I walk. I smile. I am rewarded.
—From The Shining Light by Elroy Bode

The first person to read the manuscript of retired law enforcement officer Ron Stallworth’s 2014 memoir, Black Klansman, was his future wife, Patsy. The second was Elroy Bode, the award-winning El Paso author who taught English and creative writing at their alma mater, Austin High School, for 30 years. “When I finished writing it, I asked Mr. Bode if he’d do me the honor of putting his red pen to it,” said Ron, who still has the Bode-edited manuscript. “I love that copy. I value that copy.”

Ron and Patsy are 1971 graduates of Austin High School. Their lives diverged from there. Ron was the first black detective on the Colorado Springs, Colorado police force, and successfully infiltrated the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1970s, which is the focus of Black Klansman. His career, which later included an emphasis on gangs, continued in other cities and states before he retired and wrote Black Klansman for a small publishing house (he’s now writing a follow-up).

Patsy married, had four daughters (one of whom died), worked in public relations and marketing, lived in Austin for 18 years and, after returning to El Paso, founded Desert Spoon, a nonprofit food hub, with her daughters. Widowed in 2010, she reconnected with Ron, who lived in Utah, a few years later. Their long-distance relationship brought him back to El Paso. They married in 2017, months before Elroy Bode passed at age 86, and a full year before Stallworth’s book was turned into an Academy Award-winning hit movie by legendary film director, Spike Lee.

Macmillan reissued Black Klansman, which became the top-selling book in the country, “He would be tickled to know my book hit No. 1 on the New York Times best-seller list,” Ron said of his friend and mentor. The Stallworths considered “Mr. Bode” (“I told him I can’t call you Elroy,” Ron said with a laugh) more than a teacher. “He was so humble, so ‘don’t put me in the spotlight,’” Patsy said. “His life was about loving and giving.”

Now the Stallworths are giving back. The couple created the Elroy Bode Fund in the El Paso Community Foundation in 2015. It will award scholarships to college-bound Austin High School seniors who plan to pursue degrees in the English arts fields, including creative writing, journalism, and English. “We wanted to start a scholarship in his name,” Patsy said, “and honor his love for literature.” Donations may be made at epcf.org/bode.

The Stallworths’ gift to El Paso is their love of the written word, deep affection for their teachers-mentor, and a sincere desire to give back to the community that has given them so much. Ron — who served as Grand Marshal of the 2019 Sun Bowl Parade and appeared at the Plaza Classic Film Festival — believes that none of their accomplishments would have been possible if it weren’t for the man they affectionately call Mr. Bode. “He was the catalyst in many aspects for Black Klansman,” Ron said, “because he put it in my mind in high school that I could put words together.”