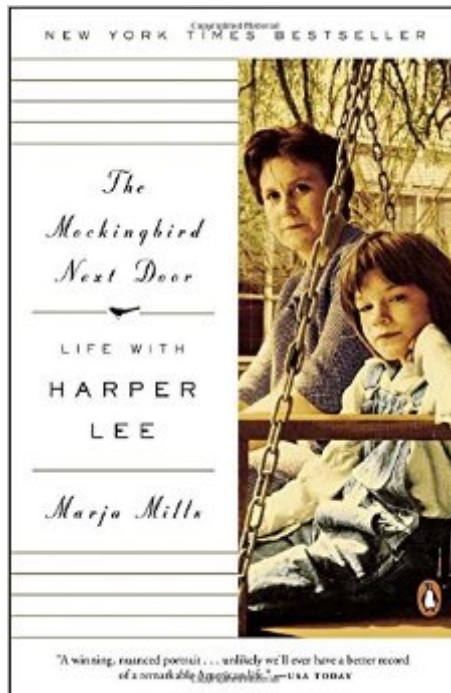


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The Mockingbird Next Door: Life With Harper Lee



Synopsis

New York Times Bestseller • A winning, nuanced portrait. . . . It seems unlikely we'll ever have a better record of a remarkable American life. • "USA Today" "There are many reasons to be grateful for *The Mockingbird Next Door*. A zesty account of two women living on their own terms yet always guided by the strong moral compass instilled in them by their father. It is also an atmospheric tale of changing small-town America; of an unlikely, intergenerational friendship between the young author and her elderly subjects; of journalistic integrity; and of grace and fortitude. The world [Mills] depicts is sadly gone, but "lucky for us" she caught it just in time." • "Washington Post *To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of the best loved novels of the twentieth century. Yet for the last fifty years, the novel's celebrated author, Harper Lee, known to her friends as Nelle, has said almost nothing on the record. But in 2001, Nelle and her sister, Alice Finch Lee, opened their door to *Chicago Tribune* journalist Marja Mills. It was the beginning of a long conversation and a wonderful friendship. Mills was given a rare opportunity to know Nelle, to be a part of the Lees' life in Alabama, and to hear them reflect on their upbringing, their corner of the Deep South, and how *To Kill a Mockingbird* affected their lives.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (May 5, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143127667

ISBN-13: 978-0143127666

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Like many Americans, I read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in high school. It made an impression at the time but not a huge one (required reading has that effect). As I have grown older I have come to appreciate the greatness of the book. When I saw Harper Lee featured as a character in the Truman

Capote movies, my interest was rekindled. The Mockingbird Next Door definitely appealed as a means to find out more about the reclusive author. This book is such a pleasant surprise. The citizens of Monroeville, Alabama fiercely protect Nelle Harper Lee's privacy. The access granted to Chicago Tribune reporter Marja Mills is something of a miracle. She showed up at the right time with a backstory that appealed to Nelle (TKAM was the One Book, One Chicago choice). Her approach was perfectly and respectfully orchestrated - first talking to Nelle's older sister Alice and some trusted acquaintances, finally meeting Nelle herself. Eventually she moved next door to Nelle and Alice and integrated into their lives. It's easy to believe that no other human being could show up in Monroeville as a stranger - a reporter, no less - and accomplish what Marja Mills did. In fact, at the same time Marja was living next door, another author was in town researching a biography of Harper Lee and had absolutely no access to her and little if any cooperation from the other citizens of Monroeville. I wish the book had more photos. The cover photo is of Nelle with Mary Badham, the young actress who played Scout in the movie of TKAM. Nelle based the character of Scout on herself. A picture of Alice and Nelle would have been much appreciated. However, the dearth of photos is consistent with Nelle's desire for privacy. This book is so well written, so conversational, so descriptive.

Added later: As everyone knows by now, allegations of this book being unauthorized have surfaced. I have read the information on that and at this time I do not believe that it is true. My reason why are at the end of this review. As I read this fascinating story by a writer who came to know Nelle Harper Lee very well over a period of time (5 or 6 years) I would think, "I'm not sure that I would like this woman. I might like her sister, Alice, better." and then I would read some more and think, "I really like this woman." I think that she has probably caused this same kind of confusion and mixed feelings all of her life. After reading the entire story, I have decided that I would like her, in spite of her idiosyncrasies. But then, she'd probably say that I am the one with idiosyncrasies! She would not be shy about stating her opinion, that's for sure. The book is written in a different style from a lot of biographies, where the writer simply starts at the person's life and progresses forward. This one is more like a series of visits with friends, where we all get to go along for the ride, too. It answers some questions that we've all asked, such as why she never wrote another book and why did she use Harper instead of Nelle for her name. It also answers some that I never thought of asking, such as where did the name Harper come from and what nicknames did she and her sister Alice have. And no, I won't answer them here; read the book!! By the end of the book, I felt that it hadn't actually seemed like I read a book. I felt vaguely like there was something I needed to do to finish. But then I

realized that the book actually felt like a series of visits with friends. Friends that you didn't actually see; friends that you don't talk back to, but, nevertheless, friends.

As a vine reviewer, I was totally unaware that Harper Lee didn't want this biography until today. I deeply saddened by this news. This review was written before Harper Lee's disapproval and outrage. I am surprised that Harper Lee would cooperate with any journalist. Original Review before Harper Lee's disapproval of the biography. If you're a Harper Lee fan, you will definitely want to read this book. Marja Mills is one of the few American journalists allowed to know reclusive Harper Lee, author of the classic novel "To Kill A Mockingbird." This book is an easy read but it is not a tell all. Mills befriends Harper and her older sister Alice Finch Lee. Alice will be a 103 years old and a practicing attorney in Monroeville, Alabama besides their father A.C. Lee who inspired the character, Atticus Finch, in her novel. Her sister Alice is known as Atticus in a dress by her sister Nelle Harper Lee. The book isn't going to make startling revelations of Harper Lee's life. Unlike her former childhood friend Truman Capote, Harper Lee dreaded the spotlight and pressure of life in the public. This book recognizes that Harper Lee has lead a classy, graceful, dignified life by her own rules. She doesn't give interviews but she doesn't live like a hermit either. She and her sister Alice have never married nor had children of their own but have led fulfilled lives. In reading this memoir, I appreciate the author's relationship with her subjects. Mills befriends the Lee sisters and they befriend her. Their relationship is definite friendship where as even personal and intimate questions are off limits or not recorded but you get the sense of laughter, fun, stories, and joy in spending time together.

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