

Hey, Boo

Harper Lee and 'To Kill A Mockingbird'

A film by Mary McDonagh Murphy

82 minutes, color, 2010

HDCAM, LtRt



First Run Features
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Short Synopsis

To Kill a Mockingbird was the first and only novel by a young woman from the South. It became one of the biggest best-sellers of all time and she became a mystery. ***Hey Boo: Harper Lee & To Kill a Mockingbird*** explores the history and impact of the novel and offers an unprecedented look at the life of the novelist.

Fifty years after its publication, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is required reading in most American classrooms and still sells nearly a million copies a year. ***Hey, Boo: Harper Lee & To Kill a Mockingbird*** chronicles how this beloved novel came to be written, provides the context and history of the Deep South where it is set, and documents the many ways the novel has changed minds and shaped history. For teachers, students or fans of the classic, ***Hey, Boo*** enhances the experience of reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Hey, Boo features insightful interviews with Oprah Winfrey, Tom Brokaw, Pulitzer Prize-winning authors Rick Bragg, Anna Quindlen, and Richard Russo, historians Jon Meacham and Diane McWhorter and civil rights leader Andrew Young addressing the novel's impact on their lives, careers and country. Lee's friends and family speak on the record, sharing intimate recollections, anecdotes, and biographical details for the first time, offering new insight into the life and mind of Harper Lee, who stopped speaking to the press in 1964.

Filmmaker Bio

Mary McDonagh Murphy is an independent documentary director, writer and television producer. Her most recent work is *Hey, Boo: Harper Lee and To Kill a Mockingbird*, released theatrically by First Run Features. She is the author of an accompanying book: *Scout, Atticus & Boo: Fifty Years of To Kill a Mockingbird*, a New York Times best seller published by Harper Collin in June 2010.

Murphy speaks frequently at schools and libraries across the country. Her other documentaries include: *Cry For Help*, about adolescent depression and suicide, for PBS; *Digital Days*, an examination of the Internet's effect on the newspaper industry, for the Associated Press; and *Before your Eyes: Don't Take my Daddy*, a chronicle of deportation proceedings against three former members of the Irish Republican Army; which aired in primetime on CBS.

Her production company, Mary Murphy & Company, is responsible for numerous book and author videos including a feature-length biography of best-selling author Jeff Kinney, author of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, for schools and libraries. Other book videos include, *Breaking News: How the Associated Press has covered War, Peace and Everything Else*; *The Translator: A Tribesman's Memoir of Darfur by Daoud Hari and Shannon*, a novel by Frank Delaney. Her feature stories about golfer Greg Norman as a business man and the History of the Sweet n' Low company aired on CNBC.

Murphy was a producer at CBS News for 20 years where she won six Emmy awards. She has written for Newsweek, The Chicago Tribune, The New York Post and Publishers Weekly. A native of Rhode Island, she is a graduate of Wesleyan University and was a John S. Knight fellow at Stanford University. Murphy lives in Scarborough, N.Y. with her husband, Bob Minzesheimer, and their two children. She is raising money for her next documentary and working on a comic novel.

Credits

Produced, Written and Directed by
MARY MCDONAGH MURPHY

Director of Photography
RICH WHITE

Editor/Producer
CHRISTOPHER SEWARD

Narrator
BOB MAYER

Editors
MARY ALFIERI
SEAN FRECHETTE
FRAN GULLO

Sound
JACK NORFLUS

Alabama Consultant
LYNN RABREN

Associate Producer
BRYONY KOCKLER

Voice of Tay Hohoff
JENNIFER LAIRD WHITE

Voice of Harper Lee
JANE BEASLEY

Voice of Truman Capote
BOB MAYER

Voice of Reporter
CHRISTOPHER SEWARD

Voice of Maurice Crain
CHRISTOPHER SEWARD

Voice of Idabel Tompkins
DONNA CONEY ISLAND

Interviewees:
MARY BADHAM
BOATY BOATWRIGHT
RICK BRAGG
TOM BROKAW
JOY BROWN
MICHAEL BROWN
REVEREND THOMAS LANE BUTTS
ROSANNE CASH
MARK CHILDRESS
JANE ELLEN CLARK
ALLAN GURGANUS
DAVID KIPEN
WALLY LAMB
ALICE FINCH LEE
JAMES MCBRIDE
DIANE MCWHORTER
JON MEACHAM
JAMES PATTERSON
ANNA QUINDLEN
RICHARD RUSSO
LIZZIE SKURNICK
LEE SMITH
ADRIANA TRIGIANI
MARY TUCKER
SCOTT TUROW
OPRAH WINFREY
ANDREW YOUNG

