

# The Saratogian

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## 'Lumby Lines' speak volumes about life in small-town America

Critics love what they're reading as new fiction series launches

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The Saratogian



Maybe you've taken a trip and stopped at a diner in a little town well off the beaten track. If you were curious enough to pick up the local paper, you were rewarded with a slice of a small-town way of life that is quickly disappearing. Or, pick up a copy of "The Lumby Lines," an unforgettable and endearing dispatch from rural America.

Read between the "Lines" and discover "Lumby," where romance blossoms between a former monk and a woman who has given up looking for a match, where a community bonds to ensure its integrity, and where a plastic pink flamingo mysteriously appears at random, dressed for the occasion at hand. "The Lumby Lines" has all the ingredients of good, compelling storytelling and believable, if not often quirky characters. It's no fantasy. Real people populate Lumby, which is what makes "The Lumby Lines" a most engaging read, full of good fun, drama and characters so richly drawn that you'll swear you know them, or wish you did.

Author Gail Fraser of upstate New York, dreamt of such a place when, as a harried strategic consultant, she considered stepping off the corporate ladder and finding a quiet refuge, far from balance sheets and board rooms. She imagined Lumby, an idyllic little town, so far off the interstate system that Lewis and Clark would be challenged to find it.

Mark and Pam Walker, central characters in “The Lumby Lines,” come across the tiny town, quite by accident. Neither they, nor Lumby, have been the same since the couple packed bag and baggage, moving from their upscale home near Washington, D.C., to tiny, rural Lumby, setting in motion an adventure of “Unsolved Mysteries”/“This Old House” proportions.

Let’s just say the city folk aren’t received with a friendly Welcome Wagon greeting when they buy the historic Montis Abbey, a burned out shell of a former monastery in Lumby. Residents, encouraged by the grumpy newspaper publisher Mr. Beezer, are hard-pressed to let the old monastery go to outsiders. The couple faces unforeseen hostility in this otherwise friendly little town of quirky characters.

“The Lumby Lines” is the name of Beezer’s paper. The old curmudgeon uses the power of his press in an attempt to force the Walkers to give up their aspiration to rebuild the abbey and rename it the Montis Inn. And an overzealous young reporter adds to the chaos, looking for a stop-the-presses story in an otherwise quiet community.

More accepting Lumbyites, even the former monks who lived there, come to the couple’s rescue. Along the way, the strangely endearing Sheriff’s Complaints section of “The Lumby Lines” is the glue that binds this community to its moral — albeit sometimes misguided — compass. This popular page surpasses any comic’s section: “Caller reported that aluminum ladder stolen yesterday was returned — bent”; “Caller reported a moose running through his cornfield with a tricycle hanging from his antlers.” Such passages are threaded throughout “The Lumby Lines.”

The stories behind the Sheriff’s Complaints are wonderfully packaged in “The Lumby Lines,” and the mystery of who burned down the abbey is woven throughout this well-paced story, where comedy, drama and adventure intersect with the an all-seeing plastic pink flamingo, Hank, for a most fulfilling read. Wrapped in its compelling pages are real emotions and page-turning situations that keep the reader involved in the pure joy and quirky lives of Lumby’s residents. Fraser has woven a distinctive tapestry in her novel, and “The Lumby Lines” has drawn up a new niche for readers who love to curl up with a good book that, at times, will have their hearts racing.