

A black and white portrait of a man with short, light-colored hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark, patterned button-down shirt and has his hands clasped in front of his chin. The background is dark and out of focus.

# Ronnie Horton

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Legacy Scholarship

CREATIVE CLASSICS  
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## A Quote

*What Ronnie wanted most was for everyone to succeed. He wanted them to be the best that they could be. And he led by example. That is his greatest legacy.*

**Nancy Horton**

Providing financial assistance for education is a proud tradition that dates back to ancient Greece when Aristotle hit up his former student, Alexander the Great, to help underwrite his new school in Athens. Back then, schooling was mostly a perk of the aristocracy because teaching was done by private tutors, so those on the lower rungs of the social ladder sought out individual benefactors to pay for their tutelage.

Over the millennia scholarships became more formalized, and by the nineteenth century in the United States, they were typically provided by either schools and education groups, religion-based organizations, or corporate America. As time goes on they seem to become more targeted: for a university to attract the best and brightest, to assist families in a particular industry, to promote a particular brand, or to help members of an underserved community achieve educational and economic parity.

In the case of the Ronnie Horton Legacy Scholarship,

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which will be administered by the National Grocers Association (NGA), the purpose goes beyond \$1,250 in financial assistance for two recipients in the grocery business; it's both a posthumous homage to a mentor who personified servant leadership and an opportunity to pay it forward.

The scholarship was the brainchild of Bill Kasko and Mike Cook, who worked together at Brookshire Grocery Company (Brookshire's) as teenagers and were the beneficiaries of being taken under his managerial wing, although the influence went far beyond the grocery business.

"He was a mentor and influenced me at a time in my life that I needed a strong father figure to direct me," Bill says. "He did the same thing for Mike."

In a case of one degree of separation, Bill's company, Frontline Source Group, is one of the fastest-growing placement firms in the US. Thirty-five years after they were together at Brookshire, they were reunited when Mike

joined Frontline as an executive recruiter in the grocery division.

“It’s been a blessing working together again,” Bill says.

Now a successful entrepreneur, talking to Mike reinforced how influential Ronnie had been in helping Bill navigate his adult professional life as well as creating a company culture that puts customer service front and center and values each employee. Bill wanted to honor Ronnie’s legacy in a more tangible way than just saying thank you in prayers, one that would help others find their path the way Ronnie had helped him.

“For years I was disturbed that no one ever recognized what he contributed to a level that was needed.

So along with Mike, we were able to secure a scholarship to help in sending two individuals to college in his name, after having the family bless it, and now we can announce the Ronnie Horton Legacy Scholarship to the world.”

Mike admits the response to the scholarship has been an emotional experience. “When Bill and I discussed the idea of a scholarship to honor Mr. Horton, I never imagined that it would reach this level. First and foremost, not one but two legacy scholarships have been established. And second, the National Grocers Association was so moved by the nature of the scholarship that it’s helping promote the scholarship, so those who need it can apply. I hope the stories shared here about Mr. Horton will hopefully inspire others.”

While Ronnie’s time on Earth may have been abruptly cut short by a brain tumor in 2003, by all accounts life did not pass him by; he lived a full life filled with family, friends, laughter, and accomplishment. And although his work ethic brought him career advancement and financial success, it was his character and humanity that set Ronnie apart—an inherent ability to connect with people, the way he treated everyone from C-suite peers to grocery baggers with respect and dignity, and his commitment to helping others

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succeed—and that has defined his legacy.

While the beneficiaries of the scholarship that bears his name may never get to meet Ronnie in person, they can get a sense of the man through the following remembrances of coworkers and protégés whose professional and personal lives he impacted and also from those who knew and loved him best: his family.

**"WHEN BILL AND I  
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*Mike Cook*



# ✦ FAMILY ✦

Ronnie Horton's wife Nancy can recall the exact day they met: September 5, 1966.

“It was the first day of classes for Tyler Junior College., and a mutual friend introduced us, saying we would be great together.”

But Nancy admits she wasn't so sure about that at first.

