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Cooper, Eula and Beulah

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K-25 Oral History Interview

Date: 4/15/05

Interviewee: Eula and Beulah Cooper

Interviewer: Jennifer Thonhoff

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[1:01:32]

[crew talk]

Thonoff, J.: What's your name and spell it for me.

Cooper, B.: B-E-U-L-A-H Magill, M-A-G-I-L-L, Cooper, C-O-O-P-E-R.

Cooper, E.: E-U-L-A. Magill was my maiden name, M-A-G-I-L-L, and Cooper C-O-O-P-E-R, married name.

Thonoff, J.: Did you guys marry twins?

Cooper, B.: Uh-uhn (negative). They say they aren't any relation, but they were both from Campbell County.

Thonoff, J.: And they're both Coopers?

Cooper, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative). I have three children.

Cooper, B.: I have four, four daughters.

Thonoff, J.: Could you describe your farm for me?

Cooper, E.: Like Beulah said, we did have a good childhood. Of course, we had to carry our water. We lived a good ways up the road, and our mother in the wintertime would stand out and watch for the bus. We didn't have the (indiscernible) clothes that a lot of people, you know, had. We look back now and we don't know how that they did as well as they did. They provided for us very well. She would say, "Here comes the bus." And we'll all start running to meet the bus. And we'd go -- Mr. Charlie (indiscernible) was one of our bus drivers.

[1:03:23]

Cooper, B.: There was quite a bit of woodland on the farm. Some of it was a little bit hilly, and then there was a lot of level. Daddy planted corn and cane and well just the main things that you plant in a garden. Mama canned, and we picked blackberries. She always tried to can 40 half gallons of berries in the summer to use, you know, in the winter, which came in handy. And she canned tomatoes. Beans wasn't -- we didn't have a good way to can beans, so she'd --

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Cooper, E.: Put vinegar in them someday, I don't remember how. But one summer we picked berries. Of course, Mama did most of them. And she picked 70 gallons, and she got 7 dollars, 10 cents a gallon.

Cooper, B.: For the prison at Petros.

Cooper, E.: We had our own meat and everything. I don't know. We just had a wonderful childhood. We had to carry water a good little ways but we made it and I can remember when we'd buy maybe lard in three-pound buckets. And they would be gone, of course, and we'd clean them up and carry water in them. When we got to where we could carry two in one hand and one in the other one and Daddy would just brag on us. And, of course, that made us feel real good. And Mama taught us how to piece quilts, and he'd just brag on us. He was very proud of his children, but they -- we had to work. We knew what it was to work.

[1:05:66]

And Beulah was talking about the cane. They made molasses and they were so good. You can't find molasses like that any more at all. They looked a lot like honey. Of course, we had to eat a lot of it when we were growing up. And I'm not too fond of molasses now. [laughs]

Thonoff, J.: Ate too much when you were young.

Cooper, E.: Yeah, we had to eat so many. But I remember Daddy killing the hogs and he'd take Mama and Beulah would make sausage. Beulah would stay up late. And Mama would put the butter in the pound mold.

Cooper, B.: The sausage.

Cooper, E.: The sausage, yeah. And then Daddy would take it to Harriman the next day, but she -- there was some lady -- I don't know who she was -- in Harriman that thought she was getting gypped. She had hers weighed. Come to find out Daddy was the one that was getting gypped. She thought she wasn't getting her money's worth. Probably got a quarter -- I don't remember how much it was. Do you? But we did. We had a good childhood.

[1:06:04]

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Cooper, B.: They took us --

Thonoff, J.: Where was your farm located?

Cooper, E.: Bear Creek Valley. It joined Mr. Crubjohn (phonetic sp.) and Bellgrub's farm (phonetic sp.), and Uncle Ben and Aunt Dora. Aunt Dora and Mama were sisters. They married cousins.

I look back and, you know, I just have so much to be thankful for. I'm really proud of our heritage because Mama was the first one that ever said anything to me about my soul. You know, she wanted me to be saved.

Cooper, B.: They took us to church.

Cooper, E.: When we were babies. Tell about that.

