



2016 Inductee
to the
South Carolina
Academy of Authors

Dorothy Allison rose to national prominence thanks to the critical and popular success of her debut novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), but had by then already established a reputation for unflinching depictions of child abuse, sexual identity, class struggle and family dysfunction. In *The Women Who Hate Me* (1983), a collection of poems, Allison deals candidly with lesbianism and her own childhood, which was marked by profound sexual abuse, poverty and neglect. These themes recur in *Trash* (1988), a collection of stories that won two Lambda Literary Awards. In “Deciding to Live,” her preface to a 2002 re-issue of *Trash*, Allison recalls taking an unfulfilling job as a clerk but at night sitting down “with a yellow legal-sized pad, writing out the story of my life.” That story became many, which together would form the basis for much of her corpus.

Allison was born on April 11, 1949, in Greenville, South Carolina, to an unwed teenage mother. The abuse she suffered at the hands of her stepfather through much of her early childhood—and her mother’s complicity in it—informs much of *Bastard Out of Carolina*. But the novel also explores the complexity of Allison’s relationship with her mother, who offered her daughter encouragement and saved some money for her college education. Allison attended Florida Presbyterian College as a National Merit Scholar and later earned a master’s degree at the New School for Social Research. *Bastard Out of Carolina* was a finalist for the 1992 National Book Award and was adapted as a teleplay for Showtime Networks.

Allison’s next novel, *Cavedweller* (1998), also won a Lambda Literary Award and was adapted as both a stage play and a 2004 film. Here again Allison deals with domestic and sexual violence and its roots in small town poverty, but she also celebrates the support and forgiveness formed by communities of women. Allison’s other work includes *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class and Literature* (1994), a collection of essays dealing with violence and divisions within the lesbian community; *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* (1995), a memoir of the women in her family; and a forthcoming third novel, *She Who*.

Allison lives in northern California with her partner Alix Layman and son Wolf. —Jon Tuttle



Image Courtesy John Foley

Dorothy Allison