

Interview with author Hilary Davidson for her Gluten-Free Blog, 2013

1. First, tell us a bit about your books. Your first novel, *The Long Quiche Goodbye*, won the Agatha Award for Best New Novel. Since then you've published *Lost and Fondue*, and *Clobbered by Camembert* is about to come out. For people who haven't encountered the Cheese Shop Mysteries yet, how would you describe the books?

Tasty. No, just kidding. First, let me thank you for asking me to join you! Great questions.

The Cheese Shop Mysteries are cozies. Each book is set in the quaint, fictional town of Providence, Ohio with a cheese shop owner as the protagonist. Why set a mystery in a cheese shop? This particular one, *Fromagerie Bessette*, is a hub. It draws in tourists and locals and is a great place for gossip. Charlotte, who owns the cheese shop, is a caring, family-oriented person who is a fixer by nature. In the first novel, her grandmother is accused of murder. How can she not get involved?

2. How long have you been on a gluten-free diet, and how difficult was the transition for you?

Fifteen years. Luckily, I am a cook, so when I found out I had to eat without gluten, I did everything I could to get started that day. [It turns out I was probably celiac my entire life but misdiagnosed.] There wasn't a lot written at the time, but there was celiac.com on the Internet, so I studied the site religiously. It took almost 6 months for my system to resolve. It is still touch and go because of the hidden gluten in so many foods, but I'm very alert to all items.

3. You travel frequently for writers' conferences and book events (and probably other things, too). How do you prepare for a trip? Do you do any gluten-free research in advance?

I always make some gluten-free banana bread so that I can have something sweet and "bready" on the trip. It packs well and stays well, even if not refrigerated. I like my carbs, but I won't eat them at very many restaurants, even if they assure me they're gluten-free. When I go to conferences, I call ahead to the hotel and talk to the banquet managers. I also check out the restaurants

where we have reservations and ask if they are familiar with gluten-free needs. And when I'm at the conference, I always contact the dining room manager as I enter. With a big smile, of course.

4. Are there any restaurants and/or hotels that you found did a really great job at taking care of a gluten-free guest?

Well, Bistango in New York is heaven! [Thank you for introducing me to it.] I don't mean to be a food snob, but I've found that many of the upper-end restaurants are better at doing on-the-spot gluten-free because the great chefs are so well-trained in substitution. They know how to remove nuts, dairy, and now gluten. Also, they love a challenge. However, I will give kudos to chain restaurants like PF Changs (excellent), Outback Steakhouse (they have a GF menu), and others. They are getting educated and bringing that to the customer. Maria's Kitchen in Los Angeles does a terrific job.

5. What is the toughest thing about traveling gluten-free?

The toughest thing going to places where friends want to dine but they feel "guilty" because I can't eat what they're eating. I do my best not to let them feel guilty. I'm fine. I'm not starving. I am not invested in food. Except cheese, of course. And chocolate. And ice cream. I adore ice cream!

6. What things do you always bring with you when you travel? (Doesn't need to be food-related; could be a travel pillow, book, iPod, pashmina...):

I always bring the banana bread, as I said. Then I bring my sound machine, a book (whatever is highest on my night stand, usually a mystery or thriller), and accessories. That's the last thing I say to myself before I close the suitcase. Do I have accessories...jewelry, purses, a scarf. I wear a lot of black to conferences, but I love those dashes of color. And, yes, a pashmina is a must. In those cold conference rooms, brrr. A pashmina helps keep me warm and feeling loved.

7. You live in Los Angeles, which is a popular destination. Have you found any restaurants, bakeries or shops near you that you'd recommend to gluten-free travelers?

I have found a number of great places that know about gluten-free. Two of my favorites are Playa and Rivera, both owned by the same team. One is downtown and the other is halfway between Hollywood and Beverly Hills. They serve tapas-style cuisine. Everything in the restaurant can be tailored to my needs. The other fun place that is family style is Maria's Kitchen, as I mentioned above. It's an Italian place, but they offer risotto and gluten-free pizza, which are fabulous! I don't frequent bakeries. I find they are highly overpriced when it comes to gluten-free items and, like I said, I bake myself. I'm a good baker. (Buffing fingernails on my shirt front and laughing)

8. What's your own dream destination to visit?

I would love to go back to Italy, the Tuscany region. I visited Italy briefly as a student in college, but I haven't been back. I'm a little nervous about the gluten-free thing there and the language barrier (I speak broken Spanish to communicate), but Italy is one of the foremost countries in exploring gluten-free items. Did you know that the children in Italy are tested at the age of two for gluten-free allergies? Soon. Soon.

9. Do you have any other advice for gluten-intolerant travelers? Also, any readings or conference appearances coming up?

I think the biggest thing when traveling is to prepare ahead. Know the territory. Call the restaurants. Call the hotels. And make sure you bring snacks. For the airplane, too. [Sounds silly but protein travels well on an airplane: hardboiled eggs and turkey burgers are easy and not too messy.]

As for my schedule, my next book comes out February 7th. I'm very excited. I'm having a book launch at Mysterious Galaxy in Redondo Beach on the 7th. Then I'll be traveling to Houston (Murder by the Books) and I'm trying to arrange a signing in the San Francisco area for mid-February. I just found out that my favorite bookstore in San Mateo closed. {Major sigh!!!} The book industry has been hit hard by e-books and Internet shopping. I have an event calendar on my website, so I hope readers will take a look.

Again, thank you so much for letting me join you today. I'm thrilled to have you as my friend.

BIO:

Avery Aames is the Agatha award winning, nationally bestselling author of The Cheese Shop Mystery series, which launched in 2010 with THE LONG QUICHE GOOBYE. The latest Cheese Shop Mystery is CLOBBERED BY CAMEMBERT (Cheese Shop Mystery book 3). The Cheese Shop Mystery series follows cheese shop owner Charlotte Bessette as she dishes up tasty morsels of goodness while solving the murders that threaten to the peace and charm of the quaint fictional town of Providence, Ohio.

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BLURB:

Charlotte Bessette—proprietor of Le Petit Fromagerie, affectionately known in Providence, Ohio, as the Cheese Shop—is busy setting up her tent for the town’s Winter Wonderland faire, where she’ll offer fine wines and scrumptious cheeses. In the midst of the preparations, Charlotte meets an old friend of her mother, Kaitlyn Clydesdale, who has come back to Providence with plans to start a new honeybee farm. When Kaitlyn is found dead in the cottage of Charlotte’s assistant Rebecca, suspicion falls on Rebecca’s boyfriend, a honeybee farmer himself. Charlotte knows this beekeeper wouldn’t hurt a fly, so she decides to find the real killer. While the town buzzes with gossip, can Charlotte catch the culprit without getting stung herself?

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AND THE EXAMINER CITING – TRYING TO FIND THAT LINK. LOST IT
SOMEHOW. DO YOU HAVE IT? - Examiner.com naming *The Long Quiche
Goodbye* as one of the best books of 2011), let me know!