



THE ROLE OF WOMEN. Bala resident Glad Bryce (right) poses with Dr. Roberta Bondar, Canada's first female in space, during the launch of Bryce's book *First in Last Out: The RCAF Women's Division and Nursing Sisters in World War II*, at the University Women's Club in Toronto. Bondar wrote the foreword for the book. (Submitted photo)

Bala author's book gets royal nod

BY ALLYSON SMELLING

It's not every day that you get a letter from Buckingham Palace.

For Bala resident Glad Bryce, a letter from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is the icing on the cake after four years of research to prepare her recently published book called *First In Last Out: The RCAF Women's Division and Nursing Sisters in World War II*.

The book, which chronicles the contribution of women in the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War, is now part of the Palace Library at Buckingham Palace.

Bryce inquired about sending Queen Elizabeth a copy of her book as a gift because it details an important section of women in history.

"The Queen served in the army," Bryce said. "I hadn't known that until I found out during the process. She was 19 years old when she joined the army and she drove trucks around."

Bryce addressed her package (the book and a letter) to the private executive secretary to Her Majesty.

"It's pretty exciting," said Bryce. "I'm told that it's in a section where she keeps her favourite ones. They also told me the Queen was so delighted that she almost missed an appointment because she was reading the book."

The Queen was presented with Bryce's book in June in Halifax during her visit to Canada with the Duke of Edinburgh.

Bryce received a letter back this summer.

"I thought I might get something, but I was unprepared for the fact that it came from Buckingham Palace," said Bryce. The letter expressed gratitude for the "thoughtful gift."

"I'm quite thrilled," she said, adding she plans to frame the letter. "For me it's like icing on the cake for my four years of research."

Bryce embarked on her novel after attending a session about women in the army and navy. There, she learned the

experiences of women in the RCAF had not been chronicled. The next day she was visiting an aging neighbour who revealed her experience of being in the women's division of the air force.

"I've known her for so many years and never knew she was in the war," said Bryce. "I figured if her story doesn't get told, it will die with her."

In June 2008, Bryce attended the 67th reunion of the RCAF Women's Division in Ottawa where she spent every moment interviewing WDs and taking notes.

At the beginning of the war, the RCAF was experiencing a shortage of personnel. As men were needed for training and combat duties, WDs took over many responsibilities.

The WDs motto "We Serve that Men May Fly" was backed by their tireless efforts. Women worked as air photo interpreters, airframe maintenance workers, parachute riggers, instrument mechanics, fabric workers and photographers, among other jobs.

Over 17,400 women served with the Women's Division before it was discontinued in December 1946. Thirty WDs died during the war.

"I'm incredibly proud of these women who are now being honoured," she said. "What all these women did for us as women had never been done before. It was unheard of for a woman to install a camera into a warplane and to train men to do this. They led the way to where we are today that there should be no barriers (between men and

women)."

Since releasing the book this spring, Bryce said copies are flying off the shelves.

"I'm mailing out copies almost daily," she said.

She credits Dr. Roberta Bondar, Canada's first female in space, for putting the topic into orbit. Bondar wrote the foreword for the book.

All the proceeds from the book are going to the University Women's Club Heritage Fund Scholarship, said Bryce.