

LAKE CASEY NARRATIVE

The following narrative is based largely on an interview with Bill and Shirley Gormin at their home on the western shore of Lake Casey, on January 28, 2000. The Gormins have lived on the lake for over eighteen years. Their comments offer a glimpse of the positive aspects of lake life and also expose some of the negative consequences that may arise with increased residential development. This narrative has been supplemented with information from a subsequent conversation with Bill Gormin in the spring of 2000.

Family History



Bill and Shirley Gormin

The Gormins moved to Lake Casey from the Baycrest area in western Hillsborough County. Their move was motivated by a desire to live on the water and for a smaller home that would be easier to maintain. In the following passage, Shirley and Bill discuss how they found their property on the undeveloped shores of Lake Casey. Shirley states,

"... We'd been looking for a lot on a lake... and Bill just happened to stumble on the property and see it." Bill comments, "Yeah, I was looking over in another area and the man mentioned this one. And so, I came over here with him and it was a beauty then. Because it was a forest over there (i.e., southern end), the pond had been all cleared out. So, we bought the lot. [At that time] there was only one house [on the lake]."

The Gormins purchased their property in October of 1980, and moved into their newly built home in July of 1981. Their children lived in the family's new home for only a few months after they moved in, and Bill's job kept him away from home regularly. So, it was Shirley who had the greatest opportunity to spend time on the lake, and she did. The following comment by Shirley reveals the many hours she spent on the lake. Shirley states, "As I said, he traveled, so I had whole mornings out there... I'd be out there from six in the morning till I had to go to work. It was just all so fascinating you could just watch them (i.e., wildlife) forever... And, if I could figure out a way to go out there after work, I would. It was beautiful." Over the years Shirley has developed a close relationship with the lake's wildlife. At one point Shirley became especially fond of Lake Casey's catfish. She comments, "... I had catfish I could feed out of my hand. I went out every morning. My son use to laugh and tell everybody, 'it's a good thing they're not walking; they'd be knocking on the door.' They would follow me all around the lake and come out and eat out of my hand."

Although Shirley's daughter Elora didn't live at home very long, she would swim in Lake Casey during her visits home. Shirley recollects, with fondness, her daughter swimming and the alligator that caused Shirley to prohibit Elora from swimming in the lake. Shirley states, "Well my daughter use to swim in there, until I saw an alligator. Of course everybody said, 'You didn't see an alligator in there. She's seeing things.' There was an alligator. So I wouldn't let her swim. ... But they use to swim, and there were Lilly pads way over on the other side [east side]. And, they would take the dogs and swim over there."

Fishing is Shirley's favorite lake hobby. Shirley mentions that the secret to catching bass on Lake Casey is to bait the hook with shiners from the lake. Shirley comments:

"One day I was down on the boat, I decided to go fishing. There were people...[who had] been fishing all day. And I went down through up my line, got a shiner, caught a huge bass. Threw it back, caught another one, threw it back...[and a woman from the group that was fishing] started yelling. Well that night she shows up at our door, about nine o'clock at night. She was mad...[because I caught so many fish, so easily.]...I said, 'Well I don't think I'll go fishing with you four out anymore.'"

Shirley's love of fishing has been passed on to her five-year-old grandson who fishes from the Gormins' shore. Shirley recalls with joy how a large bass scared him. In Shirley's words, "He caught a big bass and when it came out of the water...It got loose, you know they fight, scared him to death." Although Shirley doesn't fish regularly anymore, she and Bill still enjoy gazing at the lake and watching wildlife when relaxing in their back yard.

Lake History



Shirley called this water off her shoreline 'cloudy'

Lake Casey is located in northern Hillsborough County, approximately a half-mile north of Gunn Highway and three quarters of a mile west of Dale Mabry, in Carrollwood. It is a "spring fed" lake, and according to Shirley it was historically "...just crystal clear...it was clearer than what came out of the faucet, it was beautiful." Unfortunately, the Gormins believe that the lake has been subject to an influx of debris and nutrients in the last decade, which has made Lake Casey "cloudy." The lake is surrounded by residential development except for a portion of its eastern side. According to Shirley, Lake Casey has only recently been referred to by that name. She stated that one of the builders in the area had referred to the lake as "Shirley's Lake" after her.

Lake Casey received its current name from the Casey family who owned an orange grove on the lake's shore and withdrew water from the lake to irrigate their grove. The Gormin's assert that this property was bought from the Casey family in the late 1970's by the Kearney's who were "builders" (i.e., developers). Bill offers some insight on the history of the Lake Casey Area and implies that the beauty of the area has been diminished by development. Bill states:

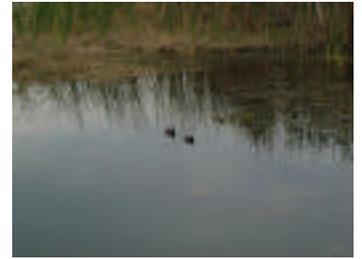
"Right before we bought this lot they had just cleared this whole thing out. ...Casey had a grove here. And it was Casey Road, and Casey lives right around the corner. And all the relatives live on Casey Road. There's about four or five houses down Casey, they're all related...They had an orange grove here [where Bill's home presently sits] and they used the pond for watering it. And they sold this area. The Kearney's were builders...they're the ones that cleaned this whole thing out and opened up the streets and everything. And it was beautiful out here, but it has changed."