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<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-hey-boo-20110513,0,5298111.story>

Los Angeles Times

Movie review: 'Hey Boo: Harper Lee and "To Kill a Mockingbird" '

The fascinating documentary gives the back story of the book and its author, including interviews with people who know Lee and celebrities who are fans of the book.



Harper Lee (Getty Images / Harper Collins)

By Kenneth Turan, Los Angeles Times Film Critic

May 13, 2011

Many books and films have partisans who insist their works are loved and admired by the American people, but "To Kill a Mockingbird" is the real thing.

The Harper Lee novel, winner of the [Pulitzer Prize](#), has sold nearly 50 million copies in the 50 years since its publication. And when the [U.S. Postal Service](#) recently issued a stamp honoring "Mockingbird" star [Gregory Peck](#), it used a still from that Oscar-winning performance as its image.

But what of Nelle Harper Lee, the young Southern writer from Monroeville, Ala., whose reaction to all this success, she said in a radio interview, was one of "sheer numbness, being hit over the head and knocked cold." What has happened to her? Why hasn't she given any interviews since 1964 or written any other novels since this remarkable success?

Writer-director Mary McDonagh Murphy addresses these questions and others in her [documentary](#) "Hey, Boo: Harper Lee and 'To Kill a Mockingbird.'" Though it's more than a little awestruck and feels padded even at 82 minutes, the story it tells remains completely fascinating.

One reason for this is that filmmaker Murphy has scoured the Earth for people close to Lee to interview. She talks to the author's 99-year-old sister, Alice, and to Michael and Joy Brown, friends in New York.

It was the Browns' spontaneous gift of a chunk of money that enabled Lee to take a year off to work on the manuscript, initially called "Atticus," that became, after two further years of rewrites overseen by her patient editor, "Mockingbird."

The genesis of the book, however, was further back, in Lee's childhood in Monroeville as the daughter of A.C. Lee, a progressive lawyer, state legislator and newspaper editor who was indisputably the model for Atticus Finch.

And the documentary points out that, as a boy, [Truman Capote](#) lived next door to the Lees for several years and was the model for the book's Dill Harris character.

Capote was an important mentor to Lee, and she returned the favor by helping him do the research for the book that became "In Cold Blood." The two drifted apart after Lee won the Pulitzer Prize and Capote did not. Capote's jealousy, says sister Alice, was the cause.

Much of "Hey, Boo" is taken up with interviews with celebrities who are fans of the book and who give their thoughts as well as read selected passages. These folks include a raft of Southern writers (Lee Smith, Rick Bragg, Allan Gurganus, among others) and apparently randomly selected well-known figures such as [Tom Brokaw](#), Rosanne Cash, Scott Turow, [Oprah Winfrey](#) and [Andrew Young](#).

As is to be expected, these interviews vary in interest and quality, but only [James Patterson](#) manages to put in a plug for his own books.

As to why Lee stopped writing when she did, the film mentions the sorrow of a pair of deaths in her family plus an understandable reluctance to follow such a classic. "I haven't anywhere to go but down," she told a cousin, and lovers of the book would find it hard to argue with that sentiment.

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THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

Film Review: 'Hey Boo'

6:14 PM 5/13/2011 by Frank Scheck



The Bottom Line

Fascinating documentary about the reclusive author and her sole literary masterpiece.

Mary McDonagh Murphy's documentary about Harper Lee offers wonderful insights into *To Kill a Mockingbird's* social and literary importance, as well as its author's personality.

Harper Lee has become one of the most fascinating literary conundrums of recent times, as reclusive as she is famous. Born in Alabama, she won a Pulitzer Prize for ***To Kill a Mockingbird***, her 1960 novel that was universally acknowledged as a masterwork and inspired the classic 1962 film adaptation starring Gregory Peck.

