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UA68/8/2 Dero Downing Oral History

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WKU Oral History Committee

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James Bennett: This is the second interview with Dr. Downing on the third of April, 1978,

By the time you moved into - well, it was a new title, rather than a new office, really, wasn't it? I guess you had gotten to know President Thompson pretty well, by this time, had you not?

Dero Downing: Well, yes, Dr. Thompson had been one of the people at the university with whom I had been well acquainted for many years. In fact, when I was a student at Western, he was Director of Public Relations and in that capacity served in something of the role of an assistant to the president. And he had a personal interest in most every activity in the university, including athletics, and as a student athlete I came to know him through his travels with the basketball team and his close friendship and professional association with Mr. Diddle as our head basketball coach. And from that beginning, I continued to be fairly closely associated with Dr. Thompson in different ways over the years. And, then, of course, when he became president at Western in 1955, I was teaching in the training school, and he asked me at that time to move into the position of the Director of the Training School. And as the years went on, we had more and more reason, because of the different responsibilities I had at the university, to grow closer in our working relationship, and my friendship for him and admiration and respect also have grown over the years as well. And it was a pleasure to work as closely with Dr. Thompson as I was able to work in some of those years.

J.B.: I'd like for us to discuss now a little bit the move from college to university status, which was developing - I'm not sure, really, when this move started...

D.D.: Well, I think in an institution like Western, rather than any abrupt change, that changes such as this are more of an evolution. They are changes that take place

in some ways unnoticed, in many ways, I'm sure, unstructured. But, particularly Dr. Thompson, and I'm sure others to some extent, in the university, always, I think, had in the back of their minds the aspiration and the hope and the desire to attain university status. This was accomplished in 1966. I know two, four years, even, before that time there was open discussion and mention of that objective. For example, when the Bowling Green Business University (at that time it was Bowling Green College of Commerce) became a part of Western in 1963, it was a well-known fact that this was being designed as the first of the colleges in a university type organization or university structure. So, it's the kind of thing that, for the immediate years prior to the naming of Western as a university in 1966, there was a definite goal, a definite objective, a definite plan. But, even back many years prior to that, I'm sure, particularly in the mind of Dr. Thompson, there was the aspiration that Western would become a university.

The basis for it, of course, came about at a time when, I think, the educational climate and also the political climate in the state of Kentucky was right, was good, for this to be accomplished through the action of the general assembly and then the support that was given by the governor, Governor Breathitt, at that time, who signed the bill.

J.B.: This was pretty much in line with the changes across the country at about this time, wasn't it? There was a good move to change the state colleges to universities. Was Western the leader in Kentucky in this movement?

D.D.: Well, I would say that certainly, Dr. Thompson, Western Kentucky State College, at that time, exerted very positive leadership. It was a team effort, I think, on the part of the Boards of Regents and administrative leadership in the regional institutions. At that time, of course, the public system of higher education was made up of University of Kentucky, Kentucky State, and then the four regional institutions,

because the University of Louisville was a municipal or a private institution at that juncture, and Northern Kentucky had not come into existence except that it existed as a part of the community college system located at that site where Northern Kentucky University is now located. But I think, primarily, the efforts and the work of Dr. Martin at Eastern and Dr. Woods at Murray and Dr. Doran at Morehead and, then, having observed first hand the tremendous leadership given to that and the impetus that was given to it through the work of Dr. Thompson, I would certainly agree with those who would suggest that he did give it leadership, because indeed he did. And he prevailed upon the governor, having an audience with him, I'm sure, on a number of occasions, making Governor Breathitt aware of the fact that this was an objective that Dr. Thompson felt deserved the governor's support. He prevailed on legislators. He had, I think, an audience on many occasions throughout the state of Kentucky when he had an opportunity to make it known that these institutions had developed and had grown to the point that they were deserving of this recognition and also making people aware of the fact that it would strengthen our institution and others in our ability to more effectively fulfill our mission.

J.B.: Dr. Thompson had a rather strong public speaking schedule, too, didn't he? This would give him access to the public...