Cooper, B.: Well, Mama said that she never had to take care of us in church. You know, nursery in a church was unheard of then. There'd always be somebody waiting. They went in a buggy when we were small, and when we were babies in fact. There would be somebody on each side of the buggy waiting for one of us and somebody for the other. So she had a baby-sitter not realizing it at that time.

[1:07:17]

Cooper, E.: My first remembrance of life was when Marie was born, April 17, 192 --

Cooper, B.: 7.

Cooper, E.: Yeah, '27. I remember sitting on Uncle John Frills' lap, Mama's brother, and he said something about a little baby sister. And that's all I remember. And then I don't remember anything until the day Joe was born. And our Uncle Bill Magill lived with us, Daddy's brother, and we don't remember going to Aunt Dora and Uncle Bens. But he came and got us and told us we had a little baby brother, and we ran all the way home. And you know, we didn't think about being jealous then. He's gonna be mine. He's gonna be mine.

Thonoff, J.: How big was your farm?

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Cooper, E.: 116 acres.

Thonoff, J.: And could you go over it again, the things that you had on your farm, the thing is that you grew, and the animals that you had?

Cooper, E.: Yeah, we had mules, cows, pigs, chickens, and --

Cooper, B.: The mules were used in the cultivating of the land, getting the ground ready for the planting and sometimes for the reaping. Daddy grew wheat, but somebody who had a thrashing machine always came and cut the wheat. And they would usually spend the night at our house.

Cooper, E.: I can't remember that.

Cooper, B.: But we also had a log smokehouse, and we had a -- what was it? A wood shed, and a corn crib; it was log also. And of course --

Cooper, E.: The barn.

Cooper, B.: The barn, and the outhouse [laughs], and oh just all the things that most everybody had. We had -- it was just a part of your life. You didn't think about someday living and turning a -- having water at your fingertips. It's just one of those things that everybody that we went to school with were pretty much on the same level of living as we were. Of course, there were some that had more and there were those that had --

Cooper, E.: Less.

Cooper, B.: -- a lot less. We were blessed and didn't know it then. We know now that we were.

[1:09:58]

Cooper, E.: I didn't even know there was a depression. That's just how everybody, you know, felt like us. But I thought everybody that lived in town was rich. [laughs]

Something else I was going to say, but I forgot what it was. But we loved each other. We didn't think about, you know, the

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fineries of life that were -- of course, we were rich and didn't really know it. Rich heritage. I'm thankful for it. I'm repeating myself. I know. I have so much to thank God for. I've three wonderful children, seven grandchildren, and two granddaughter-in-laws.

Thonoff, J.: Can you describe for me what happened when you -- when they came and took your land from you?

Cooper, E.: You know, I can't remember too much about it.

[crew talk]

Cooper, E.: It was just something that we had to do.

You can tell us apart, can't you?

Crew: Yes, ma'am.

Cooper, E.: I don't know why anybody can't.

Thonoff, J.: You guys are very, very similar looking.

Cooper, E.: Not as much as we used to be.

[crew talk]

Thonoff, J.: When your farm was taken, what actually happened? How did that --

Cooper, E.: You know, I really don't remember anything anybody come -- that came to the house and talked to Daddy. It was just an understanding that everybody in a certain amount of area had to move. There was -- the government was taking over the land. And it was just something I feel like people, more or less, felt like they had to do.

And in talking to people who had to move when Norris Dam was built, I think it's pretty much both situations people just did what they felt like they had to do. I may be wrong, but in fact some people who had to move from Campbell and Anderson County for Norris Dam had moved to that area. They had to move again. And I think that was more traumatic I think for those people than it was for some of the rest of us.

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I didn't think too much about it, but we moved into this house. It was awful. And Joe, I don't remember, but he says that Mama sat down and cried. And he didn't ever seem to be the same. But anyway, as I say I look back now. At times, if I'd let my mind dwell on it, but I know it's not right, you could be real bitter because we feel like we were taken advantage of. But look what has come out of it, so I feel like, you know, maybe -- well God doesn't make any mistakes. So there's a reason for everything.

[1:13:41]

Thonoff, J.:

Do you know if you were offered a fair price?