Despite the occasional public appearance, Lee has not granted an interview in more than four decades. More importantly, she never wrote another book, forever guaranteeing her literary reputation and provoking endless, J.D. Salinger-like speculation.

Mary McDonagh Murphy's documentary **Hey, Boo: Harper Lee and *To Kill a Mockingbird*** occasionally borders on hagiography, but it nonetheless provides wonderful insights into the book's social and literary importance as well as its author's personality.

After its limited theatrical release, the film, whose title stems from one of the novel's most famous lines, should find its biggest audiences on cable and public television.

We learn that Lee, who worked as an airline reservation clerk in New York City, was able to write the book through an act of generosity: a well-heeled Greenwich Village couple gave her enough money to take a year off so that she could devote herself to writing full-time.

Her autobiographical tale of lawyer Atticus Finch and his courageous decision to represent a black man amidst the racial prejudice of the 1930s Deep South became an instant sensation. Its lasting impact is illustrated here by moving testimonials from such disparate novelists as Wally Lamb, Rick Bragg, Richard Russo, Scott Turow and mystery writer James Patterson, as well as figures ranging from Oprah Winfrey to Mike Brokaw to civil rights leader Andrew Young.

Actress **Mary Badham**, who played the pivotal role of Scout, reminisces about the making of the 1962 film. We also learn that Rock Hudson lobbied hard for the role of Atticus, which was first offered to Spencer Tracy before it finally went to Gregory Peck.

Lee herself is conspicuously absent from the proceedings, save for archival footage and excerpts from radio interviews from the mid 1960s. But we do hear from many of her friends, associates and relatives, including her 99-year-old sister Alice, a still practicing lawyer.

A fascinating segment details Lee's lifelong friendship with Truman Capote, her childhood best friend and the model for the character of Dill Harris. That relationship, depicted in the recent films **Infamous** and **Capote**, led to speculation that Capote had a hand in the writing of **Mockingbird**, an idea this film firmly dispels.

Most poignantly, **Hey, Boo** explores the issue of why Lee never wrote another novel, despite her claim decades ago that she was working on one. Several of the interview subjects offer possible explanations. But perhaps the most truthful one comes from Lee herself, who once said to a relative, "I haven't anywhere to go but down."

Opened May 13 (First Run Features)

No rating, 82 min.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marshall-fine/huffpost-review-ihey-boo_b_862364.html

HUFFPOST ENTERTAINMENT

HuffPost Review: Hey, Boo: Harper Lee and 'To Kill a Mockingbird'

[Marshall Fine](#)

Author and film critic, hollywoodandfine.com

Is there a more beloved book than Harper Lee's **To Kill a Mockingbird**?

Mockingbird turned out to be Lee's only book. She published it, saw the classic movie made with Gregory Peck, gave a few interviews -- and then disappeared from sight, never to speak publicly again.

Instead, her book did the talking for her. It is a modern classic, a novel that is at once a page-turning courtroom thriller, a touching father-daughter tale, and a profound look at the state of race in the American South.

As Mary Murphy's compelling new documentary, **Hey, Boo: Harper Lee and 'To Kill a Mockingbird'**, shows, the book was prescient in addressing issues of race at a moment when it was on the front burner of the American agenda. Even as the civil-rights movement was bursting into flames in the South, Americans were reconsidering the racial question from a new angle, thanks to Lee's book and the movie that was made from it.

Murphy's film is, in essence, a biography of the book, as well as of Lee herself. Murphy looks at Lee's own background -- daughter of a small-town Alabama lawyer who was the model for Atticus Finch, a would-be writer working as an airline reservations clerk in New York -- and the slow journey toward completion of her book.

It wasn't an easy journey. It required the generosity of friends (who gave Lee enough money to take a year off from her job to write) -- and the vision of an agent (who helped her shape her manuscript). Still, it was never a sure thing: Almost a dozen publishers turned the novel down before Lippincott picked it up.

Even then, it took two years of rewriting -- and a title change from **Atticus** to **To Kill a Mockingbird** -- before Lee's book reached the public. Then it exploded, becoming an instant classic and, eventually, one of the best-selling books of all time.

