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Tribute to Charles A. Tarpley

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TRIBUTE TO CHARLES A. TARPLEY

KATHLYNN FADELY LEAR*

“GOOD MORNING! I am Charles Tarpley, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to the SMU Air Law Symposium.”

Who among us has not heard the opening welcome by Charles and marveled at his unrestrained enthusiasm for his beloved symposium, which was announced in his inimitable radio-announcer voice? Charles was a natty dresser and imposing figure; everyone knew when he entered the room. Charles was the ultimate gracious host, always making every effort to meet or greet symposium attendees. While I am honored to write this tribute, it is a daunting task. There was no one like Charles.

An aviator of distinction with the United States Air Force, then Pan American World Airways, and finally Delta Air Lines, he had a passion for flying. He was a well-respected pilot instructor in Delta’s human factors and new-hire programs, as well as Delta’s innovative Pilot Instructor School.

Ever the under-achiever, he graduated from the SMU School of Engineering, the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Business, and the University of Texas School of Law. His education served him well in various occupations—engineer, trial lawyer, insurance executive, and expert witness in insurance coverage disputes and bad faith actions.

Anyone who ever attended the Air Law Symposium was taken by the passion that Charles brought to what can fairly be said was his “baby.” The first Air Law Symposium was held in 1966 at the SMU School of Law where a small group met. During the thirty-eight years that Charles chaired the symposium, it grew from a modest gathering to the country’s premier aviation conference, attracting 500+ attorneys, insurance managers, expert witnesses, and students. The symposium grew in size and pur-

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pose; it transformed from being only a CLE experience with knowledgeable speakers to a highly anticipated reunion where old business friends could conduct new business. A lot of deals were done outside of the ballroom (or in the bar). Many friendships grew during discussions of cases and how such cases could be resolved or fought. One should never underestimate the importance of respectful evaluations of adversaries, and the symposium provided a fertile field for those endeavors.

It can be fairly said that Charles's true love was the symposium up until March 1, 1987, when he met Mary Ellen Darin—a bright, vivacious, and charming lawyer from Detroit. I also met Mary Ellen then, and I had the same assessment. I never knew if it was love at first sight, but his face glowed whenever he mentioned her name.

Charles Tarpley was a critical piece of the SMU Air Law Symposium, and the symposium will not be the same without him. However, Charles would be extraordinarily proud of the folks who continue in his footsteps and contribute so much of their time and talent to ensure excellence in the planning and presentation of the symposium. Having served on the Board under Charles's leadership, I am keenly aware of what such a commitment entails—finding excellent speakers, cajoling generous sponsors, and increasing attendance in challenging years. The vibrance of the symposium continues. This is the legacy that Charles left for us.

And for that, we are grateful.