

FIRST PERSON

ELAINE TAYLOR THOMAS

It's not unusual for SAIT grads to fund scholarships, but it may be out of the ordinary for friends who graduated 45 years apart to jointly sponsor a student award because of a book.

Winston Parker (Agricultural Mechanics and Tractors '39) shared his life story with me and I wrote his memoir, *Saddles and Service - Winston Parker's Story*. Profits from this memoir will fund an award for a SAIT Aircraft Maintenance Engineers Technology student. The first Saddles and Service Award will be presented in fall 2012.

Winston's story, *Saddles and Service*, is filled with colourful exploits ranging from breaking riding horses as a boy, to helping to drive stock for the Calgary Stampede down Macleod Trail. That was before he came to "Tech," as SAIT was known in those days.

When World War II began, Winston joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and flew on 12 successful bombing missions over Germany. On his 13th mission, his plane was shot down; he parachuted safely to the ground but was captured in enemy territory. Winston spent the next three years in a prisoner of war camp, Stalag VIII B. In the waning months of the war, he and his comrades were forced by their captors on grueling marches across the German countryside. Many of the prisoners didn't live to see the end of the war. Winston did, but barely. When he arrived in England after the war, Winston, normally a big, strapping man, weighed just 98 pounds.

After returning from overseas, Winston settled into a life of ranching in the Millarville area. Over the years, he became a respected community leader, and is well known as a man who is never too busy to help out his community and his friends. That tradition continues with his desire to help SAIT students with the proceeds from his memoirs.

I've known Winston since I was a child growing up in southern Alberta and I consider myself lucky for this. Over the years, he has instilled in me a belief in the importance of giving back. Because SAIT equipped me (JA '74) for a career beyond my expectations, I am happy to be part of this scholarship and to share this opportunity with Winston.

SAIT alumni Elaine Taylor Thomas and Winston Parker display Parker's memoirs at a book launch in Okotoks last fall. The two plan to fund a SAIT scholarship with proceeds from the sale of the book.