

## Boatwright family, in-laws, and friends

in *Bastard out of Carolina*

**Granny:** “The tales she told...in her rough drawling whisper were lilting songs, ballads of family, love and disappointment. Everything seemed to come back to grief and blood, and everybody seemed legendary.” (p. 26)

**Uncle Travis,** a drunk driver.

**Aunt Ruth,** Bone’s oldest aunt, wife of Travis. In her declining health, she becomes Bone’s confidant and protector. She owns a prize record collection.

**Tommy Lee,** Aunt Ruth’s oldest son, a practiced thief.

**Deedee,** Ruth’s daughter, who submits to servitude.

**Butch,** Ruth’s son, a year older than Bone.

**Uncle Earle**—Bone’s favorite uncle, “the notorious and dangerous Black Earle Boatwright.” He introduces Glen to Anney. Earle’s wife, Teresa, leaves him for “his lying ways.”

**Aunt Alma:** She moves out on her husband, Wade, and rents an apartment, where Bone befriends two African American children.

**Grey:** One of Alma’s children. When Bone suggests a caper to him, “Grey grinned at me,” Bone says, “like I’d grown an extra set of teeth.” (p. 192)

**Uncle Wade Yarnall,** a philanderer.

**Uncle Nevil:** Granny calls him and his wife, Fay, “more like furniture than anything.” (p. 45) The couple lives in a house on a steep dirt hill that Bone likes.

**Aunt Raylene,** a reclusive aunt who lives by the river, resells found items, and cooks great food. She’d once worked in a carnival. She is an advisor and protector to Bone.

**Uncle Beau.** He and Earle had been rejected from the army for criminal records. He is most ready to be violent toward Glen.

**Mama (Anney):** She is torn between love for Glen and defense of her children, whom she has nurtured.

**Reese,** daughter of Anney and Anney’s late first husband, Lyle Parsons. She fantasizes

about sex and dominance.

**Glen Waddell,** Bone’s stepfather, who abuses her. He could show love or turn like bad whiskey. His “feet were so fine that his boots had to be bought in the boys’ department...while his gloves could only be found in the tall men’s specialty stores.” (p. 34)

**Daddy Waddell,** Glen’s father, a successful dairy farmer, who has given up on Glen, and who looks down on the Boatwrights as trash.

**Shannon Pearl:** Bone’s albino friend, whose dad books revivals. Her story occupies two chapters.

## Dorothy Allison biographical dates

1949. Is born Apr. 11, Greenville, SC.

1962. Moves with her family to central Florida.

1971. Receives B.A., Florida Presbyterian (now Eckerd) College.

1976. Begins 4-year tenure as editor of *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*.

1979. Studies anthropology at New School for Social Research, New York, Masters Program.

1981. Begins 7-year directorship of The Information Center, Poets & Writers, Inc.

1983. Publishes *The Women Who Hate Me*.

1988. Publishes *Trash*, winner of Lambda Literary Award.

1992. Publishes *Bastard out of Carolina*, National Book Award finalist.

1994. Publishes *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature*.

1995. Publishes *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*.

1995. *Bastard out of Carolina* is made into a movie (dir. by Angelica Huston for Showtime).

1998. Publishes *Cavedweller*, *NY Times* bestseller.

2002. Publishes expanded edition of *Trash*.

2007. Receives Robert Penn Warren Award for Fiction.

2009: Serves as McGee Professor and Writer in Residence at Davidson College; completes new novel, *She Who*.

Lives with her partner, Alix Layman, and her teenage son, Wolf, in Northern California.

