

'Schindler's List' author to speak at Festival

By DAVID A. SCHWARTZ
STAFF WRITER

Thomas Keneally, whose novel "Schindler's List" was an international best seller and became a critically acclaimed film, will speak at 7 p.m. on March 11 as part of the Festival of the Arts Boca.

Keneally will discuss the book in his presentation "Fraternity Along the Lines of Race: The Case of Oskar Schindler."

The 77-year-old author talked with the *Jewish Journal* by phone from his home in Sydney, Australia.

Jewish Journal: When you were told about Oskar Schindler what interested you?

Thomas Keneally: I



Author Thomas Keneally, whose acclaimed novel "Schindler's List" was made into one of the finest films made in the U.S., will speak at the Festival of the Arts Boca. Submitted photo

was raised a Catholic. I've always been interested in Catholics who do some sort of good,

even if they are bad Catholics and Oskar was a bad Catholic.

It also fascinated me

that he was not a self-reflecting man. Altruism and opportunity fought for what he did. He

couldn't have run his operation without certain of his key Jews.

Writers are always fascinated by the scondrel-savior. They're not fascinated by saints. Poor Emilie [Schindler's wife] was a martyr to Oskar's unpredictability and his sexual appetites.

The Jewish question and its culmination in the Holocaust was certainly present in my consciousness. How did we get around to such an obscenity really interested me.

[Oskar Schindler's story] reduces the Holocaust to a human scale, an imaginable scale.

Europe said [to the Jews], 'We don't want you.' This really rampant anti-Semitism of Eu-

rope always fascinated me. I've always been interested in races that were attacked.

JJ: Were you surprised by the success of the book?

TK: Yes. The success of the book was slow burning. It had a 30,000 run in the U.S. initially.

JJ: What about the movie?

TK: No one believed it when the film was made. When it was first planned, it had a modest promotion budget. It played in 29 theaters in California. Then it received acclaim by the press. I thought it was an excellent film.

Spielberg was always fascinated by Oskar's ambiguity. In ambiguity

CONTINUED ON PAGE 82

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 67

lies drama.

The disappointing thing with films is you can never fit everything in. He wasn't able to mention Schindler's career in German intelligence; also Oskar's career as a whistle blower. There wasn't room. Schindler's factory never produced a shell because he spent all his time on the black market.

JJ: What do you think mankind has learned from the Holocaust?

TK: The question is

do we learn anything from history and I'm afraid we don't. Every generation comes up with its own manias. I'm not as optimistic a creature about our future as a species who can learn from history.

There are always people like Schindler who do something unexpected.

Another thing that always interested me was the question of how I would have behaved. Would I be a killer if I were correctly conditioned? I know Oskar Schindler better than I know how I would be-

have under that pressure. That's one of the reasons I wrote the book as well. It's kind of a self-examination.

Q: Why haven't you written other books about the Holocaust?

A: "I think I got wise to the fact that I got away with this one. I've never come across a story quite like this."

Keneally will speak at 7 p.m. on March 11 at the Cultural Arts Center at the southwest end of Mizner Park on Federal Highway in Boca Raton. For tickets, visit www.festivalboca.com or call 561-368-8445.

▼ DREYFUSS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 66



luncheon was Schiller's daughter Lori Jo Schiller, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia more than 25 years ago. She addressed the crowd. "I am the one who the doc-

tors said to my parents there is no hope. When my symptoms first appeared I thought that I was possessed. I would be hospitalized in and out, but thankfully due new medications I have been out of the hospital since 1989. There is always hope and with hope comes miracles."

Lori Jo Schiller is the author of the book "The Quiet Room" which was published in 1996. The book details her life as she went from being a college graduate to a woman living with schizophrenia, who would attempt suicide and require hospitalization. She told the crowd of her success in overcoming her battle with schizophrenia.

Her novel has been translated into nine languages and she has appeared on 60 minutes to discuss her experiences in writing a novel on the topic of schizophrenia. She is currently working as a peer specialist and advocate for the mental ill.

For more information on the Ruth Rales Jewish Family Services Welcome Home program, visit the organization's website at www.ruthralesjfs.org.

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