



## Dr. Nancy Carolyn Heath Hightower Cole

March 20, 1937 - November 7, 2017

Dr. Nancy Carolyn Heath Hightower Cole (March 20, 1937 – November 7, 2017) passed away in Madisonville, Texas, in the home in which she was raised. Nancy’s upbringing in Madisonville—surrounded by a close community that valued faith, family, and friends—shaped the person she became. As the daughter of Dr. Heath, the town’s physician, Nancy learned the importance of serving others and treating everyone with dignity and respect.

Nancy attended the University of Texas at Austin, graduating in 1958 with a degree in elementary education. A natural leader, she was elected president of Pi Beta Phi. Upon graduation, Nancy married and had three children, Camilla, Lee, and Elizabeth.

After 10 years at home with her children, Nancy began working as a teacher in a two-room country schoolhouse in east Texas. Her job included teaching grades 1 – 4 simultaneously and cleaning the building at the end of the day.

The experience made her grateful for every teaching position she held thereafter. Nancy joined River Oaks Baptist School in 1970 as the school’s first second-grade teacher with a class of nine children. She remained at ROBS for 42 years, watching the school grow from 50 to 850 students.

Nancy served as ROBS’ Head of School for 22 years until her retirement in 2012. She viewed her role as fulfilling the Lord’s plan for the school and enabling those around her to use their gifts to the fullest. Her headship transformed the school. What colleagues remember most was Nancy’s tireless push to elevate academic excellence and professionalism at ROBS.

As a result, the school increased in size and stature to become one of the premier schools in the region, and Nancy came to be regarded as one of the finest educators in Houston.

Nancy considered ROBS' students and graduates the soul of her professional legacy. While the accolades and honors ROBS received over the years are a testament to Nancy's leadership, she was always quick to give credit to others: the school's dedicated faculty, staff, administrators, trustees, parents, and grandparents, as well as the members of River Oaks Baptist Church. As she liked to say, "When people work very hard for a purpose that glorifies God, He joins them."

Nancy's passion for teaching was rooted in her love of learning. Her shelves overflowed with well-annotated books about child development, character education, parenting, learning differences, leadership, counseling, and Christianity. She went to school at night to earn a master's degree in curriculum and instruction with a focus on special education, followed by a doctorate degree in educational psychology. She became certified as an educational diagnostician and was licensed as a clinical psychologist. She gave back to the educational community by serving as a board member of the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest, the Orton Dyslexia Society, The Parish School, and Houston Ear Research. Through words and example, Nancy encouraged everyone around her—students and teachers alike—to embrace new opportunities and lifelong learning.

Despite her many professional accomplishments, Nancy's family took precedence over her work. As the proud grandmother of eight grandsons, Nancy attended many a sports event and not a single ballet recital. She delighted in sharing holidays, birthdays, weddings, and graduations with those she loved most. We will always remember Nancy seated at the head of the dining table, presiding over joyful celebrations with a cat by her feet.

A devoted follower of Jesus, Nancy felt blessed that her years at ROBS strengthened her walk with God. In turn, Nancy shared her vibrant Christian faith with her family, friends, students, and colleagues, waking long before

dawn to write the devotionals she delivered over the PA system at school. We take comfort in Nancy's confidence that she has been united with her eternal Lord and Savior.

Nancy was preceded in death by her parents, Bernice and Dr. Jesse Heath, and her husband Dr. Ralph Cole, who was also her childhood friend. She is survived by her beloved family: children Camilla Viator and her husband Brent of Madisonville; Lee Hightower and his wife Melanie of Houston; and Elizabeth Baker and her husband Dean of The Woodlands, as well as her grandsons—David Thompson and his fiancée Loren Graffagnino, Heath Thompson and his wife Courtney; Neal Thompson; Ryan Baker, Austin Baker and his wife Taylor, Landon Baker, Max Hightower, and Reed Hightower. Also left to cherish Nancy's memory are her brother Jesse Heath and his wife Hetta of Houston and a host of nieces, nephews, and cousins. She is also survived by Ralph's children, Janna and John Green of Denton and Craig Cole of Coppell, and lifelong friend Jane Reynolds of Madisonville. Serving as honorary pallbearers are the members of the Madisonville High School Class of 1954. The family wishes to thank Nancy's caregivers, Dr. Mary Helen Morrow, Charlotte Picazo, Ruby Proctor, Erma Owens, Marty Jones, Terry Snook, Joyce Broadnax, and Brazos Valley Hospice.

Following a private burial, a memorial service will be held at the First Methodist Church in Madisonville on Friday, November 10, at 11:00 a.m. The family will receive visitors afterwards in Wesley Hall. A celebration of Nancy's life will be held at River Oaks Baptist Church in Houston on Sunday, November 12, at 2:00 p.m. with a reception to follow in the Segner Family Commons. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests memorial gifts be made to River Oaks Baptist School in Houston or the First Methodist Church of Madisonville.

# Cemetery Details

**Madisonville City Cemetery**

Madisonville, TX