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EARL McCALLUM, AUGUST 4, 1904:
CHAPTER 5

“Luke, has anyone sent your bail more than me?” Earl McCallum, 85, asked his lifelong friend February 15, 1988, from his home in South Carthage, Tennessee.

“No, there is no doubt. You have put up my bond money more than anyone on the face of the earth. I will never, ever forget you,” Luke Denny answered.

The elderly McCallum reached for a small can of Burton Snuff, took a dip and offered some to his friend and said, “Here want some of the best you can buy?” Denny shook his head from side to side. McCallum turned the volume down on his radio, located next to the large brownish easy chair he was seated in and said “Luke, do you remember the old Southside Café, just down the street? You would stop and eat at my restaurant all the time. I couldn’t wait to talk to ya and see what you were up to. And, sometimes you’d have some of that good old white whiskey.

“One time, I recall my young son Bobby, when he was about ten-years-old, came into the café and looked at Luke while he was eating and said ‘Daddy that man has a load of whiskey out in the truck. You better call the sheriff.’ I said, ‘No son, that’s Luke Denny. He’s our friend. He knows he’ll be safe around my place.’” Both men laughed.

“I remember you coming over to the table and telling me that and we had a good laugh then,” Denny added. “I also recall you saying something like ‘You look heavy tonight, Luke. How much are you haulin’?’ I answered 120 gallons. It’s all going to the same lady in Hartsville.

“Earl served cat fish all the time. Didn’t you?” the whiskey runner questioned his 6’1” companion.

“We sold at least 100 pounds of cat fish every week. That’s not stretching the truth either. I believe my family and I ran the Southside for 20 years. The forties and fifties were good years, there. The troopers, deputies and policemen ate there too. They talked ‘bout you many times and how they were

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goin’ to trap ya here or there and I’d laugh to myself and say, ‘Shucks, Luke has already loaded, unloaded and will be here to eat in a few hours.’ Sometime snitches gave them information on you, but I’ll never figure out why they made their plans in my place, many times. Didn’t they know we were the best of friends and that I would get word to you, somehow?” the former restaurant operator pondered.

“I can’t figure it out,” Denny suggested. “I know one thing though, ol’ Earl McCallum saved this man’s bony hide from going to the jailhouse many times. I trusted him and his information like it was the Gospel. Plus, when I was empty I stopped and chowed down. I’d bring my lady friends around and Earl would always layout something special for them. He’d make them feel like a million dollars...like they were the Queen of England eating cat fish in the Southside.”

“Talkin’ about women,” the cafeteria proprietor broke back into the interview, “we must not forget to tell’em ‘bout the time you and your good lookin’ lady friend out run the law for a long, long way. Then they caught you somewhere way down in Donelson at a gas station..after they burnt up a couple of cars. I remember Sheriff J. D. Rollins tellin’ me all about it - - a blow by blow description - - while he was eating fish, that very night. He was kinda mad, but shore happy he caught you. But sad they didn’t catch you with moonshine.

“Guess who sent your bond? I did, naturally J. D. said, ‘Earl I brought Luke’s bond, I guess you will bail him out, like always.’ I signed it and the Sheriff called his office and let you go. I think it was fairly late on Sunday evening, maybe about midnight. I heard you tell our friends about this chase probably a dozen times. You drew on the table and counter how you passed that car on right side shoulder of Pope’s Hill while we ate cat fish. You must admit, Luke, you were lucky. By the way, what happened to the lady, after J. D. arrested you?” McCallum urged.

The fast driving moonshine runner smiled and said, “Let’s tell the readers how it happened, from start to finish.”

His friend crossed his legs, moved his walking cane and said, “Roll on.”

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“It was the summer of 1949, I believe,” Denny speculated. The reason I say that is I was caught in my ’49 Ford and it was about a month old. That’s how I remember the years now, Earl, by the car I was drivin’. Anyway, I was not on a whiskey run, but on a pleasure Sunday afternoon drive³ to a fish fry, with this good looking fox. We pulled out of Pleasant Shade, going south on Highway 80 (Smith County, Tennessee). After a few gulps of mountain dew we rolled into Monoville, a few miles away. That’s where the fireworks begin.

“Sheriff Jefferson Davis Rollins, everyone called him J. D., was driving his new Plymouth patrol car in the opposite direction. Just a few yards in front of us I saw J. D.’s deputy Bob Barrett - - who was riding shotgun - - point his pipe stem at me. At Monoville’s watering trough, Sheriff Rollins hit the brakes and spun around. I can hear hi tires squallin’, as if it happened this morning. As I looked in my rearview mirror, my girlfriend gave me a bewildered stare and angrily questioned, ‘Who are they? What’s going on?’

“After flooring the gas pedal, I said, ‘It’s the darn law and I’m gonna out run them. Hang on to your bonnet sister, you’re in for the ride of your life. I am not about to get caught, this afternoon. Now, reach in the back and put the four jars in the front seat, in case we have to throw them out the window.’

