

**Joyce “Joy” Nevin**  
(1924 - 1998)



*1942 High School Graduation portrait.*

*How did a pretty young girl from Rhode Island end up at the Painted Desert Trading Post and go on to become one of Holbrook, Arizona’s most celebrated citizens? Here is her story.*

**RHODE ISLAND**

She was born Joyce Withington Nevin to Rhode Islanders Margaret and Benjamin Nevin, and graduated from the Mary C. Wheeler School of Providence in 1942. She was a talented and active student and a hard worker, helping out regularly at the family farm in nearby Rice City. Following high school, she enrolled at the School of Horticulture in Ambler, Pennsylvania.



*High School Talent Show, 1941.*



*Winter, 1942.*

In 1943, Joy became engaged to Ensign Elton Wayne Cooke of Patchogue, Long Island, New York, a 1942 Brown University graduate and a pilot with the Naval Air Corps, stationed briefly in Seattle and then at Adak Naval Air Station, Alaska.



*At the farm, summer of 1942.*



*Winter, 1942.*

In a letter to her fiancé's parents, Lillian and Harry Cooke, dated February 12, 1943, she wrote:  
***"I sure feel lost without him now. But I feel the war will be over soon and he'll be back before we know it. Did he get off all right? It certainly was hard for us to say goodbye."***



*Joy & Elton, 1942.*



*The photo used with their engagement announcement in February 1943.*

In a March 1, 1943 letter to Elton's mother, Joy's mother **Margaret Nevin** expressed her approval of their engagement, using Elton's family nickname:

***"I do think that Joy and Cookie seem to get as much enjoyment from one another as any couple could possibly. I love to watch them together."***

On March 6th, Joy included this sentiment in another letter to her future in-laws:

***"I've been awful busy with school & writing to Cookie. He seems happy out there, but we are both terribly lonesome for each other. But many others are going through the same thing so we just have to be brave."***

She also announced that she would be leaving school at semester's end to help out more at the farm in Rice City, as her father, a Providence realtor, had been ill and unable to spend time there working.

In a follow-up letter on April 30th, Joy talked about working on the farm, driving a tractor, and buying cattle. She also lamented her separation from Elton.

***"I figure I'd keep myself busy this summer so my mind wouldn't wander up North where Cookie is. Nights here are quite lonesome and when I write to Cookie each night, my heart goes with the letter. He is so far away from us. He called last Wednesday night and I could hardly talk to him I was so excited. He seemed so***

***close on the telephone, & when I hung up, I realized he was so far. But September isn't too far off and we both will be counting the days & hours till it comes."***

On May 14, Elton's parents received a telegram from the War Department informing them that their son had gone missing May 10th during an aircraft patrol of the Aleutian Islands. Oddly, in a letter to Joy dated May 7th, Elton had stated that, ***"If at any time that my folks might receive word that I am missing, don't believe it."***



*Elton Cooke was the co-pilot of a Lockheed PV1 Ventura bomber that disappeared on May 10, 1943.*

But the war raged on, and the search for the aircraft and its four crew members soon ended.

Joy continued to write letters to Elton, and to keep the faith. In October 1943, she joined the Women Air Service Pilots corps (WASP), a branch of the Army Air Force which trained women to fly military aircraft for non-combat missions. She trained in Concord, New Hampshire and then Sweetwater, Texas, successfully completing a year-long program. But while awaiting activation in the fall of 1944, the program was disbanded due to a high number of pilot deaths, some of them recruits. She then considered joining the WAVES, but instead enrolled in Rhode Island's Bryant College to study business.



*Joy with flight instructor during WASP training, 1943.*

She held out hope into 1945, writing to Elton's parents in March, ***"I watch the papers each night, hoping that I'll see that maybe Cookie is in one of these prison camps. I keep feeling that as each day passes maybe it is one day nearer to the end of the War and news of Cookie. I have never once felt that he wasn't coming home. To me, it is only a matter of time."***

Joy continued to run the farm and attend college, finishing in August 1945. The war ended that same month with V-J Day, and the nation began the long process of putting the heartaches it had brought behind them. Elton Wayne Cooke was never heard from again.





