

# Little Moon Lake



Malcolm "Bunny" Mick (USF)

*The following narrative is drawn from an interview with Malcolm "Bunny" Mick, a Little Moon Lake resident for over 20 years. An avid fisherman who goes out on the lake three to four times a week, Bunny was able to share his knowledge of the lake's current condition, as well as its history.*

## Personal History

Bunny Mick has lived a fulfilling and interesting life. Being in high school when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred, Bunny joined the military upon graduation to serve in World War II. While serving, the New York Yankees scouted the young baseball player, who was signed immediately following his release from the military in 1945. Bunny recalled:

*"I got out December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945 and within 30 or 40 days, the Yankees signed me. I played in the Yankee organization for ten years and was kind of back up center fielder behind Joe DiMaggio, the great center fielder. I won three minor league batting titles in three different leagues trying to get his job, but he was the best player I ever saw and I never did really get a good shot at it."*

Bunny continued to work in baseball; taking pleasure in the lifestyle and benefits the industry provided him. Despite never beating out Joe DiMaggio, Bunny enjoyed a secure and happy career, playing and coaching baseball for the majority of his adult life. Other than DiMaggio, Bunny also had the opportunity to know Casey Stengel, Yogi Berra, and Micky Mantle. Bunny was with the Yankees for 15 years all together serving mostly as manager. He then returned to Florida.

After serving four years as Sports Director of Florida under Governor Claude Kirk, Bunny returned to baseball in the early 1970s. Under manager Bill Virdon, Bunny joined the Houston Astros as a bunting and special batting coach where he stayed for about ten years. After that, Bunny served a short time under Whitey Herzog with the St. Louis Cardinals, but at 65 years of age, he figured he would try out retirement. Bunny related what happened next:

*"I came home one day and on the telephone recorder, there was a message from Art Howe, who was one of the players when I was with the Astros. He had now become the manager. So, he says, 'Bunny I sure hope you haven't taken a job. Man, I need you real bad. These guys can't bunt. They don't know what they're doing.' So, I got a job again, back to Houston a second time. Then I coached for them until he got fired, then everybody gets fired. Oh, the manager gets blamed for everything. Anyway, so then I retired in 1993. They've called me a couple of times since, but I haven't taken the job for one reason or another."*

Bunny reflects back positively on his working life and says the only thing he misses about baseball is the players and the way they were all treated. Bunny related:



View of lake from the Boy Scout Camp (USF)



View of Little Moon Lake (Mick)



Bunny on Little Moon Lake with a 13 lb. bass (Mick)

*"The thing I miss more than anything else is being in the clubhouse with all those ball players. Find anybody who ever played, ever coached and he'll tell you the same thing....boy you really miss being in the clubhouse with all those guys. Oh, it's just wonderful. And you know when you're in the big leagues, you travel so first class. Like when I was with Houston or when I was with the Cardinals...you get ready to go on a trip, all you bring is whatever you need from home and bring it down to the Astrodome. And you don't see it again until you're in the hotel in say L.A....there's a little card table over on the side with the prettiest girl you ever saw sitting there and all our keys are there with your name on it. You walk up and she just hands you your key to your room. That's living pretty tall isn't it? Now, ya miss that."*

Despite his nostalgia, Bunny continues to live life to its fullest, enjoying greatly his planned retirement on Little Moon Lake. Being a Tampa native, Bunny always planned to retire close to home. He searched for a retirement home for about five years before settling on the house on Little Moon Lake. Bunny told how he came to find his retirement paradise:

*"I looked for four or five years and these real estate people would bring me to all these classy looking houses on Keystone and all these big lakes. I was looking for a lake that was private and off the beaten trail. You know, I didn't care what kind of house it had on it. The lady who had been trying to find a house for me for two or three years...she said 'Oh you're going to like this.' I said, 'No. I don't think I'm going to like that one... too swanky for me.' She finally said, 'I found a house, but you're not going to like it. I'll tell you that right now.' Boy, I came out here, looked out there...got in the boat, found that other lake over there. I said 'Holy cow. This is paradise.' I looked at that water...it was clear as a bell. I took a castnet and threw it...and in it was a four pound bass, two speckled perch, a brim, and a shiner. I said, 'Boy that's the place I'm looking for!'"*

Currently, Bunny enjoys helping maintain the Boy Scout Camp that borders his property to the north and fishing in the lake during his relaxing retirement years. He has two daughters, whom he describes as "great gals." One is a graduate of Florida State University, now living in Orlando working as a business consultant and the other is a graduate of the University of Florida, now living in Quincy working as a dentist. This makes Bunny a self proclaimed, 60% Seminole and 40% Gator, but 100% proud father. In this regard, Bunny said, "I'm a very blessed man."