Cooper, E.:

No, the land was condemned in '42 and they took the '43 taxes out. I think Daddy got 3,200 dollars for this farm, which now you can't buy anything, even build one room to a house for that any more. Nothing, because everything is just really out of proportion, I think.

Thonoff, J.:

And what did you do after you left? Where did you go?

Cooper, E.:

They moved to Dutch Valley. Daddy farmed for Mr. Hasted's (phonetic sp.) and R.C. Hoskis. They had all the drug stores. But Beulah and I, well it -- in December, our school closed. And then when, you know, after Christmas vacation, we started to Oliver Springs.

Cooper, B.:

We had a bus.

Cooper, E.:

Yeah, we had a bus. We rode to where --

[1:14:40]

Cooper, B.:

We rode all the way. Joe went to school and the rest of us were still in high school. So we went to Oliver Springs. And then this was before we moved, while we were still living in what is now Oak Ridge. But Eula and I had some subjects that we couldn't get at Clinton High School, so we had to go back to Oliver Springs and finish. But Kenneth -- well, Kenneth didn't go back to school. He went to the Army the next year. He was drafted. And he finished his education after he came home from the Army. But Joe, as he said before, was in seventh grade, and he finished at --

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went to school in Dutch Valley. And then he went to high school in Clinton. And then he went to Carson Newman.

Cooper, E.: But anyway, we moved to Dutch Valley in March of '43. So Beulah and I went to school at Clinton one week and then we went back, and I worked in a restaurant and she worked for Dr. Stone.

Cooper, B.: Dr. Stone worked for Stone & Webster during the day and he would have his office open at night.

Cooper, E.: And that's where --

Cooper, B.: And I was sorta I guess you could call his receptionist.

[1:16:04]

Cooper, E.: I worked also for Mrs. Britton, our principal's wife too. She gave me a real beautiful pillow top and quilt top, and my cousin quilted the quilt for me. And I'm just real, real proud of it. But they were good to work with. But our home ec. teacher was Mrs. Georgia Matthews. She was really good. At Wheat, we had home economics. We had a real nice home economics class. We had to make all different stitches, and I wish I had my book now that had all that in it, but you know, you don't realize the value of things until it's too late.

Thonoff, J.: How would you describe the community?

Cooper, E.: Where we lived?

Thonoff, J.: Where you lived, yeah?

Cooper, E.: Oh!

Thonoff, J.: Before you moved.

Cooper, E.: It was good. Nobody had locks. We never locked the door. We just had what you call a button put on the door at night. You didn't think about being afraid at all.

Cooper, B.: You could borrow -- if you ran out of something, you could borrow it. You always paid it back.

Thonoff, J.: So you were close with your neighbors?

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Cooper, E.: Pretty good. Pretty close.

[1:17:24]

Cooper, B.: Not real, real close.

Cooper, E.: Not like it is now. Our closest -- well there was an old maid that had right of way to live back behind us. But we didn't see too much of her, only at times. Did we?

Cooper, B.: During revival, she would come and ride in the wagon with us to church.

Cooper, E.: And Mama would put a quilt down and Daddy would put hay in the wagon. And, of course, that's where we'd go to sleep in church and we never did know when we got home. They would just take us (indiscernible). I remember I didn't know when I got home. Just get us out of the hay and put us to bed.

But we did -- we had a -- everybody was, you know, was nice and kind. Some, I guess, was more sorrow than others [laughs], like it is today. No, it's not like today like it was then. I wish it was. I'm thankful for the modern convenience that we have, but I wish we could go back in some of the old ways, like not having to keep your door locked all the time.

Thonoff, J.: How did they go about asking you to leave? Do you know?

Cooper, E.: No, I can't remember. Do you, Beulah?

Cooper, B.: Un-uhn (negative)

[1:18:44]

Cooper, E.: But I remember they told us --

Cooper, B.: We were among --

Cooper, E.: The last to leave.

