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MIDNIGHT MOONSHINE RENDEZVOUS

Chapter 1

Luke Alexander Denny

November 20, 1917

Personal History

Luke Alexander Denny, the legendary Middle Tennessee moonshine runner opened his life by saying, “I was born near Buffalo Valley in Putnam County, Tennessee, November 20 or 21, 1917. I have always considered November 21 as my birthday. In fact, that date is on my discharge certificated from the U. S. Army. My birth certificate, however, states I arrived at 5 p.m., on the 20th which was on a cold Tuesday. The temperature was around 10 degrees below zero, according to my Uncle Floyd Huddleston, whom I’m told had a photographic memory,” Denny explained.

“My Great Uncle Jessie Huddleston told me many times it was the coldest winter he had ever experienced. According to my father Hugh Toi Denny, the weather turned cold around November 3. It started snowing, but the temperature was so low there wasn’t much accumulation. All that fell remained on the ground. It snowed off and on all of November, and up through December. Several of the old timers from Rock Springs (the community where I was born) said the snow didn’t melt until sometime in early spring. In the far reaches on North Hill some snow could be seen as late as April 10. Mr. Earl McCallum, also told me the Tennessee River froze over throughout southern Tennessee and northern Alabama. Earl lived in Savanna, Tennessee at the time.

“As I said, my dad was Hugh Toi Denny. Dad was born in 1882. He was a 35-year-old farmer when I was born. Martha Anne (Huddleston) Denny was my beloved mother and the hardest working housewife I’ve ever seen. She was 33 when I came into this world. Mom also taught school for a short time. I was the second of three children. My brother John Henry Denny is the oldest, then came my younger and only sister Helen Denny.

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“When I went to school, head start and all the other preschool programs were unheard of. Then, the normal age to start school was six. I started my ‘book learnin’ as it was referred to in those days, in 1922. I believe school started July 26. My mother may have taught at the school, before I started. My first school was a one-room schoolhouse in Rock Spring, in the lower end of Putnam County. My first teacher was Mrs. Sadie Amonett; a dedicated tutor if there ever was one. I will always remember her special humanitarianism traits. An example of this was Mrs. Amonett shared her lunch with some poor students behind a big oak tree at the southside of the school yard many times. One day three little girls and a little boy ate nearby all of her lunch. I remember they were crying. They brought their lunch in a lard bucket. My bucket was blue and white.

“The oldest in one family, a girl about 11-years old, dispensed food to the younger members of her family, to the best of her ability. One time she was complaining bitterly because molasses got mixed with the mashed potatoes. She exclaimed in a loud voice, ‘The old soggy mess isn’t fit to eat.’ They all started crying. It was a pathetic scene. I can still see it as plain as if it had happened a month ago. There was no welfare back then. The government didn’t feed people. People worked at that time and they were proud even if they were poor.

“Mrs. Sadie, as we called her, was eating nearby. I was wondering how she was going to handle this situation. She went over and said something I couldn’t hear, but motioned toward the old oak tree. The little fellows all trooped in behind this tree. In a few seconds Mrs. Sadie joined them with some sandwiches and some tea cakes. These children’s father was in the state prison in Nashville. Back then there wasn’t hardly anyone overweight. Times were rough. They were sending their children to school to get some education against cruel and terrible odds. I would say all concerned are dead, since this took place more than 60 years ago.

“I found out later Mrs. Amonett always carried extra food with her as long as she taught school. If she is not in heaven there isn’t one!

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“My first day in school was most embarrassing, especially to my brother John Henry Denny. Instead of going to the ‘John’ behind the Sycamore tree I chose to use the front steps of the school house. I thought it was a waste of energy to walk all the way down to the tree, so I answered the call of nature at the handiest place. My brother whipped me and took me back in the schoolhouse. That was the last time I did that. The girls had their own outhouse.

“At around 10 a.m. I got hungry and decided to eat, so I raided about five or six lunches in the Clothe Room before they caught me. For a short time I thought I was at an all-day singing or a dinner-on-the-ground. John Henry, once again, gave me a good whipping. I deserved every lick.

“Some of my other teachers were Miss Nina Huddleston; Miss Nola Neighbors; Mrs. Carlen West Evans, Carlen was my first cousin; Miss Geraldine Huddleston; Mrs. Martha Bleasley Maddux Breeding; Mrs. Leona McKinley and Mr. Noel Maddux. They were all very good and dedicated teachers. We were very fortunate in getting such talented people to teach us.

“I’d say Mrs. Leona McKinley and Mrs. Martha Breeding would have been very capable teachers in a university. They were brilliant. They excelled in English and literature, but both were good in math, history and other subjects, too.

“Miss Leona McKinley was my teacher more than any other. I am sorry to say I gave her more hell than all the others combined. She whipped me regularly and I needed it every

time. A lot of times, when I got by some way or the other, I needed to have gotten more whippings from her. I was always into some kind of mischief. For example, I had to stay after school, stand in the corner and stand up to the blackboard with my nose in a circle many times. This was a great delight to all the other kids. I have heard them snicker, but I pretended I didn't hear them. I was not about to give them the satisfaction of knowing how miserable I really was.

“One time, while being spanked by Mrs. Leona, I was bellowing somewhat louder than usual and she became concerned. I was putting it on a little too thick. She knew she wasn't hurting me after finding out my britches were padded

(pg. 5) (picture of Luke Denny's first school)

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“See,” Mrs. Breeding concluded, “he was always thinking. If only he would have channeled his energy toward an honorable profession.”

On the way back to Luke's Smithville home he recalled, “When school started there were about 40 kids. That was a lot for a country school. However, many dropped out because they had to walk so far. In March there would be only about 15 students to complete the term. It seems school let out in the latter part of March, back in those days.

“Edith Amonett was an attractive fellow student. Brother, I had a crush on her during all the grade school years. Carlen Evans was the teacher when we were having a Christmas program. She was having difficulty in getting us lined up properly. I was determined to get beside Edith, so I changed positions two or three times. She would change me again and this resulted in some low places in the middle of the ranks, but finally she gave up and I slipped, once more, on Edith's right side. Clarence (Pete) Upchurch, in the confusion, somehow wound up on the other side of Edith. Pete was a foot taller it seemed and it was rather a comical arrangement. Even the youngest students started bellowing and laughing.

“Pete told me in later years it was somewhat embarrassing to him. Anyway, the teacher in desperation finally gave up. She said, ‘Awe just let it go, Luke just wants to be beside Edith.’

“Pete loved to play basketball, too. We only had one goal. The county didn't even furnish us a basketball. Someone brought us a beach ball to play with.

“We had to improvise ways of entertaining ourselves so R.D. Starnes came up with a .50 cent piece trick. R. D. told us he could make it disappear. To make it vanish he set his arms in some crazy whirling motion. The coin was to magically reappear in his mouth. However, he really made it disappear when he swallowed it. I asked him years later did he ever recover it? ‘No,’ R. D. said, ‘it was never found.’ I nicknamed him ‘Citizens Bank’ after his Houdini act. You will never guess what career he chose; dentistry.

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“Stilts,” Denny remembered. “I nearly forgot about Douglas Rittenberry’s stilts. Back then we called them “Tow Walker’s”. The pair would lift his feet about three feet from the ground. Doug could easily wade the creek without getting wet. Often he ignored the foot log that spanned the creek. We used the log to cross the creek on the way to and from school. If there was no audience Doug would place the stilts over his shoulder and walk on the log to school.

“Once around 1928 to 1930, an August flash flood drenched Middle Tennessee. Violent thunderstorms sent lightning across the sky every few minutes. The swift, high current almost dislodged the foot log. We watched from the bank and expected it to wash away any minute.

“Up come Doug. Even tho the water was high and getting higher he wasn’t about to pass up this chance to be a hero in front of his classmates with his walkers. We all advised him not to use the stilts. So, he, ignoring all advice nonchalantly began his perilous crossing. It appeared for a while he might actually make it, even though the water was up above his waist. The current was alarming to look at. At one time it washed him a quarter of a turn and he came very near being sucked under. Somehow, like magic, he regained his balance and smiled at us. At that moment he thought he was King of Buffalo Valley. Doug even ‘walked’ another step or two and was just a few feet from the shore, where we stood. Somehow one of his walker’s became wedged between two rocks. The stilt was fastened, really frozen, to the bottom of the creek bed. His facile expression changed from proud-as-a-peacock to fear!

“Suddenly he started falling backwards toward the middle of the stream, when all at once one stilt gave way. He moved it quickly back and for one second balanced himself. Suddenly the walker flung him forward. He crashed face down. We were all scared he might drown. A number of us waded a few feet into the creek and pulled him to safety. Doug was visibly embarrassed. He was lucky to be alive. He lost his wallet and the stilts floated down the Caney Fork River. The Tom Walker fad came to an abrupt end,” the quick minded Tennessean recalled.

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After a moment to reflect, Luke Denny reached back to the same era for a school day spelunking episode. “There was a small cave not more than a quarter of a mile from school where both boys and girls played during recess. We didn’t go to the cave every day. Sometimes it would be a week or two in between visits. Solid rock covered the inside of the horseshoe shaped tunnel with two openings. For some reason we always used the right entrance. The entrance-exit holes were about three feet in diameter. The tunnel was about 40 feet long, but the long curving arch went several yards under the bluff. To complete the trip, the entire adventure covered about 90 feet. There wasn’t

room to turn around nor stand up so we got down on our hands and knees. Sometimes we crawled backwards.

“The 30-minute morning recess came at 10 a.m. then the hour long lunch started at noon. At the opening bell on an October day-it wasn't too hot nor too cold – one boy started talking about a special lunchtime cave excursion. He made it sound so exciting. ‘It will be the best trip, ever,’ I can hear him say. Promptly at 10 o'clock the lad took off, by himself and disappeared into the woods between the school and the cave. Later, he told me he was afraid the kids would back out from this lunch venture. As his squad ate lunch he – the most popular boy in school – mingled with prospective spelunkers offering encouragement and exchanging little pleasantries here and a kind word there. With lunch quickly finished it was time to go.

“The trip promoter was talking to himself, but was loud enough so everyone in the group of about 15 could hear. ‘It is going to be so exciting. I can't wait to get there and be the first one inside,’ he was saying. Then he started moving up and down the column. Clint McKinney owned the cattle farm with the cave. Near the entrance we had to scatter a small herd of cattle to get by. Everyone from front to back was trying to get ahead of the next one. A few feet from the entrance our leader conveniently stumbled and fell. He put on a good show, pretending to break back into the column. No one let him break line. Not being able to get in front of anyone he complained bitterly about being the one who brought us up the trip and having to bring up the rear.

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“The happy, excited group crawled through the cave fast to see what the special event was going to be. We all found out as we came into the light at the end of the tunnel...our hands, knees and clothes were covered with MANURE. The children in front of the column had the most on them. The leader, who came through the cave last and didn't get any ‘waste’ on himself, apologetically mutter, ‘Those dare calves must have gotten into the cave.’ Pete Upchurch harshly responded ‘Them ‘ere cows didn't do that. A calf couldn't even get in ‘ere. Someone done that and I'm goin' ta find out who. When I do it'll be too wet to plow for him!’

“What a motley, yet pathetic crew we were. All of us washing at the nearby spring. I was washing too as I didn't escape the ordeal. No one came out smelling like a rose, except the promoter who set the manure trap. Some thought it was me who dreamed this prank up, but it sure wasn't Luke...for once.

“Back then the sheriffs did not receive a regular salary. They were paid on commission. A few fee grabbing sheriffs deputized many, many men to help them make enough to get by on. Some sheriffs even got fairly wealthy because of the fee grabbing system. For example, if a drunk was found guilty or ‘submitted’ (paid off) the arresting office would get about \$2 when the drunk paid it to the clerk.

“Also, Justices of the Peace (JPs) received court costs when a presiding over cases. Many times the JPs owned a country store and held court there on Saturdays. These trials were gathering places for the young and old alike. It was the farmers entertainment in the 20s and 30s. Usually the store owner made a good profit during the Saturday cases. I loved these trials and attended them nearly every weekend.

“One such trial - - held at T. D. Alcorns’ Buffalo Valley Store - - sticks out in my memory. It was around 1927, as I was about 10-year-old. A local middles aged man was arrested and charged with public drunkenness. Again, we can’t us his real name since he’s dead and his family wouldn’t give us permission, so we’ll call him Tom Bales. Ol’ Tom drank white whiskey and did get drunk from time to time. In fact, it could be stated he was a chronic offender and paid out a goodly amount to the fee grabbers. Finally, he stopped paying and started going to

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court. On two consecutive Saturdays Tom, with the side of his mouthpiece Buck Jones of Silver Point, had beaten the drunk and disorderly charges. Jones, a crafty, rather large attorney, had no formal legal education, he nevertheless proved several times to be a capable lawyer.

“Since Tom had beaten his cases the previous weeks he became a little careless with his answers, during questioning by the state’s lawyers. As Attorney Jones thundered objections to J. P. Thurmond Alcorn, Tom kept answering the state’s question. Buck Jones became very angry at his client. The state, meanwhile, became very aggressive and begin firing questions right and left, hoping to come away with a guilty verdict after two straight losses. Tom continued answering. Buck continued objecting. The state continued firing questions. It was a three ring circus.

“Finally, Buck Jones stood up and shouted, ‘I object. I object, your honor. The question is irrelevant. It has no bearing on this case.’ He then turned to his client and said, ‘Tom! Tom! your convicting yourself! The spectators were amused and roared with laughter at Buck’s convicting-yourself remarks. Tom dropped his head. He looked like a child caught red-handed with his hand in the cookie jar.

“Attorney Buck Jones very cunningly suggested a short recess, which was granted. The adults and most of us kids knew what those breaks were for. Nearly all adults headed out back for a drink of whiskey. Just a short distance from court was a water pump, housed in concrete blocks. One could look from the store and see the Kerr Mason jars protruding up and down from behind the pump house.

“After the break everyone seemed refreshed and relaxed. Tom, now, was much deliberate with his responses. He waited for an objection from Jones before answering. He became a very good witness for his own trail. Buck asked Tom if he had a drink before his arrest. Tom said, ‘Just a taste, ‘bout a spoon full. I reckon I drank it ‘bout four hours before I was arrested.’ Tom had already admitted to drinking during the earlier

fiery questioning by the state. But the state failed to draw out of him how much he drank and when.

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“Attorney Jones asked his client, ‘Alright now Tom, were you drunk when you were arrested that Saturday night on such and such a date?’

“Tom answered, ‘Naw sir I wasn’t drunk.’

“Jones responded, ‘How much did you drink Tom?’

“I’ve already told ye, ‘bout a table spoon full I reckon,’ Tom revealed, again.

“Buck looked at his client and said. “That is all. You and I know you told the truth.’

“He then turned to the state’s lawyers and in a low, rich voice asked if they wished to cross examine the witness. The state seemed to know they had lost the case. They questioned him thoroughly, but were unable to shake his testimony.

“In Buck Jones’ summation he pointed out to the state’s lawyers and lawmen, ‘My poor client has indeed been harassed by you, the law. You have picked him up on numerous occasions and slammed him in jail for no reason ‘atall’. You fee grabbers have locked my poor client up like a helpless mule. You should be ashamed of yourselves.’

“Then he turned toward the J. P. and continued, ‘Your honor, you know that a table spoon full of whiskey won’t make a 12-year-old kid drunk, let alone a grown man. I know your honor will render a just and not guilty verdict in this case. Thank you again, your honor, for listening so close to the proof that has been offered here today. I know, that you know, the state has failed to prove this man guilty of any wrong doing. I’ve known you, your honor, ever since you were a little boy and I have known your daddy a long time. We grew up and played together. We seem just like one big family. I know all of you are honest and God fearing folks and I am not a bit uneasy about your verdict. I am positive it will be one favorable to my client. With this in mind the defense rests.

“Buck sat down looking very pleased. He then place his hand reassuringly on Tom’s shoulder. The state made their summation, but their heart wasn’t in it. They knew they had lost.

“Justice of the Peace Thurmond Alcorn stood up, cleared his throat and announced the verdict, “While the arresting officer, under oath, has sworn Tom was staggering and cussing

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and reeked noticeably of liquor, the defendant denies this claiming he only had taken a small drink about a 'table spoon' full were Tom's words. The court knows, you know, and I know this would not create any stage of intoxication. The law officer swore he was drunk. Tom, swore he wasn't. The defendant is allowed the benefit of the doubt. It is therefore my opinion Mr. Tom Bales is NOT GUILTY on this particular charge of drunkenness.'

"In celebration Tom attempted to get up. Buck, seeing Tom was bleary-eyed knew instantly he had taken one too many swigs of mountain dew during the break, told him to sit still for a minute or two till the crowd scattered.

"Following Rock Spring's Grade School, I attended high school at Baxter Seminary, in Putnam County. I had a lousy time with math and had difficulty in making passing grades. In other subjects I did well. English was right down my alley. For example, I had the second highest grade in class behind Ora Mai Bean.

"After a year I dropped out of school and farmed for a while. In fact, I worked like hell and didn't make any money. My family and I had land and plenty to eat, but no money. Few had money. In 1933 or '34, when I was 16 or 17-years-old, I had \$20 in my pocket, probably from my tobacco crop. I used this money to buy some moonshine whiskey with. This friend of mine told me if I would furnish him the liquor he would peddle it and give me half the profit. Since I didn't have a car I asked a good friend from Buffalo Valley to drive. He drove me to pickup five gallons, free of charge, but told me it was the last time he would haul whiskey for me. We picked up this little dab at Boma and carried it to Buffalo Valley. He wasn't a drinking man and didn't want the Valley folks to think of him as a whiskey man.

