

Why heritage award means so much to us

We had seen Marg Couture, chair of the Bala Communities in Blooms committee, taking photos all over town in preparation for the visit of two Communities in Bloom judges.

So Linda wasn't surprised about two weeks ago when Marg asked to take her photo by the buggy at the front door of our museum.

The photo-taking was so brief and so casual that Linda didn't even mention it to me later.

Days after that photo, we were invited to an outdoor barbeque dinner, hosted by Communities in Bloom at the home of our neighbours, Ayton and Mary Grady on Mon., Aug. 13. The guests of honour were two Communities in Bloom judges who had spent the day touring our town.

Marg Couture announced towards the end of the dinner that her committee had decided to create a new award to encourage the preservation of Bala's heritage. Linda and I waited to hear the name of Kimberley Ward, who has done a fantastic job in restor-



Sisters Marylou Oliver, left, and Susan Gurr of Bala, on stage at Roy Thomson during Seniors Jubilee. Submitted photo

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ing the Bala Bay Inn. She would have been our choice.

That's not what happened. "I'd like Linda and Jack Hutton to come forward," said Marg.

"Bala's Museum was the unanimous choice of our committee to receive the first heritage award from Communities in Bloom."

I sat in shock for a few seconds. It was a true "gotcha" moment.

As I listened to Marg Couture read the award citation, memories kept flooding back. I remembered when Linda and I returned from a P.E.I. honeymoon in 1990 and discovered that the author of *Anne of Green Gables* had holidayed at Roselawn Lodge in 1922 and that she had written a book, *The Blue Castle*, based on her time in Bala.

Our next discovery was that LMM and her family had had their meals in a tourist home down the street from Roselawn, and that there were rumours that the house might be torn down to make way for a more saleable new one. It had been for sale for six years with no takers.

That's when we bought the old home at the corner of River and Maple to save it. A picket fence appeared, followed by the flowers that L.M. Montgomery loved - hollyhocks, bachelor buttons, golden glow, purple cone flowers, daisies. Inside the house, Linda uncovered openings for four



Marg Couture took this photo of Linda days before the heritage award was announced.

doors and seven windows that hadn't been seen for years.

This was quite a change for a house that started off in 1909 as one room with a sleeping loft above (reached by ladder through a trap door) and a root cellar down below. Everything else got added on later.

After World War I, the house had expanded to a point that the owner, Fanny Pike, started thinking about renting a couple of rooms upstairs and offering meals downstairs. Fanny, one of Bala's most colourful citizens, called it Treelawn Lodge to match Roselawn down the street.

In mid-July, 1922, Roselawn Lodge sent a family of four to Fanny to have all their meals for two weeks. They were Lucy Maud Montgomery, her minister husband, Ewan Macdonald, and their boys, Chester, 10, and Stuart, 7.

We doubt that Fanny knew that she had a famous author in her home. Ewan Macdonald felt threatened when people made a fuss over Maud, so she would

have been known only as his wife and the mother of their two boys. But her Bala diary mentions Fanny and includes great descriptions of "the moon silvering on the river" at Roselawn.

After 15 seasons, the Bala link with L.M. Montgomery has become famous world-wide, attracting more than 85,000 visitors in that time.

If the Montgomery link is the main draw, the museum also proudly promotes Bala's heritage. In the kitchen, mementos recall the former Swastika Hotel (now the Bala Bay Inn), the New Windsor Hotel, the old Grassmere Dairy, Dunn's Pavilion, Carr's Ice Cream Parlour, and area cottages.

The Maple Avenue door came from a main street building where you could once leave your horse for 50 cents a day. An upstairs window came from Bala's first blacksmith. Several times a day I enjoy playing the vintage upright piano from the old Swastika Hotel (donated by Bob and Leda Sutton).

Several displays have highlight-

ed Bala's history over the years. For two years in a row, the old Twins' Studio (Fairyland) was recreated in a front room. Dunn's Pavilion was in that same room one summer, including a table where patrons once sat with a pitcher of ice water and mix in front of them and a brown bag under the table.

You won't find a photo of the presentation in this publication and I'm glad of that. You would have seen me fighting back tears.

Why the tears? I was thinking of all that Linda has done. The average life of a private museum in North America without public funding of any kind is somewhere between a year and a half and five years. Linda has maintained Bala's Museum with Memories of Lucy Maud Montgomery for 15 years and made it better every year.

We rarely talk about finances, but buying and restoring the old building cost more than \$100,000 in the first year. It costs \$3,000 in insurance before every season opens. There have been extra investments - like a new chimney this spring. You never consider getting that money back. It is a legacy for the community.

Downward trends in tourism like SARS and border crossing problems affect niche attractions like ours far more than ones supported by public funding. So earlier this summer we wondered on a quiet day whether all the effort and expense was worth it.

The award from Communities in Bloom has changed all that. We are carrying on for at least another year.

Thank you, Bala Communities in Bloom, for recognizing the wonderful lady who is my wife.

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