INTRO FOR JILL'S BOOK LAUNCH

Welcome to the launch of Jill MacLean's latest historical novel, *The Arrows of Fealty*. I'm Norene Smiley and I have the honour to say a few words today before I hand it over to our esteemed author.

I met Jill over 30 years ago through our mutual friend Mary Jo Anderson, as part of a group of women taking yearly retreats to a monastery in New Brunswick. Since then I have enjoyed witnessing her successful writing career through a number of genres - romance, poetry, and juvenile and young adult fiction - winning many awards and acknowledgments, all so justifiably earned.

About eleven years ago, Jill focussed her long-held interest in medieval times. She dove deep into the research of early English villages, warfare and the Hundred Years War, archery and so much more. I was staggered at the extent of the project that emerged, but I wasn't surprised. Jill was always thorough in her research and up for a challenge. What did surprise me was when Jill determined it needed to be a work of adult historical fiction. This was new territory indeed.

As we all know - historical fiction is not easy. It is a dance, in this case, between immersing the reader in 14th century England, with its language, customs and viewpoints, and somehow writing a story readers of today can relate to, and digest, without stumbling over awkward expressions or being bogged down in ponderous detail.

Historical fiction for adults was also a whole new area of publishing for Jill. She had to start from scratch, researching the market, running the gamut of editors, agents and publishers, following leads in Canada and the UK, drafting and drafting again. It wasn't easy but Jill was determined that Edmond's story in *The Arrows of Mercy,* her first medieval novel, find its

way into print. In the end, she decided to self-publish and there followed a year of promotion and book fairs and tirelessly doing all she could to get it into the hands of readers. Not for the faint of heart.

Through it all, I have admired her integrity and dedication to her craft. Her steadfastness. She has a work ethic like none other. I think she has faith in herself and she, in turn, is faithful to her characters. They can count on her to tell their story truthfully, with compassion, without flinching. They can count on her to get that story out there, despite the challenges.

In *The Arrows of Mercy*, we were introduced to a scarred Edmond, returning from the battlefields of France, to a life of hardship in his home village. Jill chose not to focus on the high drama of war and the plague, but to turn her attention to their impact on her characters. As The Miramachi Reader wrote: "What MacLean does so brilliantly is paint their rich, tragic emotional lives, their moral struggles, the rollercoaster of love and hate, of jealousy and fraternity, of good and evil."

Now today, with great expectation, we get to open Jill's newest novel, *The Arrows of Fealty*, and meet Edmond's son Haukyn. We get to read about his discontent working the land for his Lord and struggling with his father's expectations. We ride along with him as he faces the brutality of his first conflict as part of John of Gaunt's forces, sweeping across France, raiding and causing destruction. This experience plants seeds of doubt, as Hawkyn questions why he is fighting against peasants not unlike himself. We walk alongside Hawkyn as he joins the Peasant Revolt of 1381, an uprising against tyranny and injustice. Hard and difficult times that we can relate to, not only because of the heartbreaking news surrounding us in the world today, but because of the skill of a storyteller like Jill.

And now, please welcome the compassionate, the gifted, Jill MacLean.