

# Lake Gibson Narrative

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The following narrative is based on an interview with Lake Gibson resident, Doug Epps, in his home on June 16, 1999. The perspectives articulated by Mr. Epps help to illuminate the realities of life on Lake Gibson in the past and present and to highlight some issues to be addressed by humans regarding their interaction with the natural environment in the future.

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## Family History

Doug is a relative newcomer to Lake Gibson. He moved to the north shore of the lake two years ago, after the completion of the house that he designed and built. Prior to living on Lake Gibson, he had lived on several lakes in Hillsborough County including Keystone, Island Ford, Hiawatha and Carroll.

When asked what he finds attractive about lakes, Doug explains:

"There are fewer neighbors and it is quieter when you live on a lake. Even if you have a neighbor on either side, at least you don't have a neighbor behind you. That is probably the best part. Then the view, the wildlife and the chance to go swimming. The other thing is that you can't lose on waterfront property; I haven't."

Doug had lived on lakes as he was growing up, although they were more developed than the oases he found in Odessa. He comments:

"I grew up in Lakeland on Lake Hollingsworth. . . .It's totally developed all the way around and it's in a bowl shape, and the property goes up high so it gets the drainage from the whole area. . . .You would come out of that lake and you would dry and [your skin] would be green because of the algae. There were just so many nutrients, the fertilizer and everything coming in. . . . There were still alligators and bass and catfish living in there. I don't know what they did because there were parts of that lake where you couldn't even touch the bottom because of the muck. It's amazing that stuff could still live in there."

Doug found an area in Northwest Hillsborough County with lakes quite unlike the lake of his childhood. He has settled in, and now calls Lake Gibson home.

## Lake History

Lake Gibson is a 15-acre lake located in the Brooker Creek Watershed in

Northwest Hillsborough County. The lake is located south and west of Lake Keystone. The development that characterizes the shores of Lake Keystone is making its way to Lake Gibson. Doug comments, "Originally it was a lot quieter because there were no boats. Now we have a Jet Ski. Just one so far... When I first moved in here, I was told that you couldn't have motorized boats on the lake and I was kind of happy about that." The "no boat" rule was an unwritten code among residents and has since changed as new residents lend a new flavor to that lake's environment.



The lake is rimmed by cypress and until recently retained a good deal of clarity, despite the tannic acids filtering into the lakes from the bay heads. Doug comments, "I actually had talked to several people, one who lived on Lake Alice, and they said this lake was just as clear as Lake Alice, which I find hard to believe because Lake Alice is just crystal clear. This lake is very clear. I have seen people scuba diving in there."

The clarity of Lake Gibson has been reduced in the recent past through a series of events including an infestation of weeds. Doug comments:



Lake Gibson is home to various types of aquatic vegetation.

"There was a formal organization that started up because of the weed problem we had. The lake was pretty much covered with some kind of weed that I think was hydrilla, but I am not sure. The residents put out a letter and said, 'Let's get together.' They got together and had somebody look at it and they said, 'Your lake is dying, it's going to be dead and you need to take care of it.' The residents collected the funds for chemical treatment of the lake and the weeds have abated, leaving the lake darker than it had been."

Wildlife around Lake Gibson is diverse and plentiful. Doug comments:

"There are, in the springtime, ospreys. They're not nesting and I only see them in the springtime...there's quite a few wading birds...I see a lot of turtles and I don't know why, they seem to go back and forth between Keystone and Gibson through my property...I see them all the time...they know where they are going. It's funny because one day I see them going one way and the next day I see them going the other. Then I don't see them for a couple of weeks and then I see them again."

In addition to turtles and wading birds, Lake Gibson is home to snakes, bass and a plentiful population of bluegill.

The water level of Lake Gibson is moderated by a series of canals, culverts and outflows within the chain of lakes that includes Keystone, Gibson, Juanita and Rainbow. Doug comments, "Even when we had all that rain, it would seem like it was getting awfully close to the house and then it would quickly go back down."

## Development

Approximately 15 houses surround Lake Gibson. In addition to single family

residential housing, the shores of the lake play host to farms, an appropriate land use when considering the rural nature of the Keystone area. The majority of the homes were built in the last 10-15 years, although there are a few that go back 20-25 years.

Little undeveloped land surrounds the lake. There is a parcel on the northwest corner that has yet to be built upon, but it too is being cleared. The rural nature of Odessa is soon to be replaced by the trappings of suburban life and Lake Gibson will remain an oasis for the residents who have settled on its shores.



Retention ponds such as the one in the foreground of this image help to mitigate the impact of development on the east side of the lake.

## The Future



Even though Lake Gibson has faced many challenges over the years, the tranquility of the lake remains.

The little Lake Gibson has met many challenges in the past decade. It has survived through heavy rains, near drought-like conditions, increased runoff from farms and residential development, and weed infestation. Despite the dolorous assessment of the consultant, the lake remains a peaceful and pleasant setting for the residents of its shores. New development in the area is sure to bring added challenges to the quality of the water, the wildlife population, and the vegetation occupying its shores and waters. It remains to be seen how the lake will adapt to such challenges, but for now, residents like Doug Epps enjoy the benefits of lake side living.