

## **Media Releases for *Slender Threads***

### **Media Release**

**For Immediate Release 20 March 2008**

#### **Writing memoirs “a great adventure” says 85-year-old author**

As an 85-year-old resident of an Ottawa-area retirement home with no family, what do you do to stay active? For Joyce Bryant, CM, BEM, the answer was simple. She wrote and published her memoirs, *Slender Threads*. And not only is she happy with the finished product — a 190-page book bursting with anecdotes as well as photos and other memorabilia — but the experience itself was enriching. So enriching that she says, “even if I never published *Slender Threads*, the rewards that I have reaped from the ‘process’ of writing it are priceless.”

“Looking back and reflecting on the ‘light and shadows’ of my life has allowed me to find new meaning and rediscover long forgotten joys. Early on in the project, I read through many of my old diaries written during the early years of my marriage.” (Joyce married late in life to a man 20 years her senior.) “I had forgotten how happy we were before the ravages of Alzheimer’s made the last few years of my husband’s life very painful. But I’ve been able to relive those happy times.”

But still, why go to all the trouble — and the expense — especially when, like Joyce, you have no family to pass on your life story to? “It’s quite simple, really,” she explains. “I just wanted there to be a record of my life — a legacy. If not for my family, then for the many dear friends that I have been blessed with.”

As it turns out, Joyce’s story makes interesting reading for friends and strangers alike. Born to an English immigrant family in Winnipeg in the early 1920s, Joyce’s childhood was shaped by the Depression and premature death of her father. After overseas wartime service in the RCAF – Women’s Division, for which she was awarded the British Empire Medal, she ended up working for 14 years as the private secretary to the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, the first Canadian-born Governor-General. Another 14 years followed at the secretariat of the Order of Canada, during which time she was chosen to become a Member of the Order “for her dedication throughout her service at Government House during the tenure of five Governors General.”

All in all, it’s a remarkable yet ordinary life, especially given that she writes with as much enthusiasm about her friends and faith as her experiences with notable personages. And it’s clear that the story is far from over. Joyce loves living in a retirement home and the chapter

that she devotes to explaining why could be an excellent marketing tool. “It gives me the opportunity to remain much more engaged in the larger community,” she writes. “I don’t have to worry about the care and maintenance of a home. If I want to go somewhere, I just lock my door and go. I have all the benefits of a small, well-run hotel that retains the atmosphere of a home. I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

Joyce acknowledges that initially the idea of trying to organize her life story into a readable narrative was daunting, especially as she is not computer literate and can no longer type due to arthritis. “It was something that I had been thinking about for several years,” she says, “but I had no idea how to go about it. Then by chance I read a privately published memoir and realised that with the help of a personal historian — an editor that specializes in such projects — I could do it.”

As the project progressed, so did the scope. “At first I just wanted to print a few books for close friends,” Joyce recalls. “By the time we had to decide, however, word had got out and the interest was so great that we printed 300 copies. But within three weeks of the launch, those were sold out. We’re now well into our second printing.”

The response has been overwhelmingly positive and rewarding for Joyce. “My friends say that reading the book is just like having a cozy chat with me and of course, that was my intent. But what I didn’t expect was that people who I have never met would read and enjoy it. I’ve met so many wonderful people. My only problem is, they all want to know what my next project is.”

*Slender Threads*, a delightful tale about a fascinating life.

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### **Lifelong Monarchist Tells of Life at Rideau Hall**

The recently published memoirs of “confirmed and enthusiastic” monarchist Joyce Bryant, CM, BEM, who Governor General Roland Michener once called “THE Order of Canada,” is giving readers some fascinating insights into life at Rideau Hall during the tenures of several Governors General. *Slender Threads* tells Bryant’s story, from her childhood in Depression-era Winnipeg to her present-day life in Ottawa, but it is the account of her career at Rideau Hall — rife with anecdotes — that makes for the most engaging reading.