*Joy on the cover of The Rhode Islander.*



*On the farm, early 1947.*

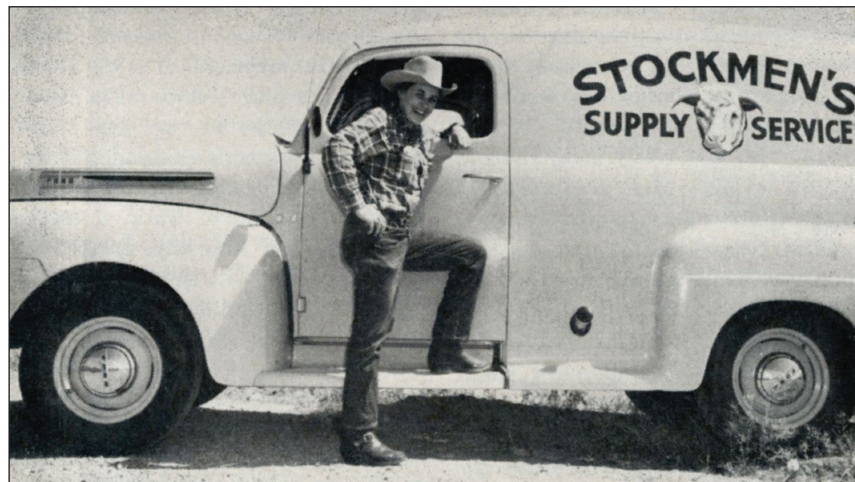
Joy worked the farm full time, getting occasional help from neighbors or her father, who had deeded the land and the house to her when she was eighteen. In September, she was featured in *The Rhode Islander* magazine in a three-page spread recognizing her as a woman succeeding in the man's world of farming.

Sometime in 1946 she contracted polio. It was not a severe case, but she was hospitalized for several months. Unable to continue operating the farm using hired help during her recovery, in early 1948 she sold out, and on April 15th she hit the road, her first stop being Big Timber, Montana, where she visited distant relatives.

## ARIZONA

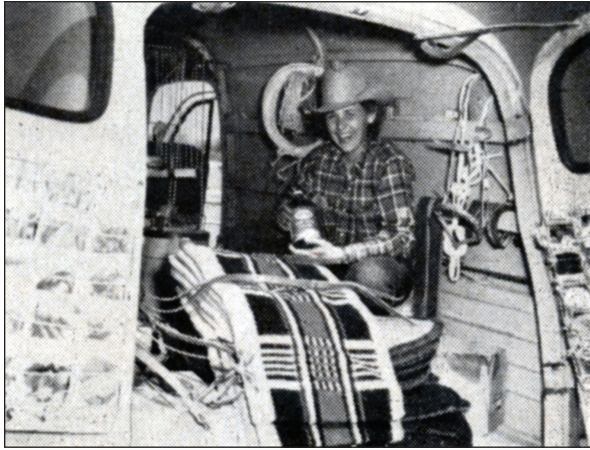
From Montana, Joy headed to Heber, Arizona, forty miles southwest of Holbrook, where the sister of her best friend, along with her husband, owned the Gibson Ranch. Though Joy walked with a limp, she could ride as well as any cowboy, and the Gibsons offered her work.

Joy adapted quickly, and before long started her own business, called Stockmen's Supply Service. She bought and outfitted a panel truck, which doubled as her home, and began selling ranch supplies "door to door." She carried everything from leather punches and rope to tick killer and ammunition. Business was good, and in 1950 she was featured in *Arizona Cattlelog*, a news magazine for the ranching community.

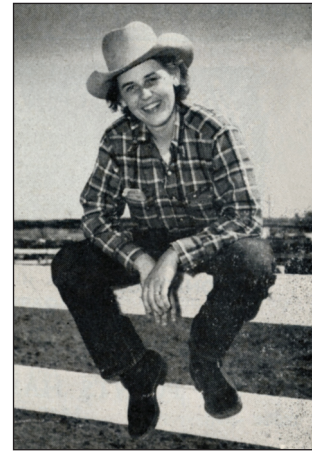


*Joy posing with her delivery truck for the May 1950 edition of Arizona Cattlelog.*

The article opens with this editorial comment: “Something new is skittering around over Arizona in the form of a department store on wheels, which at times answers as a modern Pony Express. The inventor, owner, and pilot of this outfit is attractive Joy Nevin, a way-down easterner ‘gone right’ by coming west. If Joy and her Stockmen’s Supply Service truck haven’t turned into your gateway yet, just wait, she will.” Joy then becomes the narrator, telling her story. The article concludes with this note: “Joyce Nevin is a pretty girl, no nonsense, just full of business. She’s right at home in Levi’s, checkered shirt and Stetson.”



