

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 Eng-

land, 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 Fontevault 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.

Understanding the State's End of Life Option Act

By Linda Fodrini-Johnson

When the days become numbered, and the pain or discomfort of illness is more than one can bear, Californians have a new law (End of Life Option Act) that allows those who meet the criteria to take a drug that ends their life.

I am sure this stirs up mixed feelings, values and concerns for most of us. This can be especially hard to understand for those who fight hard against suicide or have experienced the death of a family member by suicide.

To qualify, the patient must meet the following criteria:

- Be a resident of California;
- Be 18 years of age or older;
- Have a diagnosis of an incurable disease that will result in death within six months;
- The patient must be mentally competent and be able to make their own medical decisions;
- The patient must be able to self-administer the drug.

Oregon has had such a law for many years and even to this day only about 40 percent of the individuals that apply actually end their lives in this manner. In reality, 60 percent choose to allow the natural course of life to bring theirs to a close.

A complicating factor for physicians is that the American Medical Association's formal ethics policy is against doctors facilitating a patient's death, including offering information or drugs that enable the patient to perform this life-ending act. Doctors have the choice not to participate in a patient's decision to end their life. However, many will support those who choose this option.

Compassion & Choices is an organization that advocates for end of life options. They assist with education, consultation, policy promotion and more. They have a hotline for clinicians, which has more information for pharmacists and doctors to connect with resources

and trained practitioners. Their hotline number is 1-800-893-4548 or check out their website at www.compassionandchoices.org.

Care, comfort, pain management, and supporting patients and families at the end of life are also the missions and goals of the hospice movement. In my experience, individuals and families often delay or decline the options that provide death with dignity. In part, such decisions are difficult because it means refusing aggressive treatments, thus facing the end of life.

I made the hospice decision for my own mother; it was tough signing the papers to enroll her. However, this decision gave her the most peaceful and dignified end of life possible, in a home-like setting. Because of her dementia, she would not have had the choice of "the right to die" on her own. I know that I have had many clients in the past who would have also welcomed such a choice – as hard as it is.

If you would like some of my blogs related to this issue, sign up for our monthly newsletter at www.EldercareAnswers.com or call our office and we will put you on the list.



Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC is a Licensed Family Therapist and Certified Care Manager. She is the Founder of Eldercare Services, a full-service care management and home care company doing business since 1989. Linda's new e-book, "7 Steps to a Healthy Life for You and Your Aging Parents," can be found on Amazon.com.



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