"This first five gallons was sold extremely fast. So I bummed another ride to get the next batch. This five gallons went as rapidly as the first. I purchased a 'whooping' 20 gallons the third trip and convinced the moonshiner and his runner to deliver it to me on the fourth load. That's how I started the illegal whiskey career.

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"During the period I was also working on the family farm in Rock Springs. We raised tobacco, corn, hogs, cattle and wheat. I hated farm work from day-one. It seemed the more I worked the more I thought about hauling whiskey. Every chance I got I would do something concerning whiskey running. I even rode shotgun for free and helped load and unload, too. By doing this I learned where the stills were, who was selling and drinking the mountain dew. I was a moonshining intern you might say," Denny said with a smile. "I continued this until I was 19-year-old. All I could think of was, 'How are you going to get away from this back-breaking farm work?' Wheels (a car) was the only answer. Not too many folds had a car back then.

“So, during the late spring of '38, probably May,” Denny recalled, “I sold every single hog that was mine and put a down payment on my first car; a 1933 Plymouth from Carlen Motors in Cookeville.

“A few days later I stopped at R. L. Maxwell’s General Store in Buffalo Valley. One of my older friends gently took me by the arm and motioned with his head for me to follow him to a water pump. He whispered, ‘Your hoss (Luke’s car) needs shoeing (his tires were bald), plus the fellers are thirsty (for whiskey). ‘I explained to him that I would go get the moonshine and bring it back to the store but I didn’t have the cash to pay for it. He gave me the money for 30 gallons. A lady moonshiner sold me the whiskey for one dollar a gallon from her still in No-Man’s Land in Jackson County. My profit was 27 bucks. That was a hell’va lot back then I remember spreading the entire \$27 out on the hood of the car. I looked at all that money for less than one day’s work. That’s all she wrote. I was totally and completely hooked on moonshining. Remember too, gasoline was only 18 cents a gallon.

“Locally, the word of my whiskey hauling spread like wildfire. A long time friend Jimbo Medley told me of dozens of farmers who wanted whiskey. I contacted all of them. Probably half signed up for weekly deliveries. I was on my way off the farm. A local bootlegger in the St. Mary’s Community wasn’t pleased with his hauler. I told him I would be on time, with the quantity he wanted. The price was right. We shook hands for

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25 gallons twice a month. He was my first full-fledged retailer. After four or five loads he told me about another bootlegger who was dissatisfied with his runner.

“I saved about a pint of Willie Lane’s best whiskey and drove to the Peeled Chestnut area near Sparta to make a sale. That’s in White County, Tennessee. My St. Mary’s bootlegger had written him a letter of introduction for me. After the bootlegger read the note I handed him a sample of Lane’s finest. Once the price was fixed he said, ‘I’ll take 45 gallons tomorrow night.’ Again, I was on my way. Somewhere about midnight, the next evening, the Peeled Chestnut delivery was made. I was happy as could be, as I pulled away from his place. Down the road a piece two lawmen, a trooper and a deputy, pulled me over. They searched the car and naturally found the five empty (5 gallon) jacket cans and a 20-gallon keg. The trooper said in an angry, but fatherly manner, ‘Son, you should be in school, or do you go to school?’ I said no and then he asked, ‘How old are you?’ When I said 19 he laughed then added, ‘You’re to damned young to be hauling rot gut whiskey and I’m going to check these vessels and if they have enough liquor in them I’m going to seize this car.’

“Sue, they knew I had been hauling whiskey but they couldn’t prove it. The law even tried to pour out leftovers to get enough evidence to present to the judge. That didn’t work because I had put a match to each can before pulling away from the White County bootlegger. An old Jackson County moonshining man taught me that lit’ trick of the trade in the mid-1930’s. I had been stopped for the first time.

“As 1938 came to a close I picked up five larger retailers in Smith County. Therefore, Carthage became one of my biggest runs. I changed my wardrobe from work clothes to suits. Wearing a two or three piece suit served three purposes. First, if I was all dressed up the moonshiners wouldn’t want me to get my suit dirty and would LOAD. At the bootleggers they wouldn’t want me to get dirty so they would UNLOAD. I would take my time eating, talking and exchanging money, too. Secondly, most Tennessee whiskey runners wore overalls. The law knew this. They kept their eyes peeled for those characters. Therefore, I was able to play the part of a day-night chameleon

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and evade the jailhouse. A well dressed whiskey runner was really unheard of in the late 30s. Thirdly, I was single, in good shape, and had celebrated my twenty-first birthday on November 21, 1938. I was on the prowl for ladies and a good time. A well dressed available young man with a car- and money to burn-was hard to find. I was that fellow. I made no bones about it...I was ready for action, anytime day or night. I was not about to settle down, at this time in my life.

“Many have seen the movie “Thunder Road” and honestly believe hauling whiskey is one big fun time occupation. That is far from the truth. Making moonshine is a rugged job. Hauling can be tough at times. For example, in the cold winter of 1939 I had to use the back roads through Cannon and DeKalb counties to evade the law. A dragnet was out along the main hi-ways and even the secondary roads. It had been snowing for two days. Only a few inches had accumulated, but the temperature was below zero. It was about 2:30 in the morning. It was extremely dark. I was alone. My WINDSHIELD WIPERS stopped, so I slowed down to a crawl. Sleet begin hitting the windows so hard it was impossible to hear the engine running. All of a sudden my HEATER went on the blink. Within 30 minutes I couldn’t feel my toes. I had no gloves. I was LOST1

“Finally, a dim light peaked from the window of a small cabin on the left side of the road. I pulled as close to the door as possible and knocked for a long time, shivering. A middle aged man opened the door and wanted to know what I was doing out in these parts at this time in a SLEET STORM. I was shaking uncontrollably. He, seeing my teeth chattering state, invited me by the wood stove. As I got too close to the stove he pulled me back and told me to put my hands in my pockets and warm up gradually. I did as he directed. Within a couple of hours I was revived. In my pocket was a pint of moonshine, so I took a drink. When I offered him some, he took a drink. I walked out to the car and brought in a five-gallon jacket can of moonshine and poured him out a quart. Just as I finished pouring his portion fear shot through my soul as I spotted a pistol in a holster and deputy sheriff’s star hanging on a nail by his hat. He saw me staring at it and said, ‘You need not worry none,

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all I bother is them fellers that steal. And, I give 'em holy hell! I quickly shook hands—before he changed his mind—and bid him ado...and was gone. I've never seen this deputy again. The next morning I had both the windshield wipers and heater repaired. Whiskey running was not all fun and games by no means.

“About this time I was clearing at least \$200 weekly. That was a goodly amount of change in those days. O' it was wonderful, I thought.

“I was a night owl. A normal day would consist of rollin' out of bed around mid-day. East breakfast at home between noon and two. In the late afternoon I'd check on a babe or take a gingerly ride to contract a load of whiskey or just stop and chat with someone. Everywhere I stopped I enjoyed myself. I made as many friends as possible. I had time for people. I listened and I talked to everyone, rich or poor, old or young, white or colored. I wanted everyone to know me and like me. This paid dividends in many, many ways. At dark it was time for this lizard to change his colors. If it was Sunday through Thursday nights I hauled 'shine. Friday and Saturday nights were too risky to haul. Cops were everywhere, plus drunks and outlaws were always out in force on those two nights. I usually went caddin' around, attending party after party – those two nights. Every once in a while - - when I met a good looking honey, I would skip a run. I had a thousand excuses for the moonshiners and the bootleggers, usually it was the law was doing this or that. Yes, the law was one of my favorite reasons why I didn't make a run. If a retailer ran out of moonshine and desperately needed a load I made a run on Friday or Saturday, but these runs were extremely rare. Getting caught was my worse fear.

“I wore out the '33 Plymouth and a '37 Ford coupe by the time 1940 rolled around. It was time for a brand new 'mochine'. The favorite moonshine haulers car was a '40 Ford. Therefore, a '40 black Ford became my very first new car. It was perfect for hauling moonshine. It was fast, was excellent in the curves and would hold a goodly amount of whiskey.

“Japanese Bomb Pearl Harbor!”, was the headline that sent cold chills up and down my spinal column, on December 8, 1941. My draft notice sure put a damper on my

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whiskey running business. However, I did haul up to and including the last night at home. I took my basic at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. After basic training I came home and guess what I did on leave; hauled whiskey and courted the fillies. The U. S. Army taught me about machine guns in the burning heat of the summer of 1942 down in Columbia, SC. At Fort Jackson they even tried to teach me how to be a driver. That was a laugh.

“I sailed to England in the early parts of 1943 on the USS Marine Raven. It took 14 days and I got seasick. I was a member of the, Battery 'A', 696th Armored Field Artillery Battalion in England. We trained for three months there, then landed in Le Havre, France. During World War II I fought in five major campaigns; France, Belgium,

Holland, Luxembourg and finally in Germany. In October 1946 this old lad of 29 left the war zone for home.

“Moonshine was on my mind all the way from Germany to Buffalo Valley, Tennessee. And, the second I got back, transporting that clear mountain mule was the first order of business. After wearing out two used Fords I bought myself a big new beautiful 1947 Pontiac Chiefton. Normally I delivered whiskey to my Middle Tennessee bootleggers, but I did take a load to Louisville and Oklahoma City. I know I took at least two loads to Detroit, Michigan.

“It was at this time (1948) I married my first of three wives,” Denny explained. “Jewell Ray and I went together for a few months and had a wonderful time. We got hitched in Rossville, Georgia, July 1948. Jewell and I moonshined often. We lived with my mother until she left me and went to Michigan. Jewel fit right into my moonshine daily routine; up late, eat breakfast/dinner at mom and dad’s house, ride around, party, eat out, contract a load, haul a load, party again, make love and sleep. It was a fast, hard life, not made for a married woman, that’s for sure. We stayed married about three or four months, but didn’t divorce for about a year. I didn’t see her for nearly 40 years. She lives in Algood, Tennessee. We remain friends.

“Moving whiskey from the stills in Jackson, Clay and Rutherford counties was my normal job unit I got a job selling appliances for the Tuley Furniture Company, in Carthage

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during the late 1949. I met Nellie Ora Keathly shortly after that and we were married February 13, 1950. I tried going straight, and did for probably six or eight months. Nellie and I stayed together for 22 years. She divorced me May 11, 1972. She died September 1, 1982. Nellie and I had two lovely children. Charles Lynn Denny and Marilyn Elizabeth Denny.

“Believe it or not we led a fairly normal life for those six to eight months in the early to middle 1950. When I ran out of customers in Smith County I naturally moved my operation back to the old moonshining Jackson County. Then, when the moonshining men wanted to only pay in whiskey - - for the stoves, freezers and refrigerators - - it was right back to hauling. I had pickup trucks with Tuley Furniture signs on the back sides. My buddy Dewey (Junior) Bennett helped me construct a wooden box to haul my whiskey in. It was an old Frigidaire refrigerator crate. He reinforced the inside so it would hold 96 gallons. I hauled that crate until it wore out. Probably 1955 was my banner year.

“I worked for Tuley until 1958. I sold appliances a year for John Ligon Electric Company, then sold appliances for Carter-Hackett Hardware the next year. My whiskey hauling was on a downward spiral about this time. While I hauled a few large loads in the early 60s, my nerves were about gone. So, I contracted whiskey - - acted as a middle

man - - for the next few years, but on a much smaller scale as before. About 1960 I took a selling job with Woodard Brothers. I held this job for about the same length of time as Tuley's (eight or nine years). About 1969 William (Bud) Smith and I owned S&D Battery Sales, near South Carthage. I was on the road selling while Bud was back in the store taking care of the accounting and ordering portion of the business. We went out of business in 1971. I've been retired since.

"I hauled illegal moonshine for more than a quarter century and never got caught transporting it. There are many places where I hauled too and from, with unusual sounding names. In Sumner County there was Buck Lodge and South Tunnel; Rutherford County had Lascassas and Sugar Hill;

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Macon County sported Bug Tussle, Goose Horn, Webbtown, Walnut Shade and Buffalo; Jackson County spotlighted Bullet Hole; Backbone, Nameless, Philadelphia Ridge, Shake Rag, No-Man's Land, Seven Knobs and Shiloh; DeKalb County carried Pea Ridge, Doweltown (Do-well-town), Temperance Hall and Liberty; Putnam County highlighted Buffalo Valley, Silver Point, Boma, Pumpkin Center, Bloody Eight (part of DeKalb County); Clay County had Union Hill, Butler's Landing; Penitentiary Branch, Dry Creek, Turkey Town, Hickory Nut Corner and Tick; Overton County had Popular Springs Ridge and Waterloo; White County highlighted Pistol, Little Putnam and Peeled Chestnut; Wilson County had Cedar Creek, Bartons Creek, Caro Bend, Martha and Cedar Forest; Trousdale County had Macey's Hill and Cato; Smith County had St. Mary, Pigeon Roost, Helms (nicknamed Hell's Bend) and Sullivans Bend, Enigma (meaning dark thoughts), Hogtown, Lost Creek, Defeated Creek, Difficult, Pleasant Shadow, Devil's Elbow, Devil's Garden and Sebowishia (meaning swiftwater in the Indian language).

"A childhood friend, Roscoe Ash, was somewhat of a hero to me. Roscoe, who is dead, told me about a bus ride he took some 40 years ago concerning a couple of these unusual sounding names. A nosy lady was setting next to him. She asked him his name and he said Roscoe. She said what kind of work do you do and he answered Railroad man with Tennessee Central. She paused to catch her breath and said where are you from? Roscoe answered, "I was born in Devil's Garden and raised in Hell's Bend!" the old gal immediately got up and moved to another seat.

"On November 30, 1974, just after my 57th birthday, Alice Jewell Whitehead and I were married in Woodbury. We had no children. Alice and I lived in her home near Gallatin. She was a nurse at Clover Bottom on old Highway 70 near Nashville. While she worked I stayed at home. Nearly a year later, on November 6, 1975, we also divorced. Alice had five kids by her former husbands, before she died. She, like my other wives, was a good person.

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“After our divorce I moved into the Cookeville government projects until 1980. I lived in the South Carthage projects from 1980 to 1984 and on July 13, 1984 I moved to the Smithville, Tennessee government project where I now reside.

“I am not in the best health, but I get by. I live alone. If anyone thinks being alone at 73-years-old is great, think again. It’s no fun. I have a hold in my chest from a bullet-wound and virtually no money. How I wish Luke Alexander Denny would have listened to his dear mother years ago-around 1935 - - when she said ‘Leave the whiskey hauling to the devil!’”

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LUKE DENNY’S WHEELS CHAPTER 1-A

Luke Denny owned 15 cars and trucks during and after his moonshine hauling days. Each vehicle has a special story all its own. Throughout the book these cars and trucks play a unique role to disguise the moonshine or out-run the law, therefore the reason why a separate chapter is devoted to his whiskey running vehicles. O’Luke was interviewed about his mode of transportation at his and the author’s Smithville homes between December 17, 1988 and March 2, 1989. Below is a vehicle listing, followed by a little insight about each vehicle:

1. ’33 Plymouth Coupe (first car with lettering)
2. ’37 Ford Coupe (first modified for running whiskey)
3. ’40 For Coupe (first new car)
4. ’38 Ford Coupe (uncle bought, owned by doctor)
5. ’46 Ford Coupe (first car owned after WWII)
6. ’46 Ford Coupe (first and last white car)
7. ’47 Pontiac Chiefton (first and last straight 8)
8. ’49 Ford Club Coupe (first green car)
9. ’52 Chevrolet Pickup (first moonshine hauling truck)
10. ’53 Ford Pickup (first Ford truck)
11. ’55 Chevrolet Pickup (last of the hauling trucks)
12. ’62 Chevrolet Pickup (contracting truck, only)
13. ’68 Ford Pickup (very little contracting)
14. ’69 Ford Pickup (very little contracting)
15. ’77 Oldsmobile Cutless (out of business)

1933 Plymouth Coupe (black):

(1) May 1938 to January 1939.

Luke, a good looking 20-year-old, took \$40 - - from selling hogs - - and put a down payment on his very first car at Carlen Motor Company in Cookeville, Tennessee, May 1938. The single, blond haired ladies man resided with his parents at Rock Spring. He detested a back-breaking, low paying farming career in the hilly, rocky area. Since the mid-1930s Denny rode with whiskey runners and from time to time hired friends to haul small amounts of moonshine to local bootleggers. A car

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was THE way Denny thought would get him off the farm, help him make easy money running moonshine and pick up young ladies. The \$125 seemed a far price for Luke's first car...a used 1933 black Plymouth coupe. His payment plan called for the remaining \$85 to be paid by January 1, 1939. Denny thought the eight months would easily give him time to haul enough moonshine to pay the \$85. It did.

“After gassing up my '33 I headed for Pet Petty's place at Chestnut Mound (east of South Carthage in Smith County),” Denny explained. “Pet was the best sign painter and he did jobs on credit, like most business people did back in those days. I had Pet paint ‘Are you From Deep Elem?’ on the drivers side, in six inch script letters painted silver. ‘Deep Elem Blues’ was a big hit song back then. Everyone hummed the tune while dancin’ to the juke boxes in beer joints. It waz kinda catchy. Those corn fed honeys seemed to like it, too. On the passengers side I had Pet letter ‘Fallen Angels Heaven’. I wanted the gals to know I was on the prowl, up front. What that meant was my '33 was their heaven on this earth and once they got in - - it was Katy bar the door...it was party time. Some of them would say, ‘Luke, why don't you get rid of the fallen angel sign on this side?’ But, they jumped right in anyway.

