

Sunrise Lake Narrative

The following narrative was derived from an interview with Etheridge and Faye Adams at their home on the shores of Sunrise Lake, on June 8, 2000. The Adamses have been regular visitors to the lake for the majority of the last fifty years. They built a year round home on the lake ten years ago. Their perspectives offer a taste of life on Sunrise decades ago, as well as a glimpse of those issues that currently confront many of Hillsborough County's lakeside residents.

Family History



Etheridge and Faye Adams standing on the shore of Sunrise Lake. - USF

Etheridge and Faye Adams built their home on Sunrise Lake ten years ago. However, they have been coming to the lake for the better part of fifty years. Mrs. Adams' parents, Edna and Herman Girtman, bought the property where their current home rests in 1952, and ever since that time Sunrise Lake has been a regular destination for her family. Faye remembers taking trips with her parents to the area. They fished on Sunrise and on other neighboring lakes "almost every weekend".

Herman Girtman was an avid fisherman. The Adamses remember his love for the sport and the outdoors. Etheridge speaks highly of Mr. Girtman's knowledge of fishing, exposing his father-in-law's systemic understanding of the natural environment. Etheridge comments, "Her daddy was a hardcore fisherman. He broke open the bonnets to get a little worm. Use a little worm to catch a shiner. And, then drag the shiner around on the hook all day long to catch a bass. Her brother was like that, too."

Etheridge was introduced to the lake four years after the Girtmans bought the property. He reminisces about his introduction to the lake via a chancy car ride through muddy terrain with his future father-in-law. In doing so he reveals the rural nature of the area in the 1950s.

"We turned off of what is now Lake Shore on to what is now Taylor. And he (Mr. Girtman) stopped and he said, 'well I don't know if I can make it through there with this truck or not'. And, it was really bad. But we made it on through. [H]e had a little wooden boat in the back of his truck and we went fishin'. That was before we were married. That was the first time we ever come to this lake."



Herman Girtman (with the hat) fishing with his grandchildren, Jody and Lee Adams. Faye is in the foreground. - Adams



One of many family gatherings at the lake: The Wanamaker family reunion - Faye's side of the family - Adams

Throughout the years the Girtmans and the Adamses have come to the lake for numerous family outings. Faye recalls the good times with a smile. She comments, "A lot of family gatherings, family reunions, holidays... [T]he whole family was here, skiing and fishing and swimming." As time marched on and beloved family members passed away the composition of the family changed, but their enthusiasm for the lake area remained. When the Adamses had young children they would come out for the day with their friends to water ski and swim. Faye remembers the scene in the following lines: "When they were babies... And our friends all had children... We would have like four play pens lined up along the beach out there with babies in them while we skied. You know somebody stayed [and] watch the babies."

The Adamses built their current home 10 years ago. They cite a slew of reasons for their move. They had already owned the property through inheritance and adding a house to it would only increase its value, resulting in a good investment for them. They had also spent the last few decades raising kids, who were finally all grown, so they were looking for a place to retire to. In light of this, the serene lake area provided a welcome change to their Temple Terrace neighborhood that had become increasingly urban over the years.

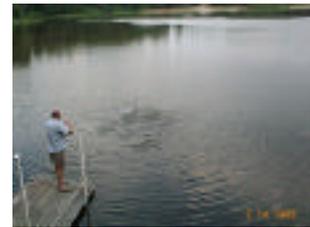


The Adams's children in the 1970s enjoying a good time on the lake with friends. - Adams



Etheridge fishing with his boys in 1973. - Adams

Faye and Etheridge do not use the lake as much as they once did, although it still provides a focal point for family gatherings. In the past, Faye and Etheridge had brought their children to the lake to swim and ski. Their children are adults now, however they still come back to the lake to relax and their youngest son enjoys fishing on Sunrise when he visits. The Adamses do have one hobby that brings them to the lake everyday. They feed aquatic animals from their dock every evening. Faye describes their ritual feeding in the following lines: *"We feed the fish every day down here. And we have a lot of big bream-a lot of them, and big soft shell turtles and green neck turtles come up to eat."*



Etheridge and Faye regularly feed the aquatic life in the evening. - USF

Lake History

Sunrise Lake is located in Northwestern Hillsborough County just south of Van Dyke Road and West of Dale Mabry Highway. Dosson Lake borders Sunrise on its northern end. When the Adamses first started coming to the lake in the 1950s there were only two homes on the lake; one of the homes was owned by Lois Taylor and the other home was owned by the Putnam family. The next home on the lake's shores was the Girtmans'. In the early 1960s Mr. Girtman came upon a 'steal' due to the widening of Busch Boulevard. For the approximate moving costs of \$1,100.00 he was able to acquire a weekend home for his property on Sunrise.



The Girtman's weekend house still stands but it has been renovated in recent years. - USF

In the early years, Faye and Etheridge recall the lake as edenic, teeming with both a high quality and quantity of fish, as well as having clear waters. The status of the lake has changed over time. Etheridge states, *"But it's not as clean as it was, but I don't think it's unsafe... I think it's algae in it. And, it's even better now than it was a few weeks ago. But uh, it's tannic stained mostly now."* Etheridge speculates that runoff from septic tanks, fertilizer, and pastoral activities have taken its toll on the lake. The Adamses claim that there are fish still in the lake but that their size and number have decreased.