The lake environment supports a diversity of plants and animals. The Gormins cite numerous animals that live in this environment, such as birds, alligators, snakes, turtles and fish, just to name a few. Their familiarity with the lake's animals hints at their strong interest in the lake's ecosystem. Although the Gormin's believe that most of the area's animal populations have remained stable, they claim that some populations have declined, such as rabbits, frogs, and shiners. Shirley discusses a decline in the shiner population. "Oh that's another thing we use to have, wild shiners. And, since...whatever the guy put on the lake, whatever stuff, no more, no more shiners. I haven't seen shiners [in awhile.] [In the past] you couldn't drop your line without getting a shiner." Shirley and Bill also believe that the frog population has dramatically declined in the last couple of years. They comment that there were numerous frogs in the area. They now fear this is no longer the case, having not seen any frogs for some time.

The Gormins seem to have a special fondness for the birds that inhabit the lake area. In the following passage,

their words not only convey the diversity of birds in the area but also their vast knowledge of the area's birds. Bill comments:

"Lots of Roseate Spoonbills and Storks come in... We...[also] get those big Blue and White Herons. And we got about three different types of ducks, Mallards, Ring Necks, [and Muscovies]... We feed a lot of birds... We have two different kinds of Grackles, Red Wings, Black Birds, Doves, all kinds of birds. We don't have any Robins because we have underground [utility lines]. So there's no lines for them to sit on." Shirley adds, "We have a Brown Thrush and we have Cardinals, and Blue Jays."



Ducks are commonly seen on Lake Casey

Over the years the Gormins have had the opportunity to witness a variety of animals living in their natural habitat. Turtles have been some of their favorite animals to watch. In the following passage Shirley reminisces about watching newly hatched turtles on a rainy day. Shirley comments:

"Beautiful turtles, they come up in our yard and lay eggs. We were sitting out one day, and it was raining. You know, nice rain, no thunder, no lightning. And, he's (i.e., Bill) you know, 'What's that moving?' There must have been fifty little turtles coming out from around the plant [on the side of their house]. And they were trying so hard to get down to the lake. And we find them up front. We have the hard shell and we have the soft shell."



These cattails border the southern side of the Gormins' shoreline

Vegetation on Lake Casey is thriving; unfortunately for the Gormins and their immediate neighbors, flourishing cattails which border their property threaten to disturb the lake's delicate ecosystem. For Shirley and Bill the cattails have been a menace due to their encroachment on the Gormins' lake frontage. Shirley states, "It's getting worse and worse, those cattails...they just suck water and keep going and going." The Gormins cite several problems caused by the cattails, including the obstruction of their view of the lake and the disruption of the lake's natural flow in front of their property. According to the Gormins the disruption of the lake's current results in the build up of algae and debris in the water off their shoreline. Shirley believes that residents should be responsible for controlling the growth of

cattails on their own shoreline. She comments, "I would force people to keep the Cattails out, because it's not like it's a native grass..."

Development

The Gormins' home was the second house built on Lake Casey, in 1981, and for many years there were only a handful of homes on the shores of the lake. Shirley and Bill recount the building of the first couple of homes on the lake with a fondness for the solitude the unpopulated area provided. Shirley states:

"We were actually the second house on the lake. The builder, whatever his name was, was the first one. It wasn't Kearney, it was one of his associates...[and]...the Fideals moved in, in October, after we did, and Kearneys moved in after that. And this (i.e., points to the western, southern and eastern sides of Lake Casey) stayed...empty forever." Bill supports Shirley's sentiments. He says "For at least five or six years we were the only house on Rolling Oaks. Other than that one over there on Meadow Hill, that one house that belonged to one of the developers... We were like on a farm here, it was really nice."



Southeastern shore of the lake in 1981 - Bill and Shirley Gormin



Lake Casey has seen significant commercial development in the last two decades.

Southeastern shore of the lake in 2000 - USF

Bill asserts that the Gormins' immediate neighborhood was developed in the early 1980's and was a southern addition to a previously existing residential development called "Village South."

The Gormins believe that residential development around Lake Casey has impacted the lake environment in several ways. They believe that runoff in the form of sediment and soil from various types of development efforts have caused the lake's bottom to rise and have degraded the lake's clarity from "crystal clear" to "cloudy." Shirley asserts that developers pushed fill (i.e., "dirt", "sand") into the lake when it was left over from the construction process. Shirley states, "But then everybody moved in, as they fill, they keep pushing...[soil] and pushing it and pushing it [into the lake]." According to Shirley, her lake frontage was significantly deeper than it is now. Shirley recalls, "This used to be real deep, where (as she points) all these reeds are now. This was when we first moved...This was a little

island out here (i.e., just off the shoreline). But, there was a six foot channel through here."