D.D.: He was very active in civic organizations; he served at one time as, I think, the governor of our district - or of this district - in the Kiwanis International, and, of course, he was in great demand as a public speaker and continues to be recognized as truly an outstanding speaker. And in those years when he worked so long and so hard in all the aspects of building the university as we know it today, he spoke on many, many occasions all across the state of Kentucky on higher education, on Western Kentucky University, and on the importance of the role and mission of these institutions in our Commonwealth. And, I think, certainly he deserves a great deal of credit not only for

what happened in the growth and development of our own institution, having served as president over the 15 years that he did from 1955 to 1969 - well, he gave tremendous leadership to our institution - but throughout many of those years, his effectiveness in the entire field of higher education was very much in evidence. And you are correct in suggesting that this was true in bringing about the role of Western as a university.

J.B.: Now, you were a major figure in the administration at the time this was coming about. I imagine that just the actual process of change from college to university involved a tremendous amount of work. I wonder if you would comment on some of your recollections about what must have been pretty hairy times there.

D.D.: Well, we were right in the midst of such unprecedented, and not entirely unexpected, but almost unbelievable growth in the student population, and you could hardly pause long enough to reflect on one aspect of what was occurring long enough to much more than realize that it was taking place. Because this whole matter of moving from college status to university did have significant impact, it opened up new vistas in terms of the institution having broader appeal for a better-qualified faculty, perhaps. It had the potential to develop into a multi-purpose institution by strengthening and broadening the program of study. It enabled the institution to take on a new dimension, to be sure, but no one had time to pause and reflect too much on that because what was occurring each year was just an unbelievable growth in the student population, making it necessary that we make certain that we remain abreast of all the elements in the institution that will enable us to just physically and socially and, above all, academically cope with the problems of day-to-day operation of the university. With the rapid growth in the student population, it was apparent that we must improve major areas in the university such as the libraries, the library facilities, the library resources, the whole matter of the preservation and the procurement of information or library resources and then the retrieval or dissemination or distribution of library services,

if you will, making these materials and information available to students and faculty. This in itself was a major enterprise, and, as a result, we included a rather lengthy study and tried to determine how we could meet these demands and built the Margie Helm Library and, then, shortly after that, the Cravens Library and Graduate Center. And all through that process we were attempting to just stay abreast of the day-to-day and the month-to-month and year-to-year demands of maintaining a quality educational program. And I guess we didn't have a whole lot of time just to pause and reflect too much on the fact that we were changing from a college to a university.

J.B.: Well, now at this same time you were also administering a larger and larger budget every year and were involved in a tremendous building program. What were some of the problems? How did you keep all of this going?

D.D.: Well, it, I think, was a real challenge to everyone in the university to utilize all the resources that were available to us in a way that would most effectively carry out our mission and fulfill our needs. We have had such a tremendous growth in the physical facilities at Western that I suspect that if you would take any one of us who has been at Western over an extended period of time, and if you had said to Jim Bennett, for example, after he'd been here for two years, if you'd walked out here and said, "Well, now, Jim, in 1975 (or 1976 or some projected date) this is what it will be like..." and then describe what actually did occur in that period of time, you would have done as I did on occasion and shake our heads and say, "Well, you know, it's nice to dream, but I don't believe it can be done." But, somehow or another, we did manage, year after year, biennium after biennium, to make the kind of case to those who were interested in higher education, to the various administrations that were in state government, as far as the governor and his administrative staff, and to the different legislatures that would meet there each two years, and with the continuous support of a number of individual legislators and a lot of people across the state of Kentucky, we managed to generate the

