

# Harper Lee's hometown welcomes eager buyers at midnight

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MONROEVILLE — Residents and visitors from as far away as Kentucky staked their claim in chairs and porch space at the Ol' Curiosities and Book Shop on West Claiborne Street late Monday night for the release of Harper Lee's "Go Set a Watchman."

Strands of lights ran from the porch to lampposts, and tables inviting visitors to sit awhile, dotted the lawn to the right of the shop. Chatter concerning rumors about the book lingered in the humidity.

Two minutes before midnight, Spencer Madrie announced that not everyone could pick up his or her full order at that time.

"We want to make sure everyone who pre-ordered will walk away with what they need tonight," Madrie said. "For those of you who ordered several, we will ship the rest to you."

A large crowd swarmed the porch of the bookshop. Madrie took a bottle of champagne from an employee of the shop and popped the cork at midnight. Julia Stroud, a Monroeville resident, became the first to climb the steps into the shop.

"I have been waiting since February for this day," Stroud said. "I'm going to start reading as soon as I get home."

Like most Monroeville residents, Stroud had heard rumors growing up about a second book.

"I'm beyond thrilled to have this exist in my hands," Stroud said.

Her sister, Judy May, drove from Florida for the event. "It was very important to me that she have a first-edition copy of this book," May said.

The rumors concerning Atticus Finch's character in the novel proved elusive to both sisters.

"We did not want to know anything," Stroud said. "I wanted to form my own opinions rather than



## Midnight Release of Go Set a Watchman

Monroeville residents and visitors from as far as Kentucky anxiously await the midnight release of Harper Lee's second book, "Go Set a Watchman," at Ol' Curiosities & Book Shop in Monroeville, Ala. on Monday, July 13, 2015. Kirsten Fiscus / The Anniston Star

have them skewed before I even turned to page one.”

As Monroeville awoke many had already turned to page one and beyond. Nancy Grisham Anderson was close to the end by the time she arrived at the Monroe County Library on Tuesday morning.

“I’m really sad I read a lot of the reviews,” Anderson said. “The book was set in the 1950s, not today. There are a lot of cultural factors that need to be taken into account. People need to learn to deal with it!”

Wayne Flynt, professor emeritus in the department of history at Auburn University, is the closest most people will get to Harper Lee. In a public forum inside the library, Flynt spoke on the evolution in Atticus’ character, other possible novels, and Lee’s life today.

“There are a lot of people who are not going to like the new Atticus,” Flynt said. “Atticus is the father I had in Anniston. He was born into this world. How many people of that time at his age weren’t a racist?”

Flynt continued on to explain that the differences between “To Kill a Mockingbird,” and “Go Set a Watchman,” is that one is a little girl idolizing her father, and the other is the portion of her life between 13 and 30 where she suddenly realizes he is not perfect.

“It is a transition that we all go through,” Flynt said. “I was enlightened about issues of race because my father worked so I could go to college. Does that mean I am morally superior? No, I just grew up in a different time. Atticus was doing what he would have needed to do to make a living in 1950s Alabama.”

Flynt does not condone Scout for her actions in the latest novel. He can, however, understand where they are coming from.

“I had slipped the bonds of racism and Anniston, but it is more complex than I thought,” he said. “Scout is just now having to battle those feelings.”

Most people would swear Harper Lee is Scout, but she would say she is more like Boo Radley, Flynt said. As most are aware, she is seldom seen outside of her nursing home these days, but that does not mean she is unhappy, Flynt said.

“Most of us would have given up at her age,” he said. “For Harper Lee, it is the interior world that grows the exterior world. She comes from the inside-out and she can live there in some kind of contentment like most people cannot. She’s an American enigma.”

The enigma that is Lee's life now has always been present in her according to Flynt.

"I never asked Nelle about her private life," Flynt said. "It was because of her sister I found out about another novel. I've heard rumors about a third, but I know for sure about a fourth."

The supposed fourth book is sort of a reprise of Lee's dear friend Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood," Flynt said.

"It follows the story of the Rev. Maxwell," he said. "Louise said this book was better than 'To Kill a Mockingbird,' and better than 'In Cold Blood.'"

Where that manuscript is today is unknown.

"My hope is that someone will see me on TV talking about it," he said. "My hope is someone will say, 'I have it, and it is time for me to give it up.'"

Flynt believes "Go Set a Watchman," will also transcend racism like "To Kill a Mockingbird" did.

"People in China do not read 'To Kill a Mockingbird' because of racism, they read it because of the tolerance it teaches," he said. "This novel is about tolerance and acceptance."

Whether or not these other manuscripts exist, Flynt is excited by the idea of them.

"Wouldn't it be ironic that the world's greatest single book author suddenly becomes a four-book author in the next four or five years," Flynt said. "Maybe the best is still to come!"