Mrs. Bryant, a long-time member of The Monarchist League of Canada, suspects that she has always been a monarchist. As the only child of British immigrants, “I was probably born a monarchist,” she writes, “but as I grew into adulthood my affection for the monarchy became an integral part of who I was and still am.”

“Fortunate” is how Bryant describes the opportunities that allowed her to carve out a career working for institutions and individuals that shared her views of the monarchy. “I worked for the Crown in some capacity nearly my entire professional life,” she says. “First in the RCAF Women’s Division overseas during the war [for which she was awarded the British Empire Medal] and then, starting in late 1951, at Government House during the last few months of Lord Alexander’s term.”

Bryant was soon appointed private secretary to the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, a post she held for his term as Governor General and during his retirement. She then returned to Rideau Hall in 1967 as the first permanent employee of the secretariat of the Order of Canada. According to Christopher McCreery, author of *The Order of Canada – Its Origins, History, and Development* and a close friend of Bryant, for the next 14 years she “played an important, although subtle, role in the development of our national honours system.” In recognition of this, Bryant was invested as a Member of the Order of Canada in 1974.

Bryant draws heavily on her personal collection of photos and memorabilia to tell her story. Understandably, Mr. Massey is well represented, with photos of him in “lighter moments” and a note thanking Bryant for a pleasant evening at her Port Hope home. And we read a charming diary entry describing a 1957 garden party at Buckingham Palace. Her Majesty wore “a turquoise two-piece with bell sleeves trimmed with mink and a matching hat. Beige bag and shoes — she has the loveliest smile.”

*Slender Threads* – a delightful account of a life well lived in service to Crown and country.

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## Media Release

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### **Vincent Massey: “An often risqué sense of humour,” says former secretary in memoir**

*Slender Threads*, A new memoir by Joyce Bryant, CM, BEM, long-time private secretary to Vincent Massey and former resident of Port Hope, is casting new light on the first Canadian-born governor general. Written from the unique vantage point of having worked closely with Mr. Massey for 14 years, both during his term at Rideau Hall and subsequently at Batterwood in Port Hope, Mrs. Bryant recalls that “his austere manner belied a delightful and often risqué sense of humour, not to mention a marvellous ability to act and mimic.”

Mrs. Bryant wants to dispel the popular image of her former boss as being distant and reserved. “Mr. Massey could be aloof, especially in public,” she says, “but so few people realise what a humorous, warm-hearted man he was. He could be great fun in his own way. I’ve tried to portray the Vincent Massey that I knew — a man who loved a good joke and who wasn’t above dropping over to our modest bungalow on Charles Street after work to relax with a *Tio Pepe*.”

Following her employment with Mr. Massey, which ended just months before his death, Mrs. Bryant went on to become the first permanent employee of the secretariat of the Order of Canada. According to Christopher McCreery, author of *The Order of Canada – Its Origins, History, and Development* and a close friend of Bryant, for the next 14 years she “played an important, although subtle, role in the development of our national honours system.” In recognition of her dedication, Bryant was invested as a Member of the Order of Canada in 1974.

Looking back at her many years with Vincent Massey, Mrs. Bryant reflects on how much he shaped her life. “When I first went to work for him in early 1952, I was little more than a secretary who loved taking shorthand. But in the next few years I discovered Canada, travelling more than 150,000 miles with Mr. Massey. And then during his retirement at Batterwood while he was writing his memoirs, we had long talks about every subject conceivable. I often say that while in his employ I received the university education that I never had.”

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## News Release

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### **Writing memoirs “a great adventure” says 85-year-old author**

As an 85-year-old resident of a New Edinburgh retirement home with no family, what do you do to stay active? For long-time resident of New Edinburgh Joyce Bryant, CM, BEM, the answer was simple. She wrote and published her memoirs, *Slender Threads*. And not only is she happy with the finished product — a 190-page book bursting with anecdotes as well as photos and other memorabilia — but the experience itself was enriching. So enriching that she says, “even if I never published *Slender Threads*, the rewards that I have reaped from the ‘process’ of writing it are priceless.”

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