resources. And then we managed, somehow, (at the time this was perhaps the most difficult part of it) we managed to bring together the human resources necessary to effectively plan and keep it within the framework of our long-range masterplan, to design and plan a facility that would function in the way that would best meet our needs. And I think it's a tribute to a large number of people across the campus, folks like L.T. Smith. Mr. L.T. gave tremendous leadership to the physical plant administration, working closely with Dr. Thompson. And, then, along with Mr. L.T. Smith, H.P. Clark and Owen Lawson working in the area of physical plant management and physical plant administration and physical plant planning, and then with the academic leadership given to it by Dr. Cravens and those working with him as part of a team of administrative faculty and then members of the faculty who served on committees planning these facilities. I think all of this brought about sort of a team effort, and if you tried to pinpoint the single individual that gave it more direction than any other, I'm sure that you would overlook some of the more important contributions that were made by just large numbers of faculty and staff in the university through those years. But we did expand the physical plant and we have here on the hill today, I think, a campus that any institution could be proud of. And then, at the same time, to try year after year to put together an operation budget that would take into account the increased cost of living that made it necessary, if we were to retain capable faculty, to try to the best of our ability to take our resources and to do all the things that we had to do to stay in operation and at the same time try to help our people make a living wage has been a real challenge to us. But here again, I think that the fact that we have been able to accomplish this in a way that I think we have no reason to be apologetic about - I'm sure there were years that we wished we could have done more, and there are times that, I'm sure, that maybe we could have done a little more had we done things a little differently. But, as you look back and reflect over those years, I think we have each year had a reasonably sound operating budget. We've continued to try to bring about the long-range improvement and at the same time operate day-to-day in a manner that will do what we're really here

for and that is to function in the classroom in a teaching-learning situation in a way that will serve the students.

J.B.: During this same time, while we were frantically expanding and trying to put up new facilities, every now and then there were suggested plans - one, I think, was a classroom and office building where the old water tank was behind Cherry Hall. There was some talk about a kind of satellite campus out at the college farm, and then, briefly, the involvement with Kentucky Southern. Now, could you comment on those three areas?

D.D.: I think that as you move along in the operation of an institution such as Western Kentucky University that there will be, just as you will find in any single unit of the university where maybe in a department the faculty will explore various courses of study; they will explore and investigate more imaginative ways to carry out their mission. Well, as an institution, this occurs also on a broader scale, and I think this frequently occurs in the development of the physical facilities that would be designed to best meet the needs of the university. And one of the things that was explored at great length was the construction of a combination classroom-office building on the apex of the campus. Old-timers would refer to it, perhaps, as the Old Fort area, and those who were familiar with the campus at the time the water tower stood on the top of the hill - it was right in the location where the old water tower was. But as we engaged in this study - as Dr. Cravens, Dr. Thompson, and I visited some other institutions that has a facility such as this, there came to our attention more and more concerns - reservations, I guess you would say - even though you find in the archives of the university some preliminary plans and exploration to this. I think it was a project that was abandoned as not being feasible because of the fact that it was determined that it would not function effectively and carry out in the life of the university the long-range function that was projected for it at that point in time, so it was abandoned.

As far as Kentucky Southern was concerned, there were a lot of people who thought that this was nothing more than a power play on the part of Western to try to establish an extended campus base in Louisville and Jefferson County. But this is not the case; Kentucky Southern came to Dr. Thompson. He called a meeting of some of us to meet with the president and members of the Executive Committee. Mr. Highbaugh, I recall, was very instrumental in working with Dr. Burhan, who at that time was president of Kentucky Southern, and they let it be known that Kentucky Southern was coming on hard times and they expressed some admiration for the manner in which Western Kentucky University had merged with or had taken into the university the Bowling Green College of Commerce. And they felt that Western, perhaps, could take over the operation of Kentucky Southern, and that it would enable Western to function in that area in an effective way, that it would be something of an extended campus of Western Kentucky University. And I think it's a real tribute to the imagination, to the educational statesmanship of Dr. Thompson, that he would enthusiastically explore such a possibility. I think it was on the heels of that exploration that Kentucky Southern became a part of the University of Louisville. But, I think there was a genuine feeling on the part of those who were giving leadership to Kentucky Southern that it could best survive as a part of Western Kentucky University, and I'm not so sure but what it wouldn't have worked.

J.B.: I suppose that the University of Louisville and University of Kentucky both would have been extremely opposed.

D.D.: I think that's the case. I think they would have viewed it as something other than what it actually was and that it would have been what they considered to be an encroachment upon a territorial right.

J.B.: They'd stake that claim. I'd always wondered really what the situation was there; it looked like it had a lot of possibilities, and it doesn't seem like Louisville has really developed those too well.

