



'DIAMOND' OF A CONTROVERSY

Author Dawn Rae Downton autographs a copy of her book *Diamond: A Memoir of 100 Days* for Isabel Henderson in Pictou. The book recounts the last days for a friend who was dying of cancer and features experiences of living for three years in rural Pictou County.

(Goodwin photo)

Based in Pictou County: *Book Raises ire of residents*

By Steve Goodwin

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NEW GLASGOW: Writing a book about a dying friend is the best way Dawn Rae Downton thought she could stay in touch with her.

Diamond: A Memoir of 100 Days is the second book written by Ms. Downton, who for 25 years was a freelance writer.

She shared parts of the book during a reading session last week at the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library.

The book contains vignettes from her family's three-year stay in *Diamond*, a small Pictou County community west of Scotsburn. But at its core, Ms. Downton catalogues her experience with a friend, known only as Carol, who lost her life to cancer.

"I have a writer's heart and soul", Ms. Downton says.

"My friend was dying. She was my best friend, and I wanted to keep her with me the only way I could, in words."

An award-winning writer, Ms. Downton is described on the book cover as a former director of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia who has written extensively on books, dance, theatre, visual arts, design and crafts in Atlantic Canada.

Her family memoir was published in 2002.

"I was always driven to be a writer," she recalls. "When I was a kid, I started writing dreadful prose, but I felt I couldn't keep going through life without being a writer."

Born in Newfoundland, Ms. Downton spent most of her life in Nova Scotia.

Some of those experiences have upset some people in *Diamond* and nearby.

She was in Vancouver with her husband, Bob, when they decided to live in a rural area for the first time and ended up moving to the *Diamond* Farm in September 1999.

They spent three years there before moving to Nova Scotia's South Shore last year so that he could find work in Halifax as an electronics engineer.

"It was my first country living experience," Ms. Downton says, recalling ruins of an old school house near the farm where they lived.

As the book took shape, Ms. Downton told her audience last week how difficult it can be to complete it.

"It's hard to get on with writing," she says. "Things stick to you."

They raised objections to how some people were depicted

in the book and claimed some of its passages were inaccurate.

"You're allowed to write about people if it's true, but not if it's a lie," said Valerie Sutherland of River John.

Ms. Sutherland says she was dismayed how Everett Pearl was portrayed. Mr. Pearl's wife Wanda is Ms. Sutherland's daughter.

They have three children who Ms. Sutherland says have endured ridicule at school over

how Ms. Downton described their home near the Diamond Farm.

"They're having an awful time," Ms. Sutherland says. "I think it's terrible to write lies about people."

The Pearls have consulted a lawyer to see what redress is available to them.

For her part, Ms. Downton says the people and events in the book are based on conclusions

she has drawn from her observations and experiences.

"I guess we'll have to agree to disagree," Ms. Downton concluded. "I wrote about Pictou County, warts and all, as an outsider."

Published by McClelland and Stewart Ltd. In Toronto, Diamond: A Memoir of 100 Days, Copyright 2003 sells for \$34.99 in local bookstores.

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