

# A “PASSIONATE NEED TO WRITE”:

An Interview with Ellyn Bache by Christy Alexander Hallberg

I first met Ellyn Bache at the 2011 Fall North Carolina Writers Network Conference in Asheville. She pulled up a chair at the table where I was selling subscriptions for and answering questions about the *North Carolina Literary Review* and began flipping through the current issue, admiring the artwork and many of the essays and short stories. I knew Bache was the author of *Safe Passage* (1988), a novel about a family struggling to cope with the uncertainty of their Marine son's fate after the 1983 bombing of US and French military barracks in Beirut, but I must admit that I was not aware of just how prolific and lauded her career has been.

Bache (pronounced with a long a and an sh) is the author of nine novels, a short story collection (which won the Willa Cather Fiction Prize), a nonfiction book, and several books for young adults. Her most recent novel, *The Art of Saying Goodbye* (2011), was selected as an “Okra Pick” by the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance (SIBA) and is a 2012 SIBA Book of the Year Award nominee.

Originally from Washington, DC, Bache received a BA in English from the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill and an MA in English from the University of Maryland. In 1985, she and her husband and their four young children moved to Wilmington, North Carolina, where Bache finished writing her first novel, *Safe Passage*, which became a Literary Guild and Doubleday Book Club Selection. In 1994, *Safe Passage* was made into a feature film starring Susan Sarandon and Sam Shepard.<sup>1</sup>

Following the death of her husband in 2001, Bache eventually settled in Greenville, South Carolina, where she currently resides with her elderly Border Collie mix, Chief. On a balmy December 2011 afternoon, Bache and I sat together at another table, this one in her airy kitchen. While Chief slept at her feet, Bache sipped a cup of tea and ruminated on her *Safe Passage* film experience and her life as a stay-at-home mom who dreamed of becoming a writer – and then became one.



COURTESY OF ONSLOW COUNTY, NC

## BOOKS BY ELLYN BACHE

- Culture Clash* (nonfiction). Boston: Intercultural Books, 1982.
- Safe Passage*. New York: Crown, 1988.
- Festival in Fire Season*. Little Rock: August House Publishers, 1992.
- The Value of Kindness*. Kansas City, MO: Helicon Nine Editions, 1993.
- The Activist's Daughter*. Duluth, MN: Spinsters Ink, 1997.
- Holiday Miracles: A Christmas/Hanukkah Story*. Wilmington, NC: Banks Channel Books, 2001.
- Daddy and the Pink Flash*. Wilmington, NC: Banks Channel Books, 2003.
- Daughters of the Sea*. Don Mills, Ontario: Harlequin, 2005.
- Riggs Park*. Don Mills, Ontario: Harlequin, 2005.
- Over 50's Singles Night*. Don Mills, Ontario: Harlequin, 2006.
- Rasperry Sherbet Kisses*. Don Mills, Ontario: Harlequin, 2007.
- The Art of Saying Goodbye*. New York: Morrow, 2011.

*Takedown*, written under the pen name E.M.J. Benjamin, with her husband, Terry Bache. Wilmington, NC: Banks Channel Books, 1999.

		THOMAS A. DISBENEDETTO USMC ATHANIEL G. BOSSLEY USMC FREDERICK B. DOUGLASS USMC EDGAR L. DRAMIS USMC TIMOTHY J. DOWNING USMC KEVIN E. EARLE USN FRED L. EDWARDS USMC WILLIAM B. ELLIOT, JR. USN JESSE J. FLEISSON USMC JANNY R. ESTES USMC DAN F. ESTLER USMC THOMAS A. EVANS USMC JAMES E. FAULK USN RICHARD A. FEINBERG USMC STEVEN W. FORRESTER USMC WILLIAM B. FOSTER, JR. USN MICHAEL D. FULLER USMC BENJAMIN G. FULLER USMC MICHAEL S. FULLON USMC WILLIAM R. GAINES, JR. USMC KEVIN R. GALLAGHER USMC DAVID A. GANDER USMC GEORGE W. GANDER USMC
--	--	---

<sup>1</sup> *Safe Passage*, adapt. of novel by Ellyn Bache, Dir. Robert Allan Ackerman. Perf. Susan Sarandon, Sam Shepard, and Nick Stahl (New Line Cinema, 1994).

**CHRISTY ALEXANDER HALLBERG** has an MFA from Goddard College, teaches English at ECU, and serves on NCLR's editorial board. This interview was transcribed by NCLR Editorial Assistant KEVIN DUBLIN, then edited for clarity and style (while being careful to remain true to the voices of the speakers).