At about this time, too - in addition to all these other problems - we were getting into that age of student unrest, weren't we, in the late '60s and early '70s.

D.D.: Yes, but Western, I think, was very fortunate in the fact that we did not have widespread disruption or unrest on the Western campus. But it was something that was pretty well spread across the country, and even though we managed to preserve something of the kind of campus decorum that you hope that you can maintain, we did have some of the social strife that remained largely under the surface, and it didn't erupt to the extent that you found in some places. But there were, from time to time, occasions when - Mr. Carl Brayden was invited to come to the campus, and because of the beliefs that he has and some of the...

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D.D.: ...as what some people have indicated is an open advocate of the communistic form of government. He was considered to be something of a radical, and we recognized the obligation that we had to maintain order and, at the same time, maintain an open campus. So, we had established a place where people like Carl Brayden could come and, within the reasonable guidelines that had been developed for speakers on the campus, he had a place that he could come and speak. But Mr. Brayden, I think, with an intention, in my opinion, to be disruptive, indicated that he was not going to speak there that he was going to speak on the lawn of the administration building. So, we were not going to let him or anyone else dictate that kind of thing on the campus; so, we had our university attorney in the office of the court when we knew Mr. Brayden was coming to the campus, and I had open phone communications with him, so he could obtain a warrant there on the spot and they could come here and serve the warrant. And while the sheriff was en route to the campus to serve the warrant, Mr. Brayden decided that was a good time for him to leave the campus, and so he simply disappeared. But we had five students, I believe, who

maintained they were going to rally any place they wanted to and any way they wanted to. So, we went ahead and served the warrant on these students and all others who refused to comply with the guidelines of the university. And, of course, we had the court case over that, and the court substantiated the fact that the university has to maintain reasonable rules of orderliness on the campus. And that was one incident that, even though it was, to some extent, rather unpleasant, I suspect there were some constructive things that emerged out of that.

There was some social unrest of a racial nature. There were more black activists on the campus, because they realized, I think, that with regard to the Vietnam War, with regard to the draft, the revolt I guess, against the establishment in whatever form it might take, that they would also seize upon this as an opportunity to make known their displeasure over what they felt had been racial discrimination over an extended period of time. So, all of those things fermented to the extent that they caused some concern on all campuses across the country, and I think it's a tribute to the great majority of the fine students on the Western campus that we've maintained a reasonable balance over the years. It's a tribute, I think, to people like Charlie Callan and Larry Berry and John Minton and a lot of other folks who gave leadership and direction to maintaining the kind of lifestyle and maintaining the kind of order that we found did prevail at Western throughout most of that period.

J.B.: You know, I think it was about then when I realized I was really out-of-date. As a student, I could not even have conceived of questioning the administration or any of the action... I was really amazed at that through all the time. Now, was that about the same time that we had - I can't think of the fellow's name - and there was an article, I believe, in the Courier not too long ago about it - who started The Skewer, this newspaper.

D.D.: No, that was back prior to this time. I guess that was about in 1967, maybe '66, somewhere along in there, '65. I think that might have been acceptable on some campuses, but I would have to say that even though we've become, all of us to some extent, more liberal in our views, I think a campus paper has the same responsibility as any other respectable, accountable, accreditable publication to refrain from the gutter kind of filth that some campuses over the years have felt comfortable with. But I don't think that we can accept it here at Western. I think our values are such that if we do that we're putting our stamp of approval on this kind of thing, and I'm a strong believer in the fact that if we do not maintain certain standards and certain values that we're going to lose something that's awfully important in the life of this university. And - now, it may be that you have in mind the Fly Case; this was similar to that -

J.B.: That may have been it.

D.D.: We had a group of students in, I guess it was, the early '70s who had scheduled the showing of a film that was pure filth. It was pornographic in our opinion. It was a film entitled "The Fly".

J.B.: I'd forgotten all about that.

