‘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 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 scoundrel-savior. They’re not fascinated by saints. Poor Emile [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 ramped anti-Semitism of Europe 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.

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...

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.

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