



thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Today

East Quogue resident **Vito**

Gentile reads from and signs his book, "Fifty Poems About Spring" (August First Arts). At 2 p.m., Quogue Library, 90 Quogue St., Quogue, 631-653-4224, quoguelibrary.org



Tuesday

Actress **Alicia Silverstone**

discusses and signs her book "The Kind Mama: A Simple Guide to Supercharged Fertility, a Radiant Pregnancy, a Sweeter Birth, and a Healthier, More Beautiful Beginning" (Rodale Books). At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington, 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



Wednesday

Sag Harbor resident **Mac Gris-**

wold reads from and signs copies of her book "The Manor: Three Centuries at a Slave Plantation" (Farrar Straus Giroux). At 11 a.m., Freeport Library, 144 W. Merrick Rd., 516-379-3274, freeportlibrary.info



Wading River author **Jody Mitchell** discusses and signs copies of her self-published book "Angels and Ogres." At 6:30 p.m., Riverhead Library, 330 Court St., Riverhead, 631-727-3228, riverheadlibrary.org

Thursday

Award-winning screenwriter

Trish Doolan

speaks and signs her self-published novel, "The Singing Gardener." At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington, 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



reviews

The afterlife of Auschwitz

IN PARADISE, by Peter Matthiessen. Riverhead, 256 pp., \$27.95.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

Toward the end of the late Peter Matthiessen's novel "In Paradise," Clement Olin, a 55-year-old American academic, takes one last look around the grounds of Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he has been on a two-week retreat with a group of 140, including descendants of both perpetrators and survivors. He imagines the not-too-distant day when the land is reclaimed by commerce and time:

"The last barracks, the last guard post, all that barbed wire and broken brick, will be stripped off and scavenged . . . the weather will transform the ash pits into lily ponds, and fresh meadows will be suitable once more for butterflies, wildflowers, children's voices, Sunday strolling, picnics, trysts. . . . Even its picturesque old name, Brzezinka, can only enhance the marketing potential of the grand development to follow. The Birches? River Meadows? And what will happen to its strange power?"

To capture that "strange power" was the last literary task undertaken by this three-time National Book Award winner who lived in Sagaponack. (Matthiessen died at 86 on April 5.) Based on the author's experiences leading Buddhist retreats at Auschwitz, the novel explores anti-Semitism, nationalism, the human capacity for evil and the role of art, mostly as debate topics among the characters. Olin's companions are a feisty group, including a profane provocateur named Earwig, a troubled nun, and a Swedish biologist, all gathered under the leadership of Ben Lama, "a genial, bearded, near-bald psychologist left over from the flower-power days of a psychedelic California youth."

To connect the philosophical questions and the crew of characters, Matthiessen



"In Paradise" explores the powerful attraction of Auschwitz.

weaves several skeins of plot. Olin is investigating the life and death of Polish writer Tadeusz Borowski, a real figure who was interned there

and committed suicide after his release. Olin has a personal quest, too, as his Protestant family emigrated from a town outside the camp. He hopes to

AN APPRECIATION

Natural world loses a friend

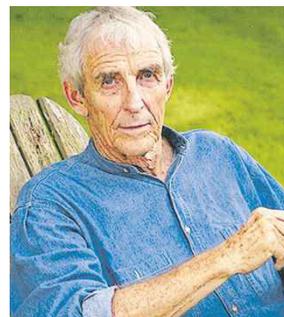
BY STEVE PARKS
steve.parks@newsday.com

Peter Matthiessen experienced the world, up close and personal, in a way few of us ever will. And for the last half of his life, he made the East End of Long Island his home — whenever he chose to stay put.

Matthiessen, whose final book — "In Paradise," a novel — was released last week, died April 5 at his Sagaponack home of leukemia complications. He was 86.

A three-time National Book Award winner, Matthiessen had the singular distinction of earning that prize for both fiction and nonfiction. He won twice, in 1979 and 1980, for "The Snow Leopard," his account of an expedition to the Himalayas in search of the endangered cat. In 2008, he won for "Shadow Country," an 890-page revision of a trilogy about a fictional sugarcane autocrat in frontier-era Florida.

His local imprint was most directly felt in his longtime participation in the Long Island University Southampton (now Stony Brook Southampton) Writers



The East End was home for Peter Matthiessen.

Conference, where he, along with such luminaries as E.L. Doctorow, Joyce Carol Oates, John Guare, Frank McCourt, Joe Pintauro and Kaylie Jones led graduate master classes. Jones is the daughter of "From Here to Eternity" author James Jones, who, with Matthiessen, was part of a post-World War II coterie of authors who mingled in Manhattan and the East End.

Pintauro, who lives in Sag Harbor, adapted Matthiessen's nonfiction "Men's Lives: The Surfmen and Baymen of the South Fork," as a play. Based on Matthiessen's hands-on work as a waterman, it portrayed the lives of fishermen shunted to the

find out what happened to his mother, who sent him to the United States but did not make it herself. There's a romantic thread involving Olin and the nun, and troubled back stories for several others.

Unfortunately, the plot proceeds somewhat mechanically, revealed through summary and contrived conversations. As a result, "In Paradise" is not fully realized as a novel. But it provides rare insight into the dark magnetism of a brutal landmark. What drives a survivor to return? What inspires conflicted visitors to join hands in spontaneous dancing? The fiction's flaws are balanced by Matthiessen's courage and clarity in addressing this topic — signal virtues of his career.

margins by the Hamptons' boom. "Men's Lives" premiered at Bay Street Theatre in 1992 and was revived for the Sag Harbor company's 20th anniversary.

"Peter was an inspiration for me," says Pintauro, who attributes his Zen-Buddhism, in part, to Matthiessen's influence. Of "Men's Lives," he said, "For Peter, it was a book that had to be written — the destruction of livelihoods, the rapid buying up of land, changing everyman's Arcadia into a suburb."

Matthiessen's life and career was, however, about much more than man's relationship to the natural world. In the 1950s, he and fellow American expatriates co-founded the Paris Review, a literary journal that also served as cover for his moonlighting with the CIA, spying on suspected American Communists.

But writing was Matthiessen's devotion. "I am a writer," he said in a 1999 Paris Review interview. "A fiction writer who also writes nonfiction on behalf of social and environmental causes or journals about expeditions to wild places . . . Yet, I am energized by fiction."