Murphy has a variety of firsthand witnesses to talk about Lee and her early years, including her own sister, the 99-year-old Alice Lee. She also talks to a wide variety of writers and celebrities about their own memories of reading the book. Everyone from Oprah Winfrey to Tom Brokaw to Scott Turow to Anna Quindlen read favorite excerpts from the book; several of them are still moved by the material, just in the reading.

She weaves this together with a variety of related material. She looks at the movie itself (and interviews Mary Badham, who was 9 when she played Scout in the film) and talks about the

evolution of race relations and civil rights during this period. She casts a wider net, talking to Southerners about the book and its impact, on individuals and the society.

She also looks at the personal stories: of Lee and her refusal to speak to the press since the early 1960s; of Lee's childhood friendship with Truman Capote (he was the model for the character of Dill in the book); of Capote's professional jealousy that ultimately led to the dissolution of their friendship, even after she'd helped him do the legwork and research for **In Cold Blood**.

Hey, Boo celebrates a novel, celebrates an imagination and, ultimately, celebrates a defining piece of Americana. It's always nice to see a movie that values literature and literacy -- and this is one of the better ones.

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/monkeysee/2011/05/12/136239312/hey-boo-a-new-documentary-explores-why-harper-lee-wrote-and-didnt>



'Hey, Boo': A New Documentary Explores Why Harper Lee Wrote ... And Didn't

by Karen Grigsby Bates



Donald Uhrbrock/First Run Features

Director Mary McDonagh Murphy interviewed Harper Lee's friends, family, and fans to construct a portrait of the writer's life.

Even if you loved **To Kill a Mockingbird**, you may be full-up with all the stories that have poured out this year to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the book's publication. But if you have room for one more, consider **Hey, Boo**. It's a documentary that will be released in New York May 13, and other cities soon after. Director/writer Mary McDonagh Murphy wanted a chance to have author Nell Harper Lee explained by people who know her well and love her.

Friends and relatives, including Lee's big sister Alice (90 and still practicing law when this was filmed), share anecdotes about Lee's struggle to write the book, the deluge of fame that followed it, and how Lee coped. (One casualty: her friendship with Truman Capote, who, Alice Lee says,

was just consumed with jealousy that her sister's little book had been awarded a Pulitzer Prize, while his grisly opus **In Cold Blood** had not.)

Through her interviews, Murphy also reveals why the now 85-year-old Lee never wrote another novel (although she did produce several essays), and why the assumption that she is a recluse is a myth.

Singer Rosanne Cash, civil rights veteran Andrew Young, and writers Alan Gurganis, Wally Lamb, and Anna Quindlen, among others, discuss the effect **Mockingbird** had on them, on their writing, and on the country. Several people, including Oprah Winfrey and Tom Brokaw, read their favorite passages from the book. It's interesting that very few of the passages are the same, and it's a nice testament to the power of **Mockingbird** that readers still think it speaks directly to them and their own lives.

The interviews, the family photographs and Lee's astonishing sister all provide an engaging portrait of the town and the times that shaped one of America's greatest writers. Murphy includes a lot of vintage television and radio footage in her film, and one of its delights is hearing Harper Lee explain her ambitions in her own voice. Before she stopped talking to reporters, Lee had a chat with a local radio host, and discussed what moves her to write.

"Well, my objectives are very limited," she told WQXR in 1964. "I think I want to do the best I can with the talent that God gave me, I suppose. I would like to be the chronicler of something that I think is going down the drain very swiftly, and that is small-town, middle-class Southern life. There is something universal in it. Something decent to be said for it, and something to lament, once it goes, in its passing. In other words, all I want to be is the Jane Austen of South Alabama."

Would that all our home towns had the same benefit.

'Mockingbird' documentary tells story, without Lee's help

By [Lynn Peisner](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

In March 1964, Harper Lee gave her last in-depth interview. Since then, the resolutely private author has declined desperate requests asking her to speak about the acclaimed 1960 novel "To Kill a Mockingbird."

This presents a bit of a challenge to a filmmaker who's long desired to make a movie about Lee. "She has in the past written 'hell no' on the tops of letters from reporters," said Mary McDonagh Murphy, whose documentary about Lee's first and only book screens Saturday night in Decatur. "I felt fortunate her agent even agreed to meet with me. I did not expect to talk to her."

