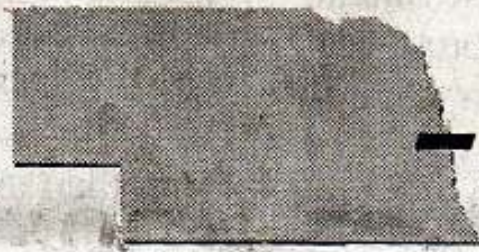


# A Fresh Look At Nebraska



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By LuAnn Schindler

A year before I was born, Harper Lee wrote a classic tale filled with universal truths about racism and injustice set in a depression-era, southern town.

Envisioned through the eyes of a 6-year-old narrator, "To Kill A Mockingbird" weaves the story of Boo Radley, Tom Robinson and Atticus Finch and his children Jem and Jean Louise, a.k.a. Scout.

At its best, it's a morality play full of meaningful, teachable layers. Atticus expects his children to treat everyone equally and respectfully. He establishes that tone early when he says, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

It's a principle Atticus emulates. He insists his children follow it, too.

The lesson reminds me of those I inherited from my parents. We were taught that everyone was created equally, that color of skin was simply a matter of tinting and some of us had more or less than others.

We accepted people for who they were, looking beyond stereotypes and idle gossip.

And, we were taught to treat others with respect, even if our point of view differed. We practiced the agree-to-disagree ideology and proved it's a viable solution when opposing perspectives clash.

But "To Kill A Mockingbird" also paints an ugly portrait of a divided society. The seemingly charming town of Maycomb, AL, resembles many small towns, even those located within our state's borders.

During the summer of 1968, my family spent our vacation in North Carolina while my dad completed coursework at UNC-Greensboro. Our nation attempted to come to terms with the civil rights movement, the untimely death of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the assassination of Bobby Kennedy.

I may have been just an 8-year-old Nebraska girl about to enter second grade, but life's lessons about race became clear as the Roanoke River that summer.

Our first night in Greensboro, we ate at the neighborhood Ben Franklin store. A circular lunch counter sat in the middle of the sales floor. Our family ate cheeseburgers and slurped root beer floats.

We sat alone at the counter. The other diners assembled around the other counter, which faced the kitchen wall.

We saw segregation nearly everywhere we went: the movie theater, grocery store and the swimming pool.

Ten years later, when my dad introduced the novel to my junior English class, he told us the book would change our lives and our thinking.

He was right.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel reminds me that in the 50 years since its debut, we are still a divided state and nation. We rush to judgment instead of seeking practical resolutions.

We continue to disregard the mockingbirds.

Scout's discovery about tolerance becomes abundantly clear in the final chapters. "Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough."

Stand on a fellow Nebraskan's porch. Acceptance takes courage, and courage isn't about winning an argument or picking sides. It's about doing what is right.

Share your thoughts about "To Kill A Mockingbird" at <http://lu-annschindler.com>.