## History/Information

Little Moon Lake is an 11-acre lake located in the Brooker Creek Watershed of Hillsborough County in Odessa, Florida, relatively close to Tampa. Little Moon Lake is also known as Boy Scout Lake and Lake Chapman. Via a narrow canal heading east, Little Moon Lake connects to a nearby larger water body called Rainbow Lake (see narrative for Rainbow Lake on the Atlas at [http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/Lake\\_Rainbow.pdf](http://www.hillsborough.wateratlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/Lake_Rainbow.pdf)).

A significant part of the history of Little Moon Lake is Camp Owen J. Brorein, also known as the Boy Scout Camp, which partly runs along its



*The main camping cabin at the Boy Scout Camp (USF)*



*View of the lake in 2002 (USF)*

shores. The camp also borders Bunny's property. Once a large piece of land owned by the Brorein family, the property now serves as a campsite for local Boy Scout Troops. The Brorein family donated the property to the Boy Scouts after traumatically experiencing the death of their son in an explosion accident while clearing the land. This tragic incident occurred in the late 1920s, according to a memorial at the camp. It wasn't long after that the family decided to give up the land and move elsewhere so as not to be reminded about the tragedy that killed their son, Owen, for whom the camp was eventually named.

Traditional land use of the area around Little Moon Lake consisted primarily of citrus groves. When Bunny first bought his home, "It was all orange groves, from here to my house all the way to Boy Scout Road, down to Racetrack Road and on down...one big 100-150 acre orange grove. Nothing but orange groves."

Wildlife on and near Little Moon Lake is abundant and includes armadillos, raccoons, peacocks, possums, bats, and foxes. Bunny believes there are deer in the area, but hasn't seen much more than their tracks in recent years. Bunny has seen otters in the lake, which he enjoys as he related one story:

*"One time I saw them...there was a floating dock. And they were jumping up on the dock, and playing with each other...flapping across and coming down and diving back into the water. They put on a show like you couldn't believe. I'm just sitting there thinking boy this is like going to Seaworld...for free."*

Another wildlife story worth sharing:

*"I caught an owl on my fishing lure once. You know how they sit up in a tree and they look for prey down below. I didn't know there was an owl up in the tree. I cast up with a big ol' top water plug because I wanted something that made a lot of noise and "bam" I got a strike. I heard the thing go splash! This guy had come down and hit the plug from up in the tree. Big...I'm talking about an owl with a wing spread like this. I had my boat with a seat in the back and another seat up front. And I turned the light on and said, 'Oh, my God. I got me an owl.' So, what can I do? I can't turn him loose? I got to bring him in. So, I got him up into the front seat of the boat and I'm sitting there holding the rod. I didn't want to cut the line cause he would get caught someplace and he wouldn't be able to get loose and he'd die. So, I'm sitting there with the light on saying, 'Owl, what am I going to do with you?' He's sitting in the front seat looking at me and I'm sitting in the back seat looking at him. He had these big ol' eyes. Big owl. So, I picked the paddle up and I slid it down the line until I got to the treble hook and the luck was with me. I pushed it down until I got it up against the plug. Now, I got the line holding that kind of tight and I've got the paddle against the plug and thought maybe if I shove real hard, I might get the hooks out. He kind of thrashed and everything. But by golly the hooks came out. He sat there cause he had had a hard time. I brought him in across about 100 feet of water, getting half drowned and everything. So, after I got the hook out, he sat there kind of recovering. He looked around, batted his eyes a couple times, and he finally got up on his feet and I finally made a swoosh at him and he went on and flew off. And he got by without bad harm. But if I didn't get that hook out in a couple tries. I don't know what I would have done. I would have really been disturbed because I couldn't reach up there. He would have clawed me all to pieces. He could have torn me up."*

There are also alligators, although fewer now than in the past. However, it is the fish population that Bunny boasted so much about during the interview. An avid fisherman, Bunny shared:



*Bunny's dock leading into the lake (Mick)*

*"There is a wonderful fish population in the lake, a good balance. Primary fish are the large mouth bass or black bass and brim. There are lots of brim. Then there are speckled perch or crappie. So, bass, brim, crappie, and catfish are the four main fishes that are out there."*

