

Lake Alice Narrative

The following narrative is based on an interview with Jody Corn at his home on Lake Alice on June 22, 1998. The interview provided information, which combined with survey, biological assessment, and other agency's data illustrates the past, present, and future trends of the lake.

Family History

Jody Corn



My parents built this house like this because they didn't have to take down trees. Of course now there's some other concerns about houses over the water, but there's an awful lot of fish under it. They seem to be pretty happy under there so, a few snakes too...

photo by: SWFWMD

The Corn family moved to Odessa from Davis Island in 1966 when they bought an 11-acre sight on the east side of the lake for \$18,000. The land they own is zoned for agricultural use and as such has only two houses, the family home, situated on old TECO pilings over the lake and another smaller house to the south, which has served as home to various Corn family members. Lake Alice is truly home to the Corn family. They gather there for holidays and it is the source of memories that span 32 years and three generations.



Here's a picture of my dad with a bird. This is the kind of thing my dad would do. He'd just sit there and open the door and let the raccoons in and eat from him...

photo by: Jody Corn

Jody's father was well known to Lake Alice residents as a mender of injured animals be they the neighborhood dog or a wandering coot.

Jody remembers a more integrated community among the scattered families in the Lake Alice vicinity when he was a child. Youngsters in the area wandered to Foxe's Corner to buy the best watermelon in the area, went to the Scotts' to attend cookouts and roam in the orange groves, finding the elusive stand of sugar cane to eat for pleasure.

The Corn family has a history of involvement with the lake. In Jody's words, "You don't move to Odessa to have a residence, you move to Odessa to adopt a property. This is the way it was." Jody's mother kept a file on proposed development projects, objecting when the natural environment was threatened. Jody continues the tradition making a weekly patrol of the lake to pick up debris

and to meet other lake residents. He also volunteers his time with LAKEWATCH.

Lake History



photo by: Jody Corn

Lake Alice is located in the NW Hillsborough Basin. It is a self-contained lake renowned in Odessa for its clarity, but a recent outbreak of a "weedy" aquatic plant has threatened the lake's pristine beauty.

Jody comments on the recent trend in vegetation growth, "The weeds are just way up, it's probably 100 times worse than I've ever seen it. Usually we'll get some drifting clumps at the end of summer, but this is way too early and way too much."



The lake was historically rimmed by cypress, but development and a lowering of the water table have altered the environment needed to support the trees. In addition, an increase in punk trees and torpedo grass has served to further distance the contemporary look of the lake from what was known to residents in the past. Looking toward an undeveloped peninsula on the north end of the lake, Jody comments, "...if you look through there, you'll see as many trees laying over as you'll see standing and this was like, unbelievably thick with cypress. None of the vines."



In the early second half of the 1900's, this Odessa lake was the setting for orange groves, such as those previously owned by Mr. Williams, a third generation grower who used the lake to water his groves, pastures and scattered fishing and weekend vacation cabins in the Florida Cracker style. Families such as the Scotts, the Tresevants, and the Williams' were early Lake Alice residents and property owners.



This is one of the original Scott

The Scotts still retain property on the West side of the lake, the Tresevants have subdivided and sold their property, and the agricultural based Williams and Allens were forced to sell due to an ever-increasing tax burden.

The lake was originally home to a multitude of bird and animal species including cranes, egrets, otters,

cottages. I want them to leave it alone because it's my view.

remembers fondly a pet otter they had when he was a child, "My dad would catch fish and put them in a



Corn Family Pet Otter
photo by: Jody Corn

alligators, fox and bass, all of which have experienced a decline in the past 40 years. Jody He raised this otter, we never caged it. It was never forced it to stay, but if you look at the outside of the door here, it looks like it's been chewed out, this door and that door. The otter would actually open the doors, as heavy as they were, and we had dog food in a Charlie's chips can under the sink he'd pull the can out, pop the top off..." Eventually the otter found a mate and moved on. Today, otters are not found on the lake. Some wildlife variation still exists, especially in the fish

population that naturally replenishes itself. Many land-based animals still populate the area around the lake including opossum, raccoons and the occasional fox.

Development

Development of the Lake Alice area began in earnest in the past 15-20 years and has focused around single-family residences. Prior to that time, Odessa was a distant location in the minds of many Tampa residents.



Jody reminisces, " My dad worked on Davis Island and lived out here. Everyone would say, 'Where do you live?', [He would reply] 'Odessa', "Where's that?' [They would ask.] Suddenly people realized that it's nice and they started coming out here...within the last 15 years a lot of the large houses started going in... " The older Florida style architecture has been replaced by what Jody terms "northern architecture" surrounded by groomed lawns requiring constant care and feeding, that in turn affect the biological balance of the lake as the nutrients filter their way into the lake.



Many issues accompany an increase in single family residential development. The natural environment has been altered by the filling in of low lands and swamps, the removal of cypress trees and the clearing of shoreline vegetation. Cypress, protected by the Hillsborough County Tree Ordinance, have been uprooted under the guise of many justifications, including tree permits and the installation of aged looking sea walls, meeting the pre-1985-grandfathered-in specifications, thus enabling property owners to alter the land behind them in any way they deem appropriate. The social environment has altered as well, moving from an ecologically based view to a preoccupation with privacy and the built environment. Jody comments, "... the attitude has changed, we're disposable, we're starting to think environmental concerns, recycle. OK, I crushed my can, when can I go cut down a tree?"



Supposedly it's going to be one house, but who knows what they're going to do with it. That stand of trees, you used to not be able to see through it at all. It was just thick.

A sense of community that prevailed before the development explosion has waned as new residents moving to the lake for various reasons, privacy, solitude, now know each other only in passing. Development has also entailed a skyrocketing in the tax base of the area. Many older residents have been forced out of the environment because they cannot keep up with the yearly increases of property tax.

The development stage of Lake Alice has not ended. A new subdivision on the northwest end of the lake with narrow lot size will increase the number of property owners with lake access. In addition, one of the last sites of natural vegetation, a peninsula on the north end of the lake has been sold and is slated for the development of single-family housing units.

The Future

Lake Alice has been affected by social and physical change thus altering the quality of life for long-time residents who have witnessed various stages of development over the past 4 decades. Residents, like Jody, realize the inevitability of change and development, but object to the "rape of the natural



I have a young family; I would like to grow old here. My sister Sue and I took care of my both my mom and my dad until they died, had their last breath, all of us were together. This is the family home

environment". Jody envisions the formation of a lake organization to address the problems that accompany an increase in the human occupation of the natural environment. Included in his goals is raising the awareness of old and new residents as to the interplay among the natural, built and social worlds including lake health, lake safety, privacy and taxes.

It is perhaps a dream that the lake will remain the way it was when he was a child, but progress and development need not entail the total destruction of the natural environment. For the present, the land owned by the Scotts, directly across the lake from Jody will not be sold or developed, perhaps for Jody that will be his final refuge. The view that he enjoys from his porch will not be altered and he can reminisce visually about the past.