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TAYLOR MOSS 66 WITH SHERIFF C.H. MALONE:
CHAPTER 18:

“Probably the closet I ever came to getting caught was in 1949 in downtown Smithville, Tennessee,” Luke Denny said as he looked toward his lifelong friend Taylor Moss, at the Moss’ residence December 29, 1987. “And, had it not been for Taylor I am sure this old whiskey runner would have been in the DeKalb County Jail. There is no doubt.”

“I know one time, Luke,” Moss added to the conversation, “Sheriff C. H. Malone was sure made at me after you got away. “I’m glad he didn’t know you and I grew up together in the Buffalo Valley Community. Did you know I went to high school with your brother, Luke?”

Denny nodded his concurrence and said? “Let’s bring the folks up-to-date. I was single at the time and catin’ around and had a good lookin’ honey with me. It was Sunday afternoon and I had loaded my 1947 blue Pontiac with 80 gallons of moonshine in the Pea Ridge area of Cannon County. My girl friend and I were on our way to Cookeville with the liquor when she said, “Oh Luke stop in Smithville and let’s eat. I’m starved.’

“I really didn’t want to stop for anything when I was loaded with whiskey, but you must remember this gal was a hot number and I didn’t want to make her mad?” Denny smiled and so did his friend Moss. Sunday afternoon and Sunday evening were always good times to haul, because the law usually had worked themselves silly with drunks and outlaws on Friday and Saturday nights. Anyway, I gave in to her wishes as I was hungry, too. Also, when I did stop for gas or food it was always at a place where I knew the people. It was folks like Taylor who helped me escape many times.

“Anyway, we pulled up in front of the Moss Café on the southwestern corner of the Smithville square, where Burton’s Insurance Company is located today,” Denny continued. “The town looked deserted and we were the only two customers

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Taylor had. My honey and I had just about finished our meal when Taylor looked up, toward the jail, and said, ‘Luke, does Sheriff Malone know what you look like, because here he comes?’

“I can see the look on Luke’s face and his girl friend’s too,” the restaurant owner explained. “Don’t get me wrong, I was scared, probably just as much as Luke. Before Luke could answer my question the DeKalb County Sheriff strolled through the door.”

Denny said, “I kept eating and gave the sheriff a casual glance when he sat down near the cash register. While I was looking at him Taylor was flipping through the pages of an

Encyclopedia Britannica volume. Then he handed the book to me and, do you remember what you said?"

"Now that's a moment that's burnt into my memory. I can see you and her and the sheriff just like it was today," Moss answered. "I said, 'I don't believe I want to buy this new Encyclopedia Britannica.' You took the hint and pushed it back toward me and said, 'I'll leave it here and come back for it.' I took the book and put it under the counter. You gently got up and so did she. While you paid for the meals she walked to the door and got in the car. You turned and walked to the door as if you and her had just returned from church and was having Sunday afternoon lunch, before going home. It was the most natural looking exit I have ever seen," and the two laughed and pointed at each other.

"I may have looked natural while walking out, but let me tell you my tummy had elephants dancing around it, not butterflies either," Denny said with a wide grin. Laughter broke out again. I cranked up that Chiefton and eased out of Smithville. I wanted to put the pedal to the metal, but I knew the sheriff would be after me in a second. I didn't look back either."

Moss continued, "The moment you closed the front door Sheriff Malone asked, 'Do you know that man?' I said, 'No, he is just a book salesman, as far as I know.' The sheriff said, 'I got a tip from the sheriff of Cannon County saying Luke Denny might be heading our way with a load of liquor.' But, that is all he said. He got up and walked briskly back to the jailhouse.

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"In about 10 minutes I saw three men come out of the jail and heading for my restaurant," Moss revealed with a concerned look on his face. "All three had badges because I remember the sun shining off them. The closer they came to my place I could tell they were mad because of the look on their faces. I can't recall the two other lawmen's names, but they were DeKalb County deputies, I do remember that.

"The sheriff said, 'Damn you Taylor, you let Luke Denny get away. You lied to me. I could have caught him red-handed with all that whiskey. You knew he was Luke Denny. I telephoned the Cannon County sheriff and he gave me the make and license number of Luke's car and they matched...to the tee. Where's he headed?' I told C. H. (Malone) I had no idea the traveling book salesman was Luke Denny, but I think the sheriff really knew I knew who he was, but he couldn't prove it so the trio left the café."

"You darn right I knew Taylor knew Luke," Sheriff Malone said during an interview from his Smithville nursery on January 14, 1988. "I believe my two deputies were Herb Puckett and John (Red) Johnson, I think. This may sound funny today, but back in '49 I was highly upset that Denny escaped and from right under my nose. See, I had caught many, many whiskey runners and would have caught the slippery Luke Denny. But as

far as I know he slowed up or stopped running liquor through my county after that close shave with me.

“I learned how to take my front bumper and hit their back bumper and spin them off the road and into the ditch,” Sheriff Malone revealed. “Running moonshine through my county was a no-no back then. I simply would not tolerate it. I was a lawman around these parts for many a year.”

Taylor Moss summed up the Smithville episode by saying, “I only stayed in business from 1948 – 1950 and then moved to Detroit. During my remaining time at the café Sheriff Malone did not forgive me, and I can’t blame him. But, that’s water over the dam. We both have mellowed in 40 years. We both live here in Smithville. As you see I lost both my legs and he is semi-retired. Those were the days, my friend, those were the days.”

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Denny smiled as we walked to the car in the driveway, and yelled to Taylor Moss, who was standing in the doorway, in a jovial tone, “What ever happened to MY Encyclopedia Britannica?”