

McMillan not letting divorce interrupt her life

By Andre Coe

Special to Sentinel-Voice

DALLAS (NNPA) - A standing room only, over capacity crowd eagerly waited. People fanned themselves and crammed in between shelves of books at Black Images Book Bazaar, craning their necks to get a glimpse of one of this generation's most notable authors — Terry McMillan.

"The Interruption of Everything," McMillan's latest fictional work, is a testament to the fact that "we" can overcome anything, a speaker said before Terry read from her book and answered questions.

When McMillan took to the podium, women, young and old, African-American and non-African-American, cheered and applauded loudly. A quick scan of the crowd revealed a few men in attendance, too; they were there in quiet admiration.

"Terry, Terry, Terry," one woman cheered.

"She is beautiful," another woman observed standing on her toes to take a photo of the author.

It was like McMillan was their personal friend. She's as familiar to them as other famous celebrities such as Oprah.

People just know that 'Yea, she'll come over here.'

Try as she might, McMillan is no ordinary woman. She is the author of "Waiting to Exhale," "A Day Late and a Dollar Short," "Mama," "Disappearing Acts" and "How Stella Got Her Groove Back." McMillan is a literary best-seller always waiting to happen.

And, she has made headlines, yet again. This time though, not for her writing. Her husband of many years has been accused of cheating, not with another woman, but with another man.

As washingtonpost.com reported McMillan as saying in a California divorce court declaration: "It was devastating to discover that a relationship I had publicized to the world as life-affirming and built on mutual love was actually based on deceit.

"I was humiliated."

McMillan spoke further on the matter to Tavis Smiley in a July 12 interview this year. Her former husband, Jonathan Plummer — Mr. Stella got her groove back in the flesh — put her life at risk, she said to Smiley on his PBS show.

"I want to know how you're feeling and [how] you're processing all this," Smiley said on his show. "Your business is all on the Internet."

"Oh, you don't have to tell me," McMillan replied.

"...The bottom line is this... I find out that he has a lover of nine months. I kicked him out of the house. His lover was not available, and I put him up in a hotel for three weeks, and the next thing I know, he gets an attorney and he's suing me for my prenuptial agreement saying that it's basically — he signed under duress, which is not true..." she said.

"I don't care about him being gay," McMillan continued. "But he risked my life. What if I'm sitting here HIV positive? I can't be — I can't be—I can't get rid of that, and he wants my money? He should get a job... That's all I have to say..."

Maybe in this age of "the down-low," women, especially Black women, need someone they can relate to. McMillan's personal story combined with the "real person" feel of her characters gives readers a woman they can relate with.

So, no matter the topic, McMillan tells it like it is.

In her latest book, McMillan focuses on a woman who is experiencing a crisis herself. She's at that age, 42, where the kids have all grown up and there is no one left to take care of but herself.

Friends don't even call the woman anymore because, as one character put it, "...you always play solitaire..." McMillan's character becomes fully immersed in her crisis, and her growing awareness of it was the source of numerous "Uhhh hmmm, that's right," out loud chuckles and down-right laughter as the noted author read aloud. They liked her.

She kept reading.

"It's pretty clear that I'm going through menopause," read Terry from the book. "Are my hormones disappearing?"

The main character was in a doctor's office filling out a questionnaire about her health.

The questionnaire drew interesting responses. Terry continued reading.

"...Memory lapses? Of course — sometimes I even smoked a joint while in college," she read aloud from her book. "I couldn't remem-

ber where I was..."

People continued to laugh and listen, and their laughter grew in volume with each outburst. Their applause also grew louder. Some brought copies of her books — old and new — for McMillan to sign.

"When did we get that book?" asked Chandra Jacobs to her friend, pointing at their copy of "The Interruption of Everything." Her friend quickly responded, "When it first came out."

"July," Jacobs concluded, adding she has been a fan of McMillan's ever since reading "A Day Late and a Dollar Short."

"I probably identify with all of them," she said of McMillan's characters. Terry soon finished reading and was now answering questions.

She advised writers in the audience to write as if no one were going to read their work and to study their craft by reading the work, emphasizing

ing good work, of other writers. She also advised them to get a good agent. If your agent doesn't do right by you, get another one she advised. "I did," she declared referring to an agent she fired who wanted her to write a certain way.

It ticked her off.

"That's not how I wanted to write," she said of the experience of having someone attempt to "whiten" her voice. "I've been to college."

As for what to write

about, she advised, "Life is what happens when you are planning for something else."

"I'm a Black woman," she responded to one woman's question. "...I write about what bothers me and what disturbs me."

"Mostly, I write about how we treat each other," she added. "...I'm just interested in trying to understand why we do what we do... That is it."

Andre Coe writes for the Dallas Examiner.

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