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MAX SIMS LALE: IN MEMORIAM

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On Tuesday, April 25, 2006, at the Trinity Episcopal Church in Marshall, Texas, my wife Phoebe and I attended funeral services for Max Sims Lale. What occurred for the next three hours was memorable. As the church program proclaimed, and rightly so, we had assembled for "A Celebration of the Life of Max Sims Lale." After an impressive church ceremony in which Father John Himes recounted his experiences with one of Marshall's most prominent and revered citizens, we collected at the Colonial Gardens Cemetery for Lale's interment with "full military honors." Then we proceeded to the historic home of Gail and Greg Beil, who comforted us with food and drink before gathering us together for personal reminiscences about Max Lale. For more than an hour friends and admirers of Max Lale recounted humorous, at times poignant, occasions in which he contributed to their lives and well-being. It was a wonderful Irish wake.

In that spirit, let me participate. I met Max Lale through the Texas State Historical Association (TSHA). As president of that organization in 1980, I especially became aware of those members who gave their time and money in behalf of Texas history; Max was one of those rare individuals who participated in the TSHA to enhance state tradition without thought of recognition for his services. He also had shown the good judgment to marry Cissy Stewart, a "star" reporter for the Fort Worth *Star Telegram* who strongly promoted the TSHA with written accounts about its annual meetings as well as alerting readers across the state regarding other association activities. Hence, in 1990, I nominated Max for second vice-president of the TSHA, which placed him on track to be president in 1992 – and he was duly elected.

Because of busy schedules, the Lales and Procters sometimes found it difficult to maintain close contact. While usually arranging to meet for dinner several times a year, we used the telephone to "keep in touch." Then at the annual TSHA meetings, during three days of association-packed gatherings – dinners, luncheons, and a business meeting – we caught up with the events that had engulfed our lives over the past year and renewed pledges to see one another more often.

While Cissy was my point of contact, Max was a unique individual whom I also came to admire. We both quickly decided to avoid discussion of two subjects – politics and the annual Texas – O.U. football game – both of which we could argue fervently without relief, but without any hope at effecting a change of positions.

But in a shared history (concerning our personal lives) we both benefited – and enjoyed. Although Max was somewhat older, we both were, so-to-speak, "depression babies" who lived through those hectic years following the stock-market crash of October 1929. Max recalled with relish events in rural-small

town Oklahoma while I added to such accounts with reminiscences about small-town Texas. We identified experiences in which our families were forced to endure depression conditions, an American way of life long past. For instance, during hot summer nights, without air conditioning, our families hauled mattresses into the backyard, hoping to attract a cool evening breeze soon after midnight. We delighted in watching hundreds of fireflies light up the darkness while exposing ourselves to numerous "chigger bites." Inevitably we recalled the emphasis on inexpensive living, in which we valued the acquisition of a few coins of the realm. Whenever possible, we became scavengers, collecting empty bottles for which the local grocer paid a few pennies. After all, "a shave and haircut" cost ten cents, a Saturday matinee at the local theater, presenting "Westerns" with accompanying serials such as "Flash Gordon," usually charged a dime, and the new "Baby Ruth" bars of nuts and delicious chocolate, which today cost more than a dollar, sold for a penny.

Even though I could not identify with life on a farm, which Max experienced, he enjoyed my renditions of going to the neighborhood grocery, where my mother would explain to the local butcher what types of meat (and the exact amount) that she wished to purchase for the evening meal or the Sunday lunch. Then the butcher, deftly wielding huge knives, cut out the prescribed amount of meat almost to the ounce, ever aware of the audience of an admiring young boy.

In another area of our lives Max and I also identified. We both served in World War II. But his contributions were far greater. While I was a seaman in the Navy during 1945-1946, he was an officer in the regular Army in 1940 and participated in the battles against Germany, beginning with the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 and ending with American victories in Europe late in the spring of 1945. In other words, he was of that "Greatest Generation" that invaded France on "D-Day" – June 6, 1944 – and then, as Bill Moyers put it, was a member of an American Army that "rocked in combat" the Germans "on the road from D-Day to the Rhine."

As a result, beginning in the mid-1990s, I penciled on my calendar a reminder to telephone Max Lale on June 6 to thank him for his invaluable contribution to the United States and the American way of life. This year, 2006, he was unable to receive my phone call. But no matter, Max. You left this world better than you found it. Your life is an example to follow and your memory one to be treasured.