

## Larry L. King

January 1, 1929 – December 20, 2012

*[Larry L. King was born in Putnam, near Abilene, and spent his formative years on a hardscrabble farm with no electricity, running water, or mechanical conveniences. He never graduated from high school, let alone college, yet he was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard and a faculty member at Princeton. He was a star contributor to Harper's in the 1960s and early 1970s, when it was edited by Willie Morris, becoming an important figure in the New Journalism movement. His book Confessions of a White Racist was a finalist for the National Book Award. His collections of journalism – especially The Old Man & Lessor Mortals – and letters are considered classics. He was one of the great humorists of his time, as evidenced in The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, the hit Broadway musical he co-wrote. King was an outsized spirit who wore boots and jeans and cussed like a roughneck from West Texas, but he spent most of his life on the East Coast. One of his best friends in Washington, D.C., was Jim Lehrer, who offers up this memory.]*

By Jim Lehrer

I have three from the hundreds of stories I could tell about this glorious man. I do so after first alerting everyone to a fair warning—if you do not like hearing or reading profanity then you had best take a hike.

Larry spoke a language that had *sumbitch* as its key word. There were good ones and there were bad ones, fat ones and skinny ones, smart ones and dumb ones (dumasses) but most everyone Larry knew and/or hated was, one way or another, a *sumbitch*.

One day Larry called and asked if I would write something good about him. Why? I asked. Because, goddam it, you *sumbitch*, I need for you to. Why? For a preface to a book of some stuff of mine they're going to publish. What stuff? Great stuff, goddamn it. They're going to call it *True Facts, Tall Tales and Pure Fiction*. Sounds awful, I said. Well, you write that goddam preface and you do it now, he said. When do you need it? Right now. You mean... I mean right now, goddam it. I don't even get to read it first? No time. Just write something. And, of course, what did I do? I sat down and wrote about the *sumbitch*, calling him one of the greatest writers since the invention of writing among a lot of other... other, you-know-what.

He called me on another day after I had gone home from the hospital to recuperate from a heart attack. OK, you *sumbitch*, I'm coming over (we only lived a few blocks from each other in Washington) and we're going to go for a walk. Oh, no we're not, I said. Yes, we are, he said. It's good for you. No, it isn't. I can barely sit up. Don't tell me to walk. Well, I am telling you to walk. I'll call you tomorrow and you better be ready to walk. He called me the next morning. I'm coming over. Get off your sick ass and get ready... No, no, no, I said. I'm not walking. Well, I'm going to call you ever day until you do. Call your heart out 'cause I am not walking around

our neighborhood like two old invalid assholes. Bottom line is, he called me most every day and we never walked a step together. But we did some great talking on the telephone. And, you should know—if you can believe it—that in one of those chats, he actually ordered me to quit smoking. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I said. And same to you, you sumbitch. For the record, I had already quit.

Larry and I had an Odessa, Texas, connection. Many MANY years ago I did some investigative reporting for the *Dallas Times Herald*. Another reporter and I “broke” the Big Story about there being illegal drinking and gambling on the top floor of the big (and mostly then only) hotel in downtown Odessa. The Texas Rangers swooped in and closed the place down. Larry, a native of Putnam, was a huge fan of the hotel and the services it offered on the top floor. He told a colleague of mine at the *Times Herald* that he’d better not ever get his hands on the “self-righteous sumbitches who did that story.” Larry and I became terrific friends years afterward and there were several times when I came close—kind of close—to finally confessing that I was, in fact, one of those self-righteous sumbitches. I always really meant to. But I never did. Until now.

I should mention my favorite rag I put on Larry had to do with the similarity of his name with that of a guy on television—you know, the one who wore suspenders and big glasses. I had just read a piece Larry L. had written in some magazine and I used that as my set up. “Great piece of work, Larry,” I said. He thanked me and agreed that it was, in fact, a great piece of work. Then I said: I have never seen a better television interview than that. You really brought out the real Burt Reynolds. Larry went ballistic—goddam you, that’s the other Larry King! You no good sumbitch! I apologized and said something about always having had trouble telling you Larry Kings apart... sorry about that. He screamed something else at me... and then got silent. Then he laughed and laughed. You no good sumbitch. You got me.

You bet. I always got Larry L. King.



## Palmer Hall

October 1, 1942 – February 9, 2013

By Bryce Milligan

Henry Palmer Hall was born in Beaumont in 1942. He occasionally said that he had never expected to go to college when he was growing up, but by 1964 he had graduated from Lamar State College of Technology with a degree in English. He spent a couple of years teaching high school in Silsbee, where began his life-long love affair with the Big Thicket. In a fluke of bad timing, Palmer received his draft notice between relinquishing that teaching position and enrolling in graduate school. While he still had an option, he joined the U.S. Army as a linguist.