A main reason for settling on Little Moon Lake was its fish population and connection to other water bodies. Being a fisherman second only to loving baseball, Bunny warmly reflected over his many years fishing at his retirement home:

*"I estimate I catch about a 1000 bass a year out here because I fish maybe three or four days a week and I've been here 22 years. So, I've gotten about 22,000 bass out here, but I put 21,000 of them back and I ate the other thousand. That's kind of how it goes. All I keep is the one or two pounders because that doesn't harm a lake as much when you take out large bass. What harms the lake is when you take out six or seven pound bass because all the big ones are the mommas. They're females. Anytime you get a big bass, it's almost never a male. It's almost always female. They have that big belly full of eggs."*

Over the years that Bunny has lived there, Little Moon Lake seems to have maintained a healthy state. There are slight concerns over the current low water levels, but there are plans to pump water to refill it if the hurricane season does not do so naturally. Bunny explained:

*"We're kind of waiting to see how the hurricane season is. If we are lucky enough to get a hurricane, hopefully it won't kill anybody. But we need a hurricane bad in this lake, in these lakes...cause if you get a big hurricane, it'll fill them right up in one shot, you know? So, anyway...we've had meetings. We've had two meetings in the last five or six weeks [to decide whether or not to begin pumping]."*



*Bunny's home on Little Moon Lake (USF)*

## Development

When Bunny first moved to Little Moon Lake in 1980, there were approximately three houses on its shores. The home he moved into was one of the first to go up in the area, approximately the third or fourth. Not too long before Bunny moved in, Little Moon Lake was a part of acres and acres of orange groves with little or no residential development. Today there is only one empty lot left on Little Moon. Bunny estimates that there are currently 13-15 lots on the lakeshore and about 12 or 13 homes. Bunny summed up the rate of development in the area surrounding Little Moon Lake: "When I came out here I was in the woods. Now, I'm back in town." The rate of development in the area and Florida at large is alarming to Bunny as he stated:

*"The problem is that Florida really can't handle the people that we get. We really can't handle it...When I went to Plant High School, Florida had 1,898,000...I always remember that. It was the census of 1940, I think. Around 1938-1940, it was one million eight hundred ninety eight thousand. And now it's heading toward 17 million people. There is a*



View of Little Moon Lake in 2002 (USF)

*huge fresh water problem because there is only so much water. These millions and millions of people coming....And they used to build a little 1200 square foot house. Now, they come build a two million dollar house. Air conditioning, huge pipes, huge wells, huge uses of water, giant lawns. At least I don't have [it on my] conscious because I've got an acre and no fertilizer goes on my lawn and no water. I don't water my lawn and I don't fertilize it. I just let it survive. If we did that....if people were so high falutin' needing their perfect green lawns mowed exactly at some level...that's a problem."*

## The Future

Bunny's primary concern for the future of Little Moon Lake is the pumping stations in the vicinity that cause the low water levels in Little Moon Lake and other lakes in the area. Bunny related:

*"The danger for the lake is Pinellas County continuing to suck water out of the aquifer. That's a huge concern and something needs to be done about it. We don't have any dangers to this lake except for the drawing off of water. That's the single danger by itself. Everything else, the lake takes care of itself pretty good. God and the lake have done a pretty good job, you know?"*

On the positive side, there are two aspects of Little Moon Lake noted by Bunny. The first is the Boy Scout Camp, which is likely to be maintained and prevent future development directly on the lake. The second, which is related to the first, are the opportunities Bunny gets to teach the young boy scouts and other children in the area about fishing and maintaining a healthy lake. Bunny shared:

*"I've had the chance to teach most of the people on the lake 'cause I fish more than everybody else put together. I teach the kids to put them back and how to put them back, how to unhook them and not harm them, how to wet their hand before they grab the fish so you don't pull that slime off the outside because it's very critical to the fish for their survival. But I teach all the kids how to do this stuff. Teach them out to fly fish. I've got lots of young fellas that I fish with and I teach them a lot."*

According to Bunny, if left to its own devices, Little Moon Lake will be fine. He explained:

*"The lake itself, if we left it alone, would be just wonderful. It'll take care of itself fine. It'll have its ups and downs and it'll come out just fine. That's the way it should be. But when some guy comes in and pulls out 20 million gallons of water a day and takes it over to some other county, that's another ball game. That's messing with nature big time. To me, that's the only danger we have with this lake because fortunately for us, since it's a private lake...people can't come in and spill gasoline in it and everything like that. We can pretty well protect it. It's going to be protected by the people who live on it."*

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