

Author to Author with Mindy Friddle

Author: Shauna Seliy

Book: *When We Get There* (Bloomsbury, May 2007)

Event: Book Signing at The Open Book

Thursday, June 14 at 6pm

After befriending Greenville residents Nancy Taylor and Maggie Marks at a writers' retreat in Massachusetts two summers ago, Shauna Seliy was eager to visit the Upstate. Now the Washington, DC resident has the perfect reason: a book tour. With the publication of her debut novel, *When We Get There*, Seliy is traveling to such far-flung cities as Iowa City, New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Fairhope, AL and Charlotte, NC. She'll be signing books at the Open Book on Thursday, June 14, at 6 pm. "I'm a big fan of independent bookstores," Seliy said, "and when I was planning my book tour I was delighted to find out about the Open Book in Greenville from Nancy and Maggie."

An accomplished short story writer whose fiction has appeared in *Other Voices*, *the New Orleans Review*, and the *Alaska Quarterly Review*, Seliy's novel is drawing critical praise. Kirkus and Booklist both gave it starred reviews, and Publisher's Weekly calls *When We Get There*, "an accomplished debut... suffused with close observations of family legends, superstitions and cultural traditions." Set in western Pennsylvania's last remaining coal mine town in 1974, the coming-of-age novel tells the story of Lucas Lessar, who has Russian, Croatian and Hungarian roots. When his mother disappears, the 13-year-old sets out to find her, and, in the process, "navigates through a terrain of loss and change," Seliy said. "He lives in an old-world type community, close knit, and he's grown up hearing lots of superstitions and folktales."

Seliy, who grew up in Pittsburgh, has a BA from the University of Pennsylvania and an MFA from the University of Massachusetts. The 36-year-old credits fellowships from writers' colonies and her stint as Writer-in-Residence at St. Albans School in Washington, DC with allowing her time to write a novel. "Writing is all about sitting down and staring at your computer. At wonderful places like the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo, you have all day and all night to do that, AND someone makes your food for

you. What could be better?" Between writing colonies, Seliy, " spent close to two years living off savings, staying with friends and family who had an extra couch," writing her novel.

"I've always wanted to write a novel, but when I first started to take writing classes and workshops, I could never seem to write anything longer than a few pages," she said. "I heard someone tell another writer that if he wanted to write something longer than a story, he should just keep writing about the same character. So, I started out with this book by working with a few stories that I'd already written about this town (Banning, PA) and about this boy (Lucas). At some point, I realized that one of the stories might make for the opening of a book."

After a summer of travel, Seliy will be moving to Chicago this fall to teach at Northwestern University. Meanwhile, between readings and signings, she's writing. "I'm working on a couple of short stories right now," she said. "Maybe one of them will turn around and tell me it's the first chapter of a book."

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