“It was about this time I really linked up with my good friend Willie Lane, in Jackson County. For a few years I had been buying a little dab of moonshine from Willie, but when I bought my '33 I started getting' in on, in earnest. A few months later, probably in August (1938) I blew up that six cylinder. If I'm not mistaken Ivy Agee from Gordonsville, rebuilt the motor. I'll never forget, it had ‘Floating Power’ on the side of the engine block. No one could ever tell me what floatin' power meant. The damn slowpoke would only run 60 mph wide open. It only held 40 gallons of whiskey. Funny, too, the six volt battery was underneath the body, about mid-ways.”

Suddenly the 73-year-old Tennessee moonshine legend started laughing. While slapping his right leg with his right hand he revealed, “That '33 didn't have an emergency brake, plus the lights were weak. I bought new headlights, tires, battery and seat covers.

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“My '33 set me up in the haulin' business, that's for sure. I probably run 25 gallons a week, and back then that was movin' a lot...at least for a little runner like me. My biggest whiskey load in the '33 was 40 gallons in the jacket cans. Gas was about 20 cents a gallon. The '33 would get about 30 miles per gallon if I kept my toe out of the carburetor, something I usually didn't do. I'd get in a hurry and grind the three gears on the floor. Lord, lord, I was a mess back then.

“Surprisingly, I only out-run the law one time,” Denny smiled and continued, “during the nine month period I owned ‘Ol’ Bessie’. A young Putnam County deputy spotted me in my Buffalo Valley backyard. It was a short chase. I gave him the slip after the first or

second quick turn onto those curvy back woods gravel roads. See, I knew every turn, nearly, in this area. Most of the deputies knew the territory around the county seat of Cookeville. Buffalo Valley is at the edge of the county, not too far from the DeKalb and Smith County lines.

“After nine months of runnin’ the pee water out of that ’33 it no longer had floatin’ power. Hell, it had no power at all. The rebuilt powerplant was a basket case. It was shot. So, after paying her off in January (1939) I swapped it for my second car...a black ’37 Ford coupe from Ford Motor Company in Cookeville,” Denny concluded his history of the ’33 Plymouth...with ‘floatless power’.

1937 Ford Coupe (black):

(2) January 1939 to May 1940.

“The Middle Tennessee lawmen knew I was running moonshine by January 1939, since I was haulin’ 25 to 30 gallons a week and my bootleggers wanted even more,” Denny said. “My ’33 was gone. The law had fast cars. Without a faster car I was going to get caught, it was simple as that. What I needed was a car that would hold at least 100 gallons and run 100 mph at a minimum. By this time I planned to move from a penny annie hauler to a 24-hour-a-day roller. My new, used ’37 Ford coupe was the answer.

“Sometime after New Year’s Day of ’39 I traded for the black ’37 V-8 Ford. It cost me \$350 and the Plymouth. Little did I realize the ’37 was a moonshiners car as it use to have a ‘smoker’ under it. (A smoker was a device used to spray smoke

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out the exhaust pipe of the car when law enforcement officers gave chase). Calvin Anderson of Gainesboro owned it, but had removed the smoker, after he bought it. Remember, if you had a smoker on the car and the law pulled you over, you would go to jail and lose the car. You automatically were guilty, period. The judges threw the book at moonshine runners who were caught with smokers on their cars. That’s why Calvin had it removed immediately after buying it.

“The ’37 was quick. It would twist the needle off the dial. I’ve pulled away from the law rollin’ between 110 and 115 mph. My black beauty could hold 120 gallons. About February 1939 I blew that engine. Sam McCulley, the chief mechanic at Ford’s in Cookeville, rebuilt the engine. It only had one long bench type front seat. Behind the seat was hollow. It had been torn out, neatly. To get 120 gallons in it I had to pull the seat all the forward and stack the jacket cans tight against the back of the seat. I could squeeze a few more gallons by sitting them on the seat next to me, but that was really risky if the law go after me. That’s why I only did that a time or two. Since I was a full blown business runner my car needed to be equipped for fast, hard-driving curvy, back road action. Therefore, I put six-ply puncture-proof tubes in Goodrich Silvertown tires on the back and heavy duty four-plys on the front. Silvertown were the best tires I could buy in 1939. My Nashville mechanic at Brandon’s Spring Company (now closed) also

added extra leaf springs to disguise the load. It had three forward gears in the floor, like the '33.

“With my '37 outfitted I was ready to roll. I moved from haulin' 25 to 30 gallons a week, immediately to a minimum of 150 weekly, and much more around the holidays. To camouflage my runnin' I kept my hand in farmin'. You better believe I didn't do much on the farm. I'd hire most of the work done, but dad gave me one-third of the corn and one-half of the tobacco,” Denny added with a smile.

“Most of the time I drove to the Jackson County stills. Willie Lane, in No-Man's Land, was one of my best moonshiners. I also loaded a lot of whiskey in '39 at stills in Popular Springs Ridge and near Route 1, in Rickman, Tennessee. From the stills I would delive the clear devil's juice to Hartsville,

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Lebanon, Gallatin, Sparta, Livingston and Carthage. It was about this time I went into business with my Putnam County backer,” Deny explained with a puzzled look on his face. “I'm sorry we can't interview him, he passed away and his family will not give us permission to use his name. See, I didn't have any money to go into the haulin' business. What little money I made in the early and mid-thirties, I spent...as fast as I made it. My backer went halfers on each load, plus when the bootleggers were full and when the shiners had run off a batch I would deliver it to his barn. It was like a whiskey warehouse. When the price was up we seem to have whiskey on hand. A month or two before a holiday I filled up his barn.”

A year and half after buying the '37 Ford, Luke was ready for a new car. “The '37 was ready for the junk yard. “I had put many, many hard miles on her, running' in and out of the ditches at night. The law chased me many times between January 1939 and May 1940, but with a souped up V-8 motor the law never caught me. Thank goodness the lawmen didn't have car radios back then. My '37 was getting hotter by the hour. By May of '40 I was on the whiskey haulin' road day and night, it seemed. I was sparkin' (going out on dates) the second I unloaded, too. Remember, I was 22 and 23 years old, single, and trying to date a different gal each night. I can remember driving my sick '37 to the same place I bought it; Ford Motor Company, Cookeville. I traded it in on my first new car...a fast 1940 V-8 black Ford coupe. The list price on the window was \$750. I can't recall how much boot I had to give them and my '37. The day I pulled my new '40 Ford coupe away from the dealership I thought I was the cat's meow.

1940 Ford Coupe (black):

(3) May 1940 to May 1941.

When Luke thinks about his hauling days three cars come to mind immediately; 1940 and 1949 Fords, and 1947 Pontiac. These were the only cars he owned. “Oh my '40 Ford Club Coupe was a young man's dream. It was fast as lightning and the girls loved to been seen in my slick black coupe,” Denny smiled and continued. “It would hit 100

really fast and hug the roads like no other car. Plus, she would hold 100 gallons. It also had the one long front bench seat, and

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hollow to the trunk. About 18" behind the seat was a partition. That area had eight, five gallon jacket cans or 40 gallons of whiskey. From the trunk I loaded 12 jackets or 60 gallons. Sometimes I loaded only the front or back compartment. She also had puncture-proof tubes and Silvertowns on her. Remember, to have a tire puncture-proofed they had to be glued on the inside of the inter tube. When it was really hot outside the glue would slightly settle on the bottom sometime and didn't ride smooth for a few miles. I had the same things done to my '40 as the '37 Ford.

"The '40 was my first column shifter. I remember burning the tires at the first stop sign and missing second gear," the old moonshine running veteran laughed. "Do you know the floor shifter had one advantage over the column linkage? Don't laugh, it's the truth. Remember I was single and 22 or 23. Anyway, I would tell the girls to move closer to me, and straddle the floor shifter. When I shifted from second to third I would make my first advance with a little touch on the leg. My next move depended on what the gal said and did after my first touch.

"I was ready, let me tell you. All I thought about was haulin' and drinkin' whiskey and women. O' yeah, I put my first radio in the '40. Plus had seat covers installed after burning' a four inch hole in the seat with a cigarette. My girl friend and I put out the fire in the seat by pouring beer on it," he grinned and continued.

"I was haulin' like never before from May 1940 to May 1941. When I had the '37 I thought I was haulin' often, but with the '40 I was movin' even more whiskey. It seemed I could never have enough booze for my customers."

About this time the Nazis were fightin' in Europe. The chat around the hills and beer joints was, 'Are we going to war with the Germans or Japs first.'

"The women loved this car. I dated about every other night, it seemed. Jackson and Overton counties were my two big moonshine still loading areas. In the year I owned the '40 I put at least 40,000 miles on her. The law got after me all the time. Once I asked the Putnam County court reporter out. She was a blond from California. On my first and late date different

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lawmen pulled me over before we got out of Cookeville. The third time I was stopped she opened the door, got out and said, 'I don't want to go to jail. You must be WANTED!' Back in those days o' John Law harassed you if they couldn't catch you haulin' whiskey.

“Then it happened. I wrecked my black ’40 Ford. It was early in May 1941. Naturally I had been drinkin’. But not drunk. It was Saturday afternoon. I was driving west out of Cookeville on old Highway 70 when my tire blew. I turned my ’40 over near the Cedar Inn, a long gone honky tonk, where Main and Springs streets are located today. It is still unknown why the puncture-proof tire blew. Policeman ‘Zabbie’ Haney investigated. He drove me to the hospital where they x-rayed my left shoulder. The car was towed back to the Ford Motor Company. It was totaled. A few days later I went back to take out the radio and someone had already beat me to it.”

1938 Ford Coupe (blue):

(4) August 1941 to 1943 or 1944.

From May to August 1941 Luke Denny was borrowing car after car to stay in the whiskey running business. “Finally, my Uncle John R. Denny bought me a blue ’38 Ford coupe...in his name,” Luke explained. “Uncle John really liked me, for some unknown reason. It was a used V-8 model. This was my first car that wasn’t black; it was blue. I had good standard tires on it. I found some of his papers under the seat a few months after Uncle John bought it. It cost \$400. We got it from the Ford Motor Company in Cookeville, naturally.

“My blue runner was a real sweet sounding car. I only had to replace the busing in my ‘blue ’37. That was only \$17. Usually I made my whiskey runs during the night. But, on some special occasions I drove in the daytime. Since I was ‘in the money’ I stayed many nights at the Shanks Hotel in Cookeville, instead of driving all the way back home to Rock Spring, specially after a date with a Cookeville gal, or if I had to rendezvous at the Rickman still in a couple of hours. About this time I made no bones about farming. I quit.

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“On January 27, 1942 Uncle Sam drafted me into the U.S. Army. I used my blue Ford to haul whiskey even up to the night I went to boot camp. My brother John Henry Denny agreed to keep it for me while I was in service. When I came home on leave I hauled as many loads as I could. Come to think of it I hauled loads on at least two furloughs, maybe three. Then it happened. Harold DeWeese, I believe that was his name, was driving it during 1943 or 1944, while I was fighting’ in World War II, in France. John Henry, I believe was the passenger. Anyway, Harold ran it into a bluff. We had to salvage the ’38. That’s all I know about Ol’ Blue.”

1946 Ford Club Coupe (black):

(5) December 1946 to December 1947.

Luke was discharged from the U.S. Army in Mid-October 1946 at Camp Atterbury, Indiana. He received about \$300 mustering out pay and according to the old moonshine runner his company first sergeant lectured the soldiers as they were about to depart Atterbury, ‘Don’t stop in town on your way home. The no good women and money grabbers will rob you in the beer joints, and the Army is not going to lend you any money for bus fare to get back home.’

“We didn’t listen to the top kick,” Denny said with a sheepish grin, “nearly ever one of us went as quick as we could to the honky tonk dives and sure enough some lost their mustering out pay. Not all hit the dives, the older and yes wisher married men headed for the bus station and home. I didn’t. But I did have sense enough to buy my bus ticket and hide \$100 in my shoe before getting commode huggin’ drunk.

“Within a couple of days I was filling out papers for a new car at the Cookeville Ford Motor Company. Back in those days,” Denny recalled, “you had to register (order) for a new car. The car factories changed to war production in the early forties, and by 1946 they were gearing up to make cars, again. Only a limited number was made in 1945, but by ’46 cars were once again rolling off the lines in Detroit. I put \$100 down, from my mustering out money.

“Men were returning to Middle Tennessee with money burnin’ holes in their pockets...huntin’ for moonshine. Here I was without wheels. I was ready to roll, ready for action and

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adventure, too. My backer explained we were losing out on the moonshine trade by the hour. “There is big money to be made, Luke. You need to quit borrowing cars and getting’ others to haul for ya or get a runnin’ car.’

“His words sounded like good ol’ sweet country music to me. I thought everyday about a car. Three months after my discharge—honorable too—my backer drove me to the Ford Motor Company. He paid cash for the low mileage, slightly used 1946 Ford. I also got my one-hundred bucks back from the down payment. I had to pay him back every cent for the car. Oh yes, I did try my hand at farmin’ on dad’s Rock Spring rocky farm on and off the first six months. Probably I helped get in one crop, but I didn’t like it at all. Farming was not for me. It didn’t pan out so I returned to my old moonshine haulin’ trade...full time.

“I wish you could have seen the inside of that car. It had the softest, prettiest blue velvet interior. O’ she was a blue heaven. The first V-8 ’46 would hold between 80 and 90 gallons of moonshine and hit 90 mph goin’ down hill. She wasn’t fast. At the very first still, after loading about 50 gallons, I could see the springs needed help. When the deliveries were made I drove immediately to Brandon Spring Company in Nashville. They added extra helper leaf springs.

“With the turn of 1947 I was pickin’ up the mountain dew in Jackson, Overton, Clay and Cannon counties. My bootleggers were the same, but they demanded larger quantities. I don’t recall having one moonshine chase in the ’46, but boy do I remember a run-in- with a Cookeville cop, shortly after buying the car. At that time in my life I was chasin’ women and haulin’ whiskey,” Denny said out the corner of his mouth. “Those two jobs kept me busy 16 to 18-hours-a-day. For some reason I could go without sleep for days,

but when it caught up with me I crashed for 10 to 12 straight hours. Probably those habits was a carry over from the war years in a combat zone.

“Let me get back to the Cookeville chase,” he said. “It was probably around February 1947. I remember it was cold outside. After unloading the moonshine I picked up a date and drove to Club 70 in West Cookeville. It was an oversized honky tonk. Club 70 didn’t serve any liquor so I left my date and told

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her I would be back in a second. I was goin’ to the car to get a pint of government whiskey called “White Horse”. Another reason I went outside was to see if that cop was still watching me. He spotted me pulling out of the bootlegger joint and follow3ed me to the date’s house and was behind me when we pulled into Club 70.

“Anyway, I unlocked the door, crawled in, locked the door, opened up the glove compartment, took the bottle of whiskey out and when I started to take a drink this snoopy lawman hollered at me. He knocked on the passenger’s window and yelled, ‘Open up!’ I yelled back and said, ‘No’. He turned the door handle harder. Although I was empty, except for the pint, I cranked her up and threw the juice to that ’46...with the cop hangin’ on to the side of the car, screaming for me to stop. I hit an oil drum of some sort in the Club’s parkin’ lot. This oil drum crash must have knocked the policeman off the runnin’ board, because he was holdin’ on while runnin’ next to the car.

“Finally he let go. As I spun around to get on the highway, sendin’ grave flyin’ I noticed from my mirror the cop getting’ into his patrol car. He ran me all the way through the Putnam-Smith County line. I was ‘bout a mile ahead of him. I pulled off the road at what is now the Buffalo Valley Drag Strip and turned my lights off. The policeman went flyin’ by. For the next hour I sit there and drank ‘White Hoss’. By the time I finished the pint I was feelin’ no pain and like and idiot I went back to Club 70. Amazingly my date was still there. During my race the work about my parking lot episode spread around the joint. They thought I was headed for jail. Therefore, I was treated like a hero instead. I was THE famous celebrity who out-run the law. My date and I had all the free booze we could drink that night and early the next morning. For some unknown reason the policeman didn’t come back to Club 70. I guess he thought I would never return there, that night anyway.”

The 73-year-old moonshine hauling man paused for a moment or two to collect his thoughts about the ’46 Ford. He continued, “I sure sold a lot of whiskey during 1947 in this car. Remember, I had been away from these parts for more than four long years in the service. Also, many of the lawmen went

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to war and some younger ones were not in office when I was running moonshine before the war. Some didn’t know me, at first. It was fairly easy for me to haul in 1947. I

pickup the clear whiskey from Aleck Haney, Johnnie and Mack Burks, Mutt and Ebb Tidwell and many others. Those were some of my regular whiskey makers. However, the car was getting hotter and hotter. I knew if I kept it much longer I would get caught with a load since I was haulin' at least five nights a weeks and made one or two daylight runs each week.

"It was time to trade cars," Denny revealed. "Along about Christmas of 1947 I turned over the keys to my black 1946 Ford with the blue velvet interior to a Shanks feller and bought another 1946 Ford coupe...a white one."

1946 Ford Club Coach (white):

(6) December 1947 to January 1948.