“I had four half gallon jars of moonshine in the car, but I hadn’t planned to sell them. My intentions were to share it with my friends at the fish fry, but the high sheriff had other ideas,” Denny continued. “J. D. was gaining on me and about Beulah Land, that’s the hill community on the northside of Carthage, he was only 50 or so yards behind me with his siren blastin’, as my speed odometer bounced between 60 and 80. “Traffic was extremely heavy. I guess everyone was out going for a Sunday afternoon joy ride. Lucky for me a car pulled in behind us at the “Y” (intersection) on Main Street.”

“Stop right there,” E.T. Morris Jr. spouted from his James Bait Shop on Highway 25, “for that’s where I come in. See I was visiting my mother on Main Street in Carthage that Sunday afternoon in 1949. I was on the porch when I heard this loud siren. I naturally looked toward the sound. It was coming from Beulah Land. Within seconds here flew a Green ’49 Ford

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just a flying. Luke was driving and looking back, while this young lady - - probably in her mid-twenties - - was looking back too. A few seconds later Sheriff Rollins and his deputy came roaring by...right after ol’ Luke,” concluded Morris, the local Postmaster who retired near the end of 1987 after 31 years of Federal service.

Luke and E. T. Morris laughed. Luke continued, “People walking watched as the two cars ran in and out of traffic for six or seven blocks until I pulled onto the Carthage Bridge, over the Cumberland River. For some unknown reason a couple of slowpokes, on car had two love birds holding the steering wheel together and the other was driven by an elderly woman, were creeping across the bridge to a snails waltz. I was blocked in on the one-lane bridge as cars were coming in the other direction.

“I remember hearing my girlfriend scream, ‘The sheriff is getting out of his car.’ I quickly looked back and J. D. had just turned loose of the door and was starting his run for me. Later I found out he planned to reach in and grab my keys. However, at that moment, there appeared an opening in the oncoming traffic - - granted there was no passing on the bridge, but I had to escape. I flipped the large steering wheel to the left and peeled rubber. It was in and out of traffice two or three times before reaching the dead end bluff of Highway 70. Rollins wuz weaving in and out of traffic right behind us. J. D. was one heck of a driver too.

“I turned west toward Lebanon and really punched that V-8 Ford. We buried the needle by the time we crossed the city limit sign and the Plymouth was gaining. My car had overdrive and I kept trying, unsuccessfully, to get it to kick in. This ’49 Ford was one of the very first cars to have overdrive in Smith County, if not the first. I hadn’t had it long

and didn't know how to make overdrive come on. My girl pointed to the lever on the dash - - marked overdrive - - and said maybe you have it the wrong way. I thought she was stupid, but I gave it a try. Wow! the Ford leaped forward and we started pulling away from the lawmen.

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“Near disaster struck on the Pope Hill, near the Smith County/Wilson line,” Denny continued. “As we started up the hill, going probably 100 or more, with J. D. and Barrett no more than an eighth of a mile away, I was getting ready to pass a car about half way up the hill. I shouldn't have tried this stunt - - passing on a hill - - but the sheriff was determined to get me. It looked safe. I told her to start tossing the whiskey out the second she had the chance. Then the unexpected happened. Out of the blue rolled a Trailways Bus. I couldn't get by the car, even though the bus driver started turning onto the southside of the shoulder. I did one of the craziest driving maneuvers, I have ever done. Within a blink of an eye I wheeled my Ford hard to the right - - nearly hitting the slower car's back bumper - - and passed it on the RIGHT shoulder. Gravels went flying all over the place. My date tossed out a jar and hit the slower car right on the top.”:

Luke's friend reasoned, “You had better thank your lucky stars that you and a whole lot of people didn't get killed at that very moment, Luke.”

“That's the truth,” Denny related. “I get goose bumps just talking about it today. It was scary. Anyhow, after we got straightened up my girl was holding onto the passenger's door and I was driving so fast and watching for the sheriff I forgot about the other three jars of whiskey.

“Lebanon had more Sunday afternoon slow drivers. More traffic. I could hear the siren in the distance, but J. D. was just out of sight. I slowed to about 60 to avoid hitting a couple of jaywalkers. Sheriff Davis was gaining as the sound of his siren got louder and louder, but I couldn't get around the massive traffic jam. All of a sudden this colored fellow ran right in front of me. I slammed on my brakes to miss him and did, thank goodness, but the poor fellow turned to see what was happening and my girl friend said, ‘He ran smack into a parking meter.’ I quickly glanced in my mirror and saw him starting to get up, next to the meter. That may sound funny, but we didn't laugh, as J>D. was on our trail.

“Without warning the sheriff disappeared. Later I found out he lost an engine. They thought he might have busted a water hose and it got to hot and blew, another officer said it ran

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out of oil. I don't really know just why the engine blew up but it did. The sheriff ran into the Lebanon Police Station and borrowed Joe Graves', the Chief of Police, car and continued the race.

