

Curiosity Creek



Curiosity Creek on the end of Jenal Road in 2003 (USF)



Curiosity Creek in 2003 (USF)

The following narrative comes from an interview with long-time Curiosity Creek resident Jeanne Hartinger and her husband Al on September 16, 2003. Jeanne has lived near Curiosity Creek since the 1930's and has seen many changes to the creek and the surrounding area.

Personal History

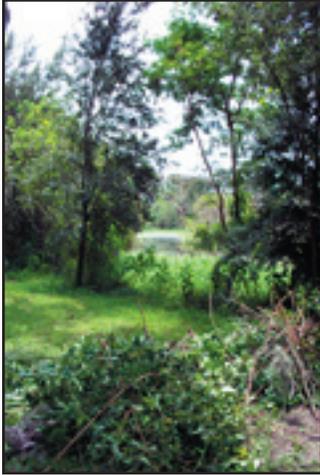
Jeanne first moved to Curiosity Creek in 1938 when her stepfather, a general contractor, wanted to live further out of town. For Jeanne and her mother, this was a significant change in lifestyle. Jeanne remembers:

“When we got here we thought, ‘Well, you couldn’t go much further than this.’ My mother and I, we were more or less city, so it was something new for us. When I first moved out here I hated it. I was in the eighth grade and there was no transportation, there was one car, it was hard to get anywhere. For transportation there was a streetcar that would come from town and stop at Sulphur Springs. Other than that, that was all the public transportation there was... and this was in ’38, and times still, were a little tough. We didn’t have a lot until after the war- things seemed to pick up. Before that it was still Depression. When you went out in your car you had to carry a couple of boards and a small shovel because the ruts were very, very deep. There were no paved streets. If you got stuck you had to get out, put the boards under the wheels, then go back and forth a little bit, and eventually you’d be out of being stuck in the deep, deep sands, such as it was. It was unbelievable the ruts!”

The house that Jeanne and her family moved into was still in the process of being built when they moved to Curiosity Creek. Today, that same house is being restored by Jeanne and Al’s daughter. Jeanne explains:

“The house itself that we moved into hadn’t been finished inside yet. There was no electricity, and we had to drill a well, too. So, for a while, it was really the pits. But when we did get electricity the poles had to be brought from Beckwith. Beckwith is what is now Country Club Drive. Then we got electricity there, and of course we had the well, and we had our own beautiful water at that time, beautiful well water. The house itself is now an old house with ten-foot ceilings and the crown molding, its very nice inside with oak floors. The house is practically being rebuilt by my oldest daughter and her husband, and building will begin shortly.”

Adding to the feeling of remoteness for Jeanne was the fact they were the only house on the block. Jeanne comments:



View of the creek leading to the remainder of the Blue Sink in 2003 (USF)

“At night-time it was so dark it was like everybody else in the world had died.”

Despite the drastic change in lifestyle for Jeanne, she came to love the natural beauty of the area including Curiosity Creek and the Blue Sinks. Jeanne remembers:

“Curiosity Creek in 1938 and the years following, the water was clear, it was beautiful. You just couldn’t imagine; to go down there and just sit. And there were rocks; the water would run over the rocks. It was just a pleasure to be there... my friends and I would go horseback riding through the woods of Blue Sinks- and the boys would be skinny-dipping!”

Blue Sink is located downstream from Curiosity Creek. Development in the surrounding area has had detrimental effects to the sinks. Jeanne comments:

“This is Curiosity Creek right down here, and it goes down across Country Club, just a very short distance, and you’ll see what is left of Blue Sinks. And it’s so sad.”



The Blue Sink in 1980 during a flooding period (Katherine Elder)

Life at Curiosity Creek was very different for Jeanne after World War II. She got married in 1946 and returned to Curiosity Creek to start her own family. Jeanne and Al built their own home down the road from the home where she had lived in with her parents. Al had never been to Florida before, but it took only a second for him to become a true Floridian in his heart. Jeanne notes:

“When Al stepped off the train, I think he fell in love with Florida.”

Jeanne and Al had three children while living near Curiosity Creek, two girls and a boy. The children loved the area as much as their parents and enjoyed the water and horseback riding. Soon, other families began moving into the area, some of which lived directly on the creek. One of these families, Jeanne remembers, was the Flack family. The Flacks moved to Curiosity Creek in the early fifties. Jeanne comments:

“They had ten children. We had two children at the time. And if you had a birthday party all you had to do was invite the Flacks and you had a real birthday party!”

History/Information



Bridge over Curiosity Creek in 2003 (USF)



Curiosity Creek - near 128th Street - in 1999 (USF)

Curiosity Creek is located in northwest of Tampa, with its headwaters near Country Club Drive and Ravine Drive. It is 16,733 feet in length and has one segment (www.hillsborough.wateratlas.org). A Tampa Tribune article contends that the creek was named for its curious relationship with the Sinks: it came in one side of the sinkhole and disappeared with nothing going out (Eagan, 2003).

