

# Little Twin Lake



Albert and Janet at Little Twin Lake.  
(Source: USF)

*This narrative is based on an interview with Albert Roberts and his longtime companion, Janet Connor, which took place on the edge of Little Twin Lake on June 12, 2001. The interview provided stories about life at the lake, as well as insight into how the area has been utilized and developed.*

## Personal History

Albert Roberts has been living on Little Twin Lake since 1971. When he first moved to the lake, Albert says his 5.5-acre property was overgrown with trees and vegetation; it looked like a jungle. To illustrate how densely covered his property near the lake was, Albert shares this story about losing a steer he was raising in the early 1970s:

*"We left here to go...and there was a lightning storm. We had it tethered by a big rope. Bulls are strong. When we came back the bull was gone and we didn't see him for three and a half days. And this is no bull. It really happened. It's hard to believe now, but like I said, it was like a jungle here. We couldn't find him. Finally, he showed up about 100 pounds lighter."*



Some of the current vegetation that is on  
Albert's property near the lake. (Source: USF)

Albert has enjoyed living near the lake for the peace and quiet that it provides. The lake is rather small, making it difficult to use motor boats or jet-skis. This is fine with him since he enjoys the serenity of the lake. In years past, Albert has gone fishing in the lake, sometimes even catching bass, but most often brim. He no longer fishes because much of his time is spent caring for his trees and gardens.

Albert and Janet have tamed the jungle surrounding the lake by planting a variety of exotic trees and plants. The two are active members of the Rare Fruit Council, giving them access to numerous types of fruit trees. They have landscaped their property with many different trees, including banana, orange, bamboo, pomelo, lychee, macadamia nut, cherry, rose apple, and starfruit. However, they have also planted basic crops like beans, corn, and beets.



One of the Pomeles that Albert and Janet  
have grown. (Source: USF)



The Bamboo that Albert planted.  
(Source: USF)

## Lake History/Information

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A view of the lake with the conduit on the other side. (Source: USF)

Little Twin Lake is a small lake located between Busch Boulevard and Waters Avenue, near Armenia Avenue. Albert describes Little Twin Lake as not very deep with a muddy bottom. Historically it was connected to nearby Big Twin Lake by a channel (See Oral History Narrative with Alberta Marrone for Twin Lake: <http://www.lakeatlas.usf.edu/lakedata/lakes/twin/default.htm>.) There is no longer direct access between the lakes because of a conduit that separates the two. This conduit is important to Albert because it still allows the water to flow and the animals to travel between the two lakes. However, it keeps the motorboats and jet-skis that are so popular on Big Twin out of the smaller lake, leaving the lake and its residents in peace.

Albert believes that the area around the lake had been used previously for agriculture and recreation. He is not sure whether it was by small independent farms or commercial operations near the lake.

When Albert moved to Little Twin Lake in 1971 there were over 50 Hamlin grove orange trees on his property.

*“The first year we were here and we had that property we had something like... 12,000 – 15,000 oranges. Of course we didn’t squeeze them all. We squeezed a lot of them and gave a lot of them away.” Nar 6*

The property was also “was solid with bananas,” with hundreds of apple banana trees. Albert describes the apple banana as “an old Florida type” that is common to the area. An oral history interview completed with Alberta Marrone in 1999 (who lives on Big Twin Lake) indicates that her father had owned land around Little Twin Lake and that he was the person who had planted the orange and banana trees.

The land around the lake was also used for smaller crops such as tomatoes and corn. Neighbors have told Albert a story about the previous owners of his house, the Kissners, once throwing a party and everything served, except for one crop, had been grown on the property near Little Twin Lake.

The area around the lake has retained a mixture of residential homes surrounded by green spaces filled with trees and plant life. However, there has been major growth in the neighborhoods near Little Twin Lake, which likely has affected the number of animals in the area. Albert says that there used to be many opossums, raccoons, rabbits, and turtles in the area, but they are no longer numerous. In the thirty years that Albert has lived on Little Twin Lake, there has only been one sighting of an alligator. The very first month that he moved to the lake, a neighbor caught an alligator that was over 10 feet long. Albert continues to see squirrels and otters in the area, as well as ducks and cranes. During our interview, we had the opportunity to watch an anhinga dive into Little Twin Lake to catch fish.

Albert has seen the vegetation in the lake change over the years. Both he and Janet say that the vegetation, such as cattails, lilies, and water hyacinths, used to be quite thick. It was so thick that Albert would sometimes have difficulty rowing across the lake because the oars would get stuck in the vegetation. This vegetation began decreasing about three or four years ago. Albert is not sure if this is due to drought conditions, which have lowered the water levels about a foot, or whether pesticides or vegetation-eating fish have been added. He misses the vegetation because he would use it for compost to “improve the Florida soil.”

# Development

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*One of the original Hamlin Orange trees. (Source: USF)*



*Habana Avenue and the school's parking lot across the street. (Source: USF)*

Currently, there are around nine houses on Little Twin Lake. The house that Albert bought in 1971 had been built in the 1930s. All but two of the houses around the lake had already been constructed by the time Albert moved in. A few of his neighbors, who are now deceased, had been living at the lake for many years. Although new neighbors have moved in, they have kept the same housing structures.

The most recent residential development around Little Twin Lake was in the early 1970s, when Albert sold part of his property to two sisters. Each sister built her own house. Albert is currently in the process of selling his home and property. Some of the potential buyers have mentioned to him that if they bought the property, they plan on bulldozing the trees to create a few lots. Although he would prefer to sell to someone who would utilize the land as it is now, with all the fruit trees and vegetation, he understands that it is out of his hands once the property has changed hands.

Although there has been little residential development directly on Little Twin Lake, the area near the lake has changed considerably with the growth of homes and businesses. Albert says that the neighborhood used to be full of orange trees.

*“This is grove country here. The only problem is that the houses have taken over, like California. It gets too valuable for a grove and the two-legged animals come along and want to build there.”*

When Albert moved to the lake, there was a school on the other side of Habana Avenue where his driveway entrance is. He recalls that the playground used to be open, allowing people to walk through it to get to other parts of the neighborhood. A few years ago the school was torn down and a new, larger one was built, with a parking lot taking over the playground area. Albert states that it is no longer possible to walk through the area. He goes on to say that since the school was re-built, there has also been more traffic on Habana Avenue, which is a narrow two-lane road. Although this causes some problems, Albert is able to block out most of the noise with a large fence and dense vegetation. With this obstruction of the noise, Albert says that his property is able to retain its rural feeling and remain undisturbed.

## The Future

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Since Little Twin Lake is such a small lake, it is doubtful that residential development will make a severe impact on lakeside life. However, Albert is in the process of selling his property, leaving the future unknown. If a future buyer decides to just rebuild the house and keep the rest of the property covered with trees, then the Little Twin Lake community will likely not change too much. On the other hand, if the future buyer does decide to raze the trees and create a few lots, this might change the lakeside landscape considerably. The current green spaces might one day be overshadowed by houses. But perhaps the lake will attract people who appreciate and respect the quiet and peace that the lake offers, as well as the years of work invested in cultivating the fruit trees.

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