“I thought he had given up, because we had temporarily lost him. In case he had stopped to call ahead and set up a roadblock, I instructed her to throw the three jars out the window, as I slowed to about 60 miles per hour, probably five miles west of Lebanon. Lo and behold she did just as I told her, without looking, and nearly hit this middle aged man with one of the bottles. We looked back and he was picking one up.

“My gas gauge was showing empty so I pulled into a service station which was owned by a friend,” Denny noted. “She stayed in the car while he was speedily pumping gas, but all of a sudden Joe Graves’ police car - - a big Buick - - came roaring off the road. Black rubber tire marks burned their imprint on the pavement by the gas pumps. I ran to my car, jumped inside, turned the key, but the Sheriff reached inside and pointed his big revolver at me. ‘Give me the keys, Luke. We are going back to Carthage. This time you didn’t get away from me,’ Sheriff J. D. Rollins informed me.

“My goose had just been cooked. I was caught. Out of nowhere my girl sarcastically bragged to the lawmen, ‘You’re to late, we already threw the moonshine out.’ That made them mad, plus I cussed them and started swinging, like I did too many times, and the fight was on. Somehow I got hit by a blackjack. Some time later a tremendous headache let me know I had arrived back on this earth, as I came too in the backseat of the Buick.

“Getting booked was the next order of business, but I still had some fight in me as they opened my cell. Another scrap took place and I got the worse end of it, again. I can’t recall having won many of my fights, but I did get into a goodly number of brawls.”

“What did J. D. do with her?” the restaurant owner asked, again.

“He charged her with Public Drunkenness. I believe the sheriff had my car towed back. I had to appear in court. My fine was \$150 and court cost, I believe.” Denny said while searching

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for the correct facts. A normal Drunk Driving fine was either \$25 and cost or if it was flagrant \$50 and cost. They told me that was the largest Drunk Driving fine ever handed out by the judge in Smith County, to that date. All in all, counting my attorney’s fees and the witness charge, I was out over \$300 and that was a lot of money in 1949.”

“J. D. told me that night the rods were knocking in that Buick, too,” Earl McCallum added.

“Yes, I heard the engine in Joe Graves’ police car had to be replaced, too. Really, I should have been fined the cost of replacing those engines. I made some stupid moves back in those days.”

The café owner recalled “one time, probably in the fifties, or late forties, Sergeant Joe Sanford was in my place making a telephone call about you. As he looked out the window, there you went by. You were loaded, too. He dropped the receiver and ran to the door. In two or three minutes the door opened. Joe slowly walked back to the telephone and said, ‘Forget it, he’s headed in the other direction. I can’t run him down because I’m parked in. We’ll get him the next time.’

“Trooper Sanford, set down, looked at me and said, ‘Earl, one of these days I’m going to nab Luke Denny and keep him off the highway, if I have to keep taking his moonshine hauling cars until he runs out of cars or ends up in prison. He will stop running liquor, I guarantee you.’ I didn’t say a word, just poured his coffee.

“Federal Revenue Officer Silas Anderson ate at the café often. Our talk centered around Luke, most every time. Mr. Sicy would tell me how close he came to catching you. One time I recall he said his wife and kids were in the car during a chase and they caught you, but you were empty. While eating his favorite meal - - a hamburger with everything - - the revenuer told me and his partner Paul Knowles, ‘Trying to trap Luke is like trapping for beaver...mighty hard to catch them both.’

“Back in those days Luke and me were big drinking buddies. I would drink anything I could, but the doctor said if I didn’t stop drinking moonshine I’d go up on the hill pretty quick...and I quit! Thank the good Lord I stopped. That’s why I’m here today,” Earl McCallum stated.

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“Denny asked, “You helped build the bridge over the Caney Ford River east of South Carthage, didn’t you, Earl?”

“Lord yes. I nearly got killed, too, the slender man said. “It was the Spring of 1929. I was sitting on one of the spans of the McMillian Bridge. I heard it pop a time or two. The whole thing came crashing down. About 100 feet of dust flew into the air. I was scared to death. The good Lord was with me that time. A whole bunch of big wheels came down from Baltimore and looked it over. I think it took about 20 years to get all that rubble up and the new bridge completed. Something like that.”

“Earl you drove a taxi for a long time,” Denny said.

“Yep, I quit December 1987, after 20 years driving a taxi and a few around here might remember I operated a taxi service from a phone booth at the corner of the Carthage Courthouse lawn. I use to whittle. I was good at it, too. In fact I won this ‘Black Widow’ knife after winning the Carthage, Alexandria, Lafayette contest. It took me six months to carve this walking stick out of cedar. Look, Luke, I cut down a slot for a Roosevelt Dime on the top.”

After looking at the uniquely whittled walking cane the interview concluded. As the engine turned over Earl McCallum cheerfully waved goodbye, while petting his dog Susie. The moonshine runner sadly remarked, "I have a gut feeling this is the last time I'll see my old friend alive. His health is failing fast."