

# Lake Hiawatha Narrative

---

Flora Bolesta  
Julie Sanders



Julie Sanders and Flora Bolesta, Lake Hiawatha Residents

## Flora Bolesta

From the northern climes of Maine and Boston, Flora relocated with her husband to the warmth of Tampa. Flora's husband had a thorough knowledge of the lakes in the area and they explored the northern regions of Hillsborough County together. Flora knew there was a lake hidden amidst the trees north of Lutz Lake Fern Road, and tells the following story of how she ended up on its shores:

"Now my husband knew every lake, every little pond around, of course, and I said, 'Honey, I know there has to be a lake over in there.' And he says, 'Only a swamp Honey, only a swamp.' I went down to the geodetic survey and I got a map and sure enough, there was one here. I didn't want ...to be bossy, but [to] be subtle. ...I got him to come out the next Sunday and I said, 'Honey, let's go down this road', Hiawatha Road. And he said, 'Well what do you want to go down there for? Okay, let's go down.' Sure enough, on the side of the road was a sign saying 'Lake Property for Sale'. It was just a little dirt road and later they put a little shell in. We drove down here and I couldn't see the property. The palmettos, everything was so high and probably full of rattlesnakes. So went to the Colley's [a family living on the lake] and he took my husband out on the dock and showed him [the property]. The next day we had him [Mr. Colley] with us in the lawyer's office and gave him [the lawyer] a check for \$1000 and got the property.

Their home on the northeast shores of Lake Hiawatha was the setting for raising their two children about which Flora comments:

"At that time, they would ride their bicycles up the dirt road, leave their bicycles at Hiawatha and Lutz Lake Fern under a tree, and then scoot home at night. . .I got them in a school where they didn't have to go all over town because I wanted them to call me from home at night. The minute they got home from school they would call me. I would call back once in awhile and say, 'Oh, honey, I forgot to tell you. . .' to be sure they were calling from the house."

Flora's children have grown up and moved away, one staying in Tampa and the other in Texas. She maintains the family home on the shores of the lake she always knew was there.

## Julie Sanders



Dale Sanders showing off his bass catch in 1980  
photo by: Julie Sanders



The Sanders maintain shoreline vegetation to support the fish population of the lake

Julie Sanders and her husband Dale relocated to Lake Hiawatha from the shores of Lake Calm where they rented a home in the late 1970's. They enjoyed living on a lake and searched for property of their own on one of the area's lakes. Julie comments:

"We moved out here in June of 1980, so it will be 19 years. . .He and I had rented a home on Lake Calm. . .we wanted to live on a lake and we looked for over a year for something that we could afford and fell into this place. . .actually it was a small weekend type home, a shotgun house, there were just three rooms. We lived in that for 7 years and then built on over the top of the house and out."

In the 19 years the Sanders have called Lake Hiawatha home, they have grown to know the lake intimately. Julie often snorkels around an artificial reef they have constructed just off their dock from old Christmas trees. Their home is situated next to Flora Bolesta's and they have been neighbors for nearing 20 years.

## Lake Hiawatha

Lake Hiawatha is a 138-acre lake located in



Aerial shot of Lake Hiawatha  
taken in 1998  
photo by: Julie Sanders

Northwest Hillsborough County. The lake is set back from Lutz Lake Fern Road and is a haven for the residents who call its shores home. Flora comments, "What I liked about Lake Hiawatha is that it was hidden and that nobody knew it was here. Even now, you have to direct people in and they say, 'I never knew there was a lake down here.'"

Lake Hiawatha is one of the higher lakes above sea level in the Odessa area. As a high elevation lake, the water level of the lake remains fairly stable, with any influx of water draining quickly to the lower parts of the watershed. Julie comments, "...when we had all that rain last year, our dock was covered, just barely. We went away for the weekend and we were gone, I think for three days and when we came home, the water had gone down..."



The southeast shores of the lake  
support protected wetlands  
photo by: Julie Sanders

The isolation of the lake has encouraged well-paced development and the protection of a habitat conducive to diverse wildlife. The southeast shore of the lake supports a wetland that is protected from development and serves as a refuge and nesting ground for many species. As is to be expected, human occupation of the land surrounding the lake has contributed to the decline of some animals traditionally represented in higher

numbers than at present. On the original map Flora looked at to identify the location of the lake, the lake was named Otter Lake because it was full of otters. Although one or two may be seen now, the days of watching a plethora of the playful critters frolic in the lake are all but gone.

