

# #1 – Harper Lee Biography



Famed author Nelle Harper Lee was born on April 28, 1926, in Monroeville, Alabama. Lee is best known for writing the Pulitzer Prize-winning bestseller *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)—her one and only novel. The youngest of four children, she grew up as a tomboy in a small town. Her father was a lawyer, a member of the Alabama state legislature and also owned part of the local newspaper. For most of Lee's life, her mother suffered from mental illness, rarely leaving the house. It is believed that she may have had bipolar disorder.

One of her closest childhood friends was another writer-to-be, Truman Capote (then known as Truman Persons). Tougher than many of the boys, Lee often stepped up to serve as Truman's protector. Truman, who shared few interests with boys his age, was picked on for being a sissy and for the fancy clothes he wore. While the two friends were very different, they both shared in having difficult home lives. Truman was living with his mother's relatives in town after

largely being abandoned by his own parents.

In high school, Lee developed an interest in English literature. After graduating in 1944, she went to the all-female Huntingdon College in Montgomery. Lee stood apart from the other students—she couldn't have cared less about fashion, makeup or dating. Instead, she focused on her studies and on her writing. Lee was a member of the literary honor society and the glee club.

Transferring to the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, Lee was known for being a loner and an individualist. She did make a greater attempt at a social life there, joining a sorority for a while. Pursuing her interest in writing, Lee contributed to the school's newspaper and its humor magazine, the *Rammer Jammer*. She eventually became the editor of the *Rammer Jammer*.

In her junior year, Lee was accepted into the university's law school, which allowed students to work on law degrees while still undergraduates. The demands of her law studies forced her to leave her post as editor of the *Rammer Jammer*. After her first year in the law program, Lee began expressing to her family that writing—not the law—was her true calling. She went to Oxford University in England that summer as an exchange student. Returning to her law studies that fall, Lee dropped out after the first semester. She soon moved to New York City to follow her dreams to become a writer.

In 1949, a 23-year-old Lee arrived in New York City. She struggled for several years, working as a ticket agent for Eastern Airlines and for the British Overseas Air Corp (BOAC). While in the city, Lee was reunited with old friend Truman Capote, one of the literary rising stars of the time.

She also befriended Broadway composer and lyricist Michael Martin Brown and his wife Joy.

In 1956, the Browns gave Lee an impressive Christmas present—to support her for a year so that she could write full time. She quit her job and devoted herself to her craft. The Browns also helped her find an agent, Maurice Crain. He, in turn, was able to get the publishing firm interested in her first novel, which was first titled *Go Set a Watchman*, then *Atticus*, and later *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Working with editor Tay Hohoff, Lee finished the manuscript in 1959.

Source: <http://www.biography.com/people/harper-lee-9377021?page=1>

## #3 – Southern Women



**Left:** A perfect picture of the proper little girl and the ideal family in the South in the 1930s. *Photo courtesy of Mary Ann Norton Meredith*

“We must persistently strive against selfishness, ill-temper, irritability, indolence. It is impossible for the self-centered or ill-tempered girl to win love and friends.

One of the greatest blemishes in the character of any young person, especially of any young girl or woman, is forwardness, boldness, pertness. The young girl who acts in such a manner as to attract attention in public; who speaks loudly, and jokes and laughs and tells stories in order to be heard by others than her immediate companions, . . . who expresses opinions on all subjects with forward self-confidence, is rightly regarded by all thoughtful and cultivated people as one of the most disagreeable and obnoxious characters to be met with in society.”

--Helen Ekin Starrett, *The Charm of Fine Manners* (1920)

Source: <http://library.thinkquest.org/12111/girl.html>

### “Southern Belles and Ladies”

A southern belle was a girl who was expected to grow up into a lady. She was supposed to be fragile and flirtatious while also sexually innocent. She was beautiful but risky to touch, like porcelain. Every southern belle was expected to be up-to-date on the latest fashions, which often proved tricky and expensive because fashion was constantly changing throughout the nineteenth century. A true lady embodied the ideals of the South, and was thus hospitable and graceful. Newspapers often took it upon themselves to update their lady readers on the newest fashion trends. The Natchez Weekly Democrat reported on November 22, 1873, that lady readers will be interested to know that spotted short veils are no longer fashionable. Bracelets are now made to twine around the arm and require no clasp. In the new style of hairdressing, called the Josephine, chignons are entirely abolished. The hair is drawn up from the back of the head and piled on the top in thick coils or braids, and loosely frizzled in front.

Source: <http://historyengine.richmond.edu/episodes/view/2259>