

Rocky Creek



View of Rocky Creek from Waters Avenue Bridge (USF)



Another view of the creek from the Waters Avenue Bridge (USF)

The following narrative comes from an interview with Rocky Creek resident Lucy Carroll in her home on October 21, 2003. Lucy has lived near Rocky Creek for forty-four years and has witnessed how the changes to the area surrounding Rocky Creek have affected the creek's health.

Personal History

Lucy Carroll's experience with Rocky Creek goes back to 1960 when her mother had one of the first houses in their neighborhood built for \$9,999. This would begin a life-long relationship between Lucy and her neighborhood that would result in years of involvement and activism. In 1967 Lucy bought the house from her mother who then moved across the street. When Lucy first saw the neighborhood it was mostly open fields in all directions. Today, the same area is full of homes. Lucy remembers:

"This house was built, then the house across the street and a partial house next door. Then the builder went out of business. Three years later they came in and built two more houses, and then they went out of business. Several years later they finished this street."

Lucy's children all grew up along the banks of Rocky Creek, which snakes down one side of their neighborhood. Lucy remembers that her son, in particular, loved the creek:

"My son's favorite place was the creek. He had the dog, and actually all the children in the neighborhood played in the creek. They had a path that went across right here that was beat down and they all went down to the creek there. The creek was clean- they swam in it. I mean there were snakes and there were alligators, but they went away when the kids came down. They played down there; they fished down there. The dog knew the path by himself. Whenever I wanted my son I sent the dog, and the dog would come back with the son. It was a great place for the kids. This was in the '60s."

Lucy fondly remembers the times when Rocky Creek was a clean and open place for family fun:

"We had great times here. Around the corner when the tide was low there used to be a little beach... We had a big rope on the branch of this tree. The kids would jump out right there."



The creek near the Waters Avenue Bridge (USF)



The edge of Rocky Creek near the Waters Avenue Bridge (USF)

At that time, Lucy remembers eight to ten children growing up in the neighborhood, playing in the fields and the creeks. Today, as the area continues to change, Lucy has become involved with different groups and organizations including the Neighborhood Watch. Lucy also regularly organizes the children in the neighborhood for litter collection.

History/Information

Rocky Creek is located in the Rocky/Brushy Creek watershed. It is 89,373 feet in length with 13 segments. Its headwaters are at Lake Carlton and it spills out into Old Tampa Bay (www.wateratlas.org).

The creek flows through an area of Hillsborough County known as the greater Town 'N Country region. Growth in this region began in 1959 and spiked through the 1980s. An illustration of this growth comes from the history of Town 'N Country: "In 1958, one could count on the fingers of one's hand the number of people who lived within a radius of three miles of what is now Hillsborough Avenue and Hanley Road, and area now containing over 50,000 people." (www.tncountry.org/history1.htm)

At one time the creek was a beautiful diversion for both the local kids and neighborhood families. The creek supported a diversity of wildlife and activities. Lucy remembers:

"It used to be teeming with wildlife. When my son was 12 he came home with an alligator, and he used to catch snakes down there all the time. He'd bring all kinds of animals from there. Fishing all the time... there were raccoons and possum, and rabbits. All kinds of slow-moving animals, not counting the snakes and the birds. There were eagles over in the wooded area, but that was a while ago, now. There are still snakes and there are still gators in the creek, it's just that you can't get to it [the creek]."

The creek has changed significantly in the last forty years. Not only have neighborhoods filled out with homes, but roads have widened and businesses have moved into the area. These changes have meant that Rocky Creek has more pollution and litter entering its water. Access to the creek has been blocked by different adjustments to the area, and the overgrowth of vegetation around the creek makes it difficult to see or find. Lucy comments:

"We don't go down there much anymore. There was a time when the creek was a great place to pack a little picnic lunch, go down and sit by the creek and let the kids play. Kids enjoy that you know, but that's in the past... When they built the last street, all the houses were on Rocky Creek, so that stopped most of the path for the children to go to the creek. Plus Rocky Creek Retirement Village built in here, and then they spread over there all the way over to the old water tank, which is all fenced in, so it pretty much stopped any way to get to the creek. Except way up where you come in off the main road."

Despite the changes to the area, there has never been a flooding problem that Lucy can recall. Lucy notes:



Vegetation near the creek (USF)

“There has never been a flooding problem. The county wanted me to buy flood insurance and I said, ‘I’ve been here 45 years, I’ve had water run in the road, but it’s never been a flooding problem.’ The creek has never come up. If there was water in the road it was from the rain.”

Development

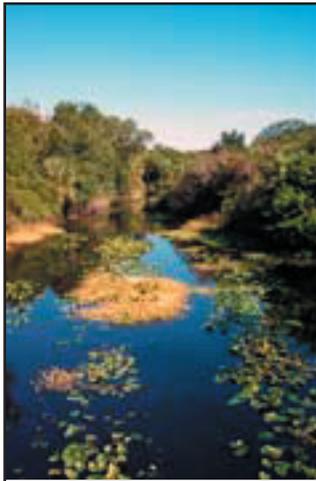
The greater Town ‘N Country area started to develop around the same time that Lucy and her mother moved into their home. Lucy remembers:



Waters Avenue Bridge going over Rocky Creek (USF)

“Waters Avenue was just two lanes: one coming and one going. When they put in this development they had to put in their own water system. Now, of course, there’s the big water plant... There are 65 houses in this little community. There was nothing between here and Dale Mabry. It was absolutely nothing but open fields between here and Dale Mabry... The kids used to play out here, play football, and of course all that disappeared when progress came in with buildings and fences.”

Lucy believes the drastic changes to the area have negatively affected the creek’s health and the neighborhoods ability to access it. Lucy explains:



Rocky Creek in 2003 (USF)

“There is a lot of pollution in the creek. The growth around it and the trees and the bushes have all grown so big that it gets down into the creek. And with the canal it just seems that the water doesn’t flow. But that’s my opinion. The water doesn’t flow as well as it used to... We don’t go down to the creek, you just can’t get to it, it’s not there for everybody to use because of the overgrowth and the pollution... We’ve had problems with dumping near the creek. People just drive in here and dump their stuff. Because of Neighborhood Watch I’ve gotten people over here watching for cars that do that and turn their tags in.”

Lucy has tried to combat the effects of change on the creek by trying to get the creek cleaned-up. Lucy comments:

“Several years ago I got the idea that the creek really needed to be cleaned up and I ended up having to go through the EPC. They finally said O.K. and supposedly somebody came and cleaned it up- I never saw any results from that.”

The Future



View of the creek in 2003 (USF)



Vegetation in Rocky Creek (USF)

Lucy has been disappointed by the degrading health of the creek and the inability to affect change; however, she continues to be hopeful that change is possible. Lucy is very involved in her community and prefers to help in areas she feels she can be most effective. Lucy explains:

“I tried to get things done for the creek, but it was just a run-around. Well, we don’t own this, we don’t do that, call this person. I moved on to Neighborhood Watch trying to get constructive things done. I lost interest. It’s not like it affects our lives anymore, we can’t get to it anyway. Moved on.”

If Lucy had one hope for the future of Rocky Creek it would be to see it cleaned up. Lucy comments:

“We’d love nothing better than to see this cleaned up. Maybe I’ll make one more run at it.”

Written By: Alexis Broadbent-Sykes