Hello University of Dallas book club. Thanks for reading *The Baker's Secret.*

One of the things fiction can do, in my view, is take a familiar thing and re-imagine it into something new. That was my purpose with this novel, which dares to inhabit the realm of the many excellent books and films about D-Day, but aspires to the new perspective, almost entirely unchronicled, of the French people. The existing canon concentrates on battle, and on truly brave men, but overlooks the women, the people whose land became battlefields, the ones who were oppressed and then liberated. I wanted to write something human-scaled, as personal as one egg, as intimate as how a person smelled or what a girl had in her pocket.

Along the way I discovered that although D-Day was a unique and particular event, the circumstances of the French people resembled a more universal experience. I believe there was someone like Emma during the siege of Leningrad, striving to help her neighbors survive. I hope there is someone like her in Aleppo today. That is why you do not see the words France, Germany, Nazi and so on, and why at times the story approaches the tone of a fable. I realized I was working in archetypes, to some degree, and wanted to honor both the heroes of that day in 1944 and the determination of the human spirit whenever such difficult circumstances arise.

The research for this book included much reading, and an extended visit to the coast of Normandy to see the places where the people lived and the battle took place. I found all of it incredibly humbling -- especially when I interviewed a veteran of the invasion at Omaha Beach. He commanded a landing craft. The first trip, none of the 32 soldiers on board made it to the beach. He went back for more. About a quarter of that group survived long enough to get out of the water. He went back again. All of that group made it to shore, and to the battle well underway.

After that interview I felt about an inch tall. I also felt an imperative to tell a story that praises human triumphs -- whether on the battlefield, or in the early morning hours in a little baking shed. The writing of this book was an enormous privilege.

Thank you so much for reading it.
Stephen Kiernan