*From a story in Arizona Cattlelog, 1950.*



*Smiling for the camera, 1950.*

Joy’s business ultimately led her to the Painted Desert Trading Post, whose owner, the recently divorced Dotch Windsor, maintained a small herd of cattle and some horses. Dotch had come to Arizona from New Mexico in the late-1930s, settling on a small ranch near the Dead River with frontage on US 66. He and his first wife, Alberta, established the trading post around 1940. They divorced in 1948, at which time Alberta likely left the area, as she vanishes into history.

Though twenty-eight years her senior, the ruggedly handsome Dotch soon struck up a romance with Joy, who was ready to end her loneliness, by then having accepted that Cookie perished in the war. Dotch and Joy were married in 1950, when she was 26 and he 54. A daughter, Addilade “Dee” Windsor, was born in 1952 at the hands of a midwife in Holbrook.



*Joy with Dotch, circa 1950.*



*Joy, “Dee,” and Dotch, 1954.*



*Hazel (a family friend), Joy, Dotch, and their dog, Navajo.*

Life at the trading post was busy but rewarding. Joy’s aviation skills came in handy the day a single-engine plane appeared overhead, tipping its wings in distress. She stopped traffic on the highway, assisted with the landing, and had a nice chat with the pilot while topping off his near empty tanks with high-test fuel. By 1954, things had changed dramatically. Joy’s marriage was dissolving and a proposed new alignment of US 66



threatened their livelihood. In an April 1955 letter to Elton's parents, she answered their question regarding her marriage to Dotch. ***"I have wondered and pondered many times on this same question. I can only agree with your conclusions—pity, loneliness and lack of contact with people of my own background. I was, at that time, running my supply truck, isolated from people a good deal—a lonely job where I travelled from ranch to ranch. This is big country, as you know, and my contacts were very limited. I met a lot of men my own age, cowboys who worked and ran these ranches but I felt they were a 'wild' bunch, not settled or mature."***

In 1956 their divorce was finalized. Two years later, traffic at the trading post dried up when the new highway opened where I-40 is today, and access to the existing roadway was blocked.

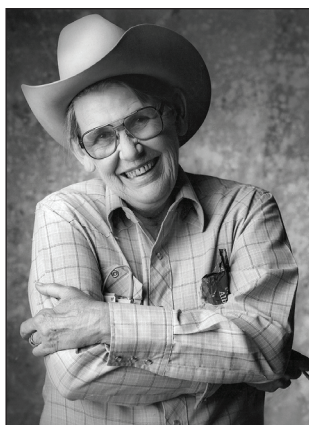
Dotch Windsor moved to Holbrook, where he died in 1964 at age 68. Joy returned to Rhode Island, where she married a man named Harold Crandall. They later divorced, and in 1970, she returned to Holbrook, where she married a third time, to rancher Ray Tankersley, a union that lasted only a few years. Joy never returned to the east, remaining in her adopted city until her death in 1998 at age 73.

Joy was rarely idle. She was a woman of independence, focus, and confidence. During her years in Holbrook she became a community leader, ambassador, and advocate. She kept the weather station there and spearheaded efforts to establish Holbrook's Senior Citizens Center and Extended Care Facility, of which she later became director. For this she received official recognition—honored in Washington, DC as a recipient of the Louise B. Gerrard Award for outstanding contributions to the quality of life for rural elderly Americans.

Today, an original segment of US 66 bears her name in her adopted hometown of Holbrook. After her passing, Joy's ashes were scattered by her daughter Adela on a family ranch in Colorado. In Arizona, and in the lore of Route 66, the legacy of Joy Nevin endures.



*A tribute to Joy in Holbrook, AZ.*



*Joy Nevin at age 65 in 1989.*



*Joy's daughter, Adela (with Gracie), at the trading post in 2019.*

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*Grateful acknowledgment is made to David Coward, curator of the Coward-Cooke family website, whose history of "The Uncle We Never Knew" (Elton Cooke) contained many of the photos on these pages as well as the letters of Joy Nevin, several of which are excerpted here.*

#### PHOTO CREDITS

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