

By Christopher Murphy

A Little Bird Told Me

IN HARPER LEE'S CLASSIC 1960 NOVEL

To Kill a Mockingbird, the story's narrator, Scout Finch, notes a piece of advice that came to her from her father and which recurs throughout the book: "One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them."

This simple idea, that true understanding of the other—in Scout's case the mysterious and initially frightening neighbor, Boo Radley—requires that we develop a capacity for empathy. This concept is central to many of the critical issues that we face both as individuals and as a society. In this issue's cover story, "In Another's Shoes," Karen Leggett explores how international experience included in the curriculum of counseling and psychology programs is helping students to learn to have a cultural awareness that can help to build empathy in clinical settings.

Norman Epstein, director of the Couple and Family Therapy Program at the University of Maryland, explains in the article that putting counseling students into unfamiliar places where even some of their most basic assumptions about behaviors and values are not the accepted standard can be eye-opening. "We teach cultural sensitivity [in class] but this is firsthand experience." He tells his students to "be sensitive to people's communication styles. Meet people where they are." The very foreignness of the situations can often help students strip away some of their own preconceptions and be more in tune with the culture of the other.

Cecil Thomas, director of global affairs at the Adler School of Professional Psychology in Chicago, concurs that they want students' international experience to inform their professional practice whether it is at home in Chicago, or anywhere else. Thomas expects newly trained counselors to be "nimble enough to work with different populations in a culturally competent manner and also have a better understanding of their own individual identity."

In her novel, Lee took Scout, and her readers, on a journey from the loving home of her family into a more grown-up world of contradictions, fears, noble motivations, and ignoble prejudice. At the end of the book, the littlest Finch says to her father, Atticus, of her neighborhood bogeyman, Boo Radley, "he was real nice." "Most people are, Scout," Atticus replies, "when you finally see them."

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