"Do we have'ta write about every single car?" Denny complained, "C'mon now, I hated that slow slug. By George I sold that beast after only one whiskey run, too.

"Let me see," he begrudging recalled. "I paid cash for the sick white, light blue interioered '46 Ford at the Kemper Mart Buick dealership on the Sparta Highway, south of Cookeville. I gave them \$1,100. To beat it all, it was my fault for buyin' that piece of shit. I didn't even take it out for a test drive, I was in such a hurry. Don't laugh. That dog was a former taxi! I mean it....a damn burnt up taxi cab.

"The second I pulled from the dealership I headed for the whiskey still in Seven Knobs, Jackson County. You won't believe this, but I could only get 50 to 60 gallons in that white '46. If all the lawmen in Tennessee used their cars to push me down hill that slowpoke would only go about 74 mph. I was scared to death of getting caught on my way to Martha's Community south of Lebanon. After using it to haul gals around for about a month from honky tonk to honky tonk my backer and bootleggers were screamin' for me to get off my dead backside and back to the moonshine haulin' business.

"In January 1948 I carried it to the Lebanon Auction and ran that slow dog through the auction. It brought \$1,050. Luckily I only lost \$50 on it. On the way back J. D. Perrgo picked me up and dropped me off at my Rock Spring home. We've been

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friends since. After checkin' around I found out the previous owner, who sold it to Kemper Martin Buick, had run over some rocks which had come off the bluff on the southside of the Cumberland River near the bridge at Carthage. It never steered worth a shit, either. The darn thing would shimmy all over the road. It was dangerous to drive. That's why I got rid of the white '46 and never ever bought a white car again."

1947 Pontiac Chiefton (blue):

(7) February 1948 to Spring 1949.

"O' that '47 Chiefton was my first big car and I loved it probably most of all. She was s-o-o-m-m-e-e-t-t-h-h-i-i-n-n' else. The women went crazy on my midnight blue dream

boat with the red and gray interior,” Denny explained as he moved the arm of his recliner, laid his head back, smiled and stared at the ceiling for a moment, before continuing.

“I had been without wheels for about a month. My roamin’ fever was high. So I had someone drive me to Nashville to buy a caddy. That’s right. I planned to haul moonshine in a Cadillac. When I spotted the ’47 at Russell Willis’ Nashville used and new car dealership the thoughts of buying a caddy went out the window. When Mr. Willis asked me, ‘How are you going to pay for it?’ I reached in my pocket and pulled out 15 one-hundred bills. With tax the Pontiac came to \$1,550. Now that straight-8 baby would roll on the straight aways let me tell ya. She would run 115 mph when needing a tune-up. Many times I twisted the needle off...way past 120, loaded too. It would hold 120 gallons: 100 in the trunk and 20 in the back floorboard. Usually I hauled the mountain liquid dynamite in fruit jars and few times in kegs. Normally, I delivered the whiskey in six gallon cases, or 12 half gallon fruit jars.

“On the way back from makin’ a haul to Detroit during December 1948 I had a wreck in Key West, Kentucky, about 10 o’clock at night. Larry Kelly from Hartsville came back with me. The roads were snowy and icy. It tore up the other car but only left a little scratch on my bumper. I was empty at the time,” the aging moonshine runner added.

“With the Pontiac I added more bootleggers in Sumner County at communities with funny sounding names like Grab-All, South Tunnel near Portland, Buck Lodge, Mitchellville

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and Providence. Brandon’s fixed my extra leafs and helper springs, again. My six-ply tires had think tread like a truck. Oh my midnight blue Bessie was ready. My, my, we were on top of the world. “I had lotsa chases in it to,” he added. “One time a Putnam County deputy tried to catch me and just for kicks I lost him in the Gentry community, near the Putnam/Smith County line. I thought I was empty, but had forgotten all about a gallon of moonshine. My date showed it to me so we parked at the old Gentry schoolhouse and drank it, then went onto the bootlegger’s joint at Chestnut Mound.

“It was with this car I picked up Jewell, my first wife. We only stayed together for about three or four months. Jewell is the only former wife who is alive.

“With the Pontiac rollin’ the moonshine at night I was also visitin’ many clubs in between. My favorite haunts around Cookeville sported names like ‘Pine-Pole-In’, ‘Royal Club’, ‘Fairview’, and ‘Cedar Inn’ (spelled See-her-in). On up the road toward Monterey was the ‘Mountain View Inn’ and then near Crossville was the ‘Black Top Inn’,” Denny recalled.

Moments later he revealed, “Probably everyone who has ever heard of my exploits will recall the time I lucked out and got away from two revenue agents - - while driving that Pontiac loaded with 84 gallons of moonshine in the trunk - - by playin’ the part of a

minister. Here's how it went. It was in the summer of 1948, probably about July. For some reason it had rained every day for a long time and during the evenings a wind breaker was needed. It was very unusual for a Tennessee July. The word was out....'Every lawman in the region is blocking every road from Jackson County to catch whiskey runners.' They were searching every single car and truck. Dadburn it my bootleggers were hot under the collar at me because I couldn't supply them with moonshine. Nearly every 'legger was bone dry. I had to make a run. So, I took the back roads to Seven Knobs in Jackson County and loaded the 84 gallons. It was in the daytime. The gravel roads were really muddy and the creeks were at flood stage. I mapped out the best way to evade the law. First, I would cross Martin's Creek and come out the

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back way to Granville, then hit Highway 70 and roll on into Carthage and unload," Denny paused a moment to get his breath and then continued in an excited tone.

"I slowed to a crawl and checked the height of the water at Martin's Creek. It was the highest I'd seen, but I thought I could get across. I looked around and didn't see anyone, revved the straight-8 and popped the clutch. Probably two third's of the way across the engine begin sputtering. I double clutched it. Then floored it. Water began pouring into the floorboard and even got in my shoes. The engine died. I was stuck in the creek with 84 gallons of shine...waiting for any lawman to catch me. What a helpless feeling. Shortly I turned the key and tried to crank her, but the motor was flooded. She was dead. I set for couple of minutes with my feet up on the front seat, cussing myself. Finally I blew the horn. Out of the rear view mirror I saw Logan halfacre leadin' a pair of the prettiest big sorrel mules, in the rain. Boy was I relieved," the light haired moonshine runner gave a sigh and added.

"Logan had been pullin' car after car out of the creek he told me later, but the first words out of his mouth were, 'Here comes the Feds!' I shall never forget the next scene as long as I live. It's burnt in my memory. I can see it as if it happened this very second. From the front of the car came two men dressed in dull yellowish brown khaki colored trousers. I knew from the way they walked and looked Logan was right on the money. They were revenue agents. I remember saying to myself, 'Okay Luke Alexander Denny how are you going to get out of this mess?'

"Mr. Halfacre continued to pull the Pontiac straight toward the bank where the agents were standing. I thanked my lucky stars I hadn't taken one sip that morning. For once in my life I was as sober as a judge speaking to the jury. When the car hit the muddy bank the agents came up to the car and so did Logan. I got out and said, 'How much do I owe ya?'

"Logan answered, 'Oh about five bucks I guess.'

“After pulling my wallet from my dark blue suit trousers I paid and thanked Logan. One agent walked around to the passenger’s side and looked inside the Pontiac. Thank goodness I didn’t have any whiskey in the back floorboard on this

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run or they would have caught me for sure. The officer standing next to Logan said, “Sir, we’re looking for a Mr. Borders hauling untaxed whiskey out of Kentucky and another runner hauling whiskey from Buffalo Valley named Luke DENNIS.’

“I was never so happy to hear the word DENNIS in my life. I knew right then they did not know who I was. Quickly I answered with a poker face, ‘Oh sir, I’m on the other side of the law. I’m a minister. I’m BROTHER HARNESS. I’m holding a revival at the Seven Knobs Freewill Baptist Church near here, for the next week. Later I found out it was actually a Church of Christ. Anyway, on my way from loading the moonshine to Martin’s Creek I just happen to recall church people going into church and seeing the revival sign. I then explained to the agent closest to me that I was a visiting minister and had gotten off on the wrong road during the foggy rainy weather. Logan looked away and held his hand over his mouth to keep from laughing. The younger agent looked in my rear window and saw a Zane Grey book entitled “Riders of the Purple Sage” and said, “Yea he’s a preacher, I can see his BIBLE back here.’ I wanted to shout for joy when I heard the officer say that. True, the dark blue binding on the Zane Grey book in the shadows would make it look like a Bible and I was dressed in a nice, clean suit like any normal preacher.

“The officer next to me said, “Keep your ears to the ground as they are beating the government out of a lot of revenue. Will you help us since your going to be in the community for a few more nights? You can help us apprehend these whiskey moving sinners? Will you help us?’

“I soberly answered, ‘NO SIR, BUT I’LL PRAY FOR THEM.’

“This revelation embarrassed the two federal agents. They shook hands with me. Thanked me and walked off toward their car which was hidden in the woods. I started casually chatting with Logan about directions back to the church, while watching the two government men out of the corner of my eye. When they were about 30 feet away they stopped. I immediately jumped into the car, turned the key as luck would have it, it cranked on the first try. Both officers were running back toward me waving their hands. I knew they realized they

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hadn’t searched the trunk. The yelled, ‘STOP! STOP! STOP!’ I acted as if they were simply waving good-bye at me, waved back and stomped the gas pedal to the floor sending creek gravels and mud all over the area....and got the hell out of Dodge.

“Logan told me later they started after me. Then stopped before cranking their car and said, ‘Damn preacher got away. We’ll catch him with that lead.’

“I did not forget my close call for some time. Probably,” Denny speculated, “that’s why I lucked out and prearranged an escape. Remember, I really hadn’t planned to arrange this plan, it just happened. While getting’ some gas at the country service station on Highway 70-north, some two or three miles east of Chestnut Mount, I explained my recent narrow escape from the two revenue officers by actin’ the part of a preacher, to the station owner. In passin’ I said somethin’ like, ‘If the law is ever chasin’ me in this area will you help me hide my car in your grease room?’

“The owner jokingly said he would, but reminded me about quittin’ the moonshine runnin’ business. He said, ‘Just think Luke, you wouldn’t have to worry about getting’ caught if you would stop runnin’ liquor.’

“I said somethin’ like, ‘Oh, I need to make just a few more runs before getting’ out of the business.’ Then I came up with a signal for him to open the grease door. If I was far enough in front of the lawman I would turn my lights off and on, plus honk the horn. I told him I would probably be headin’ west loaded with moonshine, but I would not slow down nor stop if the law was right on my back bumper. There was a fairly sharp curve about a mile east of the service station and I explained that’s where I would start hittin’ the horn and lights. Remember, he closed the gas station about dark, so the get away method would be used only during daylight hours.

“I grinned, paid him for the gas and said, ‘Now you know we’ll never need to use your garage.’ He waved goodbye and I was off, with my good lookin’ date pesterin’ me to shut up. As I cranked the engine she said in a huffy tone, ‘C’mon let’s get goin’ to the dance.’ Plus, the hot tempered redhead was hungry. Earlier, while pickn’ her up, I told her we would stop at a

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fancy restaurant in South Carthage and fill up on cat fish at Earl McCallum’s. We ate, drove to the Lebanon dance hall and drank beer and moonshine half the night. Then, when I was just about loaded (drunk) I stepped on her foot and broke a shoe strap. She got red hot. Boy she was mad. So mad, she strolled over to another whiskey runner and within two or three minutes they left the beer joint. Buddy, I was livid. I was pissed off, to say the least.

“Well, about two months later, I headed for No-Man’s Land in Jackson County to load up. When I went by the service station I tooted, waved and the owner waved back. Anyway, later that afternoon - - on the way back from No-Man’s Land (driving west) with about 75 gallons of whiskey in fruit jars - - I spotted Trooper Brown Minor headin’ straight for me some 25 yards west of Double Springs, in Putnam county. The Trooper who is dead now, had pulled me over a goodly number of times, but I was empty. He told me he was goin’ to take my big Pontiac if he ever nailed me with whiskey, and he

would have, too. As we were about even he pointed at me. His tires started burnin' as he had hit the brakes, hard. The Tennessee Highway Patrolman made a slidin' 'U' turn. As he was turnin' I floored my big straight-eight motor and the chase was on. Thank goodness I knew those curves and the load was level. My car was heavier than the Troopers so I was able to stay probably a mile ahead of him. All I could think of was, "I hope the gas station man remembers my signal." I was so excited I started blowin' the horn and switchin' the lights on and off about 500 feet sooner than I had planned.

"It was like magic. The owner was workin' on a small engine - - like a lawn mower - - with another man, next to the gas pumps in front of the station. He ran to the grease rack door, opened it. I hit the brakes, pulled into the stall and jumped out. He raised the Pontiac, while I shut the garage good, leavin' the bewildered man and his lit' engine standin' in front of the station. When the door hit the floor I headed out the back door and so did the owner. We ran out in to a field behing the station for a short distance. About 10 or fifteen feet into our run we heard the Trooper's car roar by just a gettin' it.

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"We waited a few minutes, 'til Brown got out of sight, then went back inside. He lowered the car, as I opened the garage door. Within a few seconds I backed out and headed east, in the opposite direction as the Trooper. My backer lived not too far so I pulled into the hall of his barn - - nicknamed 'The Moonshine Depot'. We quickly unloaded. My backer was mad at me for not goin' on to Hartsville to drop off the load at the lady's joint, as he had already contracted another load for me that night. Within a few minutes here came the sound of Brown's siren headed east toward Cookeville.

'Now empty,' Denny explained, "I drove back to the service station. The owner said Trooper Minor had turned around down at Elmwood and stopped at the station on his way back. The tall and slender lawman asked them if Luke Denny's Pontiac had raced by, earlier. For some reason the man waitin' to have his small machine repaired answered the Trooper, 'Yep, ol' Luke went by here mortality flyin', just before you came through. He's probably in Nashville by now.' Trooper Minor said, with his siren still blarin'. "Tell that rascal if he stops by I'm after his butt.'

"I smiled, but the God-fearin' service station attendant had an angry, scornful look on his face. His piercin' stare made me feel kinda bad. He harshly said, 'Like to got caught, didn't ya?' He turned his head and started to work on the engine, then said, 'I'm not gonna save your hide again for no 'mount of money...good customer or not.'

"That was the first, and last time I used his garage to get away. And, to this day I don't know who the man with the little machine was.

"Just before Christmas of '48 the depot was low on moonshine - - probably only had 50 to 60 gallons on hand - - so my backer asked me to check and see how much we had in the two brown metal boxes in the woods lot, between a black locust and a sassafras tree. My backer told Monroe (Coon) Woodard of Elmwood, the man who constructed the tin

metal boxes, we needed them to store seed corn. Coon worked for Roy Vaden, now deceased, whose birthday is the same as mine. The thin boxes would hold 16 cases of fruit jars.

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“In the barn we usually kept 400 gallons stocked in cases under corn or hidden in the corn crib. We rarely had nay in the loft as it was to hard to carry the cases up the ladder and to get hurt and break some of the moonshine jars. O’ yes, we also have some in the nearby tater shed and the tobacco barn. In the tobacco barn the mountain dew was stacked in the stripping room.

“A few local farmers would stop and buy a half-gallon or so, but only if the backer knew them personally. Some local bootleggers would buy up to 20 gallons and transport it themselves. I liked that best, since I got half for brin’ the whiskey from the still to the depot. To the best of my knowledge we never got raided, but we always feared the Feds most; Sicy Anderson and Paul Knowles out of the Cookeville office.

“Sorry I strayed away from the subject. Well, it made me a little angry that my backer wanted me to check on the boxes because I was on my way to a hot date and was all dressed up and smelled like a French “W” (whore). I don’t like to use that word in public. But, I agreed, and stomped through the stubble, scraggly bushes to a big hollow chestnut stump where we usually kept 40 gallons in reserve. Plus, if the law raided the depot we would have this extra liquor to take car of one run. Anyway, when I pushed back the leaves, much to my amazement, I found the two containers EMPTY!

“My boss said, ‘Get your butt out and contract a load, now.’ I didn’t dare say no, since I was dead broke and was about to hit him up for a hundred or so to party on. All my regular moonshiners were dry as a bone. First, because I hadn’t hauled for nearly two straight weeks, getting ready for the Christmas rush, and secondly, moonshiners normally didn’t make as much liquor during the dead of winter, with all the snow around. The law could easily track them down, plus it simply was to cold to work.

“One of my moonshiners in the triangle area (near a point where Overton, Clay and Jackson Counties meet) Heard about some shine in the northern part of Clay County. I think it was Mutt or Ebb Tidwell, or it might have been Johnnie or Mack Burks who told me about some possible shine. I hopped

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in my Pontiac and found the moonshiner getting’ some coal oil at a little country store not to far from his backwoods cabin. After a brief introduction we went outside and talked. He had heard of me, but we had never met. He questioned me for about 15 minutes to make sure I wasn’t a lawman. Finally, he told me to come down a narrow tree lined trail to a creek the next evenin’ after dark. There I would be met and told what to do to get the

whiskey. “Also, I’m goin’ ta check ya out to make damn shore you’re legit ‘fore ya get any of my lickin’, the suspicious moonshiner said as I started the straight eight.

“About eight the next night I stopped the car by the creek where the moonshiner had instructed. My backer had joined me this time. We walked to the fast movin’ swollen creek. It was about 40 foot wide and at least knee deep. I had my good suit on, with new slippers (shoes). I said, ‘Hell, I can’t get my suit dirty. How am I goin’ ta get across?’

