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JIM BO MEDLEY

JUNE 26, 1907 – FEBRUARY 12, 1988

CHAPTER 2

Luke Denny and Jim Bo Medley met to reminisce about their moonshining days on December 28, 1987. The two worked together during the 30s. Jim sold moonshine whiskey from 1933 to 1940 around the Buffalo Valley area in Putnam County, Tennessee, and Luke hauled the crystal clear devil's juice to him and others around Middle Tennessee.

In 1940, Medley was nabbed with illegal alcohol by Putnam County Sheriff Marion Warren and spent 60 days in the Cookeville jail. Medley said, "That was the last time I fooled with sellin' moonshine. Getting' caught taught me a lesson, just before World War II started for us."

Denny stopped his friend and added, "It was about this time Sheriff Warren and I had our run in. I picked up a load of moon' from Willie Lane in Jackson County and was driving my '38 blue Ford between Boma and Baxter. After turning off Highway 56 the sheriff met me to pull over. He then turned on his siren. Next, the sheriff tried to run me off the road. That's when I 'kicked' the '38 Ford. Warren's car was faster and after a short advantage he was right back on my bumper. I was scared shitless. Then he tried to get around me. If this would have happened he would have caught me with all that liquor and I'm sure he would have sent me up the river. Because, one Sheriff Marion Warren got you, it was lockup time. He didn't mess around. He made it stick.

"When I got to the Hopewell Road I skidded off the highway, but made the sharp turn onto the curvey, dusty road. Lady luck was with me," Luke said with a concerned look on his face as he faked wiping his forehead. "I turned my headlights OFF and the race was on for real. Shucks, I slid off the side of the Hopewell Road many times - - out of one ditch and into another - - during the six to seven mile chase. I knew the road a little better than the sheriff, thank goodness, and I began to put a little distance between us, but not much.

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"Gordon Petty of Smith County was with me durin' this chase. He was keeping an eye on Warren. Petty said the sheriff's headlights looked like two match heads glowing on and off as they turned curve after curve on the thick dusty road. To look back on it, it was funny, but we thought our goose was going to be cooked that evening. Honestly we were scared. Gordon's eyes were big as saucers. Boy, he was hanging onto the door for dear life. I don't remember if it was Gordon's idea or mine, but when we got near the Old Pump House Road, some called it the Old River Road, I locked that steering wheel and held on as we skidded into the turn and came to a sudden stop down the road apiece

by Indian Creek. Quickly, I killed the motor. We jumped out. Luckily my feet landed on the road bed. Gordon, unfortunately, came out on the creek side and kersplash. I thought he landed in the creek.”

“No, those were rocks hitting the creek,” Gordon Petty said from Room 424 of the Sumner County Hospital, January 31, 1988, “I missed the creek, barely. But, let me tell you something, I was frightened, to say the least. My legs were moving so fast I don’t remember them touchin’ the ground.”

Luke continued, “Remember, it was just turning dark out that night. Oh my, what a sight we must have been. I climbed up the bluff, still scared to death, cross the railroad tracks and rested on my tummy, laying on top of a big rock. Shortly her came Gordon.”

Before Gordon Petty got in a word Luke said, “Think of that. How stupid we were. Right there was my car, in the middle of the old dirt road, with 50 gallons of corn whiskey in the back. Thirty of it was Gordon’s and twenty was mine. We stayed up there while the sheriff’s headlights combed the area for about 45 minutes.

“During the 45 minutes a near-XXX love show happened. See there was a church near the railroad tracks. After services a group of young couples were holding hands, kissing, and making gu-gu eyes at each other. One couple lagged behind the others right below us. It was so funny, to look back on it. The sheriff was looking for us while we were watching an old timey soap box love scene behind the bushes. The young church lad was trying to hurry her up and she was looking

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down the tracks through the weeds to see if the others had reached the old rickety railbridge that crosses the Caney Fork River, just south of what is now I-40. He was having problems getting her girtle off, while she was also tying to keep her dress clean. Finally, she said ‘No, we’re not goin’ to do it again, here’. Boy that made him so mad. We held our hands over our mouths because if they would have discovered us just a few feet above them, more than likely they would have yelled and the sheriff might have caught us. A few slight laughs got out from between our fingers during the love making event. The sheriff’s headlights turned toward Cookeville and was gone.”

