

## **A Vicarious Midnight Rendezvous With Denny**

The Lebanon Democrat, Friday, 27 March 1992

By J. B. Leftwich

When I was growing up in the Rock Springs Valley in Putnam County, I never dreamed that some day my friend Luke Denny would develop into a Middle Tennessee folk hero.

That's due largely to the fact that I had no concept of the ingredients that go into the making of a hero.

But Luke Denny, runner of moonshine whiskey and chaser of females, now is celebrated as the law-breaker who evaded some darn good hill country law officers and made a pile of money in his chosen profession.

The reason for Luke's emergence as a mid-state celebrity is due to a book entitled, "Midnight Moonshine Rendezvous," written by Stony Merriman, for a period of time a journalist with newspapers in Smithville and Carthage.

Luke now shows up for autograph parties, poses for pictures in area publications, and enjoys the status of Middle Tennessee celebrity. He has earned his spurs, because he dared to be what he wanted to be and to hell with the consequences.

There are consequences. According to the publicity accruing from the book, he lives in rather austere circumstances on limited means in public accommodations in Smithville. I am among a legion of friends who hope sales of the book will help Old Luke in his remaining years.

You see, I admire Old Luke – not for breaking the law, but for his courage and daring. Though few of us hill country boys wanted to run booze, most of us never dared to do other things in our fancies because of the fear of being caught. And few of us over the long haul would have had the intelligence to evade whoever was in pursuit.

Luke was the Middle Tennessee version of Andy Capp the comic strip character who defies conventions in pursuit of his own pleasure. More nearly accurate, Luke was a real life Snuffy Smith.

He and I were best friends when we attended Rock Springs elementary school and the Rock Springs Methodist Church. We roamed the hills and valleys together, got into things for which I am eternally grateful we were never caught doing. Not that Luke was a bad influence. It was just that our chemistry as a pair of hill county boys prompted a few outrageous capers.

Our lives took different paths when he dropped out of school to pursue his profession, and I went on to college and to a much more prosaic life than his. But I am indebted to

Luke for providing some, but not all, of the characteristics in Portfolio the chief character of some of the columns I have written for this newspaper. Luke was the devil-may-care, not the snob, element in Portfolio.

In the book, there is a picture of some of Luke's schoolmates. I am not among them because when this picture was made, I was living in Arkansas. But I remember some of those in the picture-Mabel Maxwell, Nobel Harris, Edith Amonett, Mrs. Sadie Amonett, Mildred Amonett, Robert McKinley, Dick Lynch, Noel and Ralph Maxwell, and the Dennys: Joe Milton, Mary Lou, Will K. and John Henry, Luke's brother.

And I remember others not in the picture- Thomas Amonett, Emma Ruth Amonett (now Mrs. Wilson Rutledge of Lebanon), Silas and Thomas Manier, Helen Denny, and the Youngs: Leon, Dan, Emma Sue, et al.

"Midnight Moonshine Rendzvous" is not classic literature, but it is worth its modest cost, especially to us who lived vicariously exploits conventions forbade our actually doing.

(J.B. Leftwich is a veteran journalist and a columnist for *The Lebanon Democrat*.  
Email: [leftwichjb@charter.net](mailto:leftwichjb@charter.net))

<http://www.ajlambert.com>