“When I first met him, he was majoring in agribusiness, and I kind of turned my nose up at it because back then I was shallow and wore blinders.” Still, she says, “I did think he was cute.”

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When Ronnie said they had been in the same high school graduating class, Nancy didn't believe him.

"I knew he was flirting," she recalls with a laugh. "But then he told me which classes I was taking and who I walked out of class with. So I wondered: Well, why didn't I see you? Then he told me that he was only in school half days because he was in the agriculture program and spent the rest of the school day at a farm with animals. Now, even though I grew up in East Texas, I had nothing to do with farms and agriculture. I had never even been in a pickup truck at that time. And here he was studying to be a future farmer. So no, I wouldn't have noticed him in high school. But I sure did in college, and our relationship developed."

After two years at the junior college, they both transferred to East Texas State in Commerce, Texas (now called Texas A&M at Commerce), where Nancy lived in a dorm, and Ronnie lived in a campus apartment. They got married in 1969, the summer before their senior year.

Nancy, a retired teacher with a PhD in education, says academics were her joy. For Ronnie ... not so much.

“He was a good old boy more interested in outdoors and mowing the lawn and working for Brookshire’s, where he started working as a bagger when he was fourteen.”

The Brookshire name has been a grocery institution since September 1921 when Austin and Tom Brookshire opened the first Brookshire Brothers store. Within a few years the family business had expanded to more than thirty Brookshire stores in East Texas. But in 1928 cousins Wood and W. A. Brookshire withdrew from the company to go out on their own, starting the Brookshire Grocery Company with four stores in Tyler. By the late 1960s there were more than thirty Brookshire Grocery stores in East Texas, which were all founded with a commitment to customers and the community. In later years there was a sign in each company breakroom that read: *People first and profits will follow.* It’s a company that calls employees *partners*. It was that people-centric philosophy that enabled Ronnie to attend

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college, where he found the love of his life.

Brookshire's helped Ronnie fulfill his college dreams. "Brookshire's had a program back then for employees they saw potential in," Nancy explains. "The company paid for his college—tuition, books, living expenses. They believed in him, and in turn he was loyal to Brookshire's." That dedication created challenges. Nancy says college was a four-year struggle for Ronnie; on top of taking a full course load, he was also still working sixty- plus hours a week at the store, learning and excelling at every level of that business.

But for as diligent he was at tasks, Nancy says away from school and work he was "a goofball kind of person, enjoyed having fun. There was one time in junior college we broke up for a month or two, and my daddy made the mistake of saying: *You know Nancy, I'm kind of glad you and Ronnie broke up 'cause he sure is silly.* So when we got back together, he had to eat his words. But the truth is, he loved Ronnie and later in life was always going on about

how wonderful Ronnie was helping take care of him. My daddy died in July 2001, and one of my first thoughts after we got Ronnie's diagnosis was: *I'm so glad Daddy's already gone because he couldn't handle Ronnie dying.*"

After they graduated in 1971, the young couple's life together became one of constant relocation—moving up the corporate ladder in the grocery business was a lot like being in the military.

"It feels like we moved ten thousand times," Nancy laughs. "Brookshire's kept assigning him to different stores in the region, so we must have lived in at least twenty different residences, as far west as Plano, Texas, and as far east as Monroe, Louisiana. And that also made it hard for me to get a teaching job. But I knew it was part of his job, and I always supported him 100 percent. Although I would tease him, saying: You get to decide where we live because Brookshire's decides that. So you DO understand I get to make all the other decisions, right? For the longest time I really thought I did. Then after about ten years of marriage,

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I realized that even though he never argued with me, he still managed to get his way a lot. That was Ronnie for you.”

In 1975 Ronnie was promoted to district manager, was named western division manager in 1990, western division vice president a year later, then western division senior vice president in 1997, and finally senior vice president-director of retail operations in 2000. Despite the ever-increasing responsibility, Ronnie thrived.

“His job—working with people, dealing with customers—was his passion the way teaching was my passion,” Nancy says. “He fit with Brookshire’s like a glove. And he loved that company to the day he died. But he never had a problem juggling his dedication to work with family and God.”