Jim Bo Medley tapped the wooden floor of his living room with his shoe. Medley said, “Now let me tell you something I’ll bet you didn’t know, Luke. I had just returned to my cell in Cookeville after a Saturday and early Sunday with the family when they came back after the chase. I overheard their side of the race. Chief Deputy Walter Shipley, I believe that was his name, told the story again and asked me what could have happened. How could Denny just disappear? I told him, ‘You were slipped chucked (given the slip).’

“I’ll tell you one thing about Sheriff Warren,” Medley continued. “He was a fair man. I was given a two month sentence. He made sure I was given the weekends off to come

home and work on the farm and help feed my family. Not many lawmen would let a prisoner spend the weekends at home. During the week I worked on the roads. And, I NEVER sold another bottle of whiskey when I came out. We even moved to Ohio. Later, we came back south to farm.

“Luke, did I ever tell ya how I got caught?” Before Denny could answer the taller Medley said, “Warren had been snoopin’ around for some time. He knew I was sellin’ corn liquor. He told me to stop, but I knew more than he did, I thought, and didn’t stop sellin’ it. One night about 10 o’clock, in 1940, he and another deputy came by. The sheriff said he was goin’ to put me out of business. They looked all over the house and didn’t find anythin’. About midnight the lawmen went outside, for a smoke I guess, and I thought they were going’ to leave. WRONG. Sheriff Warren returned and said, “I am going to get it if it takes me all night. I know the stuff is here!”

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“Where did you have the whiskey?” Denny asked.

Medley raised his right hand to the right corner of his mouth and pointed toward the wall with his left index finger. “I had it stored under the stairway, but I had it neatly boarded up. Sheriff Warren kept pokin’ through the boards with an ICE Pick. He finally hit one of my bottles. I knew he found my stash and I was on my way to the calaboose, the second I heard the pick hit the glass jar.”

This revelation brought laughter from both men. Luke suddenly stopped laughing and asked, “Was it some of my moonshine?”

“No, but the funny part is it wasn’t mine either. I was keepin’ it for a friend who thought the sheriff was going to raid him,” Medley pointed out.

Luke leaned back in the chair and continued. “I vaguely remember you and me foing to a field close to your house when I made some deliveries. I think you buried the whiskey in the ground, didn’t you?”

“Oh yes,” Medley said without giving it a second thought. “I pulled up an old fence and put a rock over all the holes. So when you or another of my whiskey runners came by with the white lightnin’ I would take some of the jars and gently ease them down into t6he post holes and pull a rock over each one. My cattle left them alone.” They reply brought still more chuckles from the two gray haired men.

For a moment silence prevailed. A log in the wood burning stove, in the middle of the front room, made a noise. Luke reopened the conversation. “How many times did you ride with me in the 30s, Jim Bo?”

“Well, let me see,” his friend returned while gently scratching his head. “I recall goin’ with ya to Hartsville a few times and,” the 80-year-old man held his index finger up and said, “Hey Luke, we can’t forget when your ’40 Ford got stuck near Granville, just off Philadelphia Ridge, near Jim Bob Roger’s store.

“You know I nearly forgot about that,” Luke added with excitement in his voice. “I had between 50 and 60 gallons in the ’40. Martins Creek was high and we flooded out. Old Mr. Rogers pulled us out with his mules. He never knew we had moonshine in the trunk.”

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“You’re right on the money Luke,” Medley said. “Jim Bob pulled many people out of that creek with those mules. Did you know he’s dead?”

Both men dropped their head and slowly shook their head in reverence. Denny broke the long pause and said, “Nearly all the old crew has gone on.” Medley agreed by nodding his head up and down.

After photographs were taken of the two old friends shaking hands this chapter of Luke Denny’s moonshine hauling days came to a close. The last time Luke Denny⁷ and this author saw Jim Bo Medley he was sitting in his chair waving goodbye. His last words were; ‘Boys, I hope your book comes out before I meet my Maker. I shore want a copy and I shore want to go to see the movie, too.’”

Unfortunately, Jim Bo Medley did not get to see the book as he died 46 days later, on February 12, 1988.