

Pass It On®...

When Friends Believe in You.

With a little help from her friends, Harper Lee wrote one of the best-selling and most beloved novels in American history: 'To Kill a Mockingbird'

In 1956, the rawness of racism in the South burned at the nation's conscience. How could a country based on the idea that "all men are created equal" still segregate and demean a portion of the population? And what government policy, religious movement or social cause could change the heart of a prejudice that had been festering since our country's founding?

Harper Lee was a young writer from Alabama living in New York City at the time. She worked full time as a reservation clerk for Eastern Airlines, a demanding job that left her little time to write. Still, she scratched out a few nostalgic short stories about her childhood and shared them with two close friends: Broadway lyricist Michael Brown and his wife, ballet dancer Joy Williams. They loved the stories so much they shared them with Brown's literary agent, who encouraged her to expand the stories into a full-length novel. That news was disheartening to Lee. The grueling job left her with little time to devote to her writing. She had come to New York to break through as a writer but found the demands of earning a living overwhelming.

That Christmas, Brown had just received a financial windfall from a successful musical comedy. Lee couldn't afford to travel home for Christmas, and as she sat with Brown and Williams on Christmas morning, they presented her with an envelope. Inside, the note read: "You have one year off from your job to write whatever you please. Merry Christmas." Along with the note was enough money to cover her living expenses so Lee could quit her job.

Stunned, Lee tried to push back. But Brown and Williams insisted, making it clear that they believed in her and her talents.

Lee quit the airlines and threw herself into writing full-time. Over the next two and a half years, she crafted one of the most powerful books in American literary history: "To Kill a Mockingbird." Set in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, during the Great Depression, the story follows young Scout

Finch and her father, defense attorney Atticus Finch, as he defends Tom Robinson, a Black man falsely accused of assaulting a white woman. Despite overwhelming evidence of Robinson's innocence, a racially prejudiced white jury convicts him, exposing the brutal realities of Jim Crow-era injustice.

The novel's unflinching critique of systemic racism and hypocrisy in the American South forced the nation to confront the moral failings of a society that still embraced racist ideology expressed violently, or as in most cases, in a passive, almost subconscious way. The novel was a wake-up call and a testament to the power of literature. But the story also showed how each of us can have courage, empathy and moral integrity.

Today, those lessons have been learned by generations of readers – all because two friends saw how much Harper Lee had to offer and provided an opportunity for her to sing her song.

Opportunity...[PassItOn.com](https://passiton.com)

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