

# Mid Lake Narrative

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The following narrative is based on interviews with Carl Fields and Mary Mahoney, neighbors on the north shore of Mid Lake, on August 7, 1999. Their memories and observations allow non-lake residents to gain a better understanding of the issues faced by Mid Lake Residents on a daily basis.

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## Family History

Carl Fields and his wife Delores moved to the northwest shore of Mid Lake in 1966. His brother had bought and moved into the house next door several years before and served as Carl's introduction to the lake. Carl remembers:

" [Carl and his wife Delores] lived in a very tiny [house] about a mile from here...my brother...was in the roof cleaning business and I had a janitorial business. A man approached us at the 7-11 about cleaning his roof here [on Mid Lake]. Shortly after that the man died and his wife put the house up for sale, so my brother bought his house. Roger and his wife [the previous owners of Carl's house] divorced and my brother got worried that they were selling this house. He told me and we came over here to look at the house and bought it from Roger...That is how we came here."

The Fields raised one daughter in the house on Mid Lake and had older children who would occasionally visit. Their children no longer live on the lake's shores and the couple has settled into a life in which appreciation of the lake plays a big part. Carl comments, "We live on the porch when it's cool. You go out there in the morning and it is just so peaceful...Peace and Quiet and the neighbors. We have great neighbors, and that's my advantage for living on a lake."

Mary Mahoney and her husband, Tom McGuigan, are but two of the neighbors to whom Carl refers. Mary's family moved to Tampa in 1958 from Milwaukee when the Schlitz Brewing Company transferred her father to their new plant in North Tampa. She comments on the transition:

" I was eleven and I wanted to get out of Milwaukee, bad. Even at eleven I knew that: A) It was too cold, and B) I had such allergies that I was not a fan of cold weather. I remember so well, he [her father] came into the house and he had one of those printed calendars. He held it up and it had a picture of palm trees and boats and people fishing. He said, 'How would you like to do this every day?...The company has offered to transfer us out to Tampa and I think we are going to accept, but you can't tell anybody.'...We had tons of cousins, so it was really hard not to tell anybody. Being a good Catholic girl, you could tell the priest in confession, so that is how I at least got it off my chest...We moved down in 1958 and I remember ...we got off the airplane and it was the middle of June and the rainy season and the sky was black. My mother thought when the sky was black it was the end of the world, quite literally, because in the farm country [of Wisconsin] that's tornado [weather]. For her entire life here in Florida it was, 'Get in the house!' and we'd say, 'But Mom, it's just a thunderstorm!'"

The then developing Tampa, especially Temple Terrace, was a big change for the Mahoney children from the Milwaukee they had just left. Mary comments on some of the differences:

"For one thing, there were no such things as Parks and Recreation. A park was a field with a picnic shelter and that was it. The only [public] library was the Carnegie Library downtown...It wasn't until three years later that the Temple Terrace Women's Club established a library in a caddy-shack, which had as its collection paperback books that people had donated. So we went from having sidewalks and roller-skating rinks and real bus stops to [this]. The only bus service was the bus that brought the black maids up from Belmont Heights and dropped them off on the corner in Temple Terrace."

The Mahoney children eventually settled into a Florida lifestyle and Mary comments:

" We loved it. Us kids just went nuts. My mother used to say, 'I don't know where you kids got this.' We would go down to the river and play in the river. Walk through the swamps. Built lots of tree forts...My poor mother; I don't know how she kept her sanity. We thought it was all great fun. We would go out there and play in it [periodic floods]. We would catch tadpoles and snakes."

Mary spent her high school years zipping around the country roads through orange groves, or making her way over to Friches Big Boy with a gang of friends. After the rest of her family moved away, Mary stayed on and became a Tampanian. She lived in different parts of town and explains how she ended up on Mid Lake:

"We acquired this house through happen-stance on the lake. We weren't looking for a house. We were living in a little house just south of Temple Terrace...we were running out of room...The area was getting bad. We got a phone call from a friend who said she was house sitting and to come on over and look at [the house] because [the owner] was going to have to sell it...We came over and the first thing we saw was the lake and there were ducks and a rainbow. We came into the house and said, 'OK, we'll think about it.'"