D.D.: And it was nothing more than a 30 minute film of a fly crawling over the body of a nude woman. And we maintained that we had no obligation - in fact, not only did we not have an obligation to provide facilities, but we felt we had a responsibility not to provide them for that kind of thing. And we refused to provide the facilities for this film to be shown. If the students wanted to view that film, they had every right to, but we didn't think they had a right to view it on the Western campus, and this was the issue. And the students brought suit, and the court upheld the university

and the decision not to permit it to be shown on campus. Here again, I think we can't manage the lifestyles or the values of individuals, but we do have the responsibility to determine to what extent the university contributes to certain kinds of lifestyles and to certain kinds of values, and I think that was the issue. I'm sure students - and I'm sorry to say that this would be the case, but I don't think there's any question but what they find an opportunity to view things perhaps much worse than "The Fly". But I'll guarantee you that as long as I have anything to do with it - and I think there are a number of other people around here who feel the same - if they do view it, it's not going to be because of encouragement that we've given them by providing facilities and the resources to do it.

J.B.: No. It really has no place in an academic community. As you say, they have a perfect right to go somewhere and see it, but...

I've seen, I think, a real change for the better in the student body. I started noticing it about a year ago. I can tell a difference in attitude, in their performance in the classroom, and particularly in their desire to learn. They're coming around; they're wanting to know "How can I learn more?" "How can I study better?" I think it's certainly pleasing, I tell you.

D.D.: There's a renewed commitment on the part of more students than we've had in some years in the past, and I think it's gratifying. I think it's a tribute to a number of things. I think the parents are probably more concerned than they have been in some time and are probably giving more responsible direction to the rearing of a family. I think that over the years as students have observed what has taken place, they've seen little good that has come, and I think they've seen much to be regretted that has come from the kind of approach or the kind of attitude, the kind of personal conduct and behavior that some students chose to engage in over some of those years. The time comes when an individual has to accept responsibility or they become a drone;

they become a liability, and parent's can't, over an unlimited period of time, keep footing the bills. When the student soon recognizes, "You know, the time's going to come when I've got to get out there and earn my way," then they decide they need some tools with which to do that.

J.B.: And they certainly see what they used to call the establishment in a different light now, don't they?

D.D.: Yeah, that's right.

J.B.: I think that ties right in with their realization about that.

Well, let's turn to something a little bit more pleasant than that kind of thing. I wanted, of course, to get you to say something about your association with Mr. Diddle.

D.D.: Oh goodness!

J.B.: That's a whole subject in itself.

D.D.: That's right. That would take three or four hours interview, I suppose, Jim. Mr. Diddle, in my mind, was - and I think this is shared by many people - was the greatest basketball coach that ever coached. And, along with that, he was such a lovable fellow. He was loyal through and through; he supported his people. He supported his school, and he had a great knack of being on the side of the right. You know, Mr. Diddle just had an instinct as it came down to what's right and what's wrong, and he was just a tremendous fellow, and there are so many personal stories from the time he came to talk with me about coming to Western and things over the years when he visited in our home and is just reflected time and time again. And hardly a day goes by, certainly not a week passes, but what I run into someone who reminds

me in one way or another of some incident that - I was laughing the other day - and this is not the most cultural thing to put on this tape, I suppose - but somebody was talking about when we went to Madison Square Garden in 1942 and played in the National Invitational Tournament. And you'll have to remember that in that day and age the National Invitational Tournament was the national tournament; the NCAA was, of course, in effect. It was operating, but it didn't have the status, it didn't have the importance of the NIT. And for Western, who had been invited to the NIT in 1942, it was something of an accomplishment then. We went up there for the NIT; we played CCNY first. Back in those days, LIU, CCNY, Fordham, some of those teams in New York City always had great ball clubs, and we managed to beat CCNY in the first round. And then - in the NIT you stay there and play over a period of about ten days, because they don't play like just one night right after the other. And we would practice, and then they would try to find entertainment for us. And they were having on Broadway then the old Olson and Johnson Hell's A-Poppin', and it was an old vaudeville-type production that just had taken the country by storm - good music in it and a lot of laughter. And I never will forget - and this is what I said maybe it's a little bit crude to put on this tape, and I was telling them this story - but there was some comedian who would rush out in the middle of the stage as they sometimes did in that slapstick kind of stuff, you know, and he had a great big fish that he had by the tail. He'd wave it around over his head and shout, "Who hit Nellie in the bellie with a flounder?", and then he'd disappear. And he kept doing that all through the thing, and he would do it in a way and the timing would be such that it would tie into whatever else was going out, and it was hilarious. And it doesn't sound as if it would be just to say that, you know, but it was one of the things that the basketball team had tickets to, this thing, and Mr. Diddle and all of us were there, you know. So, old Coach got that as one of his sayings, and that was in 1942. And even up until the time that he passed away in - it was January, 1970, I guess that Coach died - but even up to a few short months before that, if I drove by on State Street and old Coach would be sitting