Cooper, B.: -- the last to -- some moved --

Cooper, E.: Christmas --

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- Cooper, B.: -- before Christmas and some I guess probably, you know, during the Christmas vacation. I really don't know. But we didn't move until March 16, 1943.
- Thonoff, J.: Did you notice anything going on with the community before you left?
- Cooper, B.: We didn't know --
- Cooper, E.: We just knew everybody was moving out, is all I remember.
- Cooper, B.: And I did not even wonder what was going on.
- Cooper, E.: I didn't either.
- Cooper, B.: I guess just naïve.
- Cooper, E.: I was kind of excited, you know, about it. When we got through school, I went to work at Magnet Mills.
- Thonoff, J.: How old were you when you left?
- Cooper, B.: 19.
- [1:19:41]
- Cooper, E.: 19. Mama and Daddy wouldn't let us start to school until we were 7; that was primer, you know. And they said we were so little. I don't know. But anyway, we were 19 when we graduated from high school.
- Cooper, B.: Old women. [laughs]
- Cooper, E.: Older than most of them in our class. Some of them were a year -- a couple or three was older than us, but next to them we were the oldest. The others were about 17 or 18, I guess. We just --
- Cooper, B.: Or 18, yeah.
- Thonoff, J.: And what was your reaction -- when did you know what the land was being used for?

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Cooper, E.: I just knew something was going on. I didn't know what. It was secret.

Cooper, B.: You didn't ask questions.

Cooper, E.: I guess we just listened. But I do remember being at the bus station there in Clinton. And this man was talking and he kind of bothered me what he said. He said, "Talk like the land was just terrible, you know. You didn't know how people made a living down there." Well you take land -- for instance, just take your own yard. If you don't take care of it, it looks like a wilderness. But we had a good farm. We had good land and crops, you know, produced good. Didn't they Beulah? But we had -- it's funny now.

[1:21:07]

We had -- when we were growing up, we had, you know, cans about this high. And we'd put -- called the thing kolol (phonetic sp.), which is kerosene. We had to get the bugs off the potatoes and the bugs off the beans, and we'd go through there, you know, and just pick them off. Of course, I guess we got real irritable. When we was picking berries, Mama, sweat beads and get after us, and Mama would say, "They don't bother me. They just bother lazy people." [laughs] And that was when, bless her heart, I don't know. But we had to work, but I'm thankful I did because the way life turned out for me. You know, I had to -- after my husband's accident, I had to be a mother and father both. And I'm thankful that I could work. I've done a lot of things just to try to make ends meet. I'm thankful that I was taught to be honest, be truthful.

I used to tell my children. I would say, "Now if you tell me the truth, I won't whip you, but if you lie to me, I'll whip you."

Thonoff, J.: What was your reaction when you found out?

[1:22:15]

Cooper, E.: I was kind of excited because we got to move.

Cooper, B.: No.

Thonoff, J.: When you find out that it was enriching uranium for the bombs?

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Cooper, E.: I don't even remember. Do you Beulah?

Cooper, B.: I just knew the war was over, and I was glad that my boyfriend would be coming home and that my brother would be coming home. And I -- we didn't realize, you know, just what had really, really happened, I don't think. I think I was tired of war. I wanted it to be over. And I remember they opened churches -- didn't they -- all of the churches in Clinton for people to go and prayer and a prayer of thanksgiving. But I didn't go.

Cooper, E.: I did.

Cooper, B.: I remember that, but I don't know why I didn't go. I guess I just wasn't aware of the goodness of God like I am now. And I don't like to think that I did not go. I should have and could have.

Cooper, E.: I remember going. I think it was V-Day. But I remember leaving work and going.

[1:23:40]

Cooper, B.: Anybody that wanted to could. But all in all, you know, thinking back on our childhood and our mother and our Daddy, we were so, so blessed. We didn't have any money, remember. I guess we didn't even have a dime in the house, did we?

Cooper, E.: Oh, I don't know about that.

Cooper, B.: I can remember --

Cooper, E.: Surely there must have been a few dollars somewhere there. But we didn't worry about it. We got one pair or two pair of shoes a year. It cost maybe 98 cents.

Cooper, B.: Mama sewed, made us dresses.

Cooper, E.: We had [an] aunt that gave us material, a cousin that gave us material, and we looked to sew. Beulah and Marie sews real pretty, but I just know enough to get by. But all the -- I mean, in the excitement, I guess, you know, I look back now and, like I said, I thought oh, we'll get to move. You know, and I never moved. I sure have moved a lot since 1950, [laughs] a whole lot of places.

