

# Twin Lake Narrative

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**The following narrative was derived from an interview with Alberta Marrone, at her home in 1999. Alberta has been a lakeside resident for most of her life. Her experiences provide the atlas reader with a historical perspective, enabling them to gain a glimpse of life in the Twin Lake area throughout much of the 20th century.**

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## Family History



Alberta and Mel Marrone at their home on Twin Lake

The name of her father's farm was Sunnybrook Farms and the logo pictured a calla lily and an arrow. Alberta reminisces about the significance of the logo,

*"The reason the calla lilies are here is my father drew them on everything coming and going. Now, my aunt and my uncle raised calla lilies and sold them to florists. [They raised] calla lilies and Easter lilies on the west side of the lake."*



Sunnybrook Farms in the 1920's



*The first Smith family home in Seminole Heights was built by Alberta's grandfather*

Sunnybrook Farms produced a diverse crop of fruits and vegetables. For the most part, Cavandish bananas supported the farm, but in addition the Smiths tried their hand at raising blackberries, mangos, and vegetables for the family's consumption. Alberta's father was a bit of a gambler, tempting Mother Nature by planting crops of bananas in Tampa's variable climate. He invested in an elevated irrigation system, the allure of which was too much for the young Alberta to resist. She comments,

*"He had 'above' irrigation pipes and the one time in my life that my father ever hit me, and I always blame my brother. I bragged that I thought I could go to Ringling Brothers and walk on the wire. He told me I couldn't. He said, 'Show me, show me!' He knew dad was coming and dad caught me up there prancing on the irrigation pipe. I will never forget because he took one hand and grabbed me off that thing and he swatted my butt with the other."*



Alberta's Aunt and Uncle grew calla lilies on the west



**Alberta's mother with the products of Sunnybrook Farms**

The family that relocated to Twin Lake consisted of Alberta's parents, Alberta and her brother Haywood. They moved into a three-room house with a basement used to store harvested bananas, on the Twin Lake property. Eventually the farming compound grew and a main house, still standing today, was built, as was a smaller house for the farm hand and family. Alberta comments, "We always had a black couple out here and Daddy had a cabin over that way that they lived in."

Sunnybrook Farms was productive until the depression hit. The farm became home for two of Alberta's older siblings and their families. Alberta's father, to support the family through the hard times, sold off parcels of the farm. Alberta remembers the trials and tribulations of that period:

*"He had bought this land to live on for the rest of his life and to leave to his kids, then the depression hit...I had two married sisters and both of their husbands weren't working, there was no work, no jobs. Both of their families moved in with my mom and dad. There were 13 of us. He gave [her sisters' families] the little 3 room house and the little house the colored workers lived in...They gave each one of them a house, but they all ate at the big house...I don't remember how many acres he counted out [to sell]. He drew something up and he sold that to a clown from the Ringling Brothers Circus and [the clown] built a little house out there by the lake. He put 15 dollars down and paid 15 dollars a month. It seemed like the bad times kept going on. They talk about the bad times, but I was so happy. I had all my nieces and nephews to play with. My sister, I thought she was crazy because she would say, 'Bertie, you just go out with the kids and I'll do the dishes.' I thought it was great. A lot of times we would picnic outside and that was a lot of fun. What was a milkshake? We had cows and we had these big crocks of milk and a milkshake was just putting flavor in that...If we got a sandwich on store bought bread...we lived it up like that. I could see it was hard on the old folks. They sold another piece. That piece was to the Johnsons, and that was another 15 dollars a month. We wound up selling five pieces getting 75 dollars a month and we lived on that. Those were my high school years."*



**The southeast shore of Twin Lake was the setting for many family picnics and gatherings. Alberta is depicted with her mother and her nieces and nephews, 1940's.**

Life was different for Alberta during her youth and the memories she shares provide an image of a close knit family who made do as they could and got through the challenges just fine. Alberta's nephew has a story of his birth that stands as testimony to the innovative approaches the family took to deal with challenges, and gives a new twist to 'mailman' stories:

*" My sister was pregnant and she didn't have any money to go to the doctor. She had already had two or three kids and she knew when the time came she was going to have to have something. She went and talked to this doctor and he said that he would deliver her for free if she went to the Salvation Army Home for Unwed Mothers [on Lake Ellen] because he delivered all the girls that had babies there... My dad had this old car...once a month you had to go to the feed store to get the feed and you had to go to the grocery...There was a feed store down by Tampa Bay and Armenia, Leitz's Feed Store ...and a lot of times you would go down to the City Market which was downtown and various farmers went down and sold whatever they raised...But anyway when she had to go to the hospital, the car was gone...it just so happened the mailman came...we met the mailman down there and he took her out to Lake Ellen and she had this baby..."*