out there on his front porch, and if I would roll down my window and stick out my head and holler, "Hey, Coach! Who hit Nellie in the bellie with a flounder?", he would just laugh and throw his hands up, you know. That was one of his favorite sayings. Coach had a great ability to take a bunch of fellows and make them play better than they knew how to play. If you just took ten guys and he was coaching against you, he'd let you choose the five who were the best, and he'd take the other five and beat you. Because he could inspire people to play; he had a way about him of looking a person in the eye and just making them think, "Well, there's just no way anybody's going to beat us." And he was tremendous at that. I've seen him time after time when it looked as if his team would not be able to win a game, and he would somehow or another inspire them to come on to win it. He had a language, of course, all his own. He called the Michigan Wolverines he'd call them the Wolveneers. Brigham-Young University, he'd say Brighman and Young, and he never did call it Vanderbilt - he said, "Vanderfelt." He called it Vanderfelt. And he told us in a talk one time before we were getting ready to go on an important trip, and he was concerned about how we might act, because he was a stickler for good manners, for good dress, for good impression. And he said, "Now, I want you to be courtesy to everybody while your..." And he'd say, "Be sportsmanship," and he says, "Above all, be sanitation." He kind of coined his own words, but he would always get the message across. And, I don't know, I just couldn't say enough for what he's meant in my life. Mr. Diddle wanted very much for me to be in this position that I am in as president of Western. And he made me aware of the fact that he wanted that to happen. And I told him, I said, "Coach, I'm sure there are a number of people who can fill that position as well or better, and I really have no great desire to try to do that." He said, "I want you to do it. You are the one for the job." and he said, "I want to live to see the time that you're in that position." And, of course, I'll always appreciate the support that he gave to that, and I think he was genuinely pleased when I went into the position of president at Western. And for him to feel that I could do it in itself was a vote of confidence and an expression

of support that I appreciate more than I can say. But he was one to be loyal to those with whom he had been associated many years. He'd give you the shirt off his back and just a tremendously great individual. I know when Coach Diddle was in the hospital and he was so sick I'll never forget, it was on the New Year's - not New Year's Eve, but it was on the night of January 1. About supper time I went to the hospital and knocked on his door, and he was lying in the bed there with his hand folded and his glasses on his stomach and his eyes closed, and I stuck my head in and said, "Coach, are you awake?" He said, "Yes." He said, "Where in the hell is my paper?" He said, "I wish somebody would bring me the paper." He said, "Go get the paper for me." So, I went downstairs and got an evening paper, brought it up to him, and he put his glasses on and he said, "Pull the chair over here close." And I said, "No, you go ahead and read the paper, and I'll just sit here awhile and visit with you." So, he opened the paper up and he hardly read anything; he sort of dropped it. And he took his glasses off and he said, "I want you to promise me something." And I said, "Well, Coach, you know that I would do anything in the world that I could do for you." "But," I said, "don't ask me something that I can't do, because I may promise you and I may not, because you may ask me something that I can't do." He said, "You can do it." He said, "I want you to promise me." I said, "Well, you tell me what it is." He said, "I don't think anything is going to happen, but if it did, and if it happened during the basketball season, don't you let them change any schedule." He said, "If anything happens to me, I don't want it to disrupt any schedule of basketball games." And I said, "Coach, that's something you're not going to have to worry about, because nothing's going to happen to you. You're going to be all right. And it's not going to be long before you're going to be out of here." And it was the next day that Coach died. He died on January 2nd, and on January 3rd we were scheduled to play Tennessee Tech here. And I didn't feel good at all about the fact that we were to play a home game, and Mr. Diddle had just died. But I went to Mrs. Diddle, Mary Jo, and Eddie, and I said, "Now, I want to tell you what happened just last night." But I said, "Now, I didn't promise Coach anything." And I said, "I want to do what the