Over the years, Murphy pitched pieces about the novel when she was a producer at CBS, but the consensus held that without an interview with the author herself, there was no news story.

On her own as an independent filmmaker, she decided a documentary would be effective even without an exclusive sit-down with the literary legend. The result, "Hey, Boo: Harper Lee & 'To Kill a Mockingbird,'" is an enlightened love letter to the novel.

But more than that, rare interviews Murphy obtained with Lee's sister Alice and her New York friends Joy and Michael Brown -- who on Christmas 1956 gave Lee money to take a year off from her job as an airline reservations clerk to write full time -- tease out human elements to balance the praise. We hear of the two-year editing process Lee described as a "long and hopeless period." The controversy that Truman Capote claimed authorship and Lee's fear of failure after a near-perfect debut.

Choking back tears, many cultural luminaries, including Oprah Winfrey and Tom Brokaw, share their recollections of the novel. And numerous authors weigh in on the influence of Lee's prose.

"I read the book five or six times while making the film and did so many interviews," Murphy said. "Every time I would interview someone new, I thought, 'Can anyone tell me anything I haven't heard before?' And invariably, people always did."

Gabriel Wardell and Paula Martinez, former directors of Atlanta Film Festival 365, asked Murphy to bring her film here when they saw it at Birmingham's Sidewalk Moving Picture Festival in September. It's a good fit for their new film series, Decatur Docs, that brings Atlanta audiences consistent access to meatier movie alternatives.

"Audiences are faced with fewer venues to see challenging work in a group setting," Wardell said. "International films have all but vanished from the screens of the art houses, and documentaries and small indies without stars are an endangered species at the theaters. We plan to show something more substantive than junk food to audiences eager to unpack some of the issues in post-screening dialogue."

Murphy also will be signing copies of her book, "Scout, Atticus & Boo: A Celebration of 50 Years of 'To Kill a Mockingbird.' "

<http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/27/to-kill-a-mockingbird-author-repudiates-journalists-memoir-about-her/?scp=1&sq=herper%20Lee&st=cse>

The New York Times

Arts Beat

The Culture at Large



'To Kill a Mockingbird' Author Repudiates Journalist's Memoir About Her

By [PATRICIA COHEN](#)

Harper Lee, the tight-lipped author of the Pulitzer-Prize winning novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," issued a short statement through her sister's law firm on Wednesday saying that she had nothing to do with a coming book written about her by a former Chicago Tribune reporter.

On Tuesday, Penguin Press announced that it had acquired "The Mockingbird Next Door: Life With Harper Lee," a memoir by the former reporter, Marja Mills, that was "written with direct access to Harper and Alice Lee and their friends and family."

Penguin's announcement said, "The story of Mills's friendship with the two women recounts all the Lee sisters have to say about their life in Alabama, their upbringing, how 'To Kill a Mockingbird' impacted their lives, and why Harper Lee chose to never write another novel."

One day later, the law firm, Barnett, Bugg, Lee & Carter in Monroeville, Ala., issued the statement. Signed by Harper Lee, it said: "Contrary to recent news reports, I have not willingly participated in any book written or to be written by Marja Mills. Neither have I authorized such a book. Any claims otherwise are false."

A receptionist at the law firm said on Wednesday that no one there had anything further to say on the subject. In an interview late Wednesday, Miriam Altshuler, Ms. Mills's literary agent, said Ms. Mills "has the written support of Alice Lee and a lifelong family friend, and prior to Harper Lee's stroke in 2007, she had the verbal support of Harper Lee."

Ms. Mills wrote a [long article for The Chicago Tribune](#) in 2002 on Harper Lee. While Ms. Lee declined to comment for the piece, Ms. Mills wrote that "over the past year, through extensive reporting and rare interviews with Harper Lee's older sister, Alice Finch Lee, and some of Harper

Lee's close friends, all of whom granted unprecedented access to the details of the author's life, a portrait of a remarkable woman emerged."

Harper Lee, whose book is frequently included in lists of the greatest novels of the 20th century, never wrote another and has not given a public interview in 45 years.