Nor did he let his lofty position at work color his homelife. “He never really brought any work problems home,” Nancy says. “He would come home, change clothes, walk into the kitchen where our son and maybe some of his friends were not paying attention to him. And Ronnie

would say: *You know, honey, the minute I walk into a store, people speak to me. I walk into my own house, which is supposed to be a man's castle, and everybody just keeps doing what they're doing, not even looking up.*"

"I told him: *Yeah, but at the store you pay those people.* And he would laugh. I'd always tell him it was my job to keep him grounded, but in truth he was a genuinely humble person. While he was a shining star in the grocery business, he knew he wasn't perfect. He wasn't ever the smartest in his class; he wasn't an athlete, and he wasn't the most coordinated. So he was humbled in that way and understood people will make mistakes."

Which is not to say he didn't expect people to meet his standards. But he managed with hands-on teaching to build people up, not belittlement or anger.

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# **PEOPLE FIRST AND THE PROFITS WILL FOLLOW**

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“He wanted them to know that he supported their career,” Nancy observes. “Even though the buck stopped with him, and if people under his management messed up, it could reflect badly on him, he wanted them to understand that he was on their team. And he would never expect any of them to do something that he wouldn’t do himself. Even when he got to the top, if somebody spilled something on Aisle Ten at a store he was at, Ronnie knew where the mop was. He would go to the back room, get the mop, and clean the spill up. He would show that he was part of their team, and he loved helping them succeed.

“Now, to help them succeed, he might need to be stern. But then he was just as likely to say afterward: Go home and rest and then meet me back here in the morning, and we’ll get this straight. I think he took the best of every boss he ever had and became a better boss than all of them. But I’m biased.”

As a teenager, Ronnie’s son Matt started working at a local Brookshire’s and got to see his father’s management

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style firsthand. “He came into the store with a big smile on his face, and he would walk up to the cashiers and stockers and other people working the floor and ask about you and your family and just make you feel like you were wanted. You could see those people loved him, absolutely loved him because here is the big boss, Mr. Horton, appreciating you. There was also a rue caring for him. It was the managers who got shaky knees.”

Matt says it wasn't so much that they were intimidated by his father as much as knowing he was exacting and wanting to meet his standards.

“I've heard the same story from multiple store directors: that they would walk into their store at like 5:00 a.m., and my dad was already there—probably on his third cup of coffee—with two full pages of notes. They would basically then have their ass chewed out but in a respectful way, and then Dad would leave, and the manager would be thinking: I feel good about that visit. That's the way he dealt with people.”

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Longtime acquaintance Allan Bussey agrees, noting that people found Ronnie relatable. “Whatever their roles or whatever their income levels, it didn’t make a difference to Ronnie. It was never a big me, little you type thing. He could identify with all people and made people feel at ease.”

Noting how management philosophies have evolved, Allan believes Ronnie was ahead of his time. “Back when I was coming up in business in the eighties and early nineties, the management style back then was: Do it and don’t ask questions. That was an accepted attitude. If you don’t like it, you can go find something else. But if you didn’t understand, he never made you feel small. Ronnie would explain things, which is why he would have been just as effective a leader today as he was twenty years ago. Today’s generations want to know why things are done the way they are. They want context. It requires a different style of leadership today, the kind Ronnie had.”

Allan explains that Ronnie was just as likely to communicate with hands-on actions as with words.

“It didn’t take him hours of sitting behind the desk to explain something. A lot of times he would work beside you and show you how he wanted something done and explain it. But if you didn’t understand, he never made you feel small. I adopted that leadership style from him.”

Allan also notes that one of Ronnie’s superpowers was an instinct for people who would be a good Brookshire’s fit—and not just teens just starting out like Bill and Mike.

Donnie Byars worked for one of Brookshire’s vendors and flew onto Ronnie’s radar one morning when Donnie noticed a man wandering around the store.

