

# Lake Crenshaw Narrative

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The following narrative is based on an interview with Marilyn Heyck in her home on Lake Crenshaw in August 1998. The interview provided information, which combined with survey, biological assessment, and other agency's data illustrates the past, present, and future trends of the lake.

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## The Heycks



Marilyn Heyck, Lake Crenshaw Resident and Oral History Informant

The Heyck family moved to Lake Crenshaw in 1964. Initially they rented a small house on the lake and two years later, the property next to them was put on the market. They bought the property and became lifelong Lake Crenshaw residents.

Marilyn and her husband raised two children on the lake and note the decline in the sense of community that had in the past been facilitated by young families and the interaction between children. Many of the older residents have moved from the lake and their children and the community have left with them. The Heyck children are no exception, they have grown up and moved away, but still come to visit their childhood home. Marilyn feels, "...they'll appreciate what they had more as they grow older."

Since 1990, Marilyn has been involved as a Lakewatch volunteer. She gathers data on the quality of Lake Crenshaw and attempts to educate not only herself, but also other lake residents about beneficial lake behavior. She feels the best thing about Lake Crenshaw is the land that is yet undeveloped.

## Lake Crenshaw

Lake Crenshaw is located in the Northwest



The southeast shoreline of Lake Crenshaw in 1998 and in 1969 shows the drastic fluctuation in water level and shoreline vegetation

Hillsborough basin. It is a natural lake created when a sinkhole was filled by water from the aquifer. Historically cypress trees, citrus groves and pasture, owned for the most part by the Geraci and Shell families, bordered the lake. Over the past thirty years, the natural cypress and other indigenous vegetation have been replaced by diverse development, residential, commercial and agricultural. Marilyn relates a story of the absence of cypress trees, part of the natural environment, on the lake's north shore. "We used to have

cypress trees on the north side of the lake...Florida agriculture people used to burn off their land every spring because it creates a new, green grass. He didn't pay attention a few times to the weather report and when the wind shifts...at least twice he burned our north bank". Pasture improvement is not the only cause for the decrease in the number of cypress trees. The lowering of the water table has had a drastic effect. Marilyn remembers having 15 dead cypress removed from her property alone two years ago.

Although the land use around Lake Crenshaw has dramatically changed over the years, the quality of the water has remained stable and in some aspects has improved. On this topic, Marilyn comments, "...the nitrogen [level] actually improved a bit, which is hard to believe with all the new people and their fertilizing." The lake has experienced an increase in some types of vegetation including algae and cattails.

Perhaps the factor having the largest impact on the lake environment is the introduction in the 1960's of the Section 21 Well Fields that pump water for St. Petersburg. The well fields have had enough of an impact on the lake level that St. Petersburg financed a well to augment the lake. The well requires a permit and a lake association was formed, operative in name only, to facilitate the periodic renewal of the permit.

The wildlife population supported by Lake Crenshaw has changed in the years the Heyck's have lived on the lake. Marilyn comments, "Alligators and otters have disappeared. I think...part of it is their habitat...[but] when these people moved in...they were out there shooting one...We haven't seen any since." Another aspect of the wildlife that has experienced a decline is the bird population. Marilyn recounts a story of swimming with her daughter in the 1970's and the view she was treated to while looking at the sky above the swamp, "At about 10 or 11 o'clock, the soaring birds get an updraft of heat and I counted 65 wood storks circling up. Since then the wetlands have dried up and they need wetlands. So far this year we've seen two."

Despite a decline in wading birds, alligators, otters and several other species, Lake Crenshaw is still home of a diverse fish population, a plethora of turtles and the seemingly omnipresent possums, raccoons and armadillos.

## Development

The land use surrounding Lake Crenshaw has changed considerably in the 30 years the Heycks have been residents. When they moved to the lake, the area was isolated and rural. Marilyn comments, "The closest big grocery store was a Publix on North Gate...the closest laundromat was down there too, but I knew that and I didn't mind driving".

In the early 1970's, rezoning of land surrounding the lake that was previously restricted to agricultural and single family residential use, commenced introducing commercial and multi family development to the then rural area. Marilyn comments, "In the mid to late 1970's North Lakes and then North Dale Mabry came and after that the floodgates opened." The resulting "flood" can be seen through the addition of commercial centers and multi family apartment complexes, both of which long-term residents have disputed, but who, without a consolidated voice, have little effect on proposed development.

The lake itself is the setting for 28 residences. The majority of the land surrounding the lake has been developed in single family housing, and the lake is experiencing a second round of development with older homes being purchased and then demolished to build newer and bigger structures. The influx of new residents, many of whom are "city people" who haven't lived on lakes before lends greater import to the need for education of beneficial behaviors for the lake's health.

## The Future



Crenshaw Family Dock

Development and new land uses are realities that can not be avoided by residents of the NW Hillsborough basin. Lakewatch volunteers such as Marilyn have been accumulating data and knowledge that can promote beneficial behavior and informed development. Use of such information and the participation of citizens groups such as the Keystone Civic Association and the Lutz Civic Association can help to mediate the negative

impacts of increased development, both residential and commercial. The quality of life enjoyed by residents in this area is indeed threatened and it is by having input in proposed development that a consensus can be achieved that everyone can live with, residents, developers and wildlife included.