



## Gregory J. "Ronnie" Yon

June 23, 1929 - December 25, 2020

Gregory J. (Ronnie) Yon passed away Christmas day, December 25, 2020 at his home. He is survived by his two sons, Gregory H. Yon of Tallahassee, and J. Spence Yon and daughter-in-law Terri Yon of Monticello, Florida, as well as several nieces and nephews. He is preceded in death by his wife of 49 years and the love of his life, Betty Hall Yon. Ronnie was of the Baptist faith.

The following narrative, an incredible life journey, was written by Ronnie himself.

"The sea. It had me at first sight. I was in a salt marsh on a small white beach near Panacea. I was 12 years old. Its beauty and its pull never left me, through all my years. I was born June 23, 1929 in Leon County, Florida. My parents were Emmanuel M. Yon and Odie Spencer Yon, who brought their family to Leon County from Holmes County, Florida, looking for work. The nation was in a deep depression and their turpentine and crosstie business dried up. My brothers and sisters were Earl B. Yon, Donnie Yon, Jewell Spears, Myrtle McKenzie and half-brother Dee Davis, all deceased.

Growing up during a deep depression and being poor was pretty tough. I made a wooden shoe shine box and somehow managed to buy Shinola and Sole Dressing. This endeavor failed quite miserably, leaving me with a lot of shoe polish and in debt to the country store. My childhood friend Clark Walker and I sold the Daily Democrat downtown and a few times at Dale Mabry Field, I also worked at Nathan Ong's Monroe Street Piggly Wiggly and Rob Roy Ashmore's drug store on west Brevard Street.

My chance for fame and fortune came in 1940. I was chosen for a screen test to play the part of 12-year-old Jody Baster for the film version of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' 1938 Pulitzer prize novel "The Yearling". The tests were filmed at radio station WTAL, then located where Betton Place stands today. I was scared to death, but the sandwiches they served were very good! War was declared in 1941. Everything shut down. Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn returned to Hollywood. The movie was finally made in the 1946 starring Gregory Peck, Jane Wyman and Claude Jarman, Jr. as their son Jody Baster. Claude was from Georgia.

I transferred to Leon high from Florida high in 1947 to play football. The war had almost shut Florida High down. Jobs were very hard to find and I was lucky to find one at the F.S.U. Dairy Farm. It was hard work and meager pay, but the farm was a beautiful piece of nature to labor in. It spread over several hundred acres of pastures with rising and gentle sloping hills dotted with majestic old oaks, some dripping with Spanish moss. To add to this beauty, a large fresh water pond glittered in the sun just yards from the barns and silo. Its bounty was Bass, Bream, Shell Crackers and frogs. In the summer of 1944, my lifelong friend Larry Levy (who had been a first grader with me at the FSCW Demonstration School) caught a 1 3/4lb. Shell Cracker in the pond! The farm was run by the legendary J.P. Love and furnished F.S.U.'s dining hall with fresh produce, mostly corn and snap peas. The dairy was overseen by Maj. Merrill Futch and supplied the dining room with pints of chocolate milk and regular pasteurized milk. You could see 2 inches of pure yellow cream in each bottle! The work was hard, especially for the new hand. It included mending fences and cleaning drainage ditches with a shovel where cottonmouths hung out. Most enjoyable was being on horseback in the spring bringing in the Holsteins and Jerseys from the pasture and riding the fence lines, hearing crows on the move call and seeing clover turn green on what is now F.S.U. Golf Course. I was allowed on the weekends to choose two horses from the stable for moonlight rides in the hills with those pretty high school and college girls. Now that was fun! We worked seven days a week at the

dairy with one day off per month. Cows have to be milked twice a day every day, bring what - storms, rain, sleet and freezes. Tough, but fair.

