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Kimberly Boone

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ALICE FINCH LEE: LIVING THE VALUES OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION

*Kimberly Keefer Boone**

The most famous resident of my hometown, Monroeville, Alabama, is the intensely private Harper Lee,¹ author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.² Though not nearly as famous to outsiders, her sister, Alice Finch Lee, is even better known, loved, and respected by the residents of Monroeville and many Alabama lawyers. In her own quiet and determined way, "Miss Alice," as she is affectionately known, has advanced social justice and affected positive change. Nelle Harper Lee attended law school, but left shortly before graduation and never practiced. Alice Finch Lee never wrote a novel, but instead makes her contributions through the daily, disciplined, and principled practice of law. Through law and literature, Alice and Nelle Harper, have made many of us better lawyers and better people.

When I first read this speech honoring Alice Lee, I thought about how important Miss Alice's work has been not only to those who know her, but through the people she has inspired, to countless others who will never meet her. Her intellect, honesty, integrity, and sense of fairness are evident to all who know her. While in practice, and now in teaching, I strive to live up to her standards of compassion and hard work. Although I often fall far short of her example, I think she appreciates the effort.

This speech was written and delivered by a dear friend of my family, Dr. Thomas Lane Butts, a retired Methodist minister in Monroeville. Due to Dr. Butts' vocation and his relationship with the Lee family, a good part of Tom's speech relates to Alice's church work. But regardless of one's spiritual beliefs, this speech honors a worthy role model. Although the speech introduces Alice as the recipient of the prestigious Maud McClure Kelly Award given by the Alabama Bar Association, I did not immediately think of asking a law journal to publish this piece. I assumed that most people, at least in Alabama, were aware of the tireless efforts and impressive contributions of one of the "other" Lee sisters.³ I did, however, share

* Director of Legal Writing and Legal Writing Instructor, The University of Alabama School of Law. J.D. magna cum laude 1995, The University of Alabama School of Law; B.A. magna cum laude 1992, Huntingdon College.

1. She is known in Monroeville as "Nelle Harper" or simply "Nelle."
2. NELLE HARPER LEE, *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* (1960).
3. There is also a third Lee sister, Louise Lee Conner.

the speech with friends and colleagues. After looking at the text again through the eyes of a colleague,⁴ it became clear that publishing this speech highlighting Alice Lee's trail-blazing efforts as a woman practicing law in rural south Alabama in the 1940's and her positive role in the fight for racial justice was quite appropriate, especially in an Alabama journal dedicated to ethics and the legal profession. And so I hope that this speech, which celebrates the life of an Alabama lawyer, will influence those who read it to follow their conscience and to use the practice of law to diligently and unselfishly serve their clients and our profession as Alice has done and continues to do.

Alice Lee's father, Amasa Coleman Lee, died long before my family moved to Monroeville. Mr. Lee is said by many to have been the "real" Atticus Finch, the lawyer/father hero of *To Kill a Mockingbird* who has inspired generations of lawyers. If one looks closely at *Mockingbird's* dedication, however, there is a hint that such received wisdom is only partially correct, for the book is "for Mr. Lee and Alice."⁵ When *Mockingbird* was published in 1960, Alice had already been practicing law for over fifteen years. I never knew Mr. Lee, but I know that there is a lot of Miss Alice in Atticus.

In February of 1993, Nelle Harper Lee wrote the following in a Foreword for *Mockingbird*:

Please spare *Mockingbird* an Introduction. As a reader I loathe Introductions. . . . Introductions inhibit pleasure, they kill the joy of anticipation, they frustrate curiosity. The only good thing about Introductions is that in some cases they delay the dose to come. *Mockingbird* still says what it has to say; it has managed to survive the years without preamble.⁶

The same is true of Alice Finch Lee and Dr. Tom Butts' tribute to her. They really need no further introduction.

4. Many thanks to my friend and colleague, Alfred L. Brophy, for his suggestion to publish this piece and his efforts to accomplish it.

5. LEE, *supra* note 3.

6. HARPER LEE, *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* (40th Anniversary ed. 1999).