Alberta remembers when 'neighbors' were families living five miles away because there were no others living closer. The scattered families knew each other from school and church, mostly the Lake Magdalene Methodist Church, previously the United Brethren Church. Activities and entertainment for early residents in this part of Hillsborough County were much different than the plethora of activities experienced today. She comments,



**The Smith family on Twin Lake depicted on the porch**

*" You didn't do much hanging out then. You had your own little chores at home and then you usually went to bed at dark...I remember when we first moved out here, I thought we were rich because we had an indoor toilet. The Orne's [their neighbors] had the 'outdoor' back in the orange grove. A lot of them didn't have any electricity and my father brought the poles all the way down Armenia to get electricity. We had a phone. We lived it up."*

Families such as the Bearss, the Stalls, the Walters and the Bexeleys were a part of the landscape of Alberta's life. Her good friend growing up was one of the Bexeley girls and Alberta remembers swimming and diving on Twin Lake

of the house built by Alberta's father and playing tennis at the Bexeley's house. One of the descendents of the Bexeley family perpetuates the tie between the families and the lake and lives on the plot of land originally owned by Alberta's aunt and uncle on Twin Lake's northwest shore.

The memories Alberta has from her childhood have shaped her life as an adult. As a youngster, she fashioned a sailboat from her father's old fishing boat using feed bags for a sail. Her family jokes that it was her first yacht and it set the trend for her love of sailing, played out in her adult life as she and Mel set sail for thirteen years, around the islands of the south seas and up the east coast. Mel and Alberta brought up a family of four on the shores of the lake. Their children have had kids of their own and Twin Lake continues to be a meeting place for generations of the family that took root on its shores way back in 1923.



Alberta's first yacht on Twin Lake in the 1950's

## Lake History



The north shore of Twin Lake in the 1930's depicts the area before Busch Boulevard was created.



This photo of the north shore of Twin Lake in 1985 reveals an increase in residential development.

Twin Lake is a 29-acre lake located in a highly urbanized area of Hillsborough County just outside of the Tampa City limit. The lake is named in conjunction with a smaller lake located just to the southeast of the main lake and the pair is sometimes referred to as the Twin Lakes. Alberta reminisces about the smaller lake that was encompassed by the 15 acres of land owned by her father:

*"It was a nice little lake. We would go down to that ditch and into that lake. It had lots of fish. Dad set all this area out in orange grove and in this area we had cows...down to the ditch, and from the ditch over, he had bananas. This is the small 'Twin Lake'. See how nice it was when I was I kid? ... This is my brother and I sitting on a ladder which we used temporarily because our land went on a few acres on the other side of the ditch... The County would let the convicts come out and clean our ditch, which was on private property. Can you imagine something like that now?...I remember as a little girl, my momma would be baking something and she would say, 'Take this down to the men, I know they're hungry,' and she would send me down there with all these convicts and I would be thinking, 'My gosh, my momma sent me down there with all of those convicts!' But she always told me to give it to the one with the gun, who was sitting down, he was the guard. I guess every year ...they would clean it out when it got filled up."*



Twin Lake in the 1920's

Twin Lake has changed over the years. Land use has evolved from farming to mainly residential. The lake's water quality and its general condition have also changed over the years. Alberta comments, "You could drink it when I was growing up, but now it is the middle [pertaining to water quality]." The lake previously had no problems with invasive vegetation with the exception of water hyacinth. The residents took care of an early infestation of the water plant. Alberta remembers, "The people living on the lake at the time got together and agreed that one weekend, everybody would clean out every hyacinth in front of their place and that ended it."



Alberta and her brother Haywood on the channel connecting Twin Lake with a smaller lake to the southeast, 1925.

More recently, the lake is home to a thriving crop of grass that has residents like the Marrones alarmed. " We have never had this before. I don't know, you hear different things. Some people think it is the runoff from lawns if that's what it is, then I think everybody should agree not to fertilize. We usually leave a patch of weeds and lilies on the right side of our dock for fish. There is a lot of fish in there. We buy day-old bread and go down and feed the fish. They are beautiful."