“My 5’ 8”, 250 pound backer sarcastically returned, ‘When are you goin’ ta wear clothes like the rest of us liquor men? Here you’re all dressed up, fit to meet the damn king instead of loadin’ moonshine. The next thin’ you’ll say is, Carry me ‘cross the creek on you back.’

“I said, ‘Shucks, that wouldn’t be a bad idea.’ And, sure enough he turned around and bowed out his arms and uttered, ‘Get on turd, and don’t make a darn fool of yo’self. He had on Duck-head overalls, a jumper buttoned up to the last hold by the collar, plow shoes, a blue hickory shirt, thick white socks and his favorite brown felt hat. Lord, lord, what a sight. Two grown men wadin’ across this branch in the dark of the night and me ridin’ piggyback. About halfway across silly me started actin’ the fool by pullin’ back on his ears and spurin’ him like a horse. I whisperin’ in his ear, ‘Gitty up, gitty up, gee-ha, gee-ha,’ and he slipped down to his knees on a creek rock. My shoes dipped into the icy cold water, but my pants were rolled up so they didn’t get wet.

“He snapped, ‘Damn you Luke! Get serious! Quit actin’ a fool. Be still and shut up...for once in you life.’ And, for once I didn’t say a word, I knew he was pissed. We shook off the water as we walked to the two-room old rundown cabin. It didn’t have electricity. I remember knockin’ on the door made

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with rough plank lumber. The slow-talkin’ Clay County moonshiner greeted us with, Be’n ‘spectin’ ya boys. C’mon in. It ain’t much, but she’s home.’ The shack was dimly lit by one coal oil lamp.

“I came back with, ‘Still got the liquor?’

“Without hesitation he turned a back door and said, ‘Yep. Be back in a jiffy.’ Probably four or five minutes later he walked toward us holdin’ a quarter jar. ‘Give her a good shake and see if it don’t bead like the queen’s pearls?’ the elderly backwoodsman demanded.

“Three good shakes created the string of pearls we always looked for, plus after a good samplin’ belt my backer proclaimed, ‘Ya shore can taste the corn malt. It’s good stuff.’ The moonshiner returned, ‘Ya boy. We throwed to our white mule. It’s better that way and packs one hell’va kick, too. Ain’t nobody ever said nothin’ bad ‘bout our brew. How are you boys goin’ ta get the moonshine ‘cross the creek, tonight?’

“I opened my big mouth and said, much to the dismay of my backer and the moonshiner, ‘O’ we’ll have ta come back another night when the creek is low. Maybe next week at this time.’ Boy that was the wrong thing to say. The moonshiner quickly suggested, ‘I’ve got a friend who has an old beat up truck. He’ll haul it ‘cross for five bucks, plus stack it in you car.’

“We agreed. Little did I realize the moonshine and his friend had prearranged this arrangement as the truck was already loaded. The moment we agreed to the \$5 deal in walked a tall worker with one tooth out in the front....carryin’ a double-barrel rabbit-eared 12 gauge shotgun under his right arm. ‘Glad to meet you fellers,’ the newly arrived overall wearin’ man added in a deep, gravely voice. ‘Ya ready to cross the creek?’ We nodded yes, a little scared, too.

“After countin’ out \$288 on the uneven table for the 96 gallons of moonshine - - \$3 per gallon - - we four climbed in the front seat of his pickup. I sat on the backer’s lap next to the door. The cab stunk so bad. It was covered with dirt. I’ll never forget that smell. My guess is the truck was ten to twelve years old, had been through six or seven wrecks, had different sized tires on it and had never been cleaned inside. There were old dirty, oily rags in the floorboard, wrenches in the seat, empty

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cans and bottles plus both men smoked one cigarette after another. They used the old metal Prince Albert flip top and rolled their own; droppin’ about a quarter of the tobacco while rollin’ their cigarettes. Then it hit me. For some unknown reason I had gas. O’ you know what I mean. I had to fart, big time. So I thought I would ease it out, slowly. It started to squeal real loud. They laughed, but my backer got mad and said, ‘Damn you Luke. Quit fartin’. It’s bad enough I had ta tote ya ‘cross the creek, now I have to smell your smelly cannon balls.’

“After loadin’ the 96 gallons in the Pontiac my backer gave him \$5 and we took off. It was a cold grayish misty night, with ground fog. As we pulled away from the creek, through a fog bank, my backer said, “This is one darn night I will not forget real soon. I’ll probably catch a death of cold. I pay you good money Luke for drivin’. This is your job. Don’t get me involved.’

“Just as we started unloadin’ at the depot, probably an hour later, in came a bootlegger who was out of whiskey. He wanted the entire load. I laughed because he was so desperate for the moonshine he volunteered to reload the few cases my backer and me had already put under the corn shucks. The bootlegger took one sip and paid my backer \$576 (\$6 a gallon). So, that trip made us \$288. We split it down the middle 50-50. My wallet was \$144 richer. It was time to party.

“Nearly four months later the Depot was once again low on whiskey. My backer and I agreed to contract for every drop of moonshine we could lay our hands on to restock the

barn. My backer and I agreed to contract for every drop of moonshine we could lay our hands on to restock the barn. Late Sunday night, on April 24, 1949, I headed to Clay County and bought 80 gallons from a moonshiner whose still was very close to the Tennessee-Kentucky border. During night runs, when I was alone, I would listen to WCKY-AM, an all-night radio station in Cincinnati. Approximately 1 a.m., just as I neared Penitentiary Branch (named because so many moonshiners had served time in the Federal penitentiaries), still in Clay county, the announcer came on with a news flash. He said, 'At 9 p.m. last night a freight train collided with a truck and many in the pickup were killed at a railroad crossing east of Gordonsville, Tennessee.'

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"Boy that news woke me up for sure. As my backer and I were unloadin' down to 48 gallons in the barn loft I told him about the train accident in Gordonsville. He got bent out of shape at me for moonlightin' some whiskey on the side. I can see him standin' there by the truck of my Pontiac sayin', 'Okay, how did you find out about the Gordonsville accident if you went to Clay County to lad and came straight back here? You're holding out on me, Luke.'

"Boy I came back with both barrels blazin', 'Damn, I heard it over WCKY! When you read about the train wreck in all the papers I expect an apology from you.' And, two or three days later I brought a Nashville newspaper to The Depot (Barn) and semi-angrily told my backer, read this and apologize.' He said, 'Well Luke, for one time in my life I guess I was wrong.'

"After partially unloadin' the Clay County whiskey I went the long way around by St. Marys and Club Springs to Lancaster, not to far from the accident, to drop off the remainin' 48 gallons in fruit jars to the bootlegger. Seems like we unloaded the half-load at Dick Sampson's place right in the bad curve near the Smith-DeKalb County line, on the Caney Fork River. Center Hill Dam, just down the road about two miles. Was nearin' completion about this time.

"I learned a few hours later that Jess Bennett and most of his family were killed and Linnie Biggs, a neighbor. Nine people in all died as a result of the crash. Only one young girl survived. I believe her name was Jessie. I heard they were comin' home from church when the terrible train-truck mishap occurred. Someone told me later the engineer of the Tennessee Central was Fred Randolph, originally from my old area of Buffalo Valley.

"I continued haulin' big loads in the Pontiac after the preacher, grease rack and train-truck accident episodes. About a month later - - in the late Spring of '49, probably May - - I had planned to make one delivery from Jackson County to Lebanon then come back to Cookeville and pickup Jewell from work. But, I got drunk. I was so wasted my moonshiner in Seven Knobs wouldn't sell me any whiskey. Thank goodness. That probably saved my life. I did have one case of liquor in the

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truck. Well, I was driving fast like a wild man hoping to get some moonshine from another moonshiner. I was traveling south. At the Highway 70-Double Springs intersection I ran the stop sign and crashed head-on into a Hoover Freight Line truck loaded with 66 cases of DYNAMITE and ICE CREAM PADDLES. The big truck ran over my car. After the tremendous collision both vehicles came to rest in a field on the south of the highway. Pow, the impact threw me into the windshield. I was locked in and still drunk. A girl broke the glass out on the passenger's side. She unlocked the door, but it wouldn't open. Clarence McBroom used a cant hook (loggers equipment) from his wrecker and ripped the door open. On the way out of the car door I went out like a light. The next thing I remember was a nurse at the Cookeville⁴ hospital shooing lawmen out of my hospital room with a broom. The nurse was saying, 'Get out of here. This man can't talk to you. Can't you see he is unconscious and nearly dead, I'd be ashamed.'

"A friend of mine at the sheriff's office said Dow Pippin, the owner of the Double Springs store, called and screamed, 'Send the funeral home down here. Luke Denny's torn Double Springs all to HELL! Three ambulances responded to the fiery crash. The impact ripped the truck's wheels loose from the body. That's how hard we hit each other. I understand the truck driver quickly pulled into the other lane while trying to avoid hitting me but I didn't even hit my brakes, I was so drunk. It's a miracle I survived that crash.

"I was in bad shape. My car was completely totalled. Someone stole the case of whiskey from the trunk, as the lid popped up. Jewel was made I didn't pick her up from work and I was laying up in a hospital room trying to get well while my bootleggers were crying for moonshine. Yep, that was a very sad day," Denny said as he closed out the chapter on his totalled 1947 midnight blue Pontiac.

1949 Ford Club Coupe (green):

(8) Spring 1949 to late 1952:

After Luke's terrible accident which sent his '47 Pontiac to car heaven, he took the insurance money and bought a new 1949 Ford Club Coupe from Walter Robinson's Ford dealership in Carthage. "My green '49 cost me in the neighborhood of

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\$1,200 to \$1,400. I explained to Walter (Robinson Jr.) that it had to go at least 100 mph," Denny said. "Walter said, 'You can take it out for a test drive, but I'm not about to go with you if you're going to see if it will do a hundred.' He didn't go with me, but I came back and handed him the cash on the barrel head.

"It would easily travel 100 mph, plus, and loaded too. It was rather light, but after changing tires and adding extra leafs she was in business. It had a big trunk - - holding 100 gallons easy - - and if I really had to deliver 120 gallons I could load the extra 20 gallons behind the seat. Usually I hauled 100 gallons or a little less, all in the trunk.

During this period I picked up and dropped off the moonshine to my regular customers, but the still in Popular Springs Ridge, near Livingston, and Sly Alsup's in Rutherford County began selling me more whiskey than before.

"My, my did I ever have the chases in the green Ford. This is the car in which Smith County Sheriff J. D. Rollins finally caught up with me in Donalson, empty of course, with a gal ridin' next to me. I only had the car about a month, so Rollins' race must have been in the early summer of '49.

"Oh I just remembered something about it," Denny said in a surprising voice, "I backed up and hit a fence and kept going. It was just before Christmas of 1950. Boy it was cold and spitting little blue snowflakes. The wind was high too. I thought I had filled up all my bootleggers, but the one in Martha's Community about eight miles west of Lebanon - - we can't use his name, he's dead - - let my backer know he desperately needed 100 gallons. The only moonshiner I knew about who had that much mountain dew on hand had his still way, way back in the deep hollar about six or seven miles beyond The Knobs (Seven Knobs Community, Jackson County). The moonshine was in half gallon fruit jars, which was kinda unusual. While loading I got dirty as a little pig. I hated to get dirt on me because the law know I always went neat as a pin. I had to do most of the liftin' since all the work hands were home celebrating Christmas.

About midnight or so I headed down the backroads through Gordonsville, New Middleston, Grant and into the back door of Lebanon, then onto Martha's. Somewhere in the neighborhood

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of 2:30 or three in the morning I arrived. Tired. After he checked the whiskey I pulled out the last jar and took a big gulp. Do you know that tightwad said, 'That'll be a dollar.' that tighten my jaws. Here I did him a big favor by getting' him the moonshine at the last minute in the cold, drove all the way to Jackson County then Putnam, Smith, and Wilson counties and didn't say thanks.

"That made me mad as the devil," the moonshine runner added. His upset mood continued, "By George I pulled out a dollar and slapped it into his hand while holding the bottom of his hand with my other hand...does that make sense? The paper dollar made a loud noise. Immediately I turned and headed for the car. He said, 'Don't leave in such a hurry Luke, I was only kidding.'

"Ya know, he might have been kiddin', but I was worn to a frazzle and wasn't in a laughin' mood. I slammed the Ford in reverse, dumped the clutch and scrapped the passenger's side of the car on the barbed wire fence, knocking down three fence posts. That even made me madder. Remember, it was one of those bone chilling, windy, spooky type nights with light shinning through the clouds ever so often. I drove away to fast to the Lighthouse Restaurant on Highway 70 and had breakfast, alone. After chowin' down I cruised on home in Rock Spring and went to bed for two days. I was dead tired,

since I hauled moonshine for four straight days and nights and hadn't slept a wink. I was completely pooped out."

Denny paused to collect his thoughts. His mood changed when he continued, "It had a short wheel base. Oh, it was a breeze to turn. The green '49 was easy to load and unload. It ran beautifully with about 60 gallons in the trunk. However, with over 100 gallons the weight wasn't distributed correctly and it was hard to steer. I really hauled a tremendous amount of moonshine in this car..from 1949 to 1952 was three years worth of money makin' whiskey runnin' times. I hauled mostly at night, always on Sundays through Thursdays. I tried not to drive with whiskey on Fridays or Saturdays since the drunks were always on the roads and so were the cops. I guess Sunday night were my favorite. The drunks were sobering up and the lawmen were resting up to start the next week.

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"Guess what I nearly forgot? Our secret signal," Denny grinned and continued. "See my folks still didn't have a telephone in those days. We lived off the road about a quarter mile. I usually stopped by my backers warehouse near the Smith-Putnam County line on Highway 70-N on the way back from a run or on the way to pickup some whiskey. Sometimes, however, it was out of the way for me to go by so I went on home. My backer would place a white piece of paper under my windshield wiper, as my car was parked just off the old gravel road near the path toward my parent's home. That was to let me know I had a haul to make and for me to come as quick as possible to his warehouse. See he didn't want to walk half a mile down the path to the house and another half a mile back to his car. We didn't want to be seen with each other so the law wouldn't link us together."

Denny continued to add up the miles on the 1949 Ford until the end of 1951. "By that time you could cook an egg on the hood in the middle of the winter, she was so hot," he jokingly added. "The law kept bugging me all the time. It seemed every time I cranked the motor they pulled me over. If it wasn't the city cops, it was the county sheriffs or deputies, then the highway patrol would stop me and the revenue agents were there too. After three years of hard runnin' she was ready for the junk yard anyway, so I changed haulin' strategy and traded the green '49 Ford for my first pickup truck."

1952 Chevrolet Pickup (blue):

(9) most of 1951 to 1953.

Not only did the moonshine runner change from a car to a truck, but he also tried going straight. "Yes, that's true. I married Nellie and our first child, Charlie Lynn (Denny) came along," Denny said in a sobering, reverent tone." Also, I had a job sellin' alliances with Tuley Furniture Company in Carthage. My biggest items were Maytag ringer washing machines, electric ranges (stoves), freezer (refrigerators). A few years later televisions entered the sellin' market, but I nearly always had trouble with them. They had not perfected TV's at that time. I did not sell any of the smaller appliances.

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“We rented Mr. Tuley’s house in the Eastland Heights Subdivision of Carthage. On March 25, 1952 we bought the house. Probably the average weekly salary was around \$35. I’ll say I averaged about \$75-a-week with the furniture company since startin’ in 1950.

Denny stopped talking for a couple of minutes then continued. “I drove my ’49 north to Barton Motors in Lafayette (Macon County, Tennessee), A heavy set salesman by the name of Skinny Brauner - - he weighed probably 350 pounds - - took my Ford in on a trade-in for the 1952 Chevrolet pickup. I can’t remember how much boot I had to give Skinny, but I don’t think it was much. We traded very quickly. With my green ’49 Ford went the moonshine haulin’ business. I thought I’d go straight with a truck. Believe it or not I didn’t haul any whiskey for six months. However, I sold all the appliances I could sell to my friends locally and when I branched out of Smith County my natural visits were made to my moonshinin’ friends. They wanted to buy the items, but wanted to pay me in moonshine. I told them ‘no’ at first then one day in 1952 I was makin’ a freezer pitch to a man near the Burks family place in the Hickory Nut Community. Anyway, the man flat out made me a hard proposition. He said, ‘If you take my whiskey for payment I’ll buy it, if you don’t, I won’t. Make it easy on yourself.’ I knew my backer didn’t live too far away and would take every drop I could bring him, so I said okay. They unloaded the freezer and packed the 50 gallons in the back of the truck. Then they wrapped it tightly with a furniture wrap (covering). Two hours later the moonshine was unloaded in my backer’s barn and my walled was \$150 heavier. It went for \$6 a gallon. Plus, I made a sale so my furniture company paid me my percentage. That’s one 50 gallon deal sent my right back into the moonshine haulin’ bidness (business).

“The next day a friend of mine, Dewey Bennett, everyone called him Junior, built me some sideboards for the bed. I had them painted blue and lettered in silver. Le me see, I believe it read: ‘Tuley Furniture Company, Carthage, Tennessee’. I think the telephone number was on it too. That was the best camouflage I could of thought of. See, the day I sold the ’49 Ford car I told all the lawmen from far and wide I was out

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of illegal whiskey runnin’. I was on the other side of the law...and by George I was, for a while that is,” he added in a softer tone.

