

DANCING AND KNIFE FIGHTING

By Jerry Tammer "Gus" Denny

Hey AJ & Mike. How about a little dancing and the one that will rip you, knife cuttings. What in the world could be further apart? You'd be surprised in my early days they were close.

Dancing was a sin, knife cutting was an event that took place nearly every Saturday. When I went into the service in '50 I had never seen a couple dancing. The only dance we saw and that was permitted was the May Pole dance. Would you believe it was celebrated in May? The dance was not much, going around in circles around a decorated pole (never knew the meaning.) Some one must have had a little Indian blood. But it was not a total loss because you got to hold the hand of the girl that was running around the pole with you. The battle for placement was great and Darwin would have been proud because the survival of the fittest always got beside the prettiest girl. The rest of us slower movers got the ones with knotty hands and red clay under their fingernails. But even a cheap thrill is better than none.

We had one instance where a girl took some guys behind the main building at B.S. (now stop your dirty mind) The trip was to teach them to dance. The dirty thoughts you had would have been minor in punishment compared to the tongue lashing she got. After all this girl was from Gentry and you know how reckless city girls can be. Anyway we had square dancing but it was mostly held at beer joints and we were unable to attend (the desire was there, but not the transportation or consent of our parents) I can truthfully say it didn't make a big indent into my personality as I had two left feet anyway and still do according to my wife. But the dance less walk on and a safe place to get away from this sinful act was to be on the street or Baxter (no s is required in street as there was only one. For being so small and isolated more blood per square inch was shed there than on Normandy Beach.

The cuttings were usually a social event and took place among "friends" who had a disagreement and a tough way to solve it. Time nor space will not permit them all; so we will talk about two, which would be in the annuals of the gun fight at OK corral. Number one: Ocie Brown Vs Hack McBroom. They were friends and spent time together drinking and shooting pool and other things us younger ones lusted after. They usually convened on the bench in front of Campbell Store that you barely hold them up because the "whittlers" had cut the planks into when they left their whiting stick at home. Ocie sat on the left and Hack sat on the far right. They would have been sitting side by side but Mack Hunter sat between them and had refused to yield his. I think it was because there was a little bit of plank left in that area to cut on. The argument started between Ocie and Hack. One thing led to another, out came the Barlow Knife. Hack leaned across Mack and cut Ocie throat from ear to ear. The blood flowed and the cry for help went out but mostly on deaf ears as there was only two cars on the street. The local pool room operator had a Hudson Taroplane that was quite new and he refused to take Ocie due to the fact he didn't want to bloody up his car. The café owner had a Studebaker. Now the decision was his, Ocie's life or death. The solution was solved. Ocie was

wrapped in a red checked oil table cloth and rushed off to the Cookeville General Hospital. He lived. But his fighting days were over. I think that it was due to the impression he made on his challengers when they saw that god awful scar he carried to his death. End.

The other event involved my brother in law Pee Wee Scarlett. Pee Wee was hell in a basket waiting to be unleashed to fight (I told you I didn't tell war stories, but some day I will tell you one about him, since it was his.) Pee Wee was a wonderful guy, loved his wife and family, got along with his mother in law, and loved all of the other outlaws he had married into. The feeling was mutual, as he was my hero. But you put a couple of beers under his belt Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde came alive. The bent up feeling of destruction and inflicting bodily harm became his goal (you will see part of the answer in his war story). One morning late to his work of buying chickens in the country area (he and his brother ran a produce store) He rushed off (the results of this will follow) At the end of the route Pee stopped at a local beer joint and had himself a few beers and an argument between two other guys developed. Pee left first either out of fear of his being late to get back to the store or his wife. The other guys thinking they had buffaloed him built up their courage with a couple more beers and pursued him into Baxter. On his way home Pee was met at the railroad siding and all hell broke loose. Knives flying, flesh being ripped and blood flowing. Three noble warriors went to the Cookeville Hospital. Pee required 132 stitches to hold him together. The other two, I cared less about. NOT THE STITCHES, NOT THE FIGHT, OR ANYTHING ELSE BOTHERED HIM EXCEPT ONE THING. HERE WAS A GUY TOUGH AS NAILS, HAD FOUGHT THE ENTIRE WW2 WITH PATTON AND HAD MULTILATED TWO OTHER GUYS HAD DONE ONE SILLY THING THAT MORNING IN HIS RUSH HE HAD GRABBED A PAIR OF HIS WIFE STEP INS INSTEAD OF SHORTS AND HAD THE STEP IN ON. NOTHING ELSE EVEN DEATH COULD HAVE BEEN MORE DEGRADING. HE NEVER FOUGHT AGAIN. But knife fighting went on, but the community said boys will be boys and its ok as long as they don't do any of that sinful dancing. Sorry it was so long .

See you later, Gus.

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