The Marrone clan and friends have taken matters into their own hands to deal with the grass. Alberta comments, "We started cleaning out the grass and piling it out there on the dirt part of the road we had a big gang out here Saturday, all family, working and cleaning."

Alberta relates a story about a cousin with an affinity for animals:

*"My cousin that was across the lake he could catch any animals. I would see him sometimes and he would have a fox anything Gene could catch. He tied a frog the next morning he went out and he had a snake. My aunt was afraid to go anywhere. Didn't know what he had stuck somewhere. He was one of those people, all animals. If you saw a snake, you would just tell Gene. He'd kick it, pick it up, and he'd just pop its neck it never bothered him"*

In the past alligators were commonly found in Twin Lake, however they were interacted with in a manner that is different than the one used by the Game and Freshwater Fish Commission of today. Alberta comments:



**The Smith family of Twin Lake and Sunnybrook Farms sampling the harvest, ca. 1925.**

*"I remember one time we saw one out there we'd run up and say, 'Shorty, Shorty, there's an alligator, right down there, not far from shore!' Well, Shorty would come down and take a pitch fork and stick him it was amazing because he took that gator and brought it on up near the house and just stuck it like that as kids you know, you could walk by and kick the tail. It just lived forever it seemed like. They don't die fast."*

Alberta hasn't seen an alligator in the lake for more than 20 years and no longer sees snakes either. The lake remains as a background to her life now and a link to her childhood and family.



**Shorty, a farm hand for the Smith family, and Haywood Smith sporting the catch of the day, ca. 1925.**

## Development

The families that used to own large parcels around the lake: Alberta's father, her aunt and uncle, the Orens, and the Walters, sold off acreage as the years went by to take advantage of the increasing values of lakefront property. When Alberta was growing up, the ease of accessibility to the lake was less. She comments, "Back then Busch didn't exist at all. Dale Mabry didn't exist. Waters was a little two-lane road. Habana wasn't paved yet we walked through the orange groves to get to Sligh Avenue." At that time, Alberta comments, "There was probably enough lakes for everybody our road to Armenia was just one of those two-rut sand roads. We got the mail on Armenia."

Eventually businesses got built up on the land surrounding the lake. A fruit-packing house was built on Armenia Avenue to process the harvests from the surrounding groves. Alberta comments about its demise:

*"That was an old packinghouse and you know who owned that packing house was Ebe Walter. Do you know Jimmy Walter, those homes? Ebe was Jimmy's father and I can remember Jimmy Walter bragging before he went off in the army that he had an idea for when he came home. 'I'm not coming back in this old fruit business. I've got an idea that will make me money.' And then he came back and went into home building when he sold that place, it went to a noodle factory."*

There were other businesses in the area as well., "There was a country store up there [at Busch and Armenia], Goldstein Station it was called. You could catch a train there and go to town."

Twin Lake is now the setting of thirty homes, the result of decades of well-paced development. Alberta comments, "The only woodsy area we still have is land that used to belong to my father [on the south shore of the lake]. This old lady [ Mrs. McLear] used to be a schoolteacher and her husband is dead and she said she wanted to keep it like that so children could see how Florida used to be."



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## The Future

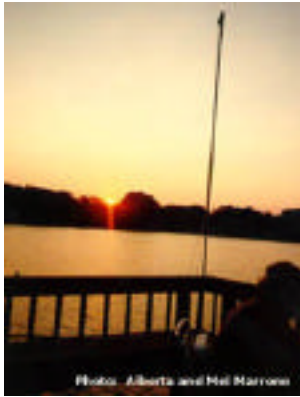


Photo: Alberta and Mel Narrows

It is indisputable that life has changed for "old-timers" like Alberta still residing on the lakes of their childhood. The land surrounding the lakes in central Hillsborough County is occupied by homes and businesses rather than groves and trees. Yet the allure of the lakes remain as links to the past and as a beautiful settings for life today. Alberta and Mel have built a life around water, leaving the lake behind for trips to other watery locals, but Twin Lake still beckons them home to Florida, and Alberta comments, "The reason I say I have lived here for 76 years is that this is always home." To Alberta and many other Hillsborough County lakeside residents, who have an intimate relationship with the lake they live on, it is imperative that the county's lakes are protected from unsustainable development. So, that these special places may be preserved as reminders of the past, and enjoyed by future generations.