“I thought the guy was lost, so I asked: *Can I help you find something, sir?* He kind of laughed and said no and walked away. As I was leaving the store a little later, the store manager told me that man was his boss Ronnie Horton. *And he told me I needed to hire you.* I said there was one condition: I had to give my current employer a three-week notice. He said no problem, so in 1983 I went to work for Brookshire’s. And I stayed for thirty-five years.”

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Donnie says what stood out about Ronnie to him was his passion for people. “I hope that whoever the scholarships are awarded to gets the chance to talk to people who knew Ronnie, to learn about who he was and what he stood for—his love for people, his love for his company, and how he conducted himself—so it won’t be just about financial help but something that helps them for a lifetime and helps them grow in their career. Ronnie knew that if his people succeeded, then our company would succeed. He was a true servant leader. Not only to the customers but also to the people that he worked with every day.”

Ronnie’s son, Matt Horton, who is now a vice president at a credit union in Tyler, notes that while executives must keep an eye on the bottom line, the best ones understand that to have a strong bottom line, you need a productive workforce. And the most productive workers feel appreciated, well-compensated, and most importantly, respected.

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In 2004–2005 Matt was in a management training program at Brookshire’s. In the wake of his father’s death, he heard even more stories. One of the more surprising and heartfelt came from a manager named Jeff.

*“He told me that my dad came in and said: Jeff, I’m going to tell you this right now. I think you’ve got a lot of potential, but you’re not doing what you need to do right now, and you’ve been in trouble. So I’m here to fire you. But you know what? You’re going to go out of here, you’re going to find another job, you’re going to grow up, and you’re going to come back here with a new lease on life. Jeff told me he walked out of the meeting cussing my dad out. Then he added: But I went out, and I got another job, and I grew up, and I came back to work.*

*“I said, ‘Yes sir, Mr. Horton, I sure did.’*

*“He said, ‘Okay, good.’”*

*“It was so weird to see how my dad could instill fear and respect simultaneously,” Matt says. “There was definitely an integrity about how he went about things;*

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he was never overbearing.”

Neither as a manager nor a father.

“Yes, he expected me to do the best that I could,” Matt says, “but he was invested—in whether or not I was happy, whether or not I was being treated right at school, whether or not I was treating people right. That I have integrity about what I was doing. He wasn’t pressuring me to some aura of success that he had defined in his mind; he just wanted to make sure that I was growing and learning.”

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*Donnie Byars*

Matt admits there were a few times in his youth when Ronnie called him out and made it clear an attitude adjustment was in order.

“He had to pull me back a little bit and say, That’s not the way you treat people. That was the most straightforward I ever saw him because he was always invested in how you interacted with people, how you treated people—your integrity. He taught me that we could have integrity about our jobs and interact with people on a friendship level, but there’s still a hierarchy. There’s a catchphrase that gets thrown around way too much—servant leadership. But I promise you, servant leadership was personified in Ronnie Horton. And that goes to what he instilled in me: the number one asset to any company is the people who work there.”

It wasn’t just Ronnie’s son who believed he was a man who not only talked the management talk but walked the servant leadership walk. A memorial article published in a 2003 issue of Brookshire Briefs included testimonials from

coworkers alluding to his rare combination of business savvy and people skills.

As Nancy notes, death can sometimes arrive with rose-colored glasses. “When somebody passes, it seems they just become a saint to everybody. And Ronnie was a wonderful husband. But nobody is perfect. And Ronnie was not a perfect man at home or work. But goodness gracious, he was genuine with people. You can know the skills, but I don’t think you can put the skill into action unless you have the heart and soul for it. And he did.”

For many who worked for or with Ronnie, the impact he had on their lives and leadership philosophies didn’t become truly clear until distilled through the perspective of time.



