

## Lauren Belfer

### Love in the Time of Penicillin

With *A Fierce Radiance* (HarperCollins, June), Lauren Belfer is furthering her claim to a very particular niche: historical dramas that shed light on taken-for-granted technologies. Like her enthusiastically received first novel, *City of Light* (1999), a love story set amid the struggles of the burgeoning electric industry, *A Fierce Radiance* uses the emerging field of antibiotics as a springboard for what the publisher describes as “a thriller, a love story, a family saga, and a window onto American history.” Set in New York City during the early days of WWII, the novel interweaves the personal life of its heroine, photojournalist Claire Shipley, with the dramatic story of the development of penicillin.

“Someone once told me you should write the type of book you most enjoy reading,” says Belfer, a Greenwich Village resident. “I find those moments very compelling when human beings create something that changes all of society, their own lives, and their view of all around them. It’s something I always have in the back of my mind.”



# AUTHORS AT THE SHOW

The miracle of penicillin was brought home to Belfer by her aunt, whose brother died

when he was 11 years old. “He contracted an infection after a Fourth of July celebration, and he was dead within a few days. There was nothing the doctors could do. I started talking to my friends and discovered this was a common story—a child who died too soon, a breadwinner who died of a scratch on a knee. I felt compelled to tell the story of the great changes antibiotics brought.”

A medieval studies major in college, Belfer knew nothing about penicillin or the details of life during the war when she started out. It took her eight years of research to become fluent in her subjects. But, she says, research has always been enjoyable for her. “The writing is the difficult part, especially the meticulous creation of characters.”

Back when *City of Light* was published, writers didn’t have their own Web sites and Facebook didn’t exist. But using these things, Belfer says, has been a lot of fun. “They make me think about my work in a new way—not about the work itself, but about how to interact with people about my work. There’s a certain joy to it.”

Belfer will be at Table 1 signing finished books today, 11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. “Writers think of BEA as a holy grail,” she says. “I am thrilled and honored to be here.”

—Suzanne Mantell