

Lake Forest Narrative



Louis and Betty Perez
(USF)

The following narrative was derived from an interview with Louis and Betty Perez at their home on the shores of Lake Forest on November 15, 2000. The narrative provides some history of the lake and its surrounding area according to the Perez family, which have lived on Lake Forest since 1980.

Family History

Louis and Betty Perez moved to the eastside of Lake Forest in 1980 after their children had grown up and moved out. They came for the peace and quiet the lake seemed to provide and to live in solitude not far away from the place each of them had grown up. Betty explains the move:

“We had sold our home where we had lived for thirty years in Tampa. We’re natives and we had raised our kids and our kids were all gone. My one daughter has moved out north of us here and we wanted to get rid of the bigger house and the huge yard and we were looking for peace and quiet”.

In recounting their 20-year history as Lake Forest residents, it seems Louis and Betty Perez found what they were looking for. Both recall a certain amount of relaxation that comes from living on the lake. For Mr. Perez, that relaxation comes in the form of fishing.

“I go out there and smoke my cigar and lean on the fence and just look at the birds come in and leave and so forth...see there’s fish out there. There’s seagulls and if you can see them catching little minnows, there’s still fish out there”.

For Betty, the lake helps her to relax and write. For her grandchildren and other youngsters in the area, the lake provides enjoyable recreation and a break from the hustle and bustle of the city. She explains:

“I do some writing. I write poetry. Of course I need the peace and the beauty of the lake. It’s been really important to me...he fishes and the rest of the kids who live around here and the grandchildren love to come over here and walk around the lake. Especially when they’re younger. The six year-olds just think it’s such a treat to have a lake right at your backdoor, and the birds and the natural beauty that they don’t see in the city”.

The best part of the living on Lake Forest however is its sunsets. According to Louis:

“the sunsets are beautiful sometimes. They hit the lake here and you can see, it’s out of this world...watching the flock of birds coming in to roost at night. Like I said, some days I come out here around 5:30 ... and it’s incredible how these birds pick their places and where to peck at them. It’s incredible. Those are the things that I enjoy about it.”

It seems the convenience of living on the outskirts of a city satisfies Betty and Louis. Living on the lake is like living in the country, yet being so close to Tampa allows residents to benefit from what a major city can provide. This is seen in the following comment made by Louis:

“You’re so close to everything. Shopping centers, hospitals, the university if you want. I mean you’re so close, yet you’re so far away from it so that it doesn’t bother you at all”. Betty adds, “I think maybe it’s the friendliness of it. When you walk around the lake everybody says good morning. The community of the lake is my favorite thing.”



The island near the Perez’s home (Source: USF)

Lake History



View of Lake Forest from Perez residence (Source: USF)

Lake Forest is a 25.6 acres lake with an average depth of 4.7 feet and a maximum of 13 feet. Located in what is now Tampa Palms in North Western Hillsborough County off Bruce B. Downs, Lake Forest was once the home of a variety of wildlife, much of which can still be seen. This includes water moccasins, black snakes, alligators wild turkeys, hawks, blackbirds, marsh bunnies, wild cats, bass, herons, mallards, armadillos, possums, a few cows and two otters that both Louis and Betty Perez see sometimes. Betty says:

“you still see wild turkey...one day I was walking and [one resident] said, ‘wait a minute, the turkeys are about to come’. She has a beautiful big piece of property there. She took out some bread and there they came.”

The history of the area is also known for its hunting. Mr. Perez recalls,

“In fact, about two or three years ago, you could still hear on Sunday mornings, shotguns going off behind us”.

According to the Perez’s, three families, the Spicolas, Grecos, and Guintas once owned the land surrounding the lake and used the property for private hunting.

“Right next door to us, east of us, [there] were wild turkey, deer, all kinds of wild animals down there”.

The area was also known for its dairy production, but only a handful of cows remain. The lake and the surrounding area were almost completely transformed from dairy production to residential. Louis says,

“...I don’t know too many cattle ranchers around here except for the Diez’s to the north of us. They have some cattle back there, but it’s just a handful”.

Much has changed since Betty and Louis moved in over twenty-years ago. The size

and quantity of bass has decreased over the years, the islands have changed, and the number of houses on the lake has gone up. Betty discussed how the islands and bird roosts in the middle of the lake have changed in composition. Louis says, they've shrunk and no one knows why. Perhaps, it is a natural succession of sorts. There are two islands in Lake Forest and Betty and Louis have reported that the larger one has become the smaller one and the smaller one has grown. They do not know why this change has occurred.



Islands in the middle of Lake Forest (Source: USF)

Development

When Louis and Betty moved into their house on Lake Forest at 15304 Morning Drive, development of the lakefront property had just begun. Then, wildlife flourished the encroachment of Tampa annexing was nonexistent. When Louis and Betty moved to the area, it wasn't completely developed yet. Building has just begun only three to four years prior.



Front view of the Perez's home and cattails (Source: USF)

Then a refuge from the city of Tampa, the community was small. Louis and Betty have mixed feelings on the growth and development of the Lake Forest area. Betty reflects on the changes.

"In the beginning I felt totally different about it, getting away from the congestion and yet having a family community, because everybody around here loves the lake. It's almost like the old fashioned, small town community."

However, the nature of the area has changed, the number of homes has increased, and the small town community feel is gone. Betty talks about this transition.

"The people come out and we don't even know their names, the people come out in the evenings. There used to be others who would bring out their chairs to sit and watch the sunset. That's changed now because of Tampa Palms and there's still a little bit of it within here, but it's not like it was when we first moved here. You had the small town community here, some families, a few college kids. I think that's very important for people of our generation to hold on to. The lake seems to draw people together".

What used to be wilderness hunting grounds and dairy farms is now Tampa Palms, an annex of Tampa that consists of housing divisions, apartment complexes, and rapid development. Lake Forest itself is developed nearly all the way around. Louis reports,

"there might be a couple of lots of the other side that aren't developed, but on this side everything is taken up...As far as empty property on the other side, I think they've got two lots that face the lake that have not been developed." Mrs. Perez chimes in, "there must be at least 150 [total]."

Future

It seems Lake Forest has survived the changes imposed upon it by growth and development, yet it will be important to continue to preserve. Like the rest of our booming state, the largest issue facing Lake Forest is a growing human population. Betty explains,

“Yeah, growth. It’s terrible that I feel like this. It’s that Florida is not Florida anymore. I know we need to accept a certain amount of change, but I don’t think we have enough water, enough air, enough land, enough anything to accommodate this kind of growth. I can’t imagine us living twenty years from now...if we’re arguing about water now”

Betty Perez’s concerns are real. As residents of Lake Forest, Louis and Betty Perez do their part to help ease the growing pains, while urging others to also contribute. By recycling, using environmentally friendly pesticides and lawn care products, participating in the annual lake clean-up, and using a row boat instead of a motor boat, the Perez’s and others that live on and around Lake Forest hope to keep “their” lake clean and available to future generations.

Written By: Deanna Barcelona



Louis Perez feeding the birds at sunrise – a daily activity (Source: USF)