

Brown Lake Narrative



Fred and Louise Crooks
in their backyard (Source:
USF)

The following narrative was developed from an interview done with Fred and Louise Crooks in their home on the morning of Thursday July 5, 2001. It tells the story of a happy couple's thirty-one years living on Brown Lake, now known as Lake Holly. In their years living on the lake they have accumulated much knowledge and many stories, some of which are shared here.

Family History

Fred and Louise met at the Continental Can Company in Tampa where they worked together. After courting, they eventually got married and had children. When Louise became pregnant, she quit Continental Can Company, but Fred stayed and retired after 32 years of service. In the late 1960s, the Crooks bought a nice piece of property on Lake Holly with plans to build a home on it and move to the country. At that point, the Crooks' two boys were teenagers and both were still living at home. Louise reflects upon the property they ended up buying:

"This was the biggest lot on the lake and it had the most trees. We had to cut down trees to put the house in."

Fred, Louise and their two boys, Chipper and Roy, were happy with the purchase. The whole family loved to fish, swim, and boat, making the move to Lake Holly an ideal one. When Fred and Louise met and before they married, Fred lived on the Hillsborough River between Temple Terrace and Temple Crest, and Louise would visit. They greatly enjoyed having access to the water, which was another factor that influenced their move to Lake Holly. Louise shares:

"We moved out here because it was country. Now it's grown, but we're not going to move again... We bought it because we wanted the water property."



Crooks' family and friends
boating on Lake Holly
(Source: Crooks)

A friend and co-worker at the Continental Can Company was the one who told Fred and Louise about the lot for sale on Lake Holly. After purchasing the land, Fred and Louise decided to build a house. With the help of family and friends, the Crooks now own a 70-foot long, three-bedroom, two-bathroom house. They did most of the work themselves through cooperation and teamwork. Although the boys were only 14 and 16 at the time, Chipper and Roy were "big boys" and able to help. Louise recalls:

"I was on that roof nailing shingles, while he [Fred] carried them up the ladder and brought them to me."

Over the years, the home has served as a refuge for many members of the Crooks' extended family. The couple enjoys several visits a year from children and grandchildren making the lake a place of many fond memories.



Crooks family wedding
on Lake Holly (Source:
Crooks)

Lake Information and History



Water-skiing on Lake Holly (Source: Crooks)

Lake Holly is a 27-acre lake located in Northwest Lutz outside of Tampa. It is the northernmost lake within the Rocky Creek Watershed in Hillsborough County. Excess water in Lake Holly comes from Big Moss Lake and flows into Lake Harvey. According to Louise, the lake used to be called Brown Lake, but it has been Lake Holly ever since they moved in, which is over thirty years ago. Fred and Louise are not sure why the name of the lake was changed.

According to the Crooks, the wildlife supported by Lake Holly is abundant, although as Fred sees it, both the quality and quantity of fish have decreased over the years. Lake Holly is home to otter, mallard ducks, Nile perch, and at least one three to four foot alligator. At the time of the interview, there was a wooden structure of unknown origin floating in the lake. Fred says he sometimes sees the gator sun bathing on it. As explained by Fred:

"He gets up there and just suns, raises his head and looks around watching the ducks. That's what he's trying to get, I think."

There are no formal organizations on the lake, but Louise and Fred say the neighborhood is friendly. When the kids were younger, residents of the lake would meet about once a month, taking turns hosting the event. Louise recalls:

"Everyone would bring a covered dish. Therefore, we kept up with what our kids were doing, who our children were playing with and the parents knew each other."

Now the Crooks have grandchildren to keep up with. This summer, Fred taught the grandchildren how to use the trolling motor on the boat. After getting home from Bible school this past summer, the kids would take the boat out and not return until dark. The Crooks say they greatly enjoy having the grandkids around and they both love when the youngsters visit.

Development



When Fred and Louise Crooks first moved to Lake Holly, theirs was the only house on the north side of the water. Now, roughly thirty homes stand around their lake. According to the Crooks, before residential development began, the land around Lake Holly was very natural – with scores of oak trees and abundant animal and plant life.

Louise remembers that there were also orange groves and shares how they dwindled due to a serious freeze in the late eighties:

"On our right here was a huge orange grove and the first row of the orange grove was on our property. Then when the big freeze came, it froze every one of them to the ground."

It was this southern country feel that attracted the Crooks to Lake Holly, and over the

years, they have done their part to preserve it. Fred recalls how he had to “fuss at the cement trucks” to keep them from running over the oak trees. According to Fred, Lake Holly used to be a swamp. Developers came in and pumped soil out of the water to create land, on which to build. Fred says about the land surround Lake Holly:

"You can dig down and you'll find trees that big around [holds up hands], cypress trees that they pushed down and just piled dirt over top of it. It's about 30 inches of white sand."



Fred Crooks harvesting Orange Blossom and Palmetto honey (Source: Crooks)

Now, with pumping for well water, it is possible that Lake Holly will one day return to its swampy origins and in an extreme case, dry land.

Future

Future issues for Lake Holly are much like many lakes in the state of Florida. An increase in population has led to a boost in development, which has led to more people, and people need water. To meet the water needs, water wells that feed the lakes are pumped and lakes are drained as a result. Fred says the pumping of Lake Holly has cut off its spring fed source. Louise feels that the situation is unfortunate because it threatens the existence of the lake.



Fred Crooks and son, Chipper after fishing one day (Source: Crooks)

Another concern of the Crooks is the future of its fish population. As Fred sees it, the quality and quantity of the fish have decreased in recent years. However, shortly before the interview, one of the Crooks' grandchildren was visiting and caught a 15-inch bass. Then again, this is not generally the case. Fred states:

"...[the lake] is getting to where it is fished out. You see Florida does not believe in re-stocking lakes."

Louise says it is the Florida State Game and Wildlife Association that deals with such issues. However, the organization has not deemed restocking necessary for Lake Holly. For what reasons, the couple does not know. Fred tells how his grandson, Kyle does not believe in killing the fish that he catches in Grandpa's backyard. Louise shares:

"When he takes them off the hook, he holds them under water. If they can swim away, that's it..."

With careful water resource management and more efforts such as those seen by Fred and Louise's grandson, perhaps the water in Lake Holly will be contained and the fish within it will be able to grow and multiply.

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