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The Friendship of Harper Lee and Truman Capote

Nelle Harper Lee and Truman Capote became friends in the early 1930s as kindergarteners in Monroeville, Alabama. They lived next door to each other: Capote with aunts and uncles, Lee with her parents and three siblings. From the start they loved reading and recognized in each other "an apartness," as Capote later expressed it. When Lee's father gave them an old Underwood typewriter, they began writing original stories. Although Capote moved to New York City in the third grade to join his mother and stepfather, he returned to Monroeville most summers, eventually providing the inspiration for Dill in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

In 1948 Capote published his first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Around that time, Lee quit law school and joined Capote in New York to work at becoming a writer, too. Years of menial jobs followed until *To Kill a Mockingbird* was ready for publication. Capote read the manuscript and made editorial suggestions. She, in her turn, accompanied him to Kansas to help research *In Cold Blood*.

After *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published, Capote resented Lee's success. He could have tried harder to dispel baseless rumors that the novel was as much his work as hers. Their friendship continued during the 1960s and '70s, but Capote's drug and alcohol abuse strained the relationship. Later he would stop publishing and sink into self-parody, sponging off high society and making endless rounds of the talk-show circuit. When Capote died in 1984, Lee confided to friends that she hadn't heard from him in years.

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