



BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY

Novel Actress

>> D.C. native **Lauren Graham**, the star of NBC's acclaimed "Parenthood," goes off script with her first foray into fiction.

It's well before noon and Lauren Graham's brain is fried. And she's the first one to say so. "I've been up for hours finishing a novel," she tells *Washington Flyer*. "I had to turn in the manuscript literally 10 minutes ago. My deadline was two days ago. Well, wait—there was another deadline I missed; this was the new deadline. I think I almost gave my editor heart failure. Right now I'm just amazed I have 320 pages of words on paper!"

So says the successful actress, 45, who has championed the plight of single motherhood on two critically acclaimed television series: NBC's current hit "dramedy" "Parenthood," where she plays the ever-challenged Sarah Braverman, plus the WB's "Gilmore Girls," a show that enjoyed a seven-season run.

The D.C. native, who moved to the area when she was 5 with her politico father, National Confectioners Association President Larry Graham, living in both Georgetown and Arlington before settling down permanently in Great Falls (where her dad still resides), says her new book is called *Faster Funnier Louder*.

"I sold it to Random House based on the first half, which came easily," she says. "I've been writing the other half for the last two years!" she laughs, suggesting part two was not quite as effortless. "It comes out in June. It's a coming-of-age story, a young girl trying to be an actress in New York."

More than 20 years ago, Graham, too, spent her salad days in Manhattan, first as a student at NYU taking acting classes and then transferring to Barnard College to become an English major. So is this a memoir in disguise?

"There are elements of experiences I've had," she nods, "but it's not at all meant to be me, or even a thinly veiled tell-all. There is nothing to tell! I was just trying to write about New York in the '90s and what that was like. Hopefully it will fall into the categories of funny and smart and entertaining, kind of chick-lit."

She then slips into Hollywood speak, cutting straight to the pitch. "It's 'My So-Called Life,' just in New York," starring a 20-something protagonist. Which begs the questions: What of the inevitable Hollywood adaptation? Will she soon wear three hats? Actress, writer and producer?

"I can imagine it being a series," she muses. "The book ends with a possible job opportunity in LA. The writer part of me would like to write this character in Los Angeles, a little older, a little more experienced. The producer part of me, sure—you always like to see a series. I don't know if it's a movie. Her triumphs are very small. It's not a show business parody in any way. It's a universal story: struggling to pay your rent, how long it takes to achieve what you're going after."

So what turned this

Golden Globe-nominated actress into a novelist, following the paths of other Gen X celebrities-turned-popular-lit-figures such as Molly Ringwald and Ethan Hawke?

"Working on 'Gilmore Girls,' I didn't have a second to breathe, and 'Parenthood' is really different. Creatively, I had to fill the time," she says. "I wish I could take up knitting as opposed to something that will expose me to criticism. Why not do something a little safer? But I hope I earn the right to do it again."

The Suitors

Graham's character on "Parenthood," Sarah Braverman, is in a love triangle with Ray Romano, the irascible crush, and Jason Ritter, the devoted-if-puppy-doggish boyfriend. So whom will she choose?

"Ray is so self-deprecating that every time he says, 'I'm horrible!' women everywhere think he's sweet," she says of her co-star Romano. "I think he's great. I knew he would be. I'd seen Ray's 'Men of a Certain Age,' and it was such compelling drama. Many comics, like Adam Sandler in 'Punch-Drunk Love,' bring a depth and darkness [to comedy] that translates to other forms. There's something about Ray," she almost winks at the allusion to his eponymously named former series, "and I love working with him. We improvise together; I love the chemistry. But I don't know what's going to happen, only that we three are headed for a giant conflict! And neither Jason or Ray is under contract for next year [yet], so it could be anything!"

With the series' devoted fan following, is this the role of a lifetime?

"It's the *show* of a lifetime," she answers. "Lo-relei Gilmore was an iconic part, in terms of the language; something about it felt so fresh. 'Parenthood,' to me, is a show that's so unusual and precious. And I'm playing a person who is more flawed, which is what I wanted. I'm incredibly lucky to be on another show where people stop and say, 'Wow, this happened to me,' and, 'We see our family reflected in this show.'"

Bikes and Family

So how exactly did her single father, a policy wonk and one-time legislative aide to former U.S. Congressman Clarence Brown, raise such a passionate thespian?

"You have to remember, when I was coming up there was no 'American Idol,' no *In Touch* magazine, no association with show business," she says. "I was interested in theater. I did Arlington community theater and school plays, and I went to drama camp at Catholic University in the summer. It was a geeky thing, to be encouraged. I'm sure he thought, 'Well, look at all this great literature she's being exposed to!' I did two summer programs at Arena Stage. I was using D.C. and all that it offered, keeping busy. I don't know at what point either of us thought



"It's the show of a lifetime," Graham says of "Parenthood."

GOLLEEN HAYES/NBC

this was my potential career. My father writes and was interested in books and reading and theater, but the profession wasn't in the family."

Graham is still a huge fan of the nation's capital and visits her dad here several times a year. "I grew up thinking it's what all kids did, that you had all this stuff as part of your day. D.C. is just so beautiful. Last summer, I took my boyfriend ["Parenthood" co-star Peter Krause] and his son, who was then 10, to visit. His son lives in California, and he couldn't get over how D.C. looks. He kept asking, 'Why doesn't everything look like this?' The green, the hills. It really takes your breath away. If I didn't go into acting, I don't think I would have left. Most of my high school friends are still in D.C., and I think it's a really wonderful area to live."

Both Grahams, Lauren and Larry, are avid travelers and big bicycle enthusiasts. The pair recently toured Ireland by pedal, reconnecting with their ancestral roots. "Old women would shout at us, 'Are you *daft*? Why not just sit in a pub and get a drink?'" laughs Graham of their rugged adventure on that country's slippery, winding, rain-soaked roads. "But we loved it."

Father and daughter also rented bikes in Vietnam last year, first stopping in Japan for a few days before soaking in the lush Vietnamese scenery on two wheels. "It was fascinating," says Graham. "Northern Vietnam and southern Vietnam are almost two different countries, peoples, landscapes, everything."

Right now, they're planning an extended family trip to Europe, beginning in Switzerland and winding down toward Greece, in the weeks after *Faster Funnier Louder* first hits bookshelves in the U.S. "We're not taking our bikes," Graham insists of the summer escape and its many European pit stops. "I said to my dad: 'Can't we just take planes and trains this time? Please?'" ☺