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## UA94/6/1 Cook Twins Oral History

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Interview with Anna Jo Cook Pickens and Betty Jo Cook Gibson, June 17, 2002.

[Note: Many of the questions they answer in unison. This document is primarily paraphrasing, not a transcription. Italics indicates Sue Lynn Stone's questions. For exact quotes, please refer to the cassette tape.]

008 *Birthdate:* August 30, 1927 in Sturgeon, Owsley County, Kentucky.

012 Lived there until age 3. Moved to Berea, Kentucky, then moved back to Sturgeon until they were age 7. Then moved to Richmond, Kentucky where our father was a student.

017 In high school years, in London, Kentucky.

019 *Parents' names* Pearl Lynch Cook and Sherman Martin Cook – from Owsley County. Siblings: Older brother Eugene Cook, deceased; younger brother, Bennie Cook still lives in London.

025 High school years – started cheerleading in 7<sup>th</sup> Grade. Dad's first job (after finishing Eastern and 2 years at UK) was teaching agriculture at Waynesburg High School. We had a penchant for singing and dancing.

034 Big cheerleaders asked them to assist them.

038 *The high school tournament* – London had not been in it for a long time. All beside ourselves. People who cheered at every game were so loyal. Anna & I made up new cheers for the state tournament.

050 Story of high school coach Hodges stopping them on the street to ask if they would be his cheerleaders. Went during the second year they were there. Last state tournament in the old alumni gym – all that it would hold. Preparing early. Stood on the press table, dancing around “quite a bit of dancing in our cheerleading”. Reporters got perturbed at us. “It is a wonder that what happened happened. A miracle happened that day for us.”

079 We started cheerleading and the whole crowd was for us. I did not realize it at the time. The next day when the papers came out, the *Lexington Herald-Leader* and the *Courier-Journal* both ran stories about the Cook twins.

090 *How many students at London High?* probably 250. The state tournament, back in those days, the entertainment revolved around the basketball team. The town people, sports fans, hooked on and wanted to do what we led them to do.

100 *A particular cheer you remember from your days in London* – one that we wrote: “Git on Board Little Chid'ren” [They chanted it.]

111 *Tell me about meeting Coach Diddle.* Harlan had won the state tournament. Diddle was going to recruit “Wah Wah” Jones. Parents' attorney came down to their home. We were

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getting letters in the mail. Lots was happening. Lawyer said, "Coach Diddle is coming back from Harlan ... and would like to talk with you all." They said, "Well, we're going to UK, but we'll be there if our hair gets dry."

135 "We were very young and immature, of course. But by 2 o'clock, the hair got dry." and they were curious. Diddle had just spoken to London's team star who was going into the service.

144 We were so impressed with him. He was so charismatic. He said, "I'd like for you to come to our school." Later he said "I'd like for ya'll to come to Bowling Green for one weekend, just to see how you like it. No pressure. I know you're going to UK. No pressure at all. I'd love to have you." So we said we'd ask our parents.

156 Their memory is that he called back to finalize the details. We said "May we bring our pianist?" And he said, "Bring the whole family if you want to."

164 We came in the summer. Rather quiet. We stayed in the dorm — White Stone Hall. The first 2 nights we stayed in Coach Diddle's house. Herman Lowe came to take our picture there.

174 Coach Diddle told us, I believe on the phone when he called back, that he wanted us to entertain. We were a little bit into show biz at that time. We were so young. We have one chapel program during the summer school time and we would like for you to give the program. That was when everyone had to go to chapel.

189 Had already entertained for Kiwanis International in Knoxville; had won a contest at Renfro Valley. They asked us to come back two or three times after that. The third time Red Foley was there. He owned half of Renfro Valley at the time though we did not know it. He interviewed us. In about 2-3 weeks after that, we were cheerleading at Stanford, close to Waynesburg, Kentucky. The other partner John Lair came in there and said, "I'd like for you all to go with me." We said "we can't today because our team is getting ready to play and we got to cheerlead." He looked at us and said, "would you rather sing or cheerlead?" And we said "Cheerlead." "We were getting ready to do our thing." We were education conscious. We wanted to get a college education first whatever we did. We were only in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, or maybe 9<sup>th</sup>, [Anna interjects "7<sup>th</sup>"] but

218 Oh, that chapel program. They lifted the roof." It was a ... they accepted us. We had a fantastic pianist. She would sing with us occasionally. She was a good part of our act. Coach Diddle fell in love with her and so did Mrs. Diddle. So he gave her a part-time scholarship to come and play the piano for us. Her name was Mayme Johnson.

229 She had already gone two years to Sue Bennett College in our hometown, so she stayed 2 years. Then Coach Diddle got us another pianist and her name was Mary Helen Larkin from Madisonville. She was fantastic, both of them were. She later married Odie Spears who played basketball for Western right after the war.

