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BAILEY DICKENS: OCTOBER 10, 1926:
CHAPTER 33

Making friends comes natural to Luke Denny. The slender light-haired man is always talking about the “good” old days of the 30s, 40s, and 50s. He rarely speaks of the 60s, 70s and 80s. Crowds gather, even today, when Denny arrives, anywhere. Most folks love to listen as the 73-year-old former moonshine runner keeps any size audience spellbound with tales of high wheeling adventure of yesteryear. It seems Denny knows everyone and they know him.

One such lifelong friend is Bailey Dicken, 63, of Smithville. Just before Luke departed for WWII service, Bailey, who was 14 or 15 at the time and raised in the Chestnut mound and Elmwood communities of Smith County, spotted Luke at ice cream and pie suppers, and cake walks, in and around schools near Denny’s Rock Spring home. Dickens saw the snazzy dressed Denny as a hero, a lady’s man with a clean new car, money in his pocket, happy-go-lucky, with friends galore. Moonshine Luke, nearly eight years older than Dickens, took up with the lad.

“One time,” Denny opened the conversation April 1, 1989 in the kitchen of his Smithville home, “in the late 30s young Bailey here bought a gallon of moonshine from me at the Rock Spring school house. I think it was a pie supper. It was one of those hot, sweaty July or August evenin’. I had about five gallons in jars and for some reason a couple were in bottles. Bailey was my lit’ bootlegger. He made ten bucks, had about half-gallon left over, got about three-quarters high...all with one gallon of Jackson County shine.”

Smiles quickly appeared on both faces. Dickens said he and Luke chummed around after the elder came home from Europe. “O’ around the late 40s, before I got married, we hit the dances. I couldn’t dance worth a fiddle, until I got a few belts of Luke’s white dancin’ mule in me. Then I went to town. I’d cut a rug on any dance floor. I married Luke’s wife’s daughter in 1951. She passed from us in 1988. Ruth sure was a fine lady.”

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After a somber minute Dickens continued, “Ruth and I were newlyweds. So, I’ll say it was about 1952. I had a 4-door ’38 Ford. My two brothers, Ruth and two of her sisters climbed into that black beauty and headed to the Saturday Night Rock Spring hoedown. Before long most of us were good and tight. Luke’s brother, John Henry (Denny) was at the shindig, too. John Henry was drinkin’ some of Luke’s mountain dew along with the rest of us while he auctioned off the pies. I’m not sure what type of lawman John Henry was, at the time. I’ll guess and say he was either a constable or deputy. Anyway, he could give you a ticket and take you to jail.

“After the dance we took off. I was driving faster than I should for those old narrow back roads. Plus, I was stone drunk. I slowed to drive over a one-lane wooden culvert. The

old rickety bridge kept moving. I thought I was going to crash into the side so I stopped. Yep, I stopped right in the middle of the bridge. Also, there was a car with its lights on right smack dab in front of me. Those bright lights didn't help me in my drunken state.

“At the same time some smart one rolled in behind us with his lights shining brightly and started honking his horn. He yelled for me to drive on. I wouldn't budge. Within a few minutes up stepped John Henry. He was mad as a wet hen. I think he was late for some meeting or something. We started fussin'. He told me to get out he was going to take me to jail. My wife Ruth jumped up and yelled at him and said, “If he (Bailey) goes to jail you (John Henry) will go too.” Ruth was angry and so were all five of us. John Henry walked in front of the car and got the man to back his car up so we could pass. Then John Henry told someone else to drive instead of me and let us go without giving me a ticket.

“Luke, you know John Henry and I have been the best of friends ever since that little scene,” Dickens said as Luke started swinging his right hand back and forth while making a bell sound.

“Cow Bell Dickens. Do you remember I gave your dad Eldon that crazy nickname?” Denny questioned his buddy. But without waiting for an answer the moonshining Tennessean continued, “Almost everyone knew your dad as Foby. He was

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a hard working farmer and the most honest man I have ever known. In the late 30s your dad bought a cow bell from Mr. Tuley in Carthage. It cost 50 cents back then. Mr. Tuley didn't make a note of the cow bell since he knew Foby was good for the money. I was a salesman for Mr. Tuley after World War II when in walked your dad. He said, ‘I come to pay for that cow bell.’

Mt. Tuley said, “What cow bell?”

Foby explained about coming into the furniture store some eight to ten years before, when he bought the bell on credit. “He made Tuley take the 50 cents, too,” Denny added.

“Your father worked for the WPA at Hogtown in the late 30s, also. If I'm not mistaken,” Denny paused and thought for a moment or two, “he walked eight miles each way. He helped cut the right-of-way for Highway 70 around the bluffs with mules. When I started sellin' for Tuley your dad bought a refrigerator and a stove from me. We had to carry the appliances up and into the hollar. I'll bet it was a mile from the road.”

The two men spoke of Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration known as the WPA. Denny explained how it was established in the Spring of 1935. It replaced direct with work relief. It paid from \$15 to \$90 per month. From 1935 to 1941 Denny said the WPA had more than two million workers on the rolls. “The WPA was one of the best ideas our government has ever come up with. It put good, hard working folks back to work. Not

like the doping welfare trash today. Shuck, that's what's wrong with this country. Hell if our government stopped paying out all kinds of welfare and made people work for the betterment of America, all of us would be hell'va lot better off."

Before Denny climbed down off his welfare philosophical soap box, Bailey rose from his chair, without warning, smiled while chuckling, pointed his index finger at his old friend Luke and said as he waved good-bye, "I'm going to be late for WORK. I'm not old enough to retire, like YOU...YET." (Bailey is employed at the Smithville, TN, Gulf Service Station).