That took him to Washington D.C. for a year, where he studied Vietnamese. He spent 1967 and 1968 in Pleiku, Vietnam, working as a translator. The NSA brought Palmer to Maryland but thought better of it after he signed a well-publicized 1969 petition against the war and marched in various protests. In 1969 he received an honorable discharge from the army.

In 1976, Palmer took his M.A. and M.L.S. in English and Library Science from the University of Texas at Austin. By the time he earned his Ph.D. two years later, he had already been appointed the Director of the Louis J. Blume Library at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, a position he held until shortly before his death on Feb. 9, 2013. He had been fighting cancer for almost two decades. He is survived by his wife of 40 years, Susan, and his son Stephen.

A few months ago I was asked to write in support of adding "emeritus" to Palmer Hall's formal title at St. Mary's. It was an honor to do so, particularly because the title was so apt to Palmer. Emeritus, of course, is Latin for "having served," and service was at the heart of how Palmer lived. Of course, there were those 37 years of service to his university as a professor and library director, but as he told me once, service is a way of life, a calling. He was not an overtly religious man, but that is how he phrased it.

He was called by his country to join the military, and in his writing he was called to tell the absolute truth about that experience when it was far from fashionable to do so. His writing about Vietnam served the veterans of that terrible conflict well—on both sides. His collection of poems, *Foreign and Domestic*, expanded his focus to other wars and our moral responsibilities for them.

Palmer began paying literary attention to environmental degradation long before that topic was as popular a cause as it has become. What seems inevitable and necessary literature now was then the province of folks who simply cared about the planet and were close observers of it. His books *Deep Thicket & Still Waters* and *Into the Thicket* are rich evocations in poetry and fiction of his beloved Big Thicket, powerful reminders of how close our relationship is—and must be—to the land. One of his essays about living in San Antonio's "loopland" was really a celebration of the flora and fauna in his backyard, a place he loved. He was mildly annoyed by people who maligned loopland as being an artificial place. To Palmer, you serve the place you live in, and that included making an oasis in suburbia. In his short story, "An Old Woman and Poetry," he describes a woman dying of cancer sitting beside a koi pond, talking to him about Yeats. At the end of the story, the old woman says, "You remember, Yeats says 'Before I am old I shall have written one poem maybe as cold and passionate as the dawn.' That's what I want." I believe that's what Palmer wanted too.

Palmer earned that "emeritus" status in more ways than just being a professor for long enough. Of course, as a San Antonio writer and publisher myself, I have been highly aware of—and often quite grateful for—the way Palmer chose to run Pecan Grove Press. Never a fully fledged university press, Palmer ran the press sometimes out of his own pocket, with limited

assistance. While he was delighted when a Pecan Grove book won recognition for its literary merit, he said many times that the existence of the press was a service to the community. By choosing to publish and promote new literary voices, especially new voices from our region, Palmer validated talent and occasionally created careers. It is easy to publish and promote established writers—Pecan Grove published several notable poets, including the poets laureate of three states—but to maintain a commitment to publishing new and local writers all these years—that was a service of inestimable value both to those writers and to our literary community.

One of the proudest moments in his life was when Palmer was inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters in 2005. He was the author of five collections of poetry, two collections of essays and one of short stories. He also wrote numerous well-regarded papers in the field of library science. He will be sorely missed not only by his family and his academic peers, but by a community of hundreds of writers, a community that he created.



## Mary Margaret Farabee

October 16, 1939 – March 3, 2013

By H. W. Brands

(from the *Texas Observer*)

Walk around Austin and you won't go far without encountering evidence of the mark one person can make on a city and its cultural life. The Paramount Theatre acknowledged its debt to a woman who helped restore the once-derelict venue, by putting her name in lights: "Mary Margaret Farabee: One of Austin's Greatest. We Love & Will Miss You!"

A block east and a block south of the Paramount is the office of the Texas Book Festival. Each year in the fall the festival takes over the Capitol and part of Congress Avenue to host hundreds of authors and tens of thousands of readers in the single greatest celebration of books in the state. The festival sponsors numerous other events throughout the year, and it has distributed millions of dollars in grants to Texas libraries and schools. The festival exists largely because of the imagination and energy of Mary Margaret Farabee, who co-founded the festival with Laura Bush, Carolyn Osborn, and others, and served as its co-chair for the festival's first eight years.