Another species affected by changes to the natural environment imposed by human occupation is the alligator. Julie comments, "When we first came out here we saw 'gators all the time. I'm not talking about multiple 'gators, but there was always a 'gator on the lake...but we hardly ever see 'gators anymore". Not only has the numerical representation of alligators decreased, but also their behavior has, in at least one case, been modified. Julie tells the following story of her run-in with a reptile:

"He was coming over here because he wanted the ducks... You would see him during the day, just cruising around, getting closer and closer. One day I was out swimming on the lake ...and I would swim out to this buoy, hang onto it for awhile and swim back. Well, I was hanging on to this buoy and I felt this huge swoosh of water, like an upsurge of water, and I thought, 'God, that was a big fish!' Then I thought, 'That wasn't a fish!' and I swam back to the dock, just like walking on water and looked back and he was right by the buoy. He swam up underneath me to check me out, but he didn't want me, he wanted the duck. Thank God...I

was a little concerned, because normally they're nocturnal and when the sun sets, you would see a 'gator or two. This one just didn't know and he was out in the middle of the day."



A once thriving duck population has been replaced by an equally thriving flock of geese  
photo by: Julie Sanders

Offsetting a decline in alligators and otters is the diverse and plentiful representation of wildlife remaining on the lake, thriving in the preserved wetlands habitat and benefiting from residential development on large-sized lots. The Bolesta and Sander's properties were once home to a numerous duck population before geese came and moved them along. The lake is often visited by an eagle, about which Julie comments, "I think he nests in the bog down there. He likes [Flora's]

property for some reason and he will come right out here and get in the water and with those huge wings, scoop up the water and wash himself. It is unbelievable to see it."

The eagles and other fishing birds are perhaps attracted by a fish population, which has declined since the time the Bolesta's settled on the lake, but has in recent times leveled off and become stable. Fishermen of all ages are still catching bass and catfish, and many brim can be seen around the Sander's dock. Julie's snorkeling expeditions have proven to be visually stimulating because of the plentiful nature of the fish population.

## Development



Lake Hiawatha in the 1980's with a west shoreline as yet undeveloped  
photo by: Julie Sanders

The isolation of Lake Hiawatha has encouraged well-paced development on large sized lots. Julie and Flora speak of the Palero and Colley families, who were early residents on the lake, and who, in the case of Marti Palero, still reside on its shores. Flora, a 40-year resident of the lake, has witnessed much development in the surrounding area and is comfortable with the changes it has affected upon the natural environment.

The shores of the lake are home to houses that have been built over a span of 50 years. Before contemporary development on the lake's shores, it is hypothesized that the lake was used by Florida Native Americans, a theory supported by the finding of chert on the Sander's property, from which an arrowhead may have been fashioned. Agriculture was interspersed with indigenous vegetation when contemporary settling of the lake commenced, but over the years much of the grove and vegetation that once surrounded the lake on the southwest side has been replaced by homes. Subdivisions and developments surround the lake and the land north of Lutz Lake Fern Road. Some of the residents of a recent residential development not situated directly on the shores of the lake have lake access through the protected wetlands on the lake's southeast shores.

The lake straddles the Hillsborough/ Pasco County Line and different building restrictions and taxing conventions apply to the respective counties. Pasco County allows trailers on lakefront property, a practice restricted by Hillsborough County, but the allure of lakefront living has increasingly led to the purchase of previously trailer-occupied lands and the building of permanent homes.



The south shore of Lake Hiawatha supports the Carrollwood Day School, used as a camp in the summer  
photo by: Julie Sanders

The south shore of the lake is the setting for one of two locations of Carrollwood Day School, which has been in operation since 1987, serving a student body of approximately 300 students. Camp Hiawatha, a private day camp, uses the facilities in the summer for elementary school-aged children.

Flora comments about the origin of the day camp in an area zoned for residential use:

"The woman who had that property called Liz Colley ...She knew if she could get around Liz she had it made. She called Liz and said she wanted to put in a little camp for the children...She wanted to rent it in the summer and charge them to come on the lake...all of the sudden, there was this camp and I saw six little sailboats..."

Julie and Flora, living on the other side of the lake from the school, agree that the school and camp do not detract from the appeal of the lake. Julie comments, "It's really not bothersome...In the summer when they have the kids camping; it's really pretty cute. In the morning, you see all the little Sunfishes on the water and you hear the kids laughing."

The existence of the school and camp on the shores of the lake have caused few worries in the eyes of most residents, although they have been the cause for concern for residents of the properties adjacent to the school due to increased traffic and noise. In spite of concerns stemming from the existence of the school, additional institutional development is not a pressing fear for the lake's property owners. As far as private residential development, Julie comments, "...it is a quiet lake. Even though the lake is maxed out, population-wise, there are not a lot of boats..." and the lake remains a pleasant backdrop to living in Northwest Hillsborough County.

## The Future



Lake Hiawatha has yet to experience many of the stresses associated with the rapid development occurring in Northwest Hillsborough County. In the 40 years Flora has been a resident, the lake has not experienced a significant amount of negative impact as a result of increasing density in the built environment.

At the conclusion of the interview, Julie commented that there was nothing earth

shattering about their lake and that she felt the interview may have been unremarkable. If unremarkability is what denotes a healthy lake exhibiting a positive balance between the human and natural environments, then unremarkability is a condition to be sought. Lake residents pursue clean, healthy lakes supporting a balance between human occupation and the natural environment. Lake Hiawatha maintains this balance and hopefully will into the future.