



## 'Jake's Gift' plays St. Andrews Presbyterian Church on June 6

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 BY CONAN DE VRIES

EMC Events - It's been nearly 70 years since D-Day, but many of its stories have yet to be told.

The allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France on June 6, 1944, has inspired books, films, television programs and plays, all of which have run the gamut from forgettable to captivating.

Add Jake's Gift to the latter list.

The one-woman show was written by its star, Vancouver playwright Julia Mackey, who was deeply moved by a visit in 2004 to Normandy, France, site of the D-Day landings, where she met with Canadian, American and British campaign veterans.

Their stories of human strength and frailty, of fear, relief, delight and guilt form the basis and inspiration for Jake's Gift, the fictional account of a Second World War veteran who returns to France for the 60th anniversary of D-Day.

There, he meets a bright and endearing young girl who charms the demon-haunted soldier into coming to terms with the ghosts that have stalked him since his boots first hit Juno Beach six decades prior. The vet is particularly embittered by the death of his eldest brother, a promising musician whose life was cut short during the war.

Mackey finished the first draft of Jake's Gift in 2006, and its first performance was well-received at a workshop at Sunset Theatre in Wells, British Columbia.

Though it started out small, the play and its impact has grown larger than even Mackey could have expected - having toured Canada since 2007 and won several prestigious awards at the Victoria, Edmonton and Winnipeg Fringe Festivals.

Critical response has been equally enthusiastic, with glowing reviews from the theatre critics of Toronto's Eye Weekly, Edmonton Sun and CBC Radio, to name just a few.

"It's one of the most remarkable performances I've ever seen," says Ian Farthing, who knows whereof he speaks.

An accomplished actor and director, the artistic director of the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival has made his living in and around the theatre and has seen the best and the worst the stage has to offer. So he knows "best" when he sees it.

"It made such an impact that when I heard that (Julia) was back in Eastern Ontario I asked her to come here," says Farthing.

Just as the renowned Shakespeare Festival has brought Shakespeare to the general public, organizers also like to bring to town works from other artists they think deserve the appreciative and thoughtful audience that comes out every summer for the Festival.

The show is suitable for all ages and, though it's a dramatic telling of a moving story, it features a good dose of humour throughout.

"Julia manages to connect with everybody in quite an amazing way," says Farthing.

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*Submitted*

Jake's Gift will be held at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church at the corner of Centre and Dibble streets in Prescott on Monday, June 6. It will begin at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$20 each and are available online at [www.stlawrenceshakespeare.ca](http://www.stlawrenceshakespeare.ca).

When Farthing and Mackey were consulting their calendars earlier this year, trading dates and times and trying to settle on the best time for the play to debut in Prescott, it didn't dawn on either of them at first that the day they had chosen Monday, June 6 was the anniversary of D-Day.

"It's going to make it particularly poignant," says Farthing.

The play will be held at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church at the corner of Center and Dibble streets in Prescott on Monday, June 6. It will begin at 8 p.m.

Tickets are \$20 each and are available online at [www.stlawrenceshakespeare.ca](http://www.stlawrenceshakespeare.ca).

Anyone who wants to know more about the show or with questions is welcome to call the Shakespeare Festival office at 613-925-5788.

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