“For the next year my appliance sales went off the tope of the chart. Mr. Tuley was happy with my sells record. One day my boss, W. M. (Big Bill) Tuley Sr., now deceased, said, ‘Luke we’ve never sold so many appliances in the hills of Jackson County. Did the electric company finish running their electricity lines to the homes back in the hills country?’ I simply nodded up and down. Because if he knew I was swappin’ his appliances for moonshine I would have been out of a job in a flash. I believe Mr. Tuley had the biggest furniture company in Smith County at the time.

“I would load up with ranges, refrigerators and freezers early in the morning, drop them off durin’ the day time. Many times I would eat with the family while the work hands loaded the whiskey. Near twilight I headed for places around Carthage. Some of my favorite unloading places were Sullivans and Helms Bends, Upper Ferry Road and Myers Bottom. I nearly always unloaded there at night, then drive on home. It’s true, I did call in sick every once in a while - - probably every other week - - and haul durin’ the day, outside the Carthage area. Unloadin’ in the day was risky. You could be easily spotted.

“I can see myself wheelin’ west down Highway 70 (north of Interstate 40) during the early ‘50’s listenin’ to country music on the truck radio. My special signers were Bill Monroe, Grandpa Jones, the Delomore Brothers from Alabama. My radio picked up WSM and WLAC in Nashville the best. On Saturday nights I listened to the Grand Ole Opry.

“To the best of knowledge,” the backwoods moonshine running legend continued, “the law never even stopped me in the truck. Many of them were my friends. I even sold them appliances. Yes, I believe they honestly believed I was goin’ straight. I was sellin’ more moonshine at that time than I had ever sold. My truck was not hot at all, but Hugh McCall kept tellin’ me about the new V-8 Ford trucks with all the power to pull the hills. The old Ford garage was on Main Street across from the courthouse in Carthage. Seems like it was called Smith County Motors. Well, I finally took Hugh up on his

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deal and swapped in my 1952 blue Chevy truck for a new 1953 black Ford pickup. My trade-in was sold the next day. I should have kept my Chevy. Yeah, I lost out on that deal.

1953 Ford Pickup (black):

(10) 1953 to 1955:

“One of the first to go were the tires. In an hour I had six-plys on the back and four-ply tires on the front of the V-8. After the Tuley Furniture sideboards were added to the bed, I headed for the lower Wilson County line to pickup a load from Clyde (Shy) Alsup. About midnight I rolled into “The Moonshine Depot” with 130 gallons for our Christmas deliveries.

“Normally,” recalled the whiskey runner, “I hauled at night, unless I had the crate loaded. My backer said the Depot was nearly empty and needed to be replenished, because one of the bootlegger’s had thrown a big unexpected party. Since I didn’t have the refrigerator crate put back on the tuck yet, I had to come up with some way to camouflage the ‘mountain dine-o-mite’. In a small grove of trees was a youngster having a hard time chopping a Christmas tree. That choppin’ gave me an idea; Christmas trees over the whiskey. A local work had helped me load and unload a few times happen to stop me about this time. I told him to cut me about 15 to 20 small Christmas trees and toss them in the bed of my new, black Ford truck. He would do it for two things. First, I had to

give him a ride by his girl friend's house so he could wave and make her jealous and secondly, he wanted a pint of moonshine.

“My worker laid the trees in correctly. At the Jackson County still the young moonshiners took out the trees, place them beside the Ford, loaded 15 cases, or 90 gallons of clear mountain dew, then restacked the trees on top. I told him, on the way inside to pay for the whiskey, to stack them with the butts toward the front end. As I was speedin' down Highway 70 I looked back and it was light, then dark all of a sudden, then light again. Those trees were flyin' out of the bed and into the highway before I knew what happened. The moonshine loadin' lads had placed the trees on top of the whiskey cases with the butts facin' every which way. I couldn't stop because the law might have nabbed me covering up the moonshine. I had Christmas trees scattered about halfway from Jackson County

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to Gentry. I'll bet a few folks found some of those trees and thought Santa Claus came early. Anyway, I drove slow until I wheeled into the Depot hallway.

“My backer was angry at me, as usual. He ranted, ‘Dog gone it Luke, you could have gotten yourself caught with 90 gallons of Jackson County's finest booze. That was a hair-brained idea, trying to cover up the moonshine with trees. What if Sicy of a Trooper would have rolled in behind you and a tree flew off and make him crash? Shucks, you could have been sent to the pen for man-slaughter...or somethin' like that.’

“I explained that I didn't get caught and no one got killed. He came back with, ‘What are you goin' to do with those scraggly trees?’ Without hesitation I grabbed one, walked to a gully near his barn that he had been bitchin' about and tossed it in the hold. Without sayin' a word I threw the other two or three in the same spot and said, ‘That will help stop your barn from slidin' into the woods.’ He didn't say a word, just grinned and shook his head.

“During the two years I kept the black Ford pickup rollin' with whiskey. I was stopped by different lawmen. For example, Tennessee Highway Patrolman Robert (Big “O”) Overstreet, received word from his boss Sergeant Joe Sanford that my empty truck was parked in front of a known bootlegger and for him to pull me over for a visual check when I hit the road. Just east of South Carthage Big ‘O’ motioned for me to pull over. He tiptoed to look over the sideboards, then while standing next to the truck he gave the inside a once over and said, ‘Luke we know you've been running moonshine. You're going to jail if we catch ya.’

“Trooper Overstreet was the nicest fellow a person could ever meet, courteous as any lawman, but the time he pulled me over and tiptoed a peek into the bed, little did he know there were six pints in my glove compartment. I had been sellin' small amounts to some local folks. Big ‘O’ retired a few years ago.

“During the early to mid-50’s I did not have one race in a truck.” Denny pointed out. “Remember too, I was married to Nellie, had two children and a steady job with Tuley Furniture Company. I hauled many, many hundreds of gallons in the bed

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of that 1953 Ford truck. Really, thousands of gallons. By the time two years had rolled around that truck was worn completely out. You could hardly steer it, as the front end was so out of line from hittin’ so many pot holes and rocks on the back roads, the brakes let you know they were gone as metal again metal sounded loudly, second gear kept jumpin’ out and a rod had started knockin’. That ’53 was a basket case and ready for the ‘moonshiner’s junk yard’. I don’t recall who I sold that Ford pickup to.

1955 Chevrolet Pickup (black):

(11) 1955 to 1962:

Luke traded the worn out 1953 Ford pickup to Cumberland Chevrolet in Carthage for a black 1955 Chevrolet pickup. Dealership owner and long time Carthage mayor James Clay along with salesman Roy Givens convinced the moonshine hauler to go with a Chevy instead of a Ford. After the sale Goodrich tires and a heavy duty back bumper were quickly added.

For the next three years Denny moonshined while continuing to sell appliances for Tuley Furniture. His main moonshiners came from Rutherford (Alsup), Jackson (Ballard), and Clay (Tidwells and Burks) counties. While his primary bootleggers sold in Lancaster, Gordonsville, Smithville, Sparta, Lebanon, Buffalo Valley, Chestnut Mound, Carthage and Hartsville.

He continued using the six-an-half feet tall Frigidaire refrigerator crate constructed by Junior Bennett while he and Nellie and the two children resided in Eastland Heights, Carthage.

“Korean war vets were returning home thirsty,” Denny noted. “They had money to buy both appliances and moonshine. No one it seemed asked for credit; they had cash. I was selling both like crazy. In fact, business was so good I made \$18,000 in 1955. That wasn’t bad back in those days. I was not out running the law, because the law didn’t pay too much attention to a furniture appliance salesman driving a pickup. I made many short daylight runs from the stills to the backer’s barn and bootlegging joints. Whiskey runnin’ was becoming a ho hum type of business. Really. It was losing its action packed

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luster. When I told my backer of my hum drum, uneventful feelings he said, ‘When things get too smooth you’re getting ready to make bond.’

“Many of the old whiskey family had moved north during the forties. Others continued to move to Michigan, Illinois and Ohio to find work. I made a couple of moonshine hauls out of the state on special runs, but they were rare.

“January 1957 sticks out in my mind. It was one of those cold, cold Januarys. I sit around the still near Seven Knobs and yakked with the workers for a couple of hours hoping the weather would break. It didn’t. So, about midnight to 1 a.m., I headed out. My windshield wiper blade came off. I had metal against glass, so I couldn’t use the wipers. Therefore, I had to drive with my head out the window. My speed was around 20 miles-per-hour, up and down those curvey roads from Gainesboro to Gentry. The thick foggy mist was so cold he seemed to cut right through me. I had to drive on dim to see the road. Visibility was only a few feet. When I arrived at the Depot with the whiskey my backer made light of my two hour hauling story. It wasn’t funny.

“Some of my favorites back between 1955 and 1958 were selling to farmers. I had done this for years, but the bootleggers were getting smart; making me sell at lower rates. They knew the moonshine market much better than the early and late 40s. However, with the farmers I could double and sometimes triple my profits. Plus, they were really happy to see me. Most of them drank it themselves.

“Tennessee Highway Patrolman Tom Fugett, from Alexandria, stopped me one time about 1957 or ’58 and said, ‘Luke the word is out you are still hauling whiskey. We know you can’t drink furniture. Keep it up and we’ll catch ya.’ He’s dead now,” the moonshine runner confirmed.

Denny took his 1955 Chevrolet pickup and changed jobs in Carthage around 1958. For the next year he sold for John Ligon Electric Company. Next, he sold Philco and G. E. appliances for Ernest Hackett around 1959-60. Then he accepted a sales position from Carl Woodard of Woodard Bros, in Defeated Creek, north of Carthage. This job he would hold for nearly nine years. For three years (1969 to 71) he and William (Bud)

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Smith owned Smith & Denny (S&D) Battery Sales. There battery warehouse was located on Lock Seven Road, three miles west of Carthage. “I was the road salesman and Bud was the inside businessman.

“By the late 50s I was hauling less and less. My nerves were really getting tome. I could hardly drive anymore with whiskey in the truck. I continued to maintain my contacts. Oh, I hauled at least one load a week. That would be only one run. Sometime, during the holidays, I would crank the running operation back up and make four or five runs, but those days was rare. Remember too, bedside my nerves giving out, the illegal whiskey market was down because moonshine was too costly and many counties had legalized government whiskey. I knew my whiskey haulin’ days were numbered. But, I kept up a good front.

Next four vehicles:

(12-15) 1962-1969:

“By 1969 I was out of the big time moonshine hauling. I would contract a load and even deliver it every once in a while, not often. I’d hear a moonshiner had some extra and wanted to get rid of it. Or a bootlegger’s runner got caught and he needed some whiskey to hold him over. I acted the part of the middle-man during the sixties, on a very, very small scale.

“Here’s an example,” Denny revealed, “between 1968 or 1969 I received word someone hijacked 19, 50 gallon barrels of Old Crow from the Hiram Walker Distillery in Louisville. My contact said it was hidden in a hay barn on the Country Poorhouse Road Community in Jackson County, near the Putnam County line. I could have it for \$17 a gallon. That night I thought about who I could get to haul and who to sell it too. I had a plan. So, I drove east of Smithville, on Highway 70, to a bootlegger with a ‘blind pig’ (a lazy susan swivel) in the back of his home with a circle drive. I tried to sell him all or parts of the 19 barrels. I struck out as he had just received a big shipment of bonded whiskey.

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“The very next day, during a visit to Carthage, Attorney General Baxter Key Jr., spotted me and asked, ‘Luke, you’re an old whiskey man and I know darn well you still have your hand in whiskey. So I want a straight and honest answer from you. Have you heard anything about 19, 50 gallon barrels being hijacked out of the Hiram Walker Distillery in Louisville, hidden here?’

“I wasn’t about to say yes. I simply shrugged my shoulders and played ignorant. Within an hour I was at the Poorhouse Road barn telling the man. ‘This ol’ moonshine runner wants nothing to do with you Old Crow it’s too damn hot.’ The farmer thanks me for coming back and said a real estate man with a white caddy was going to buy it all, anyway. I left that area in a hurry, too.

“In the late 60s I wasn’t hauling at all, but was up near Rickman, Tennessee checking on the availability of 80 gallons. The owner, a long time friend who died a couple of years ago, told me about his milk haulin’ lady. She pained her clear gallon jugs WHITE. The lawmen stopped her many time, but she had escaped. Trooper Robert Crisp, also checked her ‘milk’ and let her go. But, when he spotted the lady at the bootleggers, he checked her real close the next run and caught her will all that ‘clear devils milk’.

“When I asked where to contract a load down in White County he said there’s a whiskey man south of Doyle who keeps his still surrounded with bee hives. That way the law will stay away. While I took his directions, I didn’t even stop to check on his booze. Shucks, those bees might have been hungry for Luke.

“On the way back home I remembered my Nashville running buddy Buck. That knucklehead used to haul his whiskey in an ambulance. Inside he had a mannequin

covered with a sheet. To camouflage his big loads he would even had a lady fanning the 'body'. Ol' Buck finally got caught with the ambulance loaded with 150 gallons.

“Another time, in the late 60s, a Lebanon runner’s girl friend came to me and asked me to help him contract for 100 gallons. His girl friend was a young widow. I wrote the Burks a letter for the Lebanon man and told him he would be by in a week to pick up a load. And, that he would have a note from me,

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too. I wrote, on the note, ‘Let this guy have whatever amount he wants. He’s the same gentleman I was telling you about in the letter. He’s okay, Luke.’ I didn’t hear any more about the deal until several months later. I was at the Vets Club (American Legion) in Lebanon on Highway 231 when the bar tender and waiter kept bringing us food and drink...on the house. Then I spotted the young widow. She came by and point out her boyfriend. He gave us the old thumbs up.

“Now that I’m 73-years-old I don’t fool with any type of whiskey moving; moonshining, running, bootlegging or contracting,” the crafty whiskey Tennessee legend smiled and ended his wheels chapter with, “I still take a nip of it when someone has it around, however.”

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LUKE’S LONGEST CHASE CHAPTER 1-B

On Christmas Eve of 1948 Luke Denny had one more haul to make before taking off for the holiday. He had made pickups and deliveries for 48 straight hours and was totally exhausted. “I kept thinking, ‘One more run, you can do it.’ It was cold, but clear outside.”

Around midnight Luke ate pork-and-beans while his moonshining friend Glenous (“B”) Ballard counted the money for the 84 gallons of moonshine, in the Seven Knobs Community of Jackson County, Tennessee.

“A Nashville runner named Buck was supposed to load before me but for some reason he didn’t show up so they loaded me out instead,” Denny said from the kitchen of his Smithville, Tennessee home December 27, 1989. “The load consisted of 14 cases of half-gallon Red Ball Mason glass jars,” all in the trunk of Denny’s midnight blue, straight-8, 1947 Pontiac Chiefton.

“My goal was to drive the back roads from the Knobs to the bootlegger at Martha’s Community, a few miles south of Lebanon. Before leaving Ballard’s still I turned the radio on. As the Pontiac rolled down the one lane logging path from the still, then onto

the gravel back roads toward No-Main's Land, "Deep Elem Blues" lifted my tired spirits...as opening Christmas presents were only a few hours away, I thought.

"About a mile from "B's" I spotted a car close behind running without lights. That was unusual. My first thought was, "The law is on my tail." My palms started to sweat, a little. The adrenal glands began to pump. I did not speed up from my 45-50 mph. All of a sudden their horn sounded. I thought this might not be the law since they did not have headlights, but blew the horn. The law normally ran with lights after getting behind you, then cranked their siren. Who could it be? What do they want, beside the moonshine and me?

"Bam. They rammed their front bumper into my back one. That did it. I knew they meant business. The chase was on. I shoved it up in second gear and floorboarded it. The Pontiac responded with all eight cylinders pumpin' power. Within a few seconds I was cutting curves as the needle bounced between

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75 and 80 miles-an-hour. I was slingin' gravels on the banks alongside the road as I scooted in and out of ditches on both sides of the road. I was really getting nervous because the car behind was still back there, but not on my bumper. I'll say it was probably four or five car lengths from me. I couldn't shake it.

"I knew they had been using my taillights to guide on. We rolled through No-Man's Land—some six to eight miles from Seven Knobs—just a flyin'. As we slide south on the Highway 56 blacktop, leaving Gainesboro behind us, their lights came on and so did a siren. 'Maybe this is the law,' I thought to myself, but kept the gas pedal on the floor. By now both cars were running way over 100 miles-an-hour, there's no doubt.

"Much to my amazement their car was gaining. I was alone and scared shitless. My palms continued sweating. My muscle in my right calf cramped. My gut was aching, too. 'How could this be happening?' I said out loud, as if someone could hear me. I had one of the fastest cars around. It was tuned and to date no car had been able to stay up with my Chiefton on the straight-a-way when it had a good load in the trunk. Then it hit me, 'That ain't the law. Their cars are lighter Fords and Chevys. It's hijackers!

"I had heard runners talk about moonshine hijackers, but I had never encountered any. I'd also heard and seen people put sirens on their cars, who were not lawmen. They did not have a 'red light', therefore that gave me more reason to believe it was hijackers after me. Then it happened. They were able to pull alongside. The passenger rolled down his window and screamed, 'Pull over you white son of a bitch!' Both were mean looking colored men. They did not show any pistols, thank goodness. Then I knew 100 percent they were after my whiskey because there were no colored officers at that time. My thoughts were, 'If I stop they'll take my moonshine...maybe even kill me. Hell, they'll probably take my PONTIAC.