“I wanted what I felt to mean something and for everything in my life to change because of it.” —Bone, p. 152

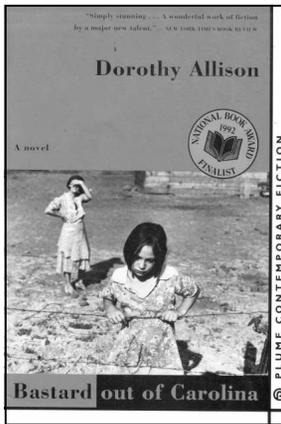
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WNC Read-for-All  
featuring Dorothy Allison’s  
*Bastard out of Carolina*

Funded by: Western Carolina University  
English Department



## About the Book

### *Bastard out of Carolina*

by Dorothy Allison  
(Dutton, 1992;  
Plume trade paper,  
1993, 315 pages)

## THE STORY

Ruth Anne—called “Bone” for her knucklebone size in the crib—tells her story, beginning with the time her mother, Anney Boatwright, had given birth to her while in a coma after a car accident. Bone is her mother’s second child, fathered by a man whom Anney had met after her young husband had died. Reese is her daughter by that marriage. Anney fights to remove the stigma of “bastard” from Bone’s birth certificate; and hungers to find another man to love and to have love her. She marries Glen Waddell, a troubled and passionate co-worker of her brother, Earle. Bone’s idyllic life changes. The ups-and-downs of Daddy Glen’s moods—and his abuse—persist, but they do not unseat the main story: Bone’s positive development. The Boatwright family provides love and dignity, while the hurts have effects: self-doubt, rage, and loss. As she reaches out, Bone becomes aware of race, class, and gender prejudice; and of the addictiveness of religion. Her mother’s faltering and aunts’ fostering remain keynotes.

## THE SETTING

The area around Greenville, S.C., from the mid- to late-1950s.

## TOUCHPOINTS

quotes from *Bastard out of Carolina*

### About home

When I think of that summer [before Mama married Glen]—sleeping over at one of my aunt’s houses as easily as at home, the smell of Mama’s neck as she bent over to hug us in the dark, the sound of Little Earle’s giggle or Granny’s spit thudding onto the dry ground, and that country music playing low everywhere, as much a part of the evening as crickets and moonlight—I always feel safe again. No place has ever seemed so sweet and quiet, no place ever felt so much like home. (p. 22)

### About rage

After [being caught stealing and being humiliated], when I passed the Woolworth’s windows, it would come back—that dizzy desperate hunger edged with hatred and an aching lust to hurt somebody back. I wondered if that kind of hunger and rage was what Tommy Lee felt when he went through his mama’s pocketbook. It was a hunger in the back of the throat, not the belly, an echoing emptiness that ached for the release of screaming. (p. 98)

### The abuser’s plea to his wife

“She told me she hated me,” he said, “told me I would never be her daddy. And I went crazy, Anney. I just went crazy. Do you know? Do you understand how much I love you all, love her?...And—oh, God, Anney! They laid me off today. Just put me out without a care. And what am I going to do to feed these girls now?” (p. 107)

### Mother’s common sense

“People don’t do right because of the fear of God or love of him. You do the right thing because the world doesn’t make sense if you don’t.” (p. 145)

### About gospel music

That was what gospel was meant to do—make

you hate and love yourself at the same time, make you ashamed and glorified. It worked on me. (p. 136)

And don’t go taking that gospel stuff seriously. It’s nice to clean you out now and then, but it an’t for real. It’s like bad whiskey. Run through you fast and leave you with a pain. (Granny, p. 144)

### About empathy even with haters

“They look at you the way you look at them,” [Aunt Raylene] told me bluntly. “You don’t know who those children are...You don’t know what happens to them when they go home...Could be they’re jealous of you, hungry for what you’ve got, afraid of what you would do if they ever stepped in the yard.” (p. 262)

## THE MUSIC OF THE BOOK

“Pistol Packing Mama” by Al Dexter and the Troopers

“Somebody Touched Me,” a gospel song  
“The Sign on the Highway,” Odell McLeod  
song performed by Roy Acuff

“The Rebel—Johnny Yuma” by Johnny Cash  
“But It’s Only Make Believe” by Conrad  
Twitty

“Get a Job” by the Silhouettes

“Walking after Midnight” by Patsy Cline

(Reader’s Guide by Rob Neufeld)

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