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Thonoff, J.: How did you like your new place, your new home?

Cooper, B.: We were pretty content. I think everybody was. Mama wasn't. But I guess we felt blessed to have a place to live because so many people were moving and it was just a -- it was a new experience.

[1:25:18]

Cooper, E.: It's a beautiful place. Of course, Mama -- the garden was just full of (indiscernible) and grass, we call it. And she dug all of that out and she was just -- when she hoed, she -- you know, your feet makes the prints in the dirt, and she reached back and she had all those footprints out, you know. She got them --

Cooper, E.: She got that from Grandma.

Cooper, E.: -- and she had beautiful flowers, but they would just grow on one side of the house and they didn't grow on the other side of the house. But it was a beautiful place to live, but the house wasn't very good. But it could be one of the pretty places in Dutch Valley, couldn't it? And Daddy worked, as I say, for Mr. Hoskins -- until what -- about '58.

Cooper, B.: I don't remember. I don't remember.

Cooper, E.: But he passed away in '60, November the --

Cooper, B.: Well, they built a new home and moved into it in May 1960. And then he passed away the last day of November that year.

Cooper, E.: Well Joe's father-in-law built the house, and he's a perfectionist.

Cooper, B.: First class carpenter.

Cooper, E.: Yeah. So Kenneth and Jane live there, at the home place.

Thonoff, J.: And how many of you were there?

Cooper, B.: How many -- how you mean, honey?

Thonoff, J.: Brothers and sisters?

Cooper, B.: Oh, five, Eula, Beulah, Kenneth, Marie, and Joe. Joe's the baby.

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Thonoff, J.: And then Mom and Dad?

Cooper, B.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Thonoff, J.: Is there anything else that you can think of that you want to -- any stories or anything you can think of about the time?

Cooper, E.: Yeah, about the time that Marie and I put a big old black snake whip in the bed, and sent Beulah to bed. [laughs] She thought she got into bed with a snake. [laughs]

Cooper, B.: It was a whip.

[1:27:25]

Cooper, E.: [laughs]

Cooper, B.: A plaided whip that belonged to Mama's brother who made a career of the Army.

Cooper, E.: We did silly things and we -- one time we dressed Beulah up like a boy and sent her off to play a --

Cooper, B.: A trick on Marie and Joe.

Cooper, E.: Yeah. And then one time Marie and Kenneth went and played this trick on us. [laughs] We went to the toilet together, and we'd sit and talk. And we'd always close the chicken house, you know, so the chickens -- the door, so the chickens couldn't get out. And then we went to close the door and we hear this big old white thing came running. [laughter] And we ran all the way home. There was a gate or a fence. We went under the fence, we were so scared. And we were screaming awful. And Marie said she never hated anything so bad in her life because she scared so bad.

Cooper, B.: Well tell her what it was that scared us. It was Joe with a towel over his --

Cooper, E.: No, a sheet over his head.

Cooper, B.: Was it --

Cooper, E.: [laughs] But we had fun. Of course, we fought a lot too. I know Mama -- we must about drove her crazy, and we've always loved

music. Mama and Daddy were good singers. And Mama, of course, could just look at a book and pick it up. And so we'd sit out on the front porch in their young days, and we'd sing and the neighbors liked to hear us. But we had this -- it seemed like it was that big around. I don't know. The flour can Mama kept the flour in. And it sat in the corner of the kitchen, and I've always wanted to play a piano, organ. There's something about the keys that just fascinates me. And we'd bang on that and sing, but Mama never did say a word. I know it must about drove her crazy. But she didn't -- she never said anything. Of course, she made us mind. We had to do. We knew to tow the mark, didn't -- and used to have business meetings on Sunday -- I mean on Saturday at church and Daddy was -- what was he a trustee? And we weren't allowed to sit at the table and laugh and talk. But every Saturday that Daddy went, which was the third Sunday or third Saturday in each month, we'd come to the table and we'd get so tickled. We just took advantage of Mama, bless her. But we had fun, but now we've learned that's the time to have good fun is at the table while you're eating.

[1:29:54]

[crew talk]

[End of Interview]