“That was all it took. No one was about to take my blue Pontiac. I hit the brakes and skidded sideways into the Highway 70 and 56 intersection. Just as I got the Pontiac nearly lined up westwards on 70 I glued the gas pedal to the floor again.

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This gave me a little lead as the colored’s dark green Buick skidded on through the intersection before turning west on Highway 70. My steering wheel was dripping with sweat. My hands were so sticky I had problems steering. I kept wiping them off going down hill or on the straight-a-ways. I wondered what type motor the colored boys had under their Buick hood, but kept flyin’ low.

“Before leaving Putnam County for Smith County my lead was stretched to about 50 yards. I prayed silently for ‘Ol’ Pontiac Bessie please stay glued together. I’ll give you a drink of high-test Ethel at the first Sinclair service station I find...after we get away.’

“The chase continued through South Carthage, cross the Cumberland River Bridge into Carthage, on Highway 25. I momentarily took my eyes off the road while going down hill near Dixon Springs to see how fast the big Chiefton was traveling. The needle had disappeared. I knew we were doing more than 120. However, I still could not lose them. My hands were ringing wet by this time. My adrenalin had tapered off for some reason. Don’t ask me why. I was still scared out of my wits.

“They were still sirening me in the rural areas, but when we ran through a town or community they would turn it off. They did have their lights on. On a wet, fairly sharp curve coming into Hartsville, in Trousdale County, I slid into a right ditch and then when my back wheels finally caught the black-top I scooted all the way across the other side of the road and in and out of that ditch, too. Just as I came out of the ditch I narrowly missed a road sign and nearly hit a farmer driving a wagon and a team.

“On the west side of Hartsville a bull was loose on the road. I could see it some 50 to 75 yards in front of me. That dumb bull was strolling across the road like it was at a Saturday night barn dance. Just as I started to the right, the bull turned straight at me and turned back...right in front of me. Since I was on top of it I gave the wheel a spin to the right and hit the ditch and road up onto the bank. After my front right bumper took out one fence post I was able to plow down the bank onto the road.

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“The hijackers skidded around the bull on the left and we came within inches of a major collision. Imagine. I was heading south off the north bank for the highway while their Buick was tearing down the south bank headed straight north...for me! Within a second both cars were fishtailin’ west...about two car lengths apart.

“Up ahead I spotted a slow movin’ pickup truck in the right land. Just as I pulled into the passing lane an even slower farmer’s tractor came straight for me...movin’ at a snails

pace. I swerved between both vehicles, luckily missing them. The second I got straightened out I looked in the rear view mirror. Luck was with the colored guys, too, but they nearly came to a stop to get around the two. I was still letting the hammer down as I came into Gallatin. Since I was nearly out of my territory and since the gas gauge was heading toward empty I had to make a quick decision. My hastily concocted plan was to make a “U-turn” at the Highway 31-E and 25 intersection. There was a small parking lot in front of a service station. I jammed on the brakes, locked the steering wheel to the right, slid around and squalled the tires back east toward the hijackers.

“I kept both eyes peeled for that Buick, but to this day I’ve never spotted it.’ My guess is they gave up at the pickup truck and tractor area. When I crossed the Trousdale-Smith County line my palms stopped ‘bleeding’, Denny explained with a smile.

“Just before daylight I pulled into my backer’s whiskey barn. When I told him I had been chased through five counties by two colored highwaymen and nearly turned over two or three times, he, in a sneering, yet scornful tone said, ‘Don’t give me the bull crap. You were out with some honey, drinking and come up with damn excuse for not delivering the 84 gallons. If that happened you would have had the law right behind ya.’

“For some unknown reason not one lawman was seen nor heard during the entire chase. Any other time I’d had dozens of them crawlin’ all over me. Ya know,” Luke Denny finished, “just thinkin’ about that chase makes my palms sweat, see.”

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LUKE ALEXANDER DENNY’S BIGGEST MOONSHINE RUN CHAPTER 1-C

“In the Spring of 1948 I was plowing corn with a mule at Tan Yard Bottom, on my dad’s Rock Spring farm,” Luke Denny said from the living room of his Smithville, Tennessee home January 28, 1989. “The reason it was named that is just after the turn of the century this spot near the Caney Fork River was a processing area for tanning leather. One of the biggest bootlegger’s from Sumner County parked his new Buick alongside the gravel road and walked out in the field. I would love to use his name but he is dead and I have not been able to locate his widow. She also ran moonshine in a decoy car. The older folks around Gallatin will remember the man and woman who drove identical green cars. He was nicknamed after a bird of prey.

“Well, he needed 100 gallons a few hours later. My backer sent him down to the Tan Yard to get me. The Gallatin bootlegger drew me a map to his home on Muddy Run on the ‘single tree’ plow handle. About midnight I pulled around to the back of his house with the 100 gallons of whiskey. When the car door opened I was met by a cross-eyed man. Shortly the bootlegger checked the whiskey I had picked up from my backer’s barn. Once the sampling was completed and the count taken the Gallatin bootlegger counted out the money on a table near the back door. That was the first time I hauled to

his home. However, during the next five months I took him probably three to four loads a week.

“Law enforcement officers had raided him off and on for sometime. The word was out on the roads to stay clear of his home because in the Fall of 1948 he was indicted. It seems to me the federal grand jury handed down a selling illegal and non-taxed alcohol charge, maybe transporting too. I’m not for sure which charge his indictment called for, maybe both. Therefore, before going in front of the judge at the Nashville Federal Courthouse, he wanted to fill up all his customers. He wanted ONE-THOUSAND gallons...in a hurry.

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“We didn’t have nearly that much moonshine in the backer’s barn. For some unknown reason the warehouse (barn) was nearly empty. I’d heard about a moonshiner in Clay County, that lived near the Kentucky border who had that much on hand. His Union Hill, Tennessee farm was located way back in the mountains. About dawn I drove my car up there and contracted for the load. He could only come up with 950 gallons. The next afternoon I drove my backer’s new one-ton truck, with plywood on the sides and bottom of the bed, to Union Hill. He had 300 gallons in fruit jars packed in cases on top of tin roofing in a big field covered with toe sacks for camouflage. Five work hands carefully stacked the whiskey on the truck bed. In a nearby shed they loaded another 650 gallons.

“A man by the name of Warren went with me. On the way back to the backer’s barn to get the remaining 50 gallons I took the back roads and did not drive on one single main thoroughfare. After Warren loaded the 50 gallons we headed down Highway 70 to Highway 25, then into Trousdale County. I remember turning by a little county store, just inside Sumner County, between a rock fence on the side of the lane. Then I drove through an open gate and continued through an open field covered with broom sage until we came upon a small gap under a big tree. O’, the night was clear. I remember wishin’ out loud that some dark clouds would quickly visit this pasture near Castalian Springs. Not a soul was there. My immediate thought was, ‘We’ve been set up!’

“Well about 10 minutes later that thought faded when in rolled two pickup trucks and three cars, with seven men. Hurriedly the Gallatin bootlegger spot sampled three or four jars. We all loaded the moonshine as fast as possible. You notice I said ‘WE’, because for once I humped like the rest of them. In 30 minutes the field was empty. We headed east, while the five vehicles headed toward Gallatin. By 11:15 p.m., I shut off the engine at the backer’s barn and started countin’ money, while Warren watch from my car.

“I paid \$7,000 to the Union Hill moonshiner for the 950 gallons of mountain dew, or about \$7.35 per gallon. The Gallatin bootlegger counted out \$10,000 in \$100s, \$50s, \$20s,

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and a few \$10 bills for the 1,000 gallons. We cleared about \$2.50 a gallon, after expenses. My backer and me split \$2,800 from the 950 gallons, plus he gave me about \$50 for the extra 50 gallons from his barn. Buddy, I visited every beer joint from Lebanon to Cookeville the next four days and nights. All the girls seem to fall in love with me, then they fell out of love the minute the case began running low. Four days later I pulled into my backer's barn with blood shot eyes and half asleep. My backer asked, 'Luke, how much of the \$1,400 do you have left?' I pulled four 100 dollar bills out of my front right pocket. He looked down, shook his head back and forth and chastised me with, 'Luke Alexander Denny, I still have my \$1,400 and it is making more money. What are you going to do later in life when you are dead broke? Please, please put some money away for a rainy day.'

Luke Denny concluded, "I should have listed to my backer, but I didn't. That's why I'm penniless today. It's sad.

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LUKE ALEXANDER DENNY MOONSHINE, WOMEN AND COUNTRY MUSIC CHAPTER 1-D

With moonshine flourishing in the late 30s and early 40s—before America entered World War II - - Luke Denny and his moonshining cohorts partied hard on weekends, "as often as possible," Denny said from his Smithville living room, March 2, 1989. "Probably two or three weekends a month around 1940, plus maybe one night or two during the week we also went honky-tonkin' and cat'en around. From time to time I would use the party weekends to repay my loaders and unloaders.

"One weekend in particular around 1939 or '40 stands out in my memory. I was single, 22 or 23 years old, had money to burn and raisin' all kinds of hell about this time. For the last few months I had been datin' this tall, good lookin' blond from Buffalo Valley. She was built like a brick shit house and stood probably 5'10'. On the way from the still I saw her at the mail box and stomped the brakes of my black '37 Ford. She smiled and said, 'Luke I've been hoping you'd come by. Are we going to party this weekend?' I told her I was loaded and had to make deliveries to Hartsville and Lebanon, first. She pleadin' requested, 'Can I go?' I said, 'Hell yes, jump in,' and away we went. It was like this many times. Everyday was like Christmas. It was like the Roarin' 20s around Middle Tennessee about this time.

"After the whiskey was dropped off, the moonshine money was burnin' a hole in my pocket. O' yes, I can see myself getting' a lot of 'sugar' from the cute blond as we rounded the curves to fast, on the way to spend the night at the Shanks Hotel in Cookeville. It was late by the time we rolled into Cookeville so we hit the sack.

"Saturday mornin' found the two lover birds sleepin' in late. After a mid-mornin' breakfast we rented a cabin at the Fairview Tourist Court. I can see the lady gigglin' while sayin', back, with a laugh, 'Are you goin' to charge me full price or just

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half?’ With a big smile she said, ‘For you it will be one dollar for one and one dollar and fifty cents for two beds.’ I shelled out a buck an’ a half, since my cousin and a loader were goin’ to bring their girls, too. We then took off for Willie Lane’s house on Highway 56 in Jackson County to get a quart of liquor. Remember this was ‘dry’ country. A person had to go to the bootlegger to buy whiskey. Somewhere around five in the afternoon my ’37 Ford pulled back into the Fairview Court...we were ready for party time!

“When the first nickel rolled down the juke box slot in came my cousin and the loader, with their honeys. My cousin grabbed the bottle and took a big swig as the record played ‘St. Louis Blues’. By seven the place was hopin’. The little Fairview tavern was packed with 50 to 60 people. Everyone was dancin’ and drinkin’. Probably 80 to 90 percent of the folks were form “the Family’ (folks who had moonshine related occupations). My cousin came over and whispered, “Give me the cabin key for ‘bout an hour.’ I handed it over as he and his date headed for the back door. On the way by me he smiled big and said, ‘Don’t come knockin’ on the door sayin’ you forgot somethin’, either.’

“Along about midnight the party continued. Moonshine friends came by and showed off their girls, gave us a pint of their finest and took a drink from our hooch. Probably about four or five, maybe six in the early morin’, one of the gal’s wanted to head for bed. She made the comment, ‘Honey which bed are we goin’ to have?’ I overheard her and said, ‘My sugar and me are goin’ to make whoop in that bed. You four can have the other one.’ Shucks, I wasn’t about to share my bed since I had rented the room. Anyway, that’s the way we six ended up that night, no really that mornin’.

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“Close to sunup my honey nudged me and said in an alarmin’ voice, ‘I smell smoke!’ About half asleep I looked up, took a big whiff of the air, and boy the smoke was heavy around the cabin. We leaped out of bed the same time we spotted the blanket on the other bed startin’ to blaze. It had already smoldered. The smoke was belchin’ from the bed, while the four slept like babies...nude as jay birds. One of the girls realized what was goin’ on, rolled off the bed, over my cousin, grabbed the blanket, ran through the cabin, out the door, and tossed it onto a box wood bush. What was really funny was she stood on the little porch for a few minutes watchin’ the smoky blanket, not realizin’ she was naked. With all the commotion, everyone awoke from their drunken slumber. What a mess. We started laughin’ and laughin’, then all of a sudden we noticed the bush had caught fire and some worker was puttin’ it out while cussin’ like a sailor. We looked out the window, but didn’t say a word.

“Shucks we went back to bed and before makin’ a little lovin’ my buddy in the next bed saw some of the hair on his leg was singed. He got mad at himself for smokin’ in bed. I told him it was the cheap 15 cent cigarettes be bought in the tavern the night before. We

laughed. My sugar pie said to him, 'We didn't burn up our blanket cause Luke bought good ol' Lucky Strikes.' They cost 18 cents a pack. As both beds were movin' up and down a hard knock stopped our love makin'. It was the owner, home from church. He was angry about the burnt blanket, but for some reason he didn't say a word about the bush. It was totally destroyed. He said in a loud tone, 'Luke Denny, that lit' blanket prank is goin' ta cost ya two dollars.' For once I was as serious as a judge. I peeled off two bucks and told him it was all my fault and it wouldn't happen again. My girl was pinchin' the hair on my leg from behind the door and I was tryin' to be so serious. I could hear the others gigglin'. When the owner got out of sight we started laughin' so hard one of the girl's laid in the floor holdin' her tummy.

"Yes, those were some of the wildest nights of my life," the moonshine running legend noted, "but during the late 30s and early 40s many times the partin' didn't stop dead; they continued. An example of this is what happened after I paid two bucks for the blanket.

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"Early Sunday afternoon the three couples split and headed home. After droppin' my gal off in Buffalo Valley I drove to my moonshiner's still in Jackson County to contract for a load. He wasn't at the still, nor at home so I headed back to check the beer joints for him on Highway 70 goin' east into Cookeville. His car was parked at the Eagle Tourist Camp on the northside of 70, not far from the Fairview Tourist Court. The Eagle was another spot the moonshine family could be found. He was at the bar sippin' on a bottle of beer when I spotted him. After makin' our moonshine arrangements for the next evenin' he grinned and point out, 'Luke, look at those two honeys in the booth over there. They're alone, how can that be? You know the blond, her brother is my wheel hoss at the still. I've had her out in the corn crib a few times, already.'

"I slowly glanced over and sure enough he was right as rain," Luke Denny muttered in a younger voice. "His 18 or 19-year-old corn tassel blond was pretty as a Georgia peach. She had long bare legs, with high heels. However, she wasn't skinny and boney like many of the modern day girls. Buddy, she was strong. I'll say she stood about 5'9 and weighed about 150 pounds.

"In the other side of the booth was her cousin. She stood about the same height and was about the same age, but weighted about 15 pounds less and had the cutest brown hair up in a bun. My moonshine friend leaned over and whispered, 'Hey Bud, I'm goin' over an' put the make on the blond, want ta come and try your luck with the other one?'

"I shook my head yes, grabbed my beer bottle and strolled behind him toward the girls. O' how well I remember the juke box was playin' Jimmie Rodgers' 'Gal Pickin' Time For Me'. After buyin' the two a fresh cold beer we found out quickly these two gals were as hot for us as we were for them. Really. However, I must say his blond was all over him within a flash, while it took me probably 15 minutes to get my first little peck (kiss). While the girls went outside to visit the lady's outhouse my partner quietly said, 'Mine wants to go over to the cabin across the way. How about yours?' I shrugged my

shoulders because I hadn't popped the question, yet. "Well get ya ass in gear, we're rollin' the second they come back," he promised in a straight forward tone.

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"A few minutes went by and in came the two, happy as two larks. Our strategy was to stand up as they arrived at the bother and not ask them to sit down. He would then take his gal by the hand and lead her out the front door while I did the same with mine...without a word bein' said. It worked like a charm. We strolled hand in hand to a widow's house about 150 yards away. From time to time we brought gals over to her house for a short time of love, if you want to put it that way. You know what I mean. O' I nearly forgot something; this redheaded widow was ugly as sin. Man, she was so ugly I couldn't think straight and look at her.

"Well, my buddy gave the widow a dollar and he and his blond happily skipped into the small bedroom. My brown haired beauty took a sip of her beer, then I put the move on her. A little to my surprise she responded immediately. I thought to myself, 'Well you're goin' to get somethin' after all.' She was all hot and bothered very quickly, but all of a sudden she said, softly, 'No I can't just now, I'm riding the cotton horse.' That threw me for a loop as I had never heard that expression before. I came back with, "Are you on the rag?" And she dripped her head and said, 'Yes, it's that time of the month.'

"I didn't know what to say, so I left her standin' in the middle of the room and slowly walked to the bedroom door where my buddy was. I gently turned the knob and cracked the door. Much to my amazement they were on the floor...going at it. I went back and whispered in my girl's ear, 'Come on over here and watch the floor show.' I was hopin' to get her to watch them make love and get turned on, plus I was curious to see if my buddy was really telling me the truth about how good she looked naked. See, I really didn't think my gal was, as she said, ridin' the cotton horse.' I thought she was just makin' an excuse not to give me a little loven.

