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In Memoriam: Rex E. Lee

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In Memoriam
Rex E. Lee

*H. Reese Hansen**

*'Tis human fortune's happiest height to be
A spirit melodious, lucid, poised, and whole;
Second in order of felicity
I hold it, to have walked with such a soul.*

—*William Watson*

Rex E. Lee was whole. In a world where lives are compartmentalized, where the public persona of the famous varies markedly from the private persona, it is refreshing to meet someone who is genuine, integral, whole. I can't determine the origin of Rex's wholeness, whether he was born with it; or acquired it from his small town, Arizona upbringing, his missionary service in Mexico, or his undergraduate years at B.Y.U. and his law school years at the University of Chicago. However, I know that he wore his wholeness, his integrity, with an ease that was as genuine and unstudied as his laugh.

I first met Rex in 1972. At the time, I was a thirty-year-old over-aged third-year law student. Rex was the thirty-six-year-old dean of a newly announced law school with no building, no books, no students, and no faculty. Not much to look up to, given third-year students' views of deans in general, even their own. But I sensed that this man was different. Little did I know that that brief meeting would eventually change the course of my professional and personal life.

After nearly a quarter century of very close association in settings from the locker-room to the university boardroom, I can attest that Rex approached everyone with the same degree of honest interest. He did not alter the openness of his response based upon the station of the person he was greeting. He was

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bilingual and able to make people at ease whether their native tongue was English or Spanish.

Rex's passions were few: his family, his religion, his friends, and the law. He knew his abilities and his limits. He was not given to false modesty nor to boasting. When asked to be President of Brigham Young University, he requested permission to try cases before the Supreme Court in his "spare" time; he posited, "If I were a concert violinist, would you expect me to give up the violin?" People were as much attracted to his self-confidence as they were to his warmth.

Rex had the ability to lead. He led by example and with boundless enthusiasm. When he added marathon running to his list of passions, a third of the law school faculty and much of the student body joined him. His running companions ranged from Olympic and All-American athletes to first-time joggers. And each companion became a part of Rex's "team" and was welcome to come along at any time. Running became a part of many of our lives and the culture of the law school, and we credit Rex with the aerobic and other blessings it brought.

Rex was a man of good humor. His wit was lightning quick and legendary. No one I know enjoyed the telling of a good joke as much as Rex. Although he was not a natural raconteur, when he found a favorite story he would repeat it until he could tell it with panache (it was always better to hear the story after he had perfected the telling), and each telling seemed to increase his enjoyment in the narrative.

It is the little things that we will miss most: the open friendship, the humor, the joy in living, the passion for law, the wholeness. I count it a major blessing to have walked with such a soul.