family wants us to do in terms of how Western recognizes the great contribution that he has made. What is the right thing, what is the courteous thing for us to do?" Eddie, Mrs. Diddle, and Mary Jo, all three said, "He's told us time and again that he was going to come back and haunt us if we didn't insist that whatever had been scheduled would go ahead and be done." So, we did, based on that, make the decision, because we thought it was what he wanted; it was what the family wanted. And we went ahead and played Tennessee Tech on the night of the third, and then Mr. Diddle's funeral was on the fourth. But he was good to me; he was good to my family, good to my brother who was a student here commencing in '37. He was here tow years before I came in '39, and he would fight for old Alec and I guarantee you Alec would fight for him. But he had a great capacity to love people, and people found that he was a person that was deserving of their love as well as their respect. There are coaches who have been outstanding in the profession who have not had that human element to the extent that Coach Diddle had. He was just one of the - he was an unusual guy, and he was the kind of fellow that he seemed to have the knack that anytime he was around unusual things occurred, unusual things happened. He just had that magnetism, you know.

J.B.: He certainly was an interesting person. I never knew him well, but he just attracted people to him.

D.D.: Yeha, he really did, and - well, I think it gives you some indication of just what the name means when we introduced Mrs. Diddle at the old-timers game that was played down there this last February 3 or 4. We had an excellent crowd that night, and when she was introduced, just spontaneous, that student body came to their feet and in one voice - just overwhelming, rousing explosion of recognition and applause. You know, they did not know her personally, and I doubt if...

J.B.: They didn't even know Mr. Diddle.

D.D.: No. There's something, though, that his image, that his heritage has continued to arouse in people - and I was so pleased that night to see the kind of spontaneous recognition that came to her.

J.B.: I'm sure it helped her tremendously.

Well, I'm not going to ask you for any of the Diddleisms now. I don't think it would be appropriate. I will tell you, I'm having Lee Robertson and Jim Pickens get together; they both, you know, can imitate him pretty well.

D.D.: Those two guys are a couple of old sore arm pitchers, you know, that played baseball under him, and quite a lot of people didn't realize that Mr. Diddle, if anything was more colorful in baseball than he was in basketball.

J.B.: Must have been.

D.D.: Coached it for forty-some odd years. And he would get everything in the world mixed up on whether you were giving a bunt signal or a steal signal or whatever, but he would beat you just as sure as the world. He just had the same success in baseball that he did in basketball.

J.B.: He certainly was an interesting and colorful individual. One of the troubles nowadays, I've told some of my classes, we don't have many characters left anymore, do we?

D.D.: Well, I think we do...

J.B.: All of them are just about like everybody else. Somebody like Mr. Diddle just stands out so much.

D.D.: Of course, if you look back over the years, you would think that maybe Western had more than its share of "genuine characters" - if I could put that in quotation marks, sort of you know - unusual personalities, but really, when you get right down to it, he and a few people like him - well baseball, for example, has had only one Casey Stengle. Now, they've had a lot of characters, maybe, but - and this is a lot how I think of Mr. Diddle, you know - there are characters and then there are characters, and he stands out as master of them all, you know.

J.B.: Let's see. Have you got some more time? Are you pressed right now?

D.D.: Let's take about 3 or 4 more minutes if that's all right with you.

J.B.: All right. Would it be possible to come back one more time?

D.D.: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

J.B.: I've got several others. I wanted to get into your presidency, because you've been in the office almost a decade now, and I would like to get some comparisons. So, if it would be agreeable for me to come back later, we can just stop it right here then.

D.D.: Yeah. That'll be fine, and I'll look forward to...

END OF INTERVIEW