Jobs were scarce, my luck changed. There was an opportunity with the State Road Department and I was hired by the Bureau of Right of Way. I worked there in Right of Way over 30 years in several positions, the last on as Deputy Bureau Chief. I was there on June 29, 1956 when the interstate system became law and was privileged to watch Malcolm Yancey, the Engineer of Right of Way, create three possible locations through Leon County on a huge table model he had made to scale. Final alignment was made by several state and federal levels. I was particularly proud to have been with the Bureau when we acquired the rights of way on that stretch of I-10 from Alabama state line to the gator Bowl in Jacksonville, Florida, 361 miles.

My most cherished years, 20 of them, were spent with my wife Betty at Inlet Beach enjoying our home and the beauty around it ...where, after pancake breakfasts, we took long walks on the incomparable sugar white sand by the cerulean sea and dredged for sand flies to catch Pompano; where we sat on the upper deck with drinks watching spectacular sunsets light up, beautiful thunderheads, pelicans gliding the thermals in long lazy gray lines and contrails of sky-high jets flying somewhere far south. Perhaps to a romantic Caribbean island; where there were suppers of "Frogmore Stew", a low country boil that was filled with fresh corn on the cob, large unpeeled shrimp, red potatoes, crabs, Cajun seasoning and a pot of melted butter and lemon wedges. To me, Betty made the best on the beach, shared and enjoyed with family and friends - and where I enjoyed spending many afternoons with my favorite authors; Hemingway, Faulkner, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Mark Twain and Peter Hathaway Capstick.

As with every beautiful place near water, Inlet Beach has rapidly and dramatically changed. It is now packed with trophy homes. I don't get over there very often anymore. But I enjoy my yard here in spring & summer and my fireplace in the winter when it's cold and raining; two ounces of Dewar's on

the rocks; Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller and Sinatra on the CD player; and the smell of Pot Roast waiting in the oven. What a lovely way to spend an evening. I still visit vicariously. Sometimes I sit on the screened porch and listen to the cicadas and crickets perform their evening symphony from the scrub oak and pine. I hear the soothing sounds of an incoming tide, breaking against the hard sand, and stretching to the far horizon...Lies the sea...And the sea...And the sea."

A graveside service will be held at 1:00 PM, Wednesday, December 30th at Roselawn Cemetery in Tallahassee.

Ronnie was a very generous man; always doing or giving freely to others. In lieu of flowers please give to your favorite cause in his name.

Rocky Bevis of Bevis Funeral Home of Tallahassee (850/385-2193 or [www.bevisfh.com](http://www.bevisfh.com)) is assisting the Yon family with their arrangements

# Cemetery Details

## Roselawn Cemetery

815 West Piedmont Drive  
Tallahassee, FL 32308

# Previous Events

## Graveside Service

DEC 30. 1:00 PM (ET)

Roselawn Cemetery  
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Tallahassee, FL 32308

# Tribute Wall

DL

“ *Ronnie was a couple of years older than me when we attended school together at the old “Demonstration School” and Leon High — but that made no difference to Ronnie — he was a friend to everyone he met. Younger or older, he reached out to everyone. He was a true gentleman, a first-rate man, and a credit to his generation. I haven’t seen Ronnie in years, but I have always kept him in my memory. ...and will continue to do so.*

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**Dave Lang** - December 30, 2020 at 10:27 AM

KE

“ *While saddened by the loss of Uncle Ronnie, I'm thankful he lived such a long and healthy life. I would have to say one of my fondest memories occurred when he drove us to Wakulla Springs about 45 years ago ( i must have been 6 or 7 ) and he asked me if I would take a break from talking so much. We laughed about that on several occasions!*

*Greg and Spence, although I will not be there tomorrow know you are in my thoughts and prayers during this difficult time. Look forward to seeing you soon.*

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**KEITH ENGLISH** - December 29, 2020 at 11:33 PM

PR

“ *Sweetest man will always have a piece of my heart Love Patricia Ann Robb*

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**Patricia Sutton Robb** - December 29, 2020 at 03:44 PM