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Remembering *To Kill a Mockingbird*

by L. Monique Pittman

Ten years ago, as the U.S. launched Desert Storm, a group of Andrews students began rehearsals for the spring production of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Moving uneasily in and out of two worlds, we left our dorm rooms and apartments as the evening news aired eerie, night-vision images of an unknown Kuwaiti landscape. We entered another unfamiliar terrain—a southern town in racial crisis. At the time, the contrast seemed decidedly surreal. However, from the distance of ten years, there appears a strange aptness to the parallel. In the clash of west and east, we can read the conflict closer to home between black and white.

To Kill a Mockingbird tells the story of a Southern town, Maycomb, Alabama, torn by racial prejudices. When Tom Robinson (George Cartwright), a black man, is accused

of raping a poor white woman, Mayella Ewell (Eleanor Hajduk), the white and black communities face off. Atticus Finch (David Lofthouse) takes the case in defense of Tom Robinson and teaches his children Jem (Nicholas Jones) and Scout (Kristina Hacko) in the ways of tolerance. Much as Harper

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David (Atticus) Lofthouse teaches his children, Nicholas (Jem) Jones and Kristina (Scout) Hacko in the ways of tolerance.

University *To Kill a Mockingbird* production, we remember the pleasures and lessons of the theater. On a campus that has always faced considerable difficulties in mounting a dramatic production, Dr. Douglas Jones, former Director of University Relations and former Chair of the English Department, directed our fledgling efforts to do justice to a timeless story. Pressed to the limit by heavy teaching responsibilities and taxed by the maddening inadequacy of the University Towers stage, Dr. Jones and his assistant director, Dr. Meredith Jones, graciously and thoughtfully guided us into the emotionally charged youthful awakening of Lee's Scout and Jem.

While other members of the cast had had previous experience on the stage, my one and only venture in the theater has been Dr. Jones's production of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Lee's young characters learn to negotiate the paths of right and wrong and the hidden byways of the heart, we as Americans during the Gulf War Crisis were confronted by evil in the enemy as well as in our own methods of aggression.

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Today, another President Bush leads the nation, and as we near the ten-year anniversary of our Andrews



Monique (Maudie) Pittman and Kristina (Scout) Hacko

Playing Miss Maudie, the well-meaning if occasionally intrusive neighbor of Atticus Finch and his children, I remember fitting gradually into the role, testing out a Southern drawl that never suited me quite comfortably enough, especially when contrasted with the full transformation undergone by Eleanor Hajduk who played Mayella Ewell with such convincing power and voice.

At the time I played Miss Maudie, I was a senior English major laboring over my honors project on Henry James and preparing nervously for my graduate school future. Miss Maudie contrasted sharply with my anxious and uncertain state of mind those months before graduation. She was a wise, stable, middle-aged honorary aunt to Scout and Jem, who dished out advice as generously as she served up cake. During the months of rehearsal, I exchanged my textbooks for an apron and mixing bowl and found a sense of serenity in portraying someone so different.

The special chemistry of the stage eludes description. At the beginning, the members of the cast eyed each other warily, wondering, "Who will drive me crazy?" "Who will I like?" and "What will they all think of me?" Each rehearsal, we crossed the divide from the real world to the constructed life of the theater. With each night that step became less a leap of faith and more the trusting return to a familiar, safe place. The theater offers the individual a chance to slip, however briefly, out of the identity the world recognizes and enter into the perspective of someone who may be radically different from the limits and confines of the actor's daily self. In doing so, the actor experiences exactly what Atticus Finch so wants for his own children; the actor walks in another's shoes, feels the emotions, the sorrow and joy, experiences the discontinuities and trials of another's world, and is thus physically forced to confront his or her own inherent egocentrism. While the Adventist church has had a complex relationship with the theater, surely drama in its best forms underscores the very principles of empathy and compassion that are at the heart of the ethical Christian life.

Inhabitants of the far reaches of the campus, the thirty cast members hailed from departments and schools as diverse as English, Biology, and the Seminary. Some members weren't even in high school yet: our youngest members, Scout played by Kristina Hacko, Jem played by Nicholas Jones, and Dill played by Nickilos Wolfer all had their bedtimes con-

siderably extended during rehearsals. Perhaps because this play centers on the vulnerability of young children awakening to the prejudices of adults who should know better, the cast gravitated towards its younger members to provide a sheltering circle.

Over 1,100 members of the Andrews and Berrien Springs community attended the three performances in February and March of 1991 and responded enthusiastically to the production and the play's message. Perhaps David Lofthouse created the most memorable moment. During a stern lecture directed

at his son Jem, he knocked a flower pot off the porch but recovered quickly with, "Do as I say, not as I do."

Over the years, the cast members have headed in many directions. Our illustrious director, Dr. Douglas Jones, is now Vice President for Academic Administration at Columbia Union College, and his son Nicholas is currently on a Maranatha trip with his grandparents. Not too many years ago, I ran into Kendra Haloviak at the Pacific Union College Church. She had played the adult Scout and provided narration for much of the play. When I last saw her at PUC, she was busy studying theology at Berkeley. We reminisced fondly over the good times of the production and wondered too what had happened to the others. As for me, I'm back at Andrews having completed my graduate work. I now teach in the very classrooms I sat in as a student and work with colleagues who were once my professors and who remain my valued mentors. I hope the rest of the cast members of *To Kill a Mockingbird* remember with pleasure our times together and perhaps are as amazed as I am that ten years could pass so quickly.

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Department. In December 2000, she earned her doctorate in English from Purdue University.



The cast of To Kill a Mockingbird

Cast of Characters

- Jean Louise Finch—Kendra Haloviak
- Scout—Kristina Hacko
- Jem—Nicholas Jones
- Atticus—David Lofthouse
- Calpurnia—Michelle Coursey
- Maudie Atkinson—Monique Pittman
- Stephanie Crawford—Becky Kyle
- Mrs. Henery Laffayette Dubose—Lizbeth Rodriguez
- Nathan Radley—Todd Jordan
- Dill—Nickilos Wolfer
- Heck Tate—Sean Kootsey
- Judge Taylor—Nabih Saliba
- Reverend Sykes—Jonathan Harkness
- Mayella Ewell—Eleanor Hajduk
- Bob Ewell—Mike Bekowies
- Walter Cunningham—Gregory Snell
- Mr. Gilmer—Richard Aguilera
- Tom Robinson—George Cartwright
- Arthur (Boo) Radley—John Love
- Helen Robinson—Tammy Qualls
- Court Officials—John Pitton
- Samir Serrano
- Townspople—Keith Baptiste
- Arthur Branner
- Rebecca DeWind
- Gregory Hann
- Stacy Harper
- Ruth Prakasam
- Mandy Swanson
- Phillip Westerman