The Adamses have seen the lake drop in water level over the years. They believe there are several reasons for this drop: the proliferation of well fields in the area, a lack of rainfall, and an increase in the number of residential wells. Etheridge believes that the area's well fields have had the greatest impact on the lake's water levels. He comments,

"Uh, but then the normal lake level changed about the time they got all these wells active and built the tanks up here at Lake Park. The lake probably ... dropped about three feet and just stayed. Normal now is about three feet lower than it used to be. We call it normal now and you can look at the tree line. And say that's where the lake used to be."

Not only has Etheridge seen the water levels in his lake drop, he has also seen the levels of other lakes drop. This has resulted in the creation of several smaller lakes where there used to be one. Etheridge

elaborates on this scenario in the following quote, *"That is Starvation Lake and we used to fish that Lake and it was a big Lake and now it is three little lakes. I mean, actually there was only two that were joined. But I mean it was one big lake."*

When Faye and Etheridge are asked to give an account of the wildlife that inhabits the area, they say they have seen buzzards, Herons and Red Tailed Hawks in recent weeks. However, they also note that over the years they have seen a drop in the number of animals, especially in rabbits, foxes, quail, and otters. Faye does mention that they *"...still have a lot of ...fox squirrel out here."*



The treeline and the dock are indicators of where water levels once were. - USF

In the decades since the Adamses first came to Sunrise Lake, people have come and gone, although Faye asserts that the current number of residents share a sense of community. In fact, for the last seven years the majority of their neighbors have gathered at the Adams' home to celebrate Thanksgiving.

Development



The western shore of Sunrise is the most residentially developed side of the lake. - USF

In the 1950s when Faye and Etheridge first came to the area, it was heavily wooded and there were few signs of human activity. Faye comments, *"There was no farming, no cattle, no nothing. It was just thick woods."* Traveling in the area was difficult, especially during the rainy season. Etheridge remembers the lack of infrastructure, especially the absence of paved roads, in the following quote, *"Van Dyke was a dirt road, ...and Dale Mabry was also dirt...from approximately Sligh Avenue or Waters Avenue... Lake Shore was a dirt road. And Taylor Road was a cattle road more or less. And, if there was any volume of rain at all, you couldn't come out here without ... [a] truck..."* The Adamses remember that oyster shells were used to fortify the dirt roads into a hardened surface to accommodate travel prior to pavement.

Development in the area has increased steadily since the 1950s with a major increase in the last ten to fifteen years. The Adamses have seen one type of impact repeated by new residents on the lake. Faye discusses the reoccurrence of dredging and its affect on the lake in the following quote,

"Well what would happened is one family would buy the property and they would want to dredge it to make a beach, and then the lake would be cloudy for a couple of years and it just start clearing up. Another family would come in, [and do the same thing over again]. You know, and so, there for a few years it was really not that enjoyable."

In the last ten years the Adamses have witnessed the erection of approximately six new homes in their immediate neighborhood. They have also seen a dramatic increase in development throughout Northwestern Hillsborough County.

Etheridge points to the urbanization of the area around the University of South Florida when discussing the tremendous growth Tampa has undergone in the past fifty years. He comments,

"Now if you stop and think, the way you know the University of South Florida today (as a metropolitan university), and that was started in 1956, and believe me just a year or so before that school started there was nothing out there but woods. I mean nothing. Oh, a few old homes maybe, you know, scattered through the woods out there. But, no mall, no nothing. In fact we used to race our Jalopi's around that place right there behind University Mall called the duck pond. We'd go out there and race our cars around that old duck pond. Well I mean, we grew up there and there was nothing there. Well that's fifty-six, so that's just forty four years ago... So who would have ever dreamed? When you're seventeen, eighteen years old, you know in forty-four years your gonna drive for an hour before you see woods."

The Future

The Adamses have several concerns when considering the future of the area. They foresee an increased demand for water from private wells, as well as from the area's municipal well-fields. They question the ability of the water table to sustainably meet an increased demand for water, and emphasize the need for long-term planning by city, county and state officials. Faye believes that the governing officials need to ensure that adequate infrastructure is in place for new residents, but also that the area's resource base (water, developable land) is able to accommodate them. She questions the viability of growth if these concerns aren't met. Faye explains her view in the following comment, *"I think they should make sure that they have the right utilities, water and so forth, to sustain the neighborhood, you know, with more growth. Not just say, 'oh well, these people have a right [to live here], they've got an acre of land, they got a right to build on it.' But, do they have that right, if they don't have the resources to live there?"*

Etheridge discusses the need for alternative water sources. He believes that continued pumping of northern Hillsborough County and Pasco will ultimately lead to problems, particularly sinkholes. He suggests that local governments proceed with the proposed desalinization plant. In the following comment, Etheridge offers his main concern about future growth in the area. *"I am worried about fifty years from now, a hundred years from now. What are we gonna have here? What's gonna be here? These lakes won't even be here. They'll be mud holes if anything. There'll be no Cypress heads out here, because we're draining the earth. And there's no sense in it."* In the end, the Adamses stress the need for planning and urge our elected officials to do so.