After an initial scare where the house was put under contract with people who backed out of the deal, Mary and Tom bought the house and began their twelve-year relationship with the lake. She comments:

"It is all just so nice and quiet. It is like being rural without being way out in the country. I tell people it is like having my own Girl Scout camp. We don't even have a concrete driveway. It is like stepping back into another life, into another time. That is what we really like about it."

## Lake History



Mid Lake is a small lake located in Forest Hills.

Photo Source: USF

Mid Lake is a 2.1-acre lake located in the middle of the Curiosity Creek Watershed, nestled between Lake Pine to the north and Lake Eckles to the south. Carl was able to shed some light on how the lake came to be, and he explains:

"Mid Lake, the story I got, was when [the Bivvens family] built their home here and moved here with the three boys, it wasn't even a lake, it was all floating marsh, tussocks. Roger said that the boys would wade out and swim out and tie ropes around all of that stuff and pull it out. That is how this lake was formed, of course, this lake was here...[but] they pulled all of that out."

Carl relates that at one time the lake was fed by springs and explains:

" Roger [Bivvens] told me...that this lake was spring fed. There was a spring over there on the southeast corner and it was fairly deep there. They think that over the years with all of the rotting vegetation and so forth that it clogged up the spring..."

The water quality has changed over the more than thirty years that Carl and his brother have been on the lake and he reminisces:

"Of course, it was crystal clear pretty much of the year. We used to swim. Oh, we had ball swimming in here. The bottom wasn't bad, it wasn't really muddy...Walter who lived in the stone house, every year he used to haul in about two truckloads of sand and would put it out on the bottom...I have hauled in some builders sand and put it out...but the bottom was not really mushy like it is now."

Mary and Carl gave several reasons for the degradation in the water's clarity. Mary comments:

" I think the last secci disk reading was only three, maybe four feet at best and in the cool weather when we haven't had much rain, you can see five. The bottom of it has so much muck on it from the vegetation and the runoff that I can remember [wading] out there one time, [to pull out] bicycles thrown in the lake and it just sucked you and pulled you down."



The quality of the lake has been affected by fluctuations in rainfall and an accumulation of organic matter on its bottom.

The level of the lake has also been of issue and Carl comments:

"We didn't have the storm sewers we do now. We had a small one, but it had been stopped up...the only water that got into the lake was off the streets, which is just as bad, but now we have a storm sewer that comes in from three different directions...This lake used to get really full and there was a drain on the south end that went into Lake Eckles. Unbeknown to most of us here, the County came out and put in another drain and lowered [the level of the lake]...way down. Now the lake doesn't get to its original depth anymore...The drain was done, without my knowledge...no one knew it was being done which I think was wrong. I don't know why or who has done it, but it lowered the level of the lake about two feet and now it won't come back up."

Photo Source: USF

The wildlife the lake supports has been both a bane and a blessing. Mary and Carl share stories illustrating both sides of the issue. Carl comments about the healthy population of waterfowl:

"Muscovy ducks, they pollute the lake horribly...they are in the yards and on the sidewalks, on the docks, on the roofs...you can't hardly walk on the dock any more because of the waste from those ducks."

The ducks have good reason to stick around as they have a steady source of food, Mary explains:

"...Across the lake...[a neighbor] is very much an animal lover and she goes out every day and ...feeds them. Of course all the ducks, the muscoveys, I have even seen a heron over there taking advantage of her generosity and they won't go away...if she would stop feeding them, they would move on."

Not only can the waterfowl be pests, but the land based animals as well. Carl reminisces:

"Possums got into my attic...and I couldn't get rid of them...I tried everything in the world. I

bought these bombs and put them in there...thinking it would run them out. I put a radio up there and turned it up really loud and closed everything up. That didn't run them out...You know how I got rid of them? Moth balls. I put a pound of moth balls and they were so strong...they only lasted about a month...but those mothballs got them out."

