

Dear Harper Lee,

I live in small rural community in the middle of Nebraska. It is a farming community, but my family hasn't had ties to agriculture in about three generations. The farmers here grow corn and beans. A little different than the cotton the farmers in Alabama grow. But I suppose my little town is fairly similar to your imagined town of Maycomb.

Two years ago, I attended my first Quinceanera, and I am pretty confident in saying it was probably the first one ever held in my little town. It was for the high school Spanish teacher's daughter. Her family is one of only a few Hispanic families in town, which makes them, I suppose, a little bit different. My house has a wheelchair ramp leading up to the front door, for my paralyzed brother. He is the only paraplegic in our town, which makes my family a little bit different, too. Your portrayal of the non-typical citizens of Maycomb as heroes reminds me of the bravery you have to have to be different in a small town.

I have read your book *To Kill a Mockingbird* multiple times, and have grown to love it more each time I read it. The first time I read your book was with my mother and brother when I was in middle school. We read it before we went to bed every night for several weeks. After reading the night's designated chapter, however, the last thing I was ready for was sleep. I remember lying awake at night thinking about the story and having questions about certain parts. There are so many themes in the book and underlying lessons. The first time I read it, I understood a few of these lessons, but was too young to really interpret all of it. I suppose my big take away from the story, at that age, was to be kind to people and treat them with respect, without regard to race or social status.

After reading the novel again in high school, I remember understanding that this book was meant to call attention to all of the injustices taking place in our country at that time, with the hope of changes taking place in the future. When you wrote this book, I can only imagine what life was like with racial tensions so high in the 1950's and 1960's. Learning about that time period in American History, I was able to read about what was happening in the south and began to comprehend why this book was so awarded, and why so many states required it to be read in high school English classes. I believe that your purpose for penning this story was to make the country's wrongs seem so obvious, that we had no choice of working to make things right.

I realize that you have been gone almost two years now, but it saddens me to tell you that you wouldn't want to see what is happening in our nation at the current time. Recently I have heard that some schools are taking your novel out of their high school English curriculum because the book makes students uncomfortable. This action upsets me because I believe that is one of the purposes of your book, to make readers uncomfortable, so they want to create a change.

I also think that when you wrote this book a change was needed in our country, and today that is still true. One example of this is the Charlottesville protest that happened this past August. This was a violent protest, that left many injured and three dead, between a white nationalist group and people that just want to live in peace, regardless of skin-color or religion. When asked to help calm the nation's nerves after the tragedy, the President's comments caused even more controversy. How I wished a man like Atticus, full of integrity and wisdom, had been the one in charge. I am afraid you may have been an author with ideas that were ahead her time.

I suppose I should admit that another reason that I hold your book so dear to my heart is because I'm named after you, the great writer, Harper Lee. My mother admired your writing so much that when she found out she was going to have a daughter, she knew exactly what my name was going to be. She understood the importance of the writing you had done and wanted for me to grow up in a world where differences were not just tolerated, but accepted and viewed in a positive way.

I sometimes wonder what life is going to be like for my Hispanic friend and my paralyzed brother. Will people treat them with disrespect because of skin color or physical disability? Or will their differences be accepted. I really hope it is the latter.

I won't give up on your dream Ms. Lee. I will spend my life being kind to those that others may see as different. I will take your lessons with me wherever I may go in this world. And I hope that someday, our nation will be ready to listen to your message.

Sincerely,

Harper Leigh Wells

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harper Leigh Wells". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.