

and keys and Chris on guitar. Within a couple of years, they performed Led Zep-
pelin's "Stairway to Heaven" for a small tal-
ent show in Fort Plain—their hometown
in rural upstate New York. By high school,
they had become local rock stars. Classic
albums were always playing at home. "The
Arndt household has a steadfast rule: we
can't have dinner without music playing in
the background," Jocelyn said. "Growing up,
Chris and I would take turns picking the
soundtrack before dinner...We both took
it very seriously."

Still, before hearing from Bourgeois, the
two thought their musical careers would
end after high school. Their parents were
both teachers. It just seemed like they'd
"go to college and then have college jobs,"
Chris said.

The December following their beer-
tent performance, Jocelyn was accepted
at Harvard. A month later, she and Chris
signed a record deal with Bourgeois. The
group, called Jocelyn & Chris Arndt, would
be filled out by a rotating cast of two or
three studio musicians, with Bourgeois
on drums. Jocelyn knew that moving to
Cambridge wouldn't shake her music re-
solve, even though her brother was four-
and-a-half hours away and writing songs
required long-distance correspondence.
Every weekend during the semester, she
returned to Albany to rehearse and tour.
"It worked, I think, because we kind of
thought that we could make it work,"
Jocelyn said. "People at Harvard are pretty
hardcore about everything, so I don't know
if my commitment seemed any crazier than
the next person's."

A year later, Chris joined her at Harvard.
They put the finishing touches on *Strangers
in Fairyland*, their first studio extended-play
record, and took a Greyhound bus out of
Boston every weekend to gig around the
East Coast. The proximity made it easier to
write songs ("Usually really late at night,"
Chris said) and plan tours.

Easier, of course, is relative. During a typi-
cal week they'd leave campus on Thursday,
travel for nine or 10 hours on a Friday, per-
form a show that night, travel another nine
or 10 hours on Saturday, perform another
show, and lug themselves back to cam-
pus on Sunday. Longer breaks meant more
elaborate tours. Weekend homework was
done in cars, trains, and hotel rooms be-
tween performances. Once, when a Chinese
final was scheduled during a tour, Jocelyn

O P E N B O O K

Harper Lee, Crime Reporter

Casey N. Cep '07, a former
Berta Greenwald Leddecky
Undergraduate Fellow at this
magazine, has since written
widely and well, for *The New
Yorker*, *The New York Times*,
and other publications. But
she has never written any-
thing like *Furious Hours: Mur-
der, Fraud, and the Last Trial of Harper Lee* (Knopf, \$26.95), her first book, on the dual
mysteries of a notorious crime and a famous novelist's attempt to write about it. The
gripping pace is established in the prologue.

...Hundreds of people were
crowded into the gallery, filling
the wooden benches that
squeaked whenever someone
moved or leaning against the
back wall if they hadn't arrived in
time for a seat. Late September
was not late enough for the Ala-
bama heat to have died down,
and the air-conditioning in the
courtroom wasn't working, so
the women waved fans while the
men's suits grew damp under
their arms and around their collars. The
spectators whispered from time to time,
and every so often they laughed—an un-
easy laughter that evaporated whenever
the judge quieted them.

The defendant was black, but the law-
yers were white, and so were the judge
and jury. The charge was murder in the
first degree. Three months before, at the
funeral of a 16-year-old girl, the man with
his legs crossed patiently beside the de-
fense table had pulled a pistol from the
inside pocket of his jacket and shot the
Reverend Willie Maxwell three times in
the head. Three hundred people had seen
him do it. Many of them were now at his
trial, not to learn why he had killed the
Reverend—everyone in three counties
knew that, and some were surprised no
one had done it sooner—but to under-
stand the disturbing series of deaths that
had come before the one they'd wit-
nessed.

One by one, over a period of seven
years, six people close to the Reverend
had died under circumstances that nearly
everyone agreed were suspicious and
some deemed supernatural. Through all
of the resulting investigations, the Rever-
end was represented by a lawyer named

Harper Lee



Tom Radney, whose presence in the
courtroom that day wouldn't have been
remarkable had he not been there to de-
fend the man who killed his former client.
A Kennedy liberal in the Wallace South,
Radney was used to making headlines, and
this time he would make them far beyond
the local *Alexander City Outlook*. Report-
ers...had flocked to Alexander City to
cover what was already being called the
tale of the murderous voodoo preacher
and the vigilante who shot him.

One of the reporters, though, wasn't
constrained by a daily deadline. Harper
Lee lived in Manhattan but still spent some
of each year in Monroeville...only 150
miles away from Alex City. Seventeen
years had passed since she'd published *To
Kill a Mockingbird* and 12 since she'd fin-
ished helping her friend Truman Capote
report the crime story in Kansas that be-
came *In Cold Blood*. Now, finally, she was
ready to try again...She would spend a
year in town investigating the case, and
many more turning it into prose. The mys-
tery in the courtroom that day was what
would become of the man who shot the
Reverend Willie Maxwell. But for decades
after the verdict, the mystery was what
became of Harper Lee's book.