Not all of the animal population has been bothersome for some of the residents on Mid Lake. Carl relates the following story of an alligator:

" My son, he caught an alligator off of [highway] 301, about twelve inches long. That alligator...was about eighteen inches long when he had gotten out. We tried to catch him. He grew about a foot a year...My brother...he would catch a small bass out there and put him in [the lake still on the hook] and that gator would see [the bass] and here that gator would come. My brother would wait until the gator got to the shore and he'd throw the bass back out, then he'd pull it in and here'd come the gator. That would go on until my brother would finally give the bass to the 'gator. Well, that is what encourages alligators to attack, so he quit that."

The alligator was eventually removed from the lake by the game commission, caught, not by a bass, but with marshmallows.

## Development

Development in the Forest Hills area began early, just after the end of World War II when affordable housing was being produced for new young couples. The area sported the Babe Zaharius Golf Course. Babe Zaharius has been touted as "The greatest woman athlete of the first half of the century" by the Associated Press. She excelled in many sports, accumulating medals at the Los Angeles Olympics in Track and Field events and leading basketball teams to championships. It wasn't until later in her life that Zaharius took up golfing and soon eclipsed her competitors. The Babe Zaharius Golf Course was created at the site of what is now the Forest Hills Golf Course.

The Golf Course was a part of the early success of the area, and its revitalization led to a resurgence of popularity for the neighborhoods. Mary comments:



The original Tudor clubhouse (1926) for the Forest Hills golf course burned down in the 1960's.

Photo Source: Burgert Brothers collection

"Where the new club house is, there was a much larger Tudor style clubhouse. It still existed until about 1966 or so. The club was not in operation, the course was let go to weeds...it was going to seed, nobody played it, and it was really ugly. Then in the mid 1970's the City of Tampa got a grant or worked out something with HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] to redevelop the golf course and to make improvements to it under the program for economic redevelopment and also stormwater retention...It would provide a place for the stormwater to go and also to promote and keep up housing values in the area.... It was very effective. By redeveloping the course it really promoted the housing values and housing stock in the whole section. It was also used to do the water retention and eventually to hook up to an massive storage system in the Hillsborough River...The Sports Authority actually operates the golf course and the City of Tampa has a lease with them for like a dollar a year."

The Forest Hills neighborhood remains a thriving community. Most houses, when vacated are on the market just a short time before they are bought and Mary comments, "The property values in this area are skyrocketing. My neighbors refinanced their house for \$120,000."

Mid Lake is home to 15 residences arrayed along its shores. Some of them date back to the 1930's and the range encompasses new additions in the 1980's and 1990's. Mary comments about the variety:

"...You have the fact that none of these houses look the same. This is not a cookie cutter community. It grew up basically from people who lived closer into Tampa, moving out here and building their homes when they wanted to build them...over different spans of time. You have different homes representing the good, bad, and the ugly of each different era from about the 1940's on...People appreciate that more. They are tired of making the huge long commutes and they want a little character and a little interest."

## The Future

The Forest Hills area, with its many lakes and long history as a residential and recreational area holds much to offer its residents, both present and prospective. Its popularity makes the importance of maintaining the natural resources located within all the more important in ensuring its sustainability. Residents like Mary Mahoney, Tom McGuigan and Carl Fields who have long histories in the area help us to acknowledge the changes in the area, positive, negative, or neutral and to show the way to developing and maintaining the area for future generations.



Some residents have initiated shoreline re-vegetation efforts

Mary comments about the existence of Mid Lake and other lakes in the area:

"...They give [the area] more of a focal point. It makes it unique. A lot of people are very surprised when I say, 'Just north of the Babe Zaharius Golf Course are all of these lakes.' And they say, 'What, in Tampa there's lakes?' Yes, there are lakes and people still swim in them. They swim in Pine Lake and Cedar Lake and Noreast Lake and Lake Eckles, and the people just don't believe it. They provide the uniqueness and a focal point."

Photo Source: USF

Locals consider the area's surface water resources to be important in their lives. The lakes are features of the environment locals are willing to work to maintain, through Lakewatch, through personal efforts, and through interaction with the local government and community organizations. Their efforts help to make a difference in preserving and improving the quality of life for present and future generations.