Two blocks in the opposite direction from the Paramount is the office of the *Texas Observer*. Mary Margaret wasn't born a liberal or raised one, but she discovered liberalism after she moved from Dallas to Austin in 1959 to attend the University of Texas. And her 1991 marriage to Ray Farabee—the second for both—sealed the liberal deal. Ray had served in the Texas Senate for 13 years during the 1970s and 1980s, when liberal Democrats still commanded

respect if not always majorities. Mary Margaret and Ray became strong supporters of the *Observer* and its causes. She served on the board of the Texas Democracy Foundation, the *Observer's* publisher, and took a leading role in establishing the MOLLY National Journalism Prize, named for the inimitable Molly Ivins. Mary Margaret organized the annual MOLLY dinners that raised money for the paper and brought some of the best investigative journalists in the country to Austin.

Up Lavaca Street past where it merges with Guadalupe, on the northwest corner of the UT campus, lie the studios and offices of KUT radio and KLRU television. The radio station is run from the Ray and Mary Margaret Farabee Control Room, so named to recognize their support of KUT, KLRU and the enterprise of public broadcasting in Central Texas.

The circle broadens to West Austin to include the Charles Moore House, formerly home of the renowned architect, currently headquarters of the Charles Moore Foundation, another beneficiary of Mary Margaret's organizational and philanthropic energy. South of the Colorado River, in Zilker Park beside the cool waters of Barton Springs, sits one of the capital city's signature works of art, Philosophers' Rock, on which Texas legends J. Frank Dobie, Roy Bedichek and Walter Prescott Webb continue in bronze the discussions they commenced in life. Mary Margaret was a driving force behind the fund-raising that made the statue possible. The Umlauf Sculpture Garden is across Barton Creek from Philosophers' Rock; Mary Margaret played a large part in the creation of this verdant outdoor gallery of the works of Charles Umlauf. Farther south, beyond the house Mary Margaret shared with Ray for 22 years, is the Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders, another object of Mary Margaret's energy and attention.

Mary Margaret didn't build these institutions by herself, needless to say. Each was the work of many minds, hearts and wallets. But every collective endeavor requires a spark, an instigator, a burr under the saddle. She was all three at times, and more besides. Her gift was to make others as passionate as she about enhancing the life of the mind and soul in her adopted city.

From the moment she discovered the joys of intellectual discourse as a Plan II student at UT, she loved to encourage and provoke the exchange of ideas. The Farabee home became a literary and artistic salon. For years the brunch she and Ray hosted on the Sunday morning of the Texas Book Festival attracted the finest authors in America to meet one another and Farabee friends from around the state. Novelists, poets, scientists, economists and political leaders shared migas, mimosas and lively conversation.

She regularly hosted book-launch parties, tailoring her guest lists to the particular subjects of the books. Local bookstores couldn't say no to her requests to send books and salespeople—and they were glad they hadn't when they saw how many copies her parties sold.

No one put on more effective fund-raisers. Her galas filled the biggest ballrooms in Austin, and they famously ran on time. Though she was as polite as any well-bred Dallas girl could be,

nothing annoyed her more than speakers who talked past the sale and jeopardized the goal of the evening: generating money and goodwill for that night's cause.

She was persistent, at times stubborn. She found ways around obstacles. The initial vision for the Texas Book Festival in the early 1990s placed it in the newly renovated Texas Capitol. But state law appeared to prohibit it. She bided her time till the arrival of former librarian Laura Bush placed a key ally in the Governor's Mansion. With Mrs. Bush's help, the law gave way, and the festival, now in its 18th year, has thrived in the Capitol ever since.

She was a tireless advocate for Texas art and Texas artists. The Farabee house is a veritable gallery, reflecting her diverse tastes. A chance visit to the Ann Richards School took her down a hallway where student art was displayed; with the unfeigned excitement she brought to most areas of life, she decided the girls' work needed a larger audience. Several phone calls and a few strategic meetings resulted in the girls' art being included in one of Austin's high-profile studio tours.

She led by example. She gave so much of her time and energy to so many boards and councils that when she discovered a new cause and threw herself into promoting it, her associates from previous endeavors couldn't refuse her invitations and requests. Soon they became as enthusiastic as she was.