"She snapped, 'No. Do you want to see for yourself that it's my time of the month?' I reached down while she pulled up her skirt a little and sure enough she was on the rag. I told her that was okay, we'd try it again some other time, then made a joke about him havin' splinters in his knees and her havin' splinters in her butt from all the floor wrestlin' that was goin' on. She laughed. A few minutes later the two floor wrestlers

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appeared, gigglin'. We went back to the table, but the girls didn't. There was no place to wash up, since there wasn't any runnin' water in the privy out back. Ya know, I never did get any loven from that brown-haired gal but a few months later my buddy's corn silked blond and me had us one more hell'va time. We went together on and off for about a year. I had probably four girls friends during this period around Cookeville, Carthage, Buffalo Valley and Lebanon.

“Finally I went home and slept. However,” Denny continued, “on Monday afternoon I drove to Jackson County while downin’ a couple bottles of brew and loaded up all the mountain dew my ’37 Ford would hold. About dark I delivered it to Carthage. But, for some unknown reason I came up with one extra five-gallon jacket can. Since I didn’t have a date that evenin’ I returned to the Eagle and it was empty.

“The Fairview, however, was jumpin’. As I entered the joint Jimmie Rodgers was yodelin’ ‘T’ for Texas and ‘T’ for Tennessee’ on the music box. The owner wasn’t in so I returned to the Ford, carried the jacket can inside the tavern and placed it on the bar and announced to everyone, ‘The moonshine is on the house, come on up to the bar.’ Remember, everything was ‘dry’ back in those days and for some it was a little hard to get the clear devil’s juice, for others it was easy as breathin’. After pullin’ the cork stopper (plug) the bartender tipped it over.

“A friendly patron of the tavern was walking out the door toward the parking lot when he grabbed his buddy by the shirt and said, ‘Looke yonder. O’ Luke Denny has a five gallon jacket can full of mountain liquor. Let’s go back in an get us a swig.’

“The entire bar, probably 15 people, was hittin’ on the moonshine when one person slipped and spilled some of the whiskey on the barroom floor. We laughed and didn’t think anythin’ about it. A few days later the owner sent me a note sayin’, ‘Never come back. Suppose the law had come in when you had that jacket can on top of my bar. We would have all be sent to jail and they would have thrown the keys away.’ I didn’t pay it any attention since the moonshine family just about kept him in business. I was a good customer and he never said a

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word to me about the problem. In fact, I’m not sure, to this day, if the note came from the Fairview owner, his wife or someone else.

“As you can imagine the last couple of years in the 30s and into the early 40s were rockin’ and rollin’ for the moonshine bunch. This country was comin’ out of the Depression, but headed for World War II. That’s when even O’ Luke Denny had to pause form drivin’ ‘shine and drive for our Uncle Sam,” he concluded the interview in a proud manner for serving his country as a soldier.

Luke Denny and members of his moonshining rendezvous crew sang these two country-music tunes when “Moonshine was King” in the Tennessee backwoods.

“Jack-A-Diamonds”

Jack-A-Diamonds, Jack-A-Diamonds
Jack-A-Diamonds of old.
You’ve robbed my po’ pockets
of silver and gold.

It's beefsteaks when I'm hungry
and lickker when I'm dry.
Greenback when I'm hardup
and heaven when I die.

It's a likker you villain
you've been my downfall.
You've banged me and cuff me,
but I love you for all.

If the ocean was whiskey
and I was a duck,
I'd drive to the bottom and never come up.
But the ocean ain't whiskey
and I ain't no duck.
So I'll stick to Jack-A-Diamonds and trust to my luck.

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“Hoover's Hard Times”

If Hoover was elected,
the people all said,
the next four years,
we'd be crying for bread.
Hard times in the country, hard times down on the farm.

Mr. Hoover when he took his seat,
02 cent hog and 20 cent wheat,
Mr. Hoover when he came in power,
he furnished his party with red cross flour
Hard times in the country, hard times down on the farm.

You move out on some man's farm,
rent a little crop of backer,
and a little crop of corn,
you work all day, and get no pay,
little piece of meat, and a bucket of lard.
Hard times in the country, hard times down on the farm.

The old farmer will go in town,
With his hands in his pocket,
And his head hanging down,
he'll go to the merchant
and the merchant will say,

the mortgage is due, and I'll have to have my pay.
He'll reply to the merchant with a trembling hand,
I can't pay it all, but I'll pay what I can.
Hard time in the country, hard times down on the farm.

Roosevelt was elected, elected in time,
went to the treasure and found one dime,
got back liquor, and got back beer,
heap better times in the next four years.
It's hard times in the country, hard times down on the farm.

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LUKE'S GATE CRASHING ESCAPE'

CHAPTER 1-E

No longer was the dreaded Depression keeping most in soup lines as the 1930s came to a close. True, Hitler was beating his war drums across the "big pond" but in America times were getting better by the day and so was Luke's business around Middle Tennessee. His business was so good that when the 1940 models ran off the assembly line "cool hand" Luke Denny was one of the first to buy a fast, V-8 Ford.

Luke, single and 22-years-old, was totally committed to hauling the clear devil's juice. He no longer pretended to work on his dad's farm. The handsome lady's man had developed an extensive Middle Tennessee bootlegging clientele east of Nashville and west of Knoxville, north and south along today's Interstate 40 corridor. This was Luke's moonshine territory. Granted, nearly all his deliveries surrounded his home countries. His small nickel and dime operation had grown from one or two customers in the early 30s to 50 or 60 bootleggers by late 1939. He had so many customers, hauling was required seven nights a week. Some nights he even made two runs. Luke was rolling often and making money just as fast. And, yes, spending the moonshine money on wine, women and song even faster.

"Every day was like Christmas," Denny said. "If I saw something I wanted I bought it, period. No questions asked. No thought given as to where the money was coming from. I had money to burn and it kept a hole in my pocket. If I saw a cute gal at a dance I moved in on her with all the confidence in the world. Sure I spent money like water, but a good time was what the women wanted and I wanted them. It was one party after another. I was the master moonshine mover. Hell, I thought I was king shit. I thought I was above the law, really. I was doing the folks a favor by giving them what they couldn't go down to the local country store and buy legally. You might say I was "The" moonshine rolling store. I made deliveries to cities and around the countryside. My route in the country included farmers located all over the area. They, in turn, sold to their neighbors. Normally, I made one stop a week to farmer's barns, fields and woods. Back then few had a car or truck. Beer and

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whiskey were illegal. This saved the farmers time and money and the chance of getting caught. I cornered the moonshine market you might say. These deliveries were great for my cash flow. The farmers were happy and that made me happy. It was a carefree time in my life.”

However, lawmen were busting stills, arresting haulers and bootleggers daily, throughout Tennessee. Federal agent Silas Anderson, based out of Cookeville, and Smith County Sheriff Lillard Yeaman were catching moonshine operators constantly during this era. Both were highly respected lawmen. And, both had pulled Denny to the side of the road and checked for illegal whiskey many times. Lucky Luke was always empty.

Word came to Luke that Sheriff Yeaman was planning to send him to jail and have a brand new black 1940 Ford coupe to auction off. The sheriff was also sporting a brand new car; a souped up, 1939 gray Pontiac, six cylinder. The word and Yeaman’s car had Denny looking over his shoulder more and more.

“About this time it seemed every lawman in a 15 county area was on the lookout for my new Ford coupe,” Denny added.

One late autumn night in 1939, Luke and Doug Madewell, his helper, drove to Jackson County for a load. There, Willie Lane, a moonshiner, and Denny counted \$66.00 for the 60 gallons of whiskey (\$1.10 per gallon). Madewell loaded the 12 five gallon cans in the trunk of Denny’s brand new ’40 Ford coupe and the two headed for St. Mary’s Community in the southeastern corner of Smith County, near Denny’s Rock Spring home.

Denny’s plan called for a fairly easy two-stop evening; twenty gallons to a Smith County farmer and forty gallons to a lady bootlegger in Hartsville.

The moon hid its face behind the clouds. It was pitch black as the two turned left (south) off the Rock Spring gravel road. Denny turned off the head lights. About 50 feet Denny stopped the car as his shotgun cautiously opened the door and got out. Both men looked and listened. Nothin’ was heard but a few katydids and crickets as Madewell swung open the old worn, wooden cattle gate. After Denny pulled through, the gate

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was closed and latched. The black Ford climbed a wagon trail into a large pasture next to a fence row. Denny slowed after reaching the apex to find a cattle path. Once located he turned toward a clump of trees, still driving without lights. The car rolled to a stop without Denny applyin’ the breaks. Within a couple of minutes out stepped two men from the shadows under a large red oak tree carrying four five-gallon empty jacket cans.

After a quick handshake Denny handed the farmer a quart jar of moonshine and said, "Here's a sample." The moon magically peeked between the clouds long enough for the buyer to shake the jar and hold it up to the moon's light. Beads around the top of the moonshine proved the quality was A-OK and the proof more than 100. He then took a small sip, sloshed it around and spit it out. The taste test was given the thumbs up. Then, Luke poured a small amount into the farmer's cupped hands. He quickly rubbed them together and raised them to his nose. Since there was no burnt smell the farmer gave Denny two 20 dollar bills. The moonshine runner cleared \$18 on the deal. Both farmers grabbed two full jacket-cans by the handle on the top—one in each hand—and disappeared into the night. Madewell stacked the four swapped empty cans on top of the eight full ones and shut the trunk lid.

"I kept the motor running during this five minute exchange," the moonshiner remembered. "An owl in a tree down the hollar gave out a 'who, who' and this started my blood pumpin'. See, animals let other animals know when danger is near. For some unknown reason I had been calm as a cucumber until that time. This was an old run. I had made it successfully many times. Nothing had happened before, but I remembered the word on the road about Sheriff Yeaman. Before lifting the clutch Doug and I listened carefully. Nothing."

Once the car was turned around and back on the cattle path Denny and Madewell seemed to relax. Denny shifted the Ford into neutral after turning onto the wagon trail, headed down the hill. They had the widows down, listening for any unusual sound. Both stared toward the gate as it was the only entrance or exit to the field. They were, in fact, trapped if the law blocked the gate. As the moonshine runner and his side-kick quietly rolled down the hill—about 100 yards from the

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gate - - a small light flashed on and off quickly. It came from the left side of the gate. Denny looked at Madewell. Madewell looked at Denny. Neither smiled.

"I see a light." Madewell told his driving friend. Denny added, "Doug's voice was scared like. Hell I was scared, too. I saw the silhouette of the sheriff's coupe next to the gate. We were then only 25 yards from the gate. Madewell asked, 'Are you going to ram the gate or go through the fence?' Without answering I jammed her (Ford) into second gear, popped the clutch, hit the lights and there were two lawmen standing next to the gate - - on the left (west) side - - but the car was not in front of the gate. Lucky, lucky me."

Denny crashed his new '40 Ford into the wooden cattle gate and with luck it broke in half. The crash cracked his right headlight but it did not go out. Both fenders were scratched but luckily no real damage occurred. Seconds after the gate went flying the lawmen recovered, jumped back into their Pontiac and took off after Denny, who had turned west heading for Club Springs and onto Carthage, then hopefully to Hartsville.

“I could see the sheriff’s lights behind us and hear his siren blaring out of the darkness. Thank goodness we had a little lead,” Denny recalled. “He stayed about an eighth of a mile behind us through Stonewall. We were going about 75 miles an hour on those curvey gravel back roads. Lord, lord that was so dangerous. As we came down into Elmwood - - to hit the main highway - - I didn’t stop, but slid sideways across the Highway 70 intersection. Oh, how lucky we were. There was a big freight truck that came ever so close to crashing into us. The sheriff had to pull behind it. This narrow escape brought s some space as the sheriff couldn’t get around the truck for a few minutes. We buried the needle flying across the Caney Fork River bridge. There was no sight of his lights as we sped through South Carthage. Doug heard his siren as we turned north to cross the Cumberland River bridge into Carthage. The sheriff’s lights turned toward us as we pulled off the bridge. He was that close.

“Don’t forget, Sheriff Lillard Yeaman was one of the best wheeling lawman around. He could flat out drive a car, plus he knew those roads as well as I did. Up through Beulah

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Land we flew. Probably five or six miles from Dixon Springs there is a fairly straight stretch and it starts downhill. Here is where I put the distance between the sheriff and us. When we crossed the Smith/Trousdale county line the lights faded away.”

Luke Denny and Doug Maxwell escaped...barely. They continued onto Hartsville, dropped off the eight jacket cans and I had a drink with the bootlegging lady, while telling her about their chase. Denny had paid Willie Lane \$66 in Jackson County a few hours earlier. He received \$120 from the two bootleggers. Luke made \$54 fro the evening’s work. Back in 1939 \$54 was a lot of money, especially for one night’s effort.

Years later, when the sheriff was out of the law enforcement profession, he and the legendary whiskey runner were sitting at a Carthage barber shop waiting for a haircut when the subject came up Denny recalled the former sheriff saying he had asked his Chief Deputy Stanton Robinson what time it was, out by the gate. Stanton took out his pocket watch and turned on a flashlight for a moment. That moment was what helped give away their position and helped Denny get away. Sheriff Yeaman said he nearly hit the freight truck at Elmwood and he was wide open headed down into Dixon Springs. He told Luke, “I believe we could have caught you with an eight cylinder. We only had a six. My car was doing nearly 100. At Dixon (Springs) we stopped and turned around.”

The sheriff also explained their patrol cars were not equipped with radios, either.

“True, Doug and I were lucky, there’s no doubt. Sheriff Yeaman and I had a good laugh about the chase. We had the entire barber shop listening about our race. Finally, one old fellow told the barber he was leaving if he didn’t start cutting hair and stop listening to moonshine tales. The sheriff and I shook hands. We remained friends until he passed away. He was a fine lawman and a gentleman. We flipped buffalo nickels to see which

one would get his haircut first. I lost the flip. Thank heavens it was the coin toss I lost, not the 1939 moonshine chase.”

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LUKE ALEXANDER DENNY’S SHOOTING INCIDENT CHAPTER 1-F

Red Petty owned a combination café-beer establishment a few miles east of South Carthage, on Highway 70-N, called Caney Fork Court. Late in the afternoon of February 23, 1961 Luke Denny strolled into the café. Denny regretfully recalled the event, “I had hauled moonshine for two straight days and nights then went home in Carthage to crash. I had to have some sleep, desperately. I took two powerful sleepin’ pills nicknamed Red Birds and like an idiot I washed them down with Old Crow. For some unknown reason I no longer felt the urge to sleep, so turned on the radio and proceeded to kill the entire QUARTER of Old Crow whiskey while listenin’ to old country and western honky-tonk tunes. I did not go to sleep all night long.

After my wife Nellie took off for work the next morning I drove, somehow, to Buffalo Valley and tried unsuccessfully to sell a range. I did, however, get lost in my old stompin’ grounds. When I finally found my way I thought I’d check my old hang out to see what was goin’ on. The moment I stepped into Red Petty’s café he said, Luke, you look mighty pale.’ Billy Bennett, a good friend was there, too. Billy and his brother Junior and me had worked for Tuley Furniture. I asked Billy if he had a drink of moonshine and he said, ‘No, do you want to go and get a jug?’

“Billy and I took my truck and headed for Chestnut Mount to buy a pint of moonshine from the bootlegger. I was in no shape to drink anything. I remember becomin’ irritated when we discovered the bootlegger wasn’t home. We jumped back into my truck and somehow made it back to Red’s place. Billy was in a hurry to get back home for some reason so he got in his car and left before I went back into the café.

“Once inside I ordered a bottle of beer,” Denny said without any of the normal cheerfulness in his voice. With his head lowered the former moonshine hauler continued, “Well when the beer was about half gone I began to have a nervous

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breakdown or hallucinate. The doctors are not sure what happened. One doctor said the whiskey mixed with sleepin’ pills and beer brought on the hallucinations. Anyway, I walked back to the little storage room and pulled out my .22 caliber High Standard revolver with extra long rifle rounds. What happen next is kinda fuzzy in my memory, but all I can faintly recall is pullin’ the pistol out and somehow shootin’ myself in the chest, just over the heart. Not a single person was in the little room with me. And, I have no idea, today, why I did such a stupid thing.

“The cook, a colored man named Mike Carver, came rushin’ in sayin, ‘Are you goin’ to cash in Mr. Denny?’ It’s amazin’ how clear that statement is. Mike said ‘Do you want me to do anythin’ for ya?’ For some unknown reason I said, ‘Pull my shoes off?’ He did. Red Petty called the hospital to come and get me. I remember that, then went out like a light.

I’m not sure how I was transported to the Carthage hospital, but Dr. Hugh Green worked on me. The hollow point round hit a rib near the heart and went up and lodged right near my backbone. They ‘dug’ out the bullet. It was up and down, not horizontal but close to the back surface, so it didn’t take a lot to cut the bullet out. For the next two days I stayed in Carthage, then they took me to the VA Hospital in Nashville where I recovered in about two weeks. The doctors were worried about me catchin’ new-moan-ie (pneumonia). Some-how no inflammation nor infection set up. Lucky again. I continued to have outpatient treatment until I was healed, oh about two months later.

“Billy come to see me and said, ‘I was questioned by the law. No I was grilled by them. They thought I shot you or knew something’ about the shootin’. By George the next time you’re goin’ ta attempt suicide tell me so I can go to Canada.’

“After recoverin’ I went back to work as a salesman in Carthage. This time I was a lot smarter. That was the last time this o’whiskey runner mixed Red Birds and Old Crow. It was by far the stupidest trick I’ve ever pulled in my life...it was nearly my last, too.”

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PICTURES