The Gormins speculate that the development of a wetland at the southern end of Lake Casey has disrupted the lake's natural drainage system. The Gormins believe that this is the cause of flooding in recent "wet years." Shirley expresses her dissatisfaction with the residential development at the southern end of the lake in the following comment. Shirley states, "Last year when the water came back up, my son calls frantic because he saw us on TV. They were showing national TV and they were pumping water out of this lake because it was flooding. But, it wouldn't have been flooding if those homes (i.e., Lake Casey Estates) weren't over there."



Although it no longer exists, this island (ca. 1981) use to sit within a few yards of the Gormins' shoreline. It was a favorite resting spot for the Lake's only known alligator. - Bill and Shirley Gormin



The Lake Casey Estates lie at the southern end of Lake Casey

A culvert that runs along the southern side of the Gormins' home and diverts surface water from the street to the lake has been the source of a series of problems for the Gormins. The culvert has "broke down" three times resulting in the washing out of the bank on the Gormins' shore each time. Fortunately, this problem was corrected by the county, however the culvert is also the source of a potentially more serious threat to the lake's ecological system. The culvert has transported garbage from the street to the lake for some time according to the Gormins. Shirley states, "We are still getting just as much garbage in there. Everybody that goes by throws it in." Bill states, "Even though Mrs. Huhta put that

little sign on the top...'You're not supposed to put trash in it [people still place trash in the culvert].'"

On a final note, the Gormins lament that they are the last members of the original group that moved to their neighborhood in the early 1980's still living on the lake. In doing so, they imply that the area lacks communal spirit due to the transient nature of its residents. Shirley states, "I'll tell you people come and go around here fast. It just seems like you don't know anybody anymore. ...[W]e're the only ones left..."



The northern shore of Lake Casey was home to some of the first houses on the lake's shores.

The Future

Lake Casey has been affected by dramatic social and physical change in the last decade, altering the quality of life for longtime residents, such as Shirley and Bill. Although the Gormins still enjoy the lake environment, they are disturbed by threats to the lake's health which are primarily the result of increased residential development. Problems such as the disruption of the lake's drainage system, the excessive

growth of cattails, and the polluted runoff entering the lake may negatively impact the health of Lake Casey. Fortunately, all of the issues mentioned by the Gormins can be resolved by implementing more sustainable practices (i.e., development and lifestyle). One possible solution for recent flooding may be the creation of a retention pond, which would accept a portion of the runoff (water), thus reducing the amount of runoff entering the lake while still allowing the lake to regenerate.

Community members can play an important role in maintaining the health of the lake environment through living sustainably and promoting sustainable development in the area. Shirley believes that by and large the future health of Lake Casey lies in the hands of its residents, who should feel privileged to live on such a lake. Shirley states, "... You know they should realize that...it's really a privilege to live on something as nice as this was. And they should want to take care of it. But just to neglect it and let it go. And not care, it's ...[really upsetting]."

One organization that enables local residents to contribute to the maintenance of the lake they live on is LAKEWATCH. Citizens can become lake monitors by volunteering for LAKEWATCH. Nancy Huhta, a neighbor of the Gormins, currently monitors Lake Casey. She records monthly readings of the lake's characteristics, such as clarity and water level. For it is through the actions of community members and local government entities that Lake Casey will remain healthy for use by future generations.

The following addendum was added after a second conversation with Bill Gormin in May 2000.

Currently, Hillsborough County is undergoing one of the worst draughts in decades and the health of Lake Casey has not gone unaffected. Bill states that, "the lake has never been this low before in the eighteen years we've been here." Low water levels on Lake Casey may have contributed to a recent fish kill on the lake. Low water levels and warm temperatures can combine with other factors (e.g., high levels of decaying organisms, etc.) to induce the lake into a state of oxygen depletion that may result in a fish kill (*Florida LAKEWATCH 1999:11-2).

In the 'big picture' Lake Casey's recent problems caused by draught conditions are symptomatic of not just a statewide water crisis, but a global crisis of water scarcity. This crisis must not only be dealt with at the macro level via international, national and regional water conservation and management protocols (e.g., Swiftmud), but also at the local level through the actions of citizens. Individuals can contribute to conserving water through various practices, installing low-flow, showerheads and toilets, choosing to landscape one's home in a manner that requires minimal amounts of water for maintenance, and by washing a load of laundry/dishes when the washer is fully loaded. Such lifestyle changes will continue to become increasingly important if the planet is going to be preserved for use by future generations.

*Florida LAKEWATCH 1999 A Beginner's Guide to Water Management - The ABCs: Descriptions of Commonly Used Terms. Information Circular #101. Gainesville Florida: University of Florida.