Her example was never more compelling than during her final year, as she battled the cancer that ultimately took her life. She spoke not a word of complaint, except that there was too much yet to do, and she would not have another summer to pull weeds in her garden. She continued to organize and consult and host. She threw a hair-cutting party to get a jump on her chemotherapy. Between trips to the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, she found fresh causes to champion, including a leadership program at Huston-Tillotson University in Austin. She was quietly pleased that so many of her causes were thriving. A yellow-dog Democrat to the end, she was tickled but hardly surprised at the spectacular stumble of Rick Perry in his ill-fated run for president, and she cheered the reelection of Barack Obama.

Her sense of humor never faltered, growing more irreverent as her time diminished. She held court from the bed Ray installed in their living room, where a fireplace eased the morning chill and the afternoon sun cast shadows of bare tree branches across her bookcases. Her daughter Patricia couldn't fend off all the friends, protégés and admirers who paid calls, till Mary Margaret said with a wink that she wondered how a woman was supposed to get her rest.

She left us on a morning when the wind snapped across Zilker Park and carried a thousand kites into the sky over her beloved city.

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## MM and Paisano

By Michael Adams

Mary Margret became involved with the Dobie Paisano Fellowship Program when Carolyn Osborn asked her to serve on the Friends of Paisano committee, a small group focused on supporting the Paisano Program in many ways, especially raising funds for a number of ranch and programmatic needs. Mary Margaret was helpful in making connections with donors willing to get involved. Under Carolyn's leadership, the committee raised most of which was used to help replace the old, broken windows in the ranch house.

After much hard work and her usual devotion to all things Paisano, Carolyn turned the reigns over the Mary Margaret who immediately went to work. First of all, she donated 10 broadsides used to promote Texas' most prominent writers: from John Graves to Cormac McCarthy, from Larry McMurtry to Horton Foote, from A.C. Greene to Elmer Kelton. Mary Margaret had these framed at her own expense. These now grace the walls in the ranch house.

Mary Margaret then began to hold noon meetings in places where only she would have an entrée— such as the third floor of Book People. And Mary Margaret ordered and paid for the lunches. And it was here that most of the discussions concerning the future of the Dobie Paisano Fellowship Program took place. Because of Mary Margaret, the beginning of a vision began taking shape and is now in the process of being implemented. In this sense, Mary Margaret's legacy will BE part of the future of the Dobie Paisano Fellowship Program.

Part of that future would be the very quality of life for future fellows. After learning of the woes at the ranch, specifically the complete invasion of cedars and thus the impossibility of any movement through the 257 acres, Mary Margaret called David Bamberger, Texas' most famous environmentalist who advises ranchers how to restore dried up, ill-kept, even barren, ranch-land to its original, pristine condition.

David agreed to meet me as director of the Dobie Paisano Fellowship Program to see what help he might offer. And in no small part because of Mary Margaret, David offered to do something for the ranch that had only been a dream among the Friends of Paisano—a complete soil and botanical study of the ranch, documenting every plant, bush, tree, even lichen, and do what is an expensive task, for free. This, then, would serve as the basis for a Master plan for the ranch. Over a year and a half, David along with his botanist arrived at every new season and went to work walking the entire fence line as well as meandering through dense cedar. The result was a guide that isolated where the first steps toward restoration of the ranch should begin, what were the best routes for possible trails through the property, where to begin cutting down the first cedars in order to free beautiful oaks, in order to restore native bluestem grasses, in order to begin the retention of water in important places along the creek. Through Mary Margret's efforts, the future of ranch restoration is no longer a faraway dream.

Mary Margaret's influence continued through Bamberger who, in turn, made contacts with the Central Texas Trail Tamers, a volunteer group that selflessly devotes its time to creating trails in state and national parks. Normally, they work only places that allow public access. For the Dobie Paisano Program they have made an exception. They have already created two beautiful trails (one from the house to the creek, and one from the creek up to and along the bluff) and will be returning to create more. These trails will now provide the fellows with a more intimate contact with the beauty, peace, and serenity of the ranch, deepening their connection with the legacy of J. Frank Dobie.

Before Mary Margaret died, the Texas Institute of Letters and the Dobie Paisano Fellowship Program purchased a special, hand-made bench carved from Louisiana cypress and placed a simple plaque on the front with the simple words With Sincerest Gratitude to Mary Margret Farabee. This bench is placed at the end of the second trail that takes the hiker up a steep angle to the top of the bluff and along the rim to a spot where one can sit next to a beautiful gnarled, wind-swept old-growth cedar tree and overlook the ranch the ranch-house below. Every future fellow will cherish this spot and every future fellow will know that they are there, experiencing this blessing, because of a kind and generous woman they never met, but whose spirit and beauty lives on in this special place.

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