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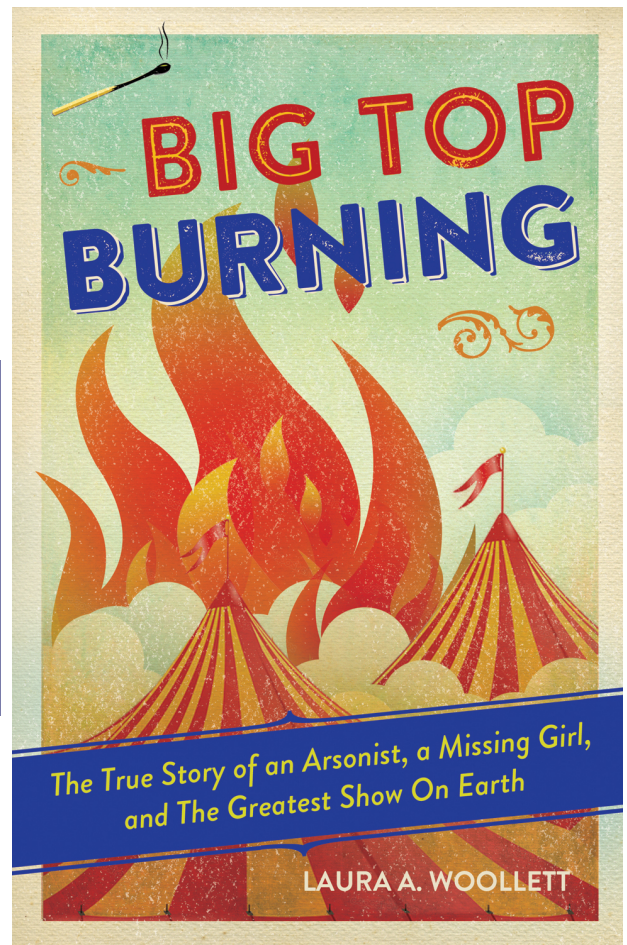
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"Fascinating,
devastating,
and impeccably
researched."

- starred review, *Booklist*



Big Top Burning

by Laura A. Woollett

The fire broke out at 2:40 p.m. Thousands of men, women, and children were crowded under Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey's big top watching the Flying Wallendas begin their death-defying high-wire act. Suddenly someone screamed "Fire!" and the panic began. By 2:50 the tent had burned to the ground. Not everyone had made it out alive.

With primary source documents and survivor interviews, *Big Top Burning* recounts the true story of the 1944 Hartford circus fire—one of the worst fire disasters in U.S. history. Its remarkable characters include Robert Segee, a 15-year-old circus roustabout and known pyromaniac, and the Cook children, Donald, Eleanor, and Edward, who were in the audience when the circus tent caught fire. Guiding readers through the investigations of the mysteries that make this moment in history so fascinating, this book asks: Was the unidentified body of a little girl nicknamed "Little Miss 1565" Eleanor Cook? Was the fire itself an act of arson—and did Robert Segee set it? *Big Top Burning* combines a gripping disaster story, an ongoing detective and forensics saga, and World War II-era American history, inviting middle-grades readers to take part in a critical evaluation of the evidence and draw their own conclusions.

Laura A. Woollett is the author of the middle-grade book *Big Top Burning: The True Story of an Arsonist, a Missing Girl, and The Greatest Show On Earth*, a nonfiction account of the 1944 Hartford circus fire, published by Chicago Review Press. She is also a contributor to *The Great Connecticut Caper*, an online, serialized mystery for kids published by CT Humanities. Laura has a Master's degree in Children's Literature from Simmons College and is a full-time editor of literacy curriculum for children in grades K–12. Originally from South Windsor, Connecticut, Laura now lives in Massachusetts with her husband, daughter, and two cats.

"This meticulously researched book will draw readers into a terrifying disaster story—and an unsolved mystery." — Steve Sheinkin, award-winning author of *The Port Chicago 50*

Author Visits

Big Top Burning by Laura A. Woollett

Laura is an energetic presenter with a passion for writing and for ferreting out the forgotten stories of history. A standard school visit can be done with an auditorium of kids, with a class, or with a small group. Presentations are approx. 60 minutes with time for Q&A. (Laura can tweak timing depending on schools' needs.) Due to the difficult subject matter of *Big Top Burning*, school visits are most appropriate for students in grades 5 and up.

Laura is happy to sign books for any students who have purchased them before the presentation. Parents are often motivated to purchase the book if advanced orders are organized through a local bookseller. Laura cannot personally bring books or arrange to sell them at the event.

Recent Presentations:

Wellesley Middle School, MA
New Milford High School, CT
Mark Twain House and Museum, CT
Jewish Historical Society of Greater Hartford, CT

Telling True Stories

Through a slide show of her own journey of writing *Big Top Burning*, Laura will explain how published authors conduct research to make true/nonfiction stories come alive. She will share research tips that students can use when they write their own papers and presentations for school as well as techniques for choosing a topic and stylistic ways to make their informational writing interesting. If time and setting permit, students will participate in a group activity of selecting and narrowing one or more true stories they want to learn more about.

Skills: research, choosing and narrowing a topic for writing, author's craft

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.5; W.6.5; W.7.5; W.8.5;
W.9-10.8

Other Presentations: Laura has shared the story of the Hartford circus fire with audiences at the Mark Twain House & Museum in Hartford, Connecticut, for a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and at various bookstores and libraries. If you would like to hire Laura as a guest speaker for your organization or event, please contact her directly to discuss the details, including compensation and book sales.

School Visit Fees

Boston/Metrowest, MA area: \$300 per 60-minute presentation

Hartford, CT area: \$300 per 60 minute presentation plus mileage reimbursement at \$.50/mile

Other areas: Please contact Laura to discuss.

Laura will do up to four presentations in one day at the same school or at a second school in the same district.

Discounts for multiple presentations are available:

2 presentations = \$500
3 presentations = \$800
4 presentations = \$1100

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Exploring the Hartford Circus Fire

Appropriate for those interested in the history of the Hartford circus fire, Laura will use a slide show of primary source photographs to describe the events of the 1944 disaster and conduct an interactive discussion of its ongoing mysteries: Was the fire an act of arson? Who is the unidentified victim, a child nicknamed Little Miss 1565? This presentation is based on research conducted for her book, *Big Top Burning*, can be modified for students in grades 5 and up or for adults.

Skills: research, analyzing primary sources, making inferences/drawing conclusions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1; SL.6.1; SL.7.1;
SL.8.1; SL.9-10.1