237 He had to make a phone call back to get permission for us to stay the rest of the week. So we did. He took us to Russellville, Glasgow, Scottsville, Auburn, Smiths Grove. I may have

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forgotten someone. But he took us all around here to the Kiwanis club, the civic clubs. So by then we had a real good following. By the end of that week, there was no question about it, we were coming to Western.

[COUNTER RESET – thus, index numbers do not appear in the rest of this paraphrase]

*Concern about being homesick?* -- “it’s different when you are a twin. ... There’s a loyalty there. That’s not to say we haven’t had our differences, but it’s a unconditional loyalty.”

When we were 5 years old we were visiting in the mountains where we came from, our cousin sang and played guitar. We got off to ourselves and we started singing. Anna adds, “and I started singing harmony, not knowing what it was. I had no idea. At 5 – we thought it sounded good.”

*Did you all dress alike?* Every day until she got married on June 6, 1948. Four years after we’d come to Western.

*Twin pranks?* On a date home for the Summer, on the way back we stopped at the restaurant, and one of us said, “let’s change on them.” We did and we got away with it, but we were young and told them. They did not like it. We’d gotten their goat so we never did that again.

We did one time at Western. In Dr. Griffin’s class, he sat you according to what you had made on the last test. He was always 15 minutes late. The class wanted us to change. They asked us 2 times. The third time they broke us down and we did it. Somebody went in after the class and told him. We did not know it. Next day, a plain white sheet of paper for everyone to write their names down. Is that your right name? If anyone is not in their right seat, they get an F today. We were okay there. We went after class and apologized to him. He didn’t like it. They talked us into it. We should not have done it. It got his goat. People don’t like that, so we’ve never done it again.

*Did you all take the same classes?* Yes, until our practice teaching. They would not let us take it together. Dr. Jagers. We had it two semesters and one semester he decided to separate it. Yarbrough was the teacher we taught under.

BETTY: But Anna, do you remember? They were complimentary that we had done a good job apart, so the next semester we could be together. By this time, I was engaged to be married. That was the end of our college. We graduated one night and Dee and I got married the next morning at the Presbyterian Church at 8 in the morning. ANNA: Do you know why? Our families were here for graduation. They were going to Florida on their honeymoon. So they went on.

*Any professors on the Hill that you would like to comment on?* We loved Dr. Gordon Wilson. We had 6 English courses under him. We became English majors and both of us taught after we got out some there. Both of us 7 years. Dr. Poteet. Dr. Wood. Miss Richards – we thought a lot of her. ANNA: Did we have a class under Miss Richards? BETTY: Oh, yes, Anna, we had at least one. Probably more.

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Dr. Gordon Wilson made a statement when we first got here that we could not possibly come out of this unspoiled. That this would ruin us. And we were determined to show Dr. Gordon Wilson that he was wrong. Meanwhile, we fell in love with him and we admired him so much.

*Tell me about this radio show.* Coach. First of all, let me go back. When Coach came back the second time to talk to Mother and Daddy. And this lawyer, Murray Brown, he had played football here at Western and he was a loyal Westerner. And they decided to draw up this contract because we were so young, but one of the reasons it happened was that Coach thought that we would eventually go into show business, so he became our manager legally at that time. And he was our legal guardian. So this was a legal contract. The reason for all that was we graduated from high school when we were 16. And so we actually could not sign that contract, they had to. They were protective about what was going to happen to us, because coming all the way across the state. But they trusted Coach; they really did. And they trusted us. Because of this lawyer who had been Mother and Daddy's lawyer for years. Four year scholarship. Books, lodging.

This radio program we had it 2 nights a week. Coach gave his time to come get us and take us out there. It was at the dinner hour. He gave that time to us. There are so many things. He became like a second father to us. And Mrs. Diddle was wonderful. And their children are still like brothers and sisters to us.

*The format of this radio show?* We did what they called popular songs back in those days. We won that contest in Renfro Valley, but we did not like country music. But we won on popular music. Actually the reason they put that in that contract, I think, was that Coach learned that we'd been show biz a little bit there and he was a showman himself. He had traveled with the Chautauqua circuit when he was at Centre College in the summer; that's what he did. He had it in his blood. All 3 of us were frustrated show people. And that's how that all came about. After we got here, everywhere that he went to make a appearance, we went. And I might mentioned that he had promised in that contract that he would take us to Madison Square Garden at Christmas time. They already had a 2 week tour scheduled in the East and so, we did not realize. We did not know it until later. He had promised to take us to Madison Square Garden where we gave a show at half time. Four encores. 18,500 people. In those days. Madison Square Garden was full.