**IF THERE WERE A  
POPULARITY CONTEST AT  
BROOKSHIRE GROCERY CO.,  
RONNIE WOULD ABSOLUTELY  
WIN FIRST PLACE. EVERYONE  
WHO HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF  
KNOWING RONNIE LOVED  
HIM. HE WILL BE  
REMEMBERED FOR HIS  
WINSOME SMILE, HIS  
AMAZING GIFT OF  
FRIENDSHIP, AND HIS DAILY  
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*Britt Brookshire*

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GLORY OF FRIENDSHIP IS  
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OUTSTRETCHED HAND, THE  
WARM SMILE, OR THE  
COMPANIONSHIP. IT'S THE  
SPIRITUAL CONNECTION  
THAT COMES WHEN YOU  
DISCOVER A FRIEND WHO  
BELIEVES IN YOU AND  
TRUSTS YOU. THAT WAS MY  
FRIEND, RONNIE. HE WAS  
ALWAYS THERE FOR ME.**

*Johnny Skelton*

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**RONNIE SHOWED THE SAME  
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HAS TOLD ME WHAT A GREAT  
FRIEND AND MENTOR HE  
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FORGIVE A PERSON'S  
MISTAKES AND ENCOURAGE  
THEM TO MAKE HIM PROUD—  
AND NO ONE WANTED TO LET  
RONNIE DOWN.**

*Jimmie Horton*

# ✦ **TURNING POINTS** ✦

The thing about turning points is that you're usually unaware you're at one except in hindsight. When Bill Kasko applied for a job at Brookshire his senior year in high school, he had no idea just how much it would inform his future.

“In 1983 I interviewed to be a courtesy clerk, which is what they called a bagger back then,” Bill says.

“Brookshire’s was opening a brand-new store in Plano, Texas.”

The father of this then-girlfriend had suggested it,

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saying it would be a great opportunity, even if for just a summer job. So Bill applied and interviewed with the district manager: Ronnie Horton.

“He hired me on the spot and then took me around and introduced me to the store manager and a couple of others. And that was kind of it.”

Bill says a few months later, his parents abruptly split up, and his father took off, leaving Bill and his three younger siblings in the financial lurch. Bill was about to graduate from high school and now had no idea how he was going to pay for college. He confided in one of the assistant managers, Joey Shelton, about his situation. Joey explained that Brookshire’s had a scholarship program for individuals they felt had potential.

“I had no idea,” Bill says. “Then Joey tells me: *You need to go to Mr. Horton. I’m like, I’m a courtesy clerk. I make \$4 an hour.* But Joey set up a meeting anyway. Mr. Horton was this big bear when you looked at him, and yet when you spoke with him, he was just this gentle power.

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I told him what was going on, and he said he would make a couple of calls. I think you would be fantastic as a representative for our scholarship program. I was blown away. And sure enough, that's exactly what he did. They awarded me a scholarship to go to school. The only condition was I had to maintain a C average, and they paid for my books and tuition. And so I started down the path of going to school during the day and still working at the store as a night stocker.”

Bill says his schedule was to get home at six in the morning from work. Sleep till about noon. Go to an afternoon class. Come home and try to study. Sleep a little bit. Then go to work at 11:00. Every night.

“It was very difficult. But even though I wasn't taking a full course load, I felt like I was moving along with my education and that my career path was being set because I was moving up that ladder through different positions, was transferred to different stores, and ended up at a premier store as the lead assistant manager.”

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But eventually his snail's pace progress at school— after a few years, he was still not close to a diploma— because of his work commitments became untenable to Bill.

“I just never saw an end to finishing school if things didn't change.”

Throughout this time, Ronnie had maintained an interest in Bill, following his ascension through the Brookshire ranks. And Bill loved working there.

“This is how much I loved this career: This hip young guy happily wore a white shirt and black bowtie to work every day,” he says. “I was proud of what I was doing. So one of the darkest days I had in my youth was the visit with Mr. Horton where I told him that I wanted to go back to school full-time and wanted to step down as assistant manager. I didn't want to work sixty, eighty hours a week anymore.”

Not that the long hours had been an issue. Bill says he went six months without a weekend off but never once

questioned it—because of Ronnie.

“There was a group of us guys who all worked together, and we were so dedicated to him. The respect we had for him ... we worked for him, for his approval. I don’t know how he did it,” Bill admits. “It wasn’t even that he expected it; he just knew we would do whatever it took to get the job done.”

