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LUKE ALEXANDER DENNY: LIFE SAVING EPISODE:
CHAPTER 36

Late one Spring evening in 1953 Luke Denny – an appliance salesman for Tuley Furniture Company - - had one more stopover to sell an electric range before picking up a load of moonshine from a Jackson County still. The 25-year –old Denny turned off the engine of his blue 1952 Chevrolet pickup alongside the Dillard Creek Road, near Chestnut Mound in Smith County, Tennessee. He heard a woman scream and looked up the gravel road toward a house on the ridge.

“What the hell is going on?” Denny thought to himself as he spotted a lady, crying while racing down the graveled driveway toward him with a baby over one shoulder and a middle-aged man running after her. “Before I knew what was happenin’ she ran right through the gate I was standing next too. I was totally bum-fuzzled, but managed to ask, ‘What’s goin’ on?’”

Mrs. Frank Young frantically answered, ‘My baby’s dying, I’m going to the doctor in Carthage!’

“Carthage, That’s 11 miles away. How ya goin’ to get there?” Denny countered.

“I don’t know,” Mrs. Young cried, but stopped.

“I’ve got a truck here. I’ll drive ya,” Denny quickly explained. Without answering Opal Young turned and ran toward Denny’s passenger door. The other man, who had been “chasing” her, opened the door. Opal climbed in and slid to the middle as the other man jumped in and shut the door about the same time Denny slammed his.

Denny revealed, “The little boy was turnin’ blue. He wasn’t moving’. At first I thought he was dead. I got scared. Remember too, the lady was still weepin’. Then I heard a soft moan come from the little boy. Then a low wheezin’ sound. I knew he was alive.”

Mrs. Young hurriedly said, as tears streamed down her cheeks, “My baby is dying. Who are you?”

“I’m Luke Denny.”

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She smiled a little and said, “O’ yes, I saw the signboard on the back of your truck. You work for the Tuley Furniture Company man.” Luke shook his head yes.

Mrs. Young said, “Please take me to the Petty Clinic in Carthage before my baby dies.”

The moonshine runner slung rocks and gravel all over the place as he spun his tires while fish-tailing up and out of Dillard Creek.

“By the time we rolled through South Carthage,” Denny recalled, “the speedometer needle had disappeared. It probably took me only ten minutes to travel the 11 miles from her Chestnut Mound home to the clinic. That was probably my fastest truck run, ever, without shine. At the clinic she bolted out of my truck before it came to a complete stop. Then Opal raced through the clinic doors, with the lad turnin’ a darker shade of blue.”

“Dr. Hugh Green knew what the problem was. He gave my year-old son Jesse a shot, then some medicine. Like a miracle he recovered in about 30 minutes. What a relief. Luke was waiting in the lobby with Henry Young, my father-in-law, who ran behind me down the road from my home. My husband Frank was working in Nashville at the time,” explained Mrs. Young in the living room of her Chestnut Mound home on Highway 53, May 6, 1989.

“I never did find out what was wrong with Jesse,” Denny returned to the conversation.

Jesse Young, 37, said from the living room couch. “I had a severe asthma attack they told me, years later.”

“Well, Mr. Denny drove the three of us back home and wouldn’t take a penny,” Opal added. “I just don’t know what would of happened to our young son if Mr. Denny hadn’t arrived when he did.”

“We just might have lost our son,” the elder Frank Young firmly stated.

“We’re sure glad you came by that day,” Jesse’s wife said while smiling.

“You know,” Jesse said, then paused, “I’ve heard about my fast ride to the clinic many, many times, but today I’ve learned a few little tidbits I didn’t know about. However, I also remember very well something that Luke did which made my

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blood boil. It happened the day before my wedding date. (December 30, 1971). I took my first car - - my very first one mind you - - to Gordon Petty’s Garage in Chestnut Mound.”

Frank Young chimed in, “Now that was totally my fault, my fault.” Everyone laughed. “I was half owner of a battery company called S&D. Travelin’ salesman, that was my job in the company. My partner Bud Smith had the other jobs. Well, I was in a hurry to drop off my load of batteries and get movin’. When I pulled in, Jesse’s clean Olds Cutlass F-85 wasn’t there. After the delivery I was out of the garage and on my way to the next stop...in a hurry. See, I was already late for a hot date with a tall strawberry blond, with the prettiest green eyes and legs that would stretch from here to China. Shucks, I slid

under the wheel of my truck, slammed it in reverse without lookin' back and crash...my bumper crinkled in the driver's door. Jesse was angry with me and by George he had every right to be made, too."

Jesse added, "Mad? That's an understatement. I was sick, too. Luke, that white Olds was my very first buggy and to beat it all I was getting married the next day. It was white with red bucket seats. Some of the boys came out and jumped up and down on the bumper to get the vehicles untangled. Before long Luke's insurance company gave me the check to have it repaired. I think, Luke's 'finder bender' came to around \$400.

Silence prevailed for a couple of moments. Frank Young, 66, looked at Luke and in a somber tone remarked. "Luke, there is something I want to tell you and I hope it doesn't make you mad. When you and I were growing up I idolized you. See, you were six years older than me. I remember you were always dressed in the fanciest suits, drove the sharpest cars and trucks and was seen with the prettiest girls in the valley. I told myself that one day I would drive around middle Tennessee in a brand new truck, just like you.

"Then you saved our Jesse. That made you even more honorable in my eyes, even though we all knew you hauled illegal whiskey.

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"A few years ago I was coming out of the post office in Carthage. You were walking toward the Cumberland River bridge. I saw you first and said, 'Say Luke where ya headin?' You said, 'Across the river to visit my daughter.' You didn't have a car and were walking, so I gave you a lift to her home in my new Chevy Silverado. Luke, you no longer sported those snazzy suits. No longer were the girls chasing you. Your teeth and smile were gone. I felt bad for you. Everyone knew the bottle had brought you down. It was sad. But one thing for sure Luke, you still have so many, many friends around middle Tennessee. Don't let that old bottle keep you down. Fight back."

Luke Alexander Denny in a low tone of voice said, "I never expect to take another drink of liquor." We then put his signature to that statement on a yellow divider sheet of paper in the author's interview notebook. He concluded on a happier note, "Yes, there are many things in my life I wish I could change. There are a few things in my life I'm proud of. Helpin' get this young lad to the clinic in 1953 was one of my happiest, proudest days."