We played Canisius at Buffalo, NY; [Cornell at Ithaca; Brooklyn College at Madison Square Garden; Cornell at Ithaca, NY]. We never had traveled before. We traveled by train. Mrs. Diddle, Mamie, Betty & Anna shared a sleeper car. It was fantastic. We were just proud to be on the train. We would have slept on the seats. President Thompson was in the service then. He met us there. Still working for Western even though he was in service. Boys in the service and from our hometown – they all showed up there. The president of Madison Square Garden – Coach told him that he would like to bring us to put on the show. He said, "Bring 'em on. What can I do?" He said, "Well, have a piano ready." And so they had that piano ready.

Now if you lived in Bowling Green and you turned on your radio at 6:15 on Tuesday or Thursday evening what have heard first? [ANNA & BETTY sang "Hello" and "Goodbye." The girls switched positions. Anna on the right.] We had Ken Givens as an announcer.

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*Where did Western play basketball at that time?* In the old gym – where the library is now. They had a balcony and the young children liked to sit around there. The whole gymnasium was filled. It was the biggest one in Kentucky at that time. The Health & Physical Education building.

*Any ballgames that you particularly remember? Showmanship?* It was good. There again. Coach Diddle he had it prepared for people to be entertained. The ladies, they dressed up like they were walking down 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Louisville. Or in New York. Hats, they came in there dress up. That was still the entertainment. The students, they were all at the games and they were all involved. The people were participating.

*If you were a student at Western in the 1940s, what rules were in place for you? Were there curfews in the dorms?* Oh, yes, 9:30 on weeknights. 10:30 or 10:45 on the weekends.

*Dress?* We could not wear blue jeans. Finally our last year here, we could wear blue jeans on Saturday.

*Other things you remember about being in Bowling Green? Did you participate in a church?* Yes, First Presbyterian Church. We were raised Presbyterian.

*Which dormitory did you live in?* West Hall, they called it then. We lived in a suite. Mamie Johnson shared our suite the first 2 years. Only 950 students on the campus when we came. And everybody knew everybody.

*Where did you eat?* We ate at the cafeteria in Potter Hall.

*I believe you all signed a petition relevant to the food.* I may have because I did not like those creamed green beans. And also the eggs, it was during the war, and they said they were powdered eggs and that they had something in them that made you not passionate. [laughter] *The rumors that go around.* I can't believe we are remembering all of this. Salt peter. Yes, that's what they said was in there.

*Describe for me – obviously the Coach thought that Bowling Green would sell you all, a small town with a lot of love between the campus and the town. Did you interact with the town a lot?* Yes. And your dad, we knew him and we liked him. We interacted with a lot of town people. People were wonderful to us.

*Meeting your fellow?* BETTY: I was the first one to break the spell. I fell madly in love with an athlete who had come back from the war. We started dating not long after he came back. We got married and have been married 54 years and have 2 wonderful children.

ANNA: And I was a little bit behind there. We were home for the summer between our junior and senior years and the *Rotomagazine* came out in the Courier Journal and had a photograph of a new boy who had been in the service in Germany. From Princeton, Ky., had gone to Butler High School, and had been a very good athlete. And they had a picture. And I think I fell in love with that picture. I told Betty, "I want to you to look at this picture of this cute boy we're gonna have on the football team." But I said that I'd be too old for him because I'm a senior and he's a

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freshman. So when I got over here, I did some research and he & I were the same age. We were cheerleading at the bonfire at Homecoming. Well, first of all, we had to go out for cheerleader every year. It was nervous. The Lord only knows how it happened that we got it for four years, but I will have to say this – I just want to tell you the truth of it – one of the coaches said that we got 98% of the vote our last year. We thought they might be tired of us – you know, 4 years. We were up there and they were voting on the cheerleaders and the football team was right behind us. He tapped me on the shoulder. He said, “do you vote for you by yourself or for you and your sister together?” I liked that Southern drawl first of all. I said, “I think you vote for us separately.” And then, to make a long story short, I was watching him practice under the lights one night. I was there with someone else. But the more I saw, the more I liked. He called me. Eye contact was being made. Up there under those lights. One of the football players, the captain of our team, told him – you see I’d said, “I’d like to meet him.” Jim said, “oh, no, she’s a Senior and I’m a Freshman – that would not work at all.” He said, “Well, why don’t you just ask her for a date and see.” But before that happened – well, along about the same time – I was watching him down there on the football field, he could kick, he could pass, he could run, he could do it, he was great. He looked up there in the stands at me. It was one of those cases that he looked up and I looked at him. And then he looked back and I looked back and finally he gave me the sign “wait 5 minutes after this is over. Wait there.” I was there with four or five of my roommates. My roommates stayed with me as they were cutting the lights. He came up there and they moved on out. For 51 ½ years, we spent our lives together, but we did marry for about a year after that. She was going to get married and the students all said, “Ya’ll ought to have a double wedding.” And I said, “I don’t know this man that well.” I wasn’t ready to get married yet. But in 6 months, we got married. I have a son, the Sports Editor of the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*. His name is Jim Pickens, Jr. Wonderful grand daughters and a wonderful daughter-in-law.