Even so, when Bill told Ronnie he needed to step down to finish school, he assumed he’d get fired before he could resign. Instead, he asked Bill what he needed to make it work.

“I told him I wanted to keep working, but just part time. So he sent me to a store where I could work ten hours a week—at a ridiculously high hourly part-time wage that was unheard of back then. And I know that the manager of the store probably wasn’t real happy, but he was at least a friend of mine,” Bill laughs. “But Mr. Horton wanted to make sure I was taken care of financially, and he understood how driven I was to get my degree.”



Despite Ronnie's largesse, Bill soon realized even ten hours a week was too much. "I was so tied in that I needed to completely separate. So the next worst day of my young life was telling Mr. Horton I needed to quit and leave the company. His expression was sheer disappointment."

The loss Bill felt would eventually turn to gratitude when he realized that even though he left the company, the lessons Ronnie taught by example would be a part of him forever.

"None of us were very close with our father. But my years with Mr. Horton really brought home that you can have a career and a family and treat people with respect because I watched him with his son and how he interacted with us at work. He instilled those philosophies in people that actually would resonate years later. He was that father figure to me. I've run a company now for almost twenty years and have hundreds of employees, and we've won several awards for being the best staffing agency to work for. I would sometimes wonder what I was doing right

other companies weren't, and then I realized I was just following Mr. Horton's lead."

Meaning, showing employees respect and compassion while making clear what is expected usually instills loyalty, commitment, and productivity in return.

"I actually hear it a lot from people: they don't want to disappoint me, just like we didn't want to ever disappoint Mr. Horton. He came across in a way to say: Get it done, or I'm gonna kick your rear end, and then he would turn around and go: You wanna go grab lunch? And that's the same way that I operate today. Because of him."

Bill says even though he hadn't talked to Ronnie in decades, his death left him shaken. "In 2003 there wasn't Twitter, Facebook, or other social media like there is today. So news didn't travel quite as fast. I got a phone call at my office from a woman named Lisa Shields I had worked with at Brookshire's. Like with a lot of people there, we'd gone to high school together. She asked me if I'd heard that Mr. Horton had passed away. I was sitting at my desk, with all

these people around me, and tears came down my face. I hung up and said I had to go home. People thought I'd lost a member of my family, which is exactly what it felt like."

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*Bill Kasko*

What has sat most heavily on Bill were words left unsaid. "I never had an opportunity to go back and tell him: *Thank you.*"

The only time he'd seen Ronnie after leaving Brookshire's had been a few years earlier on a golf outing. "I was playing with a bunch of guys and hit a ball that sailed right through a window of a home that was under

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construction.

“The homeowner came out, and I look at him: Mr. Horton? And he goes: Bill Kasko, did you hit this golf ball in my house? I said: If I’d known it was your house, I would have aimed better. And that was the last time I ever saw him. Since he died I’ve wished many times that I had thanked him and made sure he knew how many lives he had influenced and changed. I needed closure but never knew how exactly to do it.”

Until Mike Cook joined his company and they shared many of their experiences at Brookshire’s and what Ronnie meant to them. “We knew that there was a scholarship program with NGA, and about ten minutes later it was a done deal—contingent on getting his family’s blessing, which we got.”

The applicants will be asked to write an essay about the person who has influenced them the most so far in their life, in what way, and how they think that will impact their future. Nancy and Matt will participate in determining

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the scholarship candidates.

“As I told Nancy and Matt—who looks so much like his dad—our desire is that this scholarship will remind people that the ones who influence you the most today will resonate throughout your life if you are open to listening and accepting mentorship.

“I’ve done pretty well in life, and I know Mr. Horton was the foundation for that success by teaching me your people are so important, take care of the business, and just do the right thing. I live that every day.”

Like Bill, Mike Cook got his first job via typical Brookshire’s serendipity. “I walked into Brookshire’s with a friend, and the manager at that time said: *Hey kid, you want a job?* I had just turned sixteen, and it was time for me to go to work. So I said sure and started working in a grocery store. Mr. Horton was the district manager, so he had several stores in our district. He was a tall man, and when he walked in he had this presence about him. He was the boss and expected production, so he was firm but fair.

