

Author Lucinda Franks boldly goes candid in new book

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Author Lucinda Franks will chat about her new book, "Timeless: Love, Morgenthau and Me," during a moderated discussion Thursday morning at the Rancho Mirage Public Library, as part of the Rancho Mirage Writers Festival, which runs through Saturday.

It's an honest, candid, almost-tell-all of her 36-year marriage to longtime Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau — a man nearly 30 years her senior — an unlikely alliance between a decorated journalist and self-described radical and a famous attorney who operated within a circle of political movers and shakers.

Franks' entrée into the world of professional journalism was unconventional — and off the charts. She opened her fledgling career with a Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting in 1971 while working out of the London bureau of United Press International.

Soon after, she landed a plum job at the New York Times where she worked for venerable city editor Arthur Gelb.

The early arc of her personal life is similarly remarkable.

Franks marched with demonstrators and chained herself to fences in protest of the Vietnam War. For a while, she harbored a draft dodger who also happened to be her lover. She was a bit of a wild child — until she met the man she would spend the rest of her life with.

Fittingly, Morgenthau had been one of her interview subjects.

She was 26. He was 53 — fairly recently widowed with five children. Morgenthau, a successful attorney, worked and walked in the realm of political giants, including John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

In 1961, after 12 years of practicing corporate law, he had been appointed by President Kennedy as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. In 1974, he was elected to the office of District Attorney of New York County, a position he held until 2009, when he retired at the age of 90.

His father, Henry Morgenthau Jr. — longtime Secretary of the Treasury during the President Franklin D. Roosevelt administration — played a central role in designing and financing the New Deal.

A handful of years after first meeting, Lucinda and Robert would marry. An unlikely duo, there was general opposition to the union — by his kids, friends and other family members.

She tells the story of their lives together in a page-turner of a new novel. Franks is also the author of "My Father's Secret War: A Memoir," about her father's service during World War II — secrets he harbored until he entered the early stages of Alzheimer's.

Her accounts of the ups, downs and challenges of their May-December romance are cringe-worthy only because she could be writing about any of our relationships. The scenes are all-too-familiar.

It's highly likely most people reading the book will see themselves in these pages, as the struggle to work and live together as a couple — with all of the outside distractions and influences — is universally experienced.

Franks first got the idea to write the book about her life with Bob, now 95, after he began going back into the memories of his own service in World War II, reliving the experiences.

"One day, we were at a romantic restaurant and I said, very tentatively, because I expected a no, 'Bob, what would you think of me writing a memoir about us — about you,'" Franks said during a phone interview with The Desert Sun. "He looked at me and said, 'Do you think anybody would read it?'"

Bob had pondered the idea of writing a book— because he had been inundated with writers and publishers angling for the opportunity — but he didn't like to look back and relive the past, Franks said.

"He thought to himself, 'I wonder if Lucinda would ever do it, because she knows more than half of the story and I wouldn't have to do all of the work,'" Franks said. "I guess he was just waiting for the day when he thought I might ask him. I was so surprised."

But she wasn't aiming to pen a hearts and flowers-type novel.

"I didn't want to write a love letter — I wanted to write an authentic, complex portrait of him with all of his foibles and weaknesses, strengths and quirks."

In fairness, she had to examine her own life within those same pages.

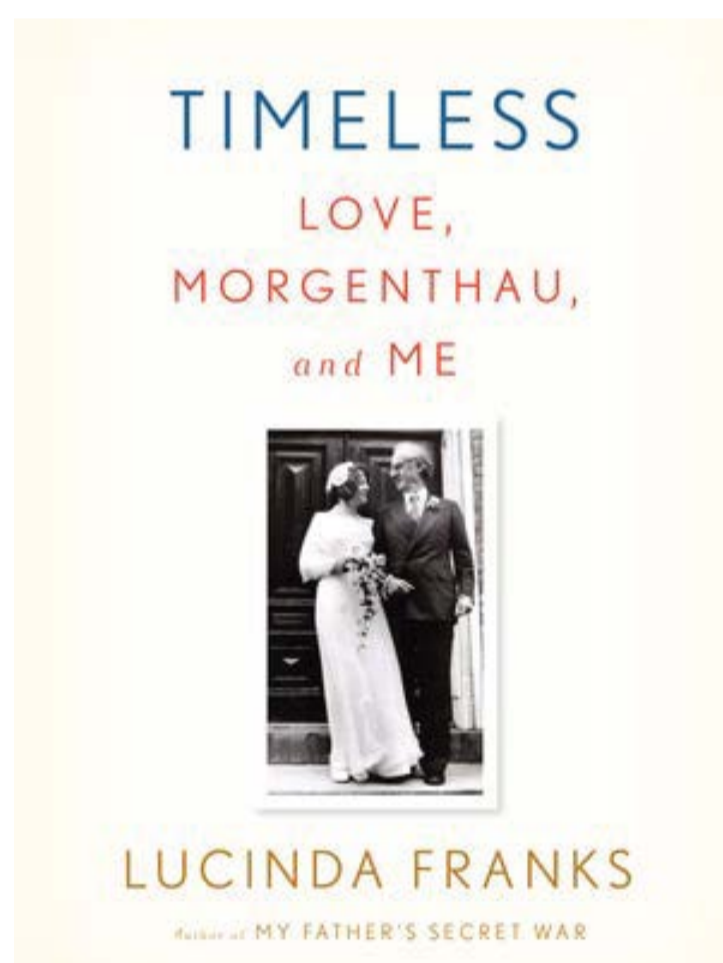
"It was difficult," she said. "At first, I didn't want to reveal my own weaknesses and foibles and I began to write things that kind of whitewashed me and made me look good and then I realized what I was doing — then I tipped the other way, too far, and made myself look bad — worse than I am. So it was a hard time. It was a hard thing to get it right and get my character as true as I could do with all my own weaknesses."

Once she got started, the story almost wrote itself.

"Writing is like going into an old car that coughs and sputters and then you finally get it going and it races away — and that's what happens with me."



Lucinda Franks Provided Photo



Book cover: 'Timeless: Love, Morgenthau and Me,' by Lucinda Franks Provided Photo