*After graduation?* I got married and Dee & I went to Illinois for Dee to play professional basketball 2 years up there. Our daughter was born. Dee was working on his masters in the summer. Third year, a professional team was formed in Louisville – Dee, Duck Ray, Odie Spears, a couple of guys – Kenny Rawlings from UK. They formed a professional team and Reynolds metals was their sponsor. They thought they had a good place to play in Louisville, but the contract... they played in Male High’s gym. Then Dee went to Reynolds Metals ... for 15 years. The last 3 years, it was a subsidiary of Reynolds. President Thompson and Dero Downing came and offered him a place here on the Hill. Western was beginning to mushroom and they needed administrative help very badly. Dee had signed to go with another aluminum company and we’d already made arrangements for the move and everything. It was quite traumatic to make the change, but we did. Before he started with this other company, he came back to Western. It has been a great experience.

*Anna?* Jim and I had just been going together about 8 months when they got married. I went home on June 6<sup>th</sup>. He came over there about every other weekend to London, Kentucky. I was more or less thinking of pursuing a teaching job. In July, one morning at 6 a.m. the phone rang and it was Coach Diddle. He said, “I’ve got you a job over here if you want to come back.” To make a long story short, I did come back and Jim (he had been a Freshman while I was a Senior). He finished his tenure out. Taking the time out at one spot in there, he signed a pro-baseball

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contract with Detroit. We lived in Davenport, Iowa. He played on the same field outside, where Dee played on the basketball court inside – but not at the same time. We had moved to Atlanta, Georgia and they had moved there. He hurt his arm. He had done well until he hurt his arm. And back then, now you can get an operation for that – rotary cup – it may be that – anyway, they did not have operations at that time. He & I decided that we would come on back here. He could have gone back one more year and kept trying to get that healed, and so we decided that the best thing was to come back and finish his degree. He did not lack much, just a year. Coaching job at Elizabethtown, Kentucky and I got a teaching job there. And that's how we started on the rest of our lives. It was good. Yes, we went away to coach and teach. [Betty: They came back before we did.] We were at Danville after Elizabethtown. And Jim had had an undefeated team that particular year. The people at Bowling Green had lost 30 games straight. They called Jim to come over here and help them get out of that syndrome. WE did not come immediately. He was going to have about the same team the next year. I was pregnant. We decided after it was all said and done. I'd been teaching. Since I was going to get to have this baby after we'd been married 11 years, I wanted to stay home so I could take care of that baby. [Betty: "They had told her she would not have any."] So we came back, they changed their money about 3 times. At the beginning, we could not move on that. Jim said, "my wife is pregnant and I can't make it on that." And the money just kept going up. They got us a place to come and rent at the beginning. We came. He had a real good season that first season. They just lost 2 games. So that was getting them back on track. He was there for 6 years. He and the team won the State Baseball championship that year. The baseball coach, who was Gene Rhodes at that time, he was going to have to help more with basketball recruiting. So they needed someone to be the baseball coach. Western brought him up here in the same calendar year that they [the Gibsons] came. Since then, Western has been our lives. *And you still enjoy Bowling Green?* Oh, yes. Our blood runs real red. I don't go to all the games now. I'm 75.

*Anything else you'd like to discuss on this tape?* BETTY: We are both real strong Christians, Sue Lynn and we feel, and Anna can vouch for it or she can say what she wants, we feel the Lord has been in all of it. It all hadn't been a jolly, jolly, jolly ANNA: cup of tea. *Not always an easy road?* BETTY: That's right. It's not that way for anyone. We are just thankful to Him.

ANNA: Sue Lynn, my life, most of my years have been spent around Western. And we had a son, Jim Pickens, Jr. as I mentioned a moment ago, and I feel so fortunate that he got to start at the first grade and he went until finally they disbanded the school in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade – and he had to change schools. His whole life was built around Western. He knows nothing else but Western. He is the Sports Editor over there at Owensboro. He grew right up on this campus. His whole life, more than mine, was Western and he loves Western so much. And I'm thankful that he got to be a part of it that much.

*AND through his career, he promotes Western whenever he has an opportunity.*  
BETTY: That's right. His blood runs red as do all our families.

SL: Thank you so much for participating.