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He was also approachable. He had a great smile, and you'd always get a laugh when you talked with Mr. Horton."

From the beginning Ronnie believed Mike was a good Brookshire fit and took an early interest in trying to convince Mike of the same thing.

"One day he asked me about my long-term career goals. He asked: *What do you think about staying with us?* I admitted that I wasn't sure and told him that all of my family had always worked in and around the oil industry. This was shortly after the oil bust, and a lot of people in oil-producing areas were unemployed and financially hurting."

Ronnie suggested another career option. "He told me: *People have to eat. Remember that. This is a business. You're not just working at a grocery store; you're in an industry that serves the community through food.* It was the first time I realized that you could have a career in an industry that's not glamorous. But one where you can be proud and take care of your family."

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Ronnie promoted Mike through the ranks quickly and named him an overnight grocery manager when Mike was eighteen. “A year later Mr. Horton had enough confidence in my ability and my maturity that he promoted me to an assistant manager. A nineteen-year-old in that position was really unheard of, but Brookshire’s liked to promote from within. Mr. Horton saw something in me, and I was so appreciative. To put that kind of trust in me went a long way.”

Obviously aware that he was putting a lot of responsibility on a teenager, Ronnie offered Mike some words of advice. “He sat me down and said: *I know you’re young. I know you’re going to face some obstacles because of it. You’re gonna have to earn people’s respect. But do not throw a title in their face; earn their respect instead. I want you to make decisions. And remember, if you take care of the customer and you uphold the policies of Brookshire’s—which was jump-over-the-counter service of always putting the customer first—there’s nothing you can do that can’t be*

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*fixed."*

Ronnie was also there to offer sage words when Mike was promoted to store director at the same store where he had worked at sixteen bagging groceries.

"He came by that first week, pulled me aside, and gave me another pep talk. The buck stops with you. Make those decisions and stand with them. But just remember, there are some people who are looking at you in a different light. He was very reassuring that I had earned the position. I tried to show genuine appreciation on several occasions during that conversation, but he stopped me. *All I did was give you a chance, so quit thanking me. You earned this.* He spoke in simple statements that had such profound meaning."

Mike also worked with Ronnie's son, Matt, and says managing the boss's son was a bit nerve-racking. "I was the one who gave Matt his first-ever work performance evaluation. Not long after, I got a phone call from Mr. Horton."



Mike, this is Ronnie.

Yes, sir.

Did you give Matthew an evaluation?

Yes, sir.

Did you tell Matthew that he needed to hustle a little more?

(Pause) Yes, sir.

After a slew of other questions, I stopped him. Mr. Horton, I just got married a few weeks ago. Am I about to get fired? I'd sure like to know because this is killing me. He laughed and said, No. I just appreciate the fact that you're treating Matthew like you would any other partner and not giving him special favors. It was just another example that he treated everyone equally, even his own son."

During the thirty-two years he worked at Brookshire's, Mike says he often found himself giving the same pep talks to other partners that Ronnie had given him. "Those simple statements that had profound meaning became standard to me because they were the fundamentals that Mr. Horton

provided, which enabled me to have a career and take care of my family. And not just me. Over the years I watched him influence just so many people. And whenever we would get together from, as an assistant manager group, and then later on in this store director group, his name was always brought up in some facet.”

**PEOPLE HAVE TO EAT.  
REMEMBER THAT. THIS  
IS A BUSINESS. YOU’RE  
NOT JUST WORKING AT A  
GROCERY STORE; YOU’RE  
IN AN INDUSTRY THAT  
SERVES THE  
COMMUNITY THROUGH  
FOOD.**

*Ronnie Horton*

Even though many people thought of Ronnie as their mentor, Nancy doesn't think her husband saw himself in that light. "But the reason he was such a great mentor," she observes, "is because he respected each individual person—whether in work, out of work, wherever—as an individual human being and respected them. What Ronnie wanted most was for everyone to succeed. He wanted them to be the best that they could be. And he led by example. That is his greatest legacy."