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## Lafayette Author Pens the Story of a Hidden Medieval Heroine

By Kara Navolio



Hilary Benford Photo provided

It's never too late to cross an item off your bucket list.

That is definitely true for Lafayette author Hilary Benford, who has just had her historical fiction novel published at the age of 79. "Sister of the Lionheart," published by Wordfire Press in July and available through Amazon.com, is the story of Joanna Plantagenet, a young princess in England during the Middle Ages.

"Much has been documented about her famous parents, King Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine, and her brother, Richard the Lionheart, but I always wondered about the women of that time period, what they were doing and thinking," says Benford. "All of my history classes always focused on the men and the battles and laws."

The story begins in 1168 with Joanna as a young girl, growing up at courts in France and England, always admiring her mother's strength. She was married off to King William of Sicily at the age of 12 but her strength and her close relationship with her brother Richard led her to become a formidable force in history, even joining her brother in the Crusades.

"This historical epic introduces a strong and truly unforgettable heroine whose drive and persistence helped change the course of history," states the publisher.

Benford grew up in England and experienced the World War II bombings around London. She married an American physicist and moved to Lafayette 39 years ago. She began writing this book in the 1970s, but then other obligations took her away from completing it. In the meantime, she raised two sons and coauthored a science fiction book with her brother-in-law, Gregory Benford, titled "Timescape" that won the 1980 Nebula Award (voted on by Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America).

Almost 40 years later, Benford decided it was time to complete her book about Joanna. She took up her writing and research full time about two years ago. Her research included books on medieval history and customs, online research, as well as travel to all of the places Joanna lived, from Fontevrault to the Holy Land, and Sicily to Toulouse.

"Sister of the Lionheart" is volume one of a two-part series. The second novel, "Joanna Crusader," is the story of Joanna's later years and is slated to be published next year.

Benford will be signing books at a launch party at 3 p.m. Sept. 3 at Orinda Books.

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