In 1938, Jeanne remembers the area surrounding the creek being woody, secluded, and a favorite hunting ground:

“There were no houses on the creek at the time. In fact, it was very woody even to get down to the creek. There was hardly any path there. People used to love to come and hunt in this area. Sometimes they’d set the woods on fire to chase the animals out. ...And we’d go over and beat. We’ve had fires across the street, it was scary. And the fire department would come with this one little truck, with the one little barrel of water on the back of it and thank heavens they put out the fires! It was people that would come, too.”

Abundant wildlife inhabited the area of Curiosity Creek from small reptiles to large mammals. Al remembers:

“You used to see quail, rabbits- they were everywhere... You’d see raccoons, everything around here. We spotted one Florida panther one time, but you know you only get a glimpse of them and they’re gone. We spotted one down along the creek. As far as snakes would go, we never saw a rattlesnake. People used to come out here looking for gopher tortoises. It’s always been real woody, and the creek has always been real nice.”

Jeanne has her own story about Curiosity Creek wildlife:

“Down from Curiosity Creek there were all types of animals that would go down to drink. And I would stay home alone at night, this is from ’38 to ’42, I know people say there is no such thing as a black panther, but we had seen a black panther. I know it wasn’t a dog because we got too good of a look, and one of those things was on the back porch of the house. And I looked out the window and this thing was long and sleek and it just spread out. And it was scary”

At one time there was also an abundance of fish in the creek. Al notes:

“My son used to take a pole down there all the time. The kids used to fish. They caught quite a bit of fish. In fact, I’d say up to about four or five years ago, I saw a man out here on Country Club Drive standing on the bridge there, he was catching fish right off of there, what they call brim. He had a nice string full of them.”

Jeanne has seen the area where she lives change significantly from her first days there. In fact, she has been a strong advocate for her neighborhood and has helped to guide the course of change. Jeanne explains:

“This was zoned agriculture. You could have horses, anything you wanted out here. Al and I, when we first married and started our house here, there was a man who bought a lot across Ola Avenue on Curiosity Creek. He would bring truckloads and truckloads of tires and junk, and this was in 1946, and we would be working out in the yard, trying to clear tree stumps to make a yard, and our daughter was only five months old. We would go out and dig up the palmettos and the plant grass. And this man would keep going by with his loads of junk, so one day we walked down, and he was making a junkyard. Now this was zoned agriculture, so as far as zoning was concerned he could make a junkyard. So, I called down to zoning, being a committee of one, because I was the only one out here, and I told them, ‘Have you been out in this area? Do you know how beautiful this area is? How it’s going to be developed in the next few years? It’s not going to be a junk yard, its going to be a neighborhood.’ And he said, ‘Well, let me call you back.’ And he did call back, and he said, ‘We are looking into this and see if we can help because we are aware of the area.’ Well, that wasn’t enough. So, I got the baby and I got into the car and went down to talk to him personally, they were very nice. They said, ‘We want to help you, but the only way we can help you is to sort of bluff this man because legally he can have his junk yard. We are going to talk to him and tell him as far as health is concerned he cannot have his junkyard, it is not healthy.’ And we did save the area, and it could have been very serious.”

Development

Jeanne has had the pleasure of knowing many families who have lived in the neighborhood off Curiosity Creek. She has also had the opportunity to see the area change from woods to neighborhoods. Jeanne comments on the progression of changes:

“Well, in ’38 when we moved out and shortly after there were just a couple of families. It would have been after ’42 that it started even more. And when we were married in ’46 and moved out here it was still very woodsy. Late ’50s and early 60s you really saw a difference.”

The increase in the number of people living in the area meant that there would be fewer habitats for wildlife and more people affected by the natural flooding of the creek. Al explains the changes:

“There was nothing out here except my wife’s parents house, and ours; we were the only one on this street. The creek used to flood; it didn’t have a path to follow anymore. It used to kind of spread out south of Country Club Drive, there were no homes or anything, it was flatlands and it used to kind of spread out there and just keep running south. Now, I’ve seen it running across Linebaugh Avenue about six inches, just running across and going south towards the river. Then this area started building up and people were having problems with water. The Blue Sinks are down here and Curiosity Creek used to kind of spill over into them until the rains would stop. But, a normal year wasn’t so bad as far as flooding would go.”

According to Jeanne, recent measures to control the flooding have been very successful.

The Future

Jeanne is hopeful for the future of Curiosity Creek and the other waterways in the area. Different groups have taken interest in their health and have been working to improve or restore conditions of the waterways in this area. Jeanne and Al are also looking forward to the original house being restored to its former glory. Despite drastic changes over the last 65 years, some things remain the same. The house Jeanne's father first built will once again stand as a testament to their long history in this neighborhood, and Curiosity Creek still runs through with a small presence, but unmistakable beauty. Al fondly remembers the Florida he fell in love with:

*"Our kids, you always knew where to find them, they were always in the creek or down at Blue Sinks...
You can't believe what a beautiful place Florida was back then."*

Works Cited

Eagan, David. *Sinkhole Reflections*. May 20, 2003. The Tampa Tribune. Baylife, Pg. 3

Written By: Alexis Broadbent-Sykes