

Bryan Cooke

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Brianna said her father’s addiction spiraled out of control. Because he didn’t have money, she said he began stealing Mucinex from stores. He also began stealing money from her and other family members.

“I noticed him going through my drawers at night looking for money,” said Brianna. “I started hiding my wallet under my mattress and one night I felt him come in and lift up my mattress trying to get my wallet while I was asleep.”

Her father had become totally changed, Brianna said. He began suffering blackouts and disappearing for days.

“He would get up and go and be gone for three days,” said Brianna. “Usually on the fourth or fifth day he’d call my mom freaking out because he didn’t know where he was or how he got there. He turned up in Alabama, Kentucky and Florida.”

With a readily apparent drug problem, Bryan Cooke went to several rehabilitation clinics in an effort to get clean. Brianna said she didn’t want to be around her father because he couldn’t stay sober so she went to live with her grandparents, Gary and Gail.

Despite his time in rehab, Brianna said her dad wasn’t showing signs of progress. In fact, he relapsed and was discovered in Navarre Beach, Fla.

“He tried to kill himself,” said Brianna. “They found him passed out on the floor of a men’s bathroom in Walmart with Mucinex bottles beside him. When he was released from the hospital, my mom went down to get him.”

When they returned to Warren County, Brianna said her father never made it inside the house. He told her brother, Cody, he was going to stay outside and clean out the car and would be inside in a moment. When he never came inside, Cody went to look for his father and found he had driven off with the car.

A few hours later, Bryan Cooke showed up in the Fairview community after stealing an 8-inch knife from Walmart in McMinnville. He used a credit card to gain



Bryan Cooke is shown during his trial on Nov. 2 in Circuit Court at Warren County Courthouse. He was found guilty on two counts of first-degree murder and was given life without parole. Cooke still awaits sentencing Feb. 14 for lesser charges including burglary and theft.

entry to the Dodson home through a back door. Prosecutors maintain he stabbed Gary and Gail multiple times while they slept before removing his blood-stained clothes and leaving them in the bathroom.

Cooke once again fled to Florida where an alert hotel clerk noticed his suspicious behavior while checking in and contacted police. He was found naked and incoherent on a hotel bed surrounded by money he had stolen from the Dodsons.

“When we learned they caught him in Florida, the next few days were just a big blur,” said Brianna.

The double murder trial left Brianna and the rest of the family overcome by emotion. When the jury returned guilty verdicts Nov. 2, it produced mixed reactions.

“We got justice for my Pa and Nana and that was great,” said Brianna. “But on the other hand, the hope I had been clinging to that my dad could possibly change and be a dad again was gone. There were tears of joy, but I was crying because my dad was going to be in prison for the rest of his life.”

Brianna says she hasn’t visited her father in prison but the two have exchanged letters. She says the letters haven’t provided comfort.



Gary and Gail Dodson are shown on the front porch of their popular Mt. Leo business, Gary and Gail’s Pit Stop. The market continues to be run today by their daughter, Amber Dodson.

“He’s written me and my brother and he acts like nothing has happened, like he’s dad of the year,” said Brianna.

She said she’s demanded he reveal what happened that night and why he would kill her grandparents. His response was he would tell her if she came to visit.

“That’s where it is right now,” said Brianna, uncertain if she will visit him.

As for her everyday life, Brianna, 19, is working at OK Heating and Air. She’s also taking classes in paralegal studies and says she would like to help other families the way Faye Braxton and Penny Medley with the District Attorney’s Office were there for her family.

Her brother wants to become a welder and her mom is working several jobs, one of which is at Gary and Gail’s Pit Stop, the market in Mt. Leo her grandparents operated.

“Amber (Dodson) is the owner now and she works hard to keep it going,” said Brianna. “I know she really wants to keep it open in their memory.”



Mike Vinson and Brianna Cooke have organized an inaugural Walk Against Opioid Abuse to take place this Saturday, Feb. 10, beginning at 9 a.m. at McMinnville Civic Center. The 1.8-mile walk will take approximately 45 minutes and end at Gondola Restaurant.

County backs away from opioid lawsuit

BY **LISA HOBBS**
Reporter for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

One month after Warren County government tentatively stepped into the opioid lawsuit ring, it is bowing out.

The county Budget and Finance Committee voted to hold off on an agreement with Galligan & Newman, Attorneys at Law to represent the county in a lawsuit against opioid manufacturers.

Committee members are waiting on a judge’s ruling that could make or break a similar lawsuit filed by District Attorney General Lisa Zavogiannis.

Leading to the reversal was information presented by county attorney Larry Stanley and assistant attorney Robert Bratcher on Monday. They said two types of lawsuits are being filed in Tennessee: lawsuits filed by district attorneys representing their counties, and private lawsuits filed by government entities for their communities.

At this time, said Bratcher, there are 31 district attorneys in Tennessee and 14 are participating in



The Warren County Commission won’t be considering a measure to pursue an opioid lawsuit during its monthly session later this month. The county Budget and Finance Committee rescinded a prior decision to send the measure forward. Pictured, from left, are Commissioners Carl E. Bouldin, Michael Martin, Diane Starkey, Gary Prater and Terry Bell.

opioid litigation cases seeking to obtain, among other items, monetary damages related to government entities such as increased law enforcement costs, ambulance costs, etc.

“We are in a strange situation of basically having a lawsuit brought for us by

our DAs and then considering to file a second lawsuit,” Bratcher said. “As far as we can determine, this type of litigation brought by the DAs has never happened before. We don’t know what’s going to happen. Some judge is going to have to

tell us.”

One will.

“The lead case that was filed in Kingsport has been under attack and is under attack as we sit here tonight,” Bratcher said. “There is some question whether or not the DAs have standing to begin litigation.

The judge who is hearing this has it under advisement and will make a ruling any day. We don’t know what day, but it will be soon. Based on what happens there, those cases will either proceed with them representing us or not.”

Approximately six months ago, Zavogiannis signed with a Nashville firm of Branstetter, Stranch & Jennings with the intention of representing her 31st Judicial District of Warren and Van Buren counties in state court.

If Warren County commissioners sign with Galligan & Newman, it would be one of only two counties to have both lawsuits going at the same time. Green County filed a private lawsuit Jan. 4 after its district attorney did.

“I haven’t been asked but one of the paths you can follow would be to wait and see what happens with the district attorney’s litigation,” said Bratcher. “That’s imminent. Whatever it is, yes, you can continue to represent your county or no, you can’t, we are going to know that pretty soon. Probably within a matter of days. At that time, you can take another look at it.”

Budget and Finance Committee members voted unanimously to rescind January’s decision to send the measure to the full Warren County Commission.

Lisa Hobbs photo



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