter is not only a literary work of love, but also a book you will want to re-read to be sure you didn't miss any of the details.

It is not something I normally would read, and it did get a little tedious at times, but the writing was outstanding and made it worth the reading journey. 4/5

Amy Fisher says

I was about 60 pages in when I realized this was a memoir and not a novel. I was wondering when a big plot twist would happen and then it made more sense and I sat back and enjoyed it more. The suspense promised on the dust jacket was sort of a let down because the situation had not resolved before the book was published. I tried to look up what eventually happened online and didn't find much, to my dismay. Reading about an area that's familiar to me makes a book more enjoyable and I recently visited the area near this setting, so I liked hearing more about it.

Elizabeth says

Set in Minnesota, Sarah Stanich weaves a tell of the formative events of her life as well as her ancestor framed against her desire to get back to the Northern Minnesota community where her family first settled. Part of the joy of reading this book was knowing the places and types of people she described and watching them come alive in a whole new light. I loved how she weaved her family history in with the geography and history of the area. Wonderful book. 4/5

Evie says

Originally posted to: Evie-Bookish

Sarah Stonich is a magical writer. She paints with words. Through her wonderfully descriptive passages, one can almost taste the sweetness of late autumn afternoons in the woods of far Northern Minnesota, hear the chirping of birds and the rustling of leaves, feel the unbelievable coldness of Minnesota's Winter. Her latest novel, *Shelter*, is a memoir of a journey into the wilderness, inspired by the longing to find her very own piece of perfect land, a shelter, that would become her remote writing retreat.

Shelter is a true story of one amazingly brave woman, who one day finds herself longing for change. In Sarah's case, change means buying a distant and raw piece of land, isolated for most of the year. The forty-some-acre parcel comes with no amenities, no power, no road.. no anything! And yet in Sarah's eyes this is the most beautiful place in the world and deep inside she knows, this is the place she was looking for all along.

Nothing comes easily in a place like that and so Sarah has to build everything from the ground up, working very hard every step along the way, facing hardships and overcoming many obstacles. She shares her good and bad experiences, her hopes and fears. She also talks about the land and it's ancestors, her neighbors, friends, relatives and closest family members. She shares interesting anecdotes about local people and animals, and even opens up about very personal matters, like her dating stories or how her grandparents met and fell in love, and how they came to settle down in the exact same area a century before herself. What she really does here, though, is share a piece of her soul and dreams, and that's exactly why reading this book feels so special.

This book is like a magical chest filled with captivating, humorous stories, interesting facts and anecdotes. It's 200 pages of pure wonderful, written with beautiful, evocative language. It's the kind of book you'd read when you're feeling home-sick or you find yourself in need of something that will comfort you and fill you up with positive energy and strength. It's no doubt an amazing treat for anyone who likes outdoors, camping, hiking, breathing in the fresh, clean air and enjoying remote, untouched locations. Whether you're a land owner yourself or not, whether you spend your free days exploring wilderness or prefer to stay at home and read books, wrapped tightly in a blanket - this book is something you ought to have on your bookshelf. It's an inspiring and eye-opening read, very vibrant and nostalgic. I loved every bit of it and would definitely recommend it to everyone!

Laura (booksnob) says

Sarah's family once owned a nice piece of property in northern Minnesota. Her father wanted her to have the cabin experience but leased the land. After her father died, Sarah wanted to give her son a legacy, a piece of land on a lake to call their own and to continue to the family tradition of the cabin experience. So she head up north to Ely, Minnesota, where her ancestors are from, to look for land. She settled on a piece of land on a small lake with tall pines and rocky cliffs.

For almost every Minnesotan, it is a wish to have a cabin on a lake. Sarah is able to make her dream come true with a lot of muscle and hard work. Unfortunately the state has other plans and decides to build a public road right through the middle of it.

This is the first book I have read by Sarah Stonich and I wish I would have read her fiction first. Sarah's fiction garners exceptional acclaim and I hear nothing but great things about her as a writer. *Shelter* is interesting but probably not her best book. Stonich's writing is picturesque as she evokes the beauty of the northern Minnesotan landscape perfectly. The storyline is like a lazy day at the lake waiting for the fish to bite.

If you have a cabin, *Shelter* would be a good addition for your bookshelf.

Esther says

In her extraordinary new memoir, *Shelter*, Sarah Stonich proves it is possible to connect a family through the land—to bridge the gap of generations separated by the great distance of time—through the clues we leave behind in our few acres of earth. With a careful investigation of the landscape and its inhabitants, plant and animal alike, she repairs the familial line between her father and her son.

Filled with humor, and hovering skillfully between the extremes of nostalgia and snark, she writes from a place of honest curiosity, with a humble appreciation for life's small things. Her prose carries the melody of the woods, and a rhythm only realized by those who've surrendered to the timelessness of their surroundings. Where we can search for the tiniest and greatest reasons for happiness.

With tenacious wonder, she searches the bogs and the marshland for the dark parades of hidden life and hints of what came before, from leaf impressions in stone to splintering dinosaur bones. Of equal importance are treasures of the manmade sort, trinkets of the past that hold apparitions of ancestors. Clues for our grandchildren who might one day search for us among the trinkets they dig up in the shelter of the woods.
