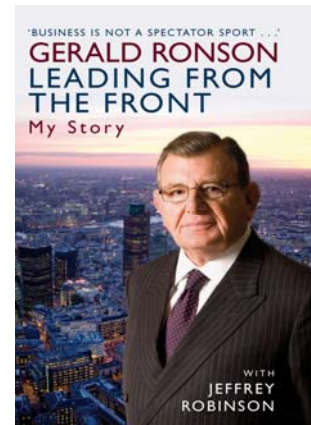


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## Leading from the Front – My Story

### ▪ By Gerald Ronson with Jeffrey Robinson



Gerald Ronson's story is the stuff of Hollywood movies.

One of Britain's most successful businessmen, he is also one of the most hardworking and generous philanthropists in the UK.

Bored by school, and failing his 11 plus, he left at the age of 14½ to work in his father's furniture factory. Starting at the bottom, sweeping floors, he learned the ins and outs of business from his entrepreneurial father, who soon took the family out of furniture and into property.

Gerald quickly expanded the family business, in 1966, when he pioneered Britain's first "self service" petrol station. Next, he invented the "convenience store" concept, putting mini-marts at all his petrol stations; over the years, he has built almost 1,000.

By 1972, having combined his petrol station business with property development throughout the UK (he developed city centres in Sunderland, Cardiff and Nuneaton) and then expanding his property interests into Europe (he was the first British developer in France and has become the most important foreign developer in Spain), Gerald had turned the family business (named Heron, after his father Henry Ronson) into the second largest privately owned business in the UK.

By then, much of the money he was making was going into family charitable trusts to help educate young people in the UK and Israel. He was also building schools and spending nearly 20% of his time on raising money for various charities.

But in the late 1980s-early 1990s, life for Gerald Ronson changed, inexorably, when two major crises followed, one immediately after the other.

First, he became embroiled in "the Guinness Affair". The biggest financial scandal of the decade --- and the most expensive show trial to date in British history --- he was found guilty and sentenced to six months in jail. Years later, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled that it had been an unfair trial.

Serving his sentence at Ford Open Prison, he organised his life there and quickly earned the respect of his fellow inmates who called him, "The Guv'ner", "The General" or "GR". Since then, he has helped many of his fellow prisoners find their own way back into society.

In 1991, he was hit again, this time by a major financial crisis, causing a near fatal blow to his business. The "Savings and Loan" crash in the United States cost him and his family nearly \$1 billion. But he avoided bankruptcy by negotiating the first British version of a "Chapter 11" bailout.

Putting those two crises behind him, he has spent the past two decades rebuilding his reputation and his businesses.

Under Gerald's directorship, Heron has developed 156 buildings in the key business districts of nine leading UK cities. His latest project, the iconic 46 storey, 202 metres (663ft), Heron Tower will be the tallest building in the City of London.

A man who believes firmly that with wealth comes an obligation to help those who are less fortunate, he has now raised over £100m in his lifetime for charities and has personally donated more than £35m. He has also bequeathed all his shares in Heron to the Ronson Charitable Foundation.

Gerald's commitment to the Jewish Community is also immense. As a young boy, he and his friends were street fighters, taking on the fascists. That experience propelled him to establish the Community Security Trust (CST), unique in the world, with police and political support to defend and protect Jewish community relations throughout the UK.

He married Gail (now Dame Gail Ronson DBE) in 1967 with whom he has four daughters – Lisa, Amanda, Nicole and Hayley.

All profits due to Gerald Ronson from the book, which is dedicated to his family, are being donated to the Gerald Ronson Charitable Foundation.

**Commenting on his decision to write the book, Gerald Ronson, said:**

*“As I have always said, business is not a spectator sport. I have been in the ring, I have taken a few blows but I am in it for the full 15 rounds. I have packed a lot into the last 70 years but I guess that is what happens when you work six and a half days a week. The book represents the many facets of my life of which I hope there will be many more chapters to come.”*

**His co-author, Jeffrey Robinson, said:**

*“I think the book truly captures the phenomenon that is Gerald Ronson. It's his voice. It's his view of the world. It's the life of the last great British tycoon.”*

**Leading from the Front – My Story, is published by Mainstream Publishing  
and is available from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk).**

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**Notes to Editors:**

- Videos of Gerald Ronson in conversation with Jeffrey Robinson are available on YouTube, MySpace and Facebook.
- Publication quality photographs are available via Emma Kane, Redleaf
- Gerald Ronson was 70 years old on 27 May 2009
- He is the founder and Chief Executive of Heron International [www.heroninternational.co.uk](http://www.heroninternational.co.uk)
- He has received many awards over the years including:
  - Encomienda de Numero of the Order of Civil Merit bestowed by His Majesty The King of Spain in recognition of services to Spain (2009) – the equivalent to a British knighthood (2009)
  - Honorary Doctorate from Northumbria University (2009)
  - Ambassador of the Druze Community on Mount Carmel
  - Norwood Lifetime Achievement Award (2008)
  - The Property Industry Award for High Achievement (2007)
  - Personality of the Year (Property Awards - several years)
  - Entrepreneur of the Year Award - (The Variety Club of Great Britain)