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Lunching and learning with the league

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Dina Matos McGreevey just managed to keep her emotions at bay when she addressed the crowd of 300 women at the Junior League of Morristown's sixth annual "Lunch with the Authors" Friday, May 4, at the Olde Mill Inn in the Basking Ridge section of Bernards Township.

"I want to thank all of you for your support," said Matos McGreevey.

"Most of you have heard my story. It certainly has been in the news every week. It goes without saying the last 2½, three years have been very, very difficult."

At one of her first local public appearances to promote her new book, "Silent Partner: A Memoir of My Marriage," Matos McGreevey signed copies of the book, spoke and participated in a question-and-answer session along with other guest authors, Linda Francis Lee and Susan Vreeland.

"You can imagine the confusion and emotion I was experiencing at the time," said Matos McGreevey of the discovery that her estranged husband, former Gov. James McGreevey, was homosexual.

"Other marriages and relationships that fail break up in private, not public. It's already difficult enough when a marriage or relationship ends, but it's even more difficult when it's played out in public."

Matos McGreevey said she decided to write the book because she got tired of people telling her story inaccurately.

She said she initially wrote the book for herself, and for her 5-year-old daughter, Jacqueline, to know what her mother experienced. Since the book's publication, however, she said she has come to realize she also wrote the book for other spouses, both men and women, who have gone through or are going through the same ordeal.

"I didn't realize how many people are out there in the same circumstances that I am," said Matos McGreevey. "They're called 'straight spouses.' I hope that by reading this book, people who have questions about their relationship or marriage will ask questions and look for the signs.

"They should not be ashamed of themselves; they've done nothing wrong," she said.

When an audience member asked what kind of priest she thinks her former husband will make, referring to McGreevey's recent disclosure of his intention to become an Episcopal minister, Matos McGreevey said, "I don't think you can set a good example for people if you have lied your entire life."

The comment, though spoken with a tremble in her voice, met with animated audience applause.

"I was just impressed by the courage she shows," said Arlene Ward of Bernardsville, league president and luncheon mistress of ceremonies. "She's got a difficult situation, and I think she's going to help a lot of people in similar situations. She was inspiring."

'Great Junior Leaguer'

On a lighter note, author Linda Francis Lee proved to be a big hit as she spoke of and read from her very-relevant-to-the-audience book, "The Devil in the Junior League."

"Jennifer Garner has signed on (to star in the film adaptation of the book) and I think she'll make a great

Junior Leaguer," said Lee to a laughing crowd.

A former Texas Junior League member and debutante, Lee entertained the gathered league members and their guests with comical and endearing anecdotes from her book and experiences.

"The members' coming together is the beauty of the Junior League," said Lee. "These women come together for the greater good."

"I enjoyed her very much," said Ward. "I thought she was funny and insightful, and I loved hearing her behind-the-scenes story of the book."

Completely different from the serious Matos McGreevey and the light-hearted Lee, author Susan Vreeland, an art enthusiast and former English teacher, captivated the crowd with a lecture and reading from her new book, "Luncheon of the Boating Party," a fictional account of the models coming together in Auguste Renior's painting of the same name.

"I researched their lives, followed their careers and read their memoirs," said Vreeland of her characters based on the subjects in the painting. "I did this to give a picture of this vibrant 19th century Paris."

"Her presentation was wonderful; insightful and so in-depth," said Ward. "I really felt like I was sitting on a cafe terrace with all the models by the way she was explaining everything."

'Began My Healing'

As to why they write, all three authors shared similar inspirations.

"For me, it was all the stuff going on in my head," said Lee. "It's cathartic to get it all out."

"I share that sentiment," said Matos McGreevey. "It was very cathartic. The whole process of writing this book I think began my healing."

"I also believe one writes to find out what one thinks," said Vreeland. "I think art as well as literature allows us to cultivate our imaginations."

"We try to get a nice mix of authors so it appeals to everybody," said Ward about the speakers' event. "This is probably the best mix of authors that we've had. The feedback that I had was that everybody enjoyed every one of them."

Proceeds from the event will support Junior League of Morristown community projects and its scholarship fund, which awards \$2,500 to four high school seniors each year for leadership and community service.

"This year the Junior League will present a \$2,500 scholarship to a woman over 40 who will be going back to school," said Ward.

"It's a fabulous turnout, just fantastic," said Megan Schubiger of Chatham, the league's president-elect. "Gorgeous setting, wonderful food, fabulous authors - it's a great day."

"I am so excited about today," said Ward. "It is such a success. Everything went off without a hitch, and it was a very nice day."

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