Double Branch Creek

The following narrative has been written based on an interview with Mary Lou Klieves, her daughter, Martha, and their neighbor Russell Dodson on September 12, 2003. The Klieves have been living on Double Branch Creek since 1970 and have seen significant changes to Double Branch and the surrounding area.

Personal History

Since 1970, Mary Lou Klieves has lived nestled along Double Branch Creek hidden away from the encroachment of developments and subdivisions. Mary Lou and three of her children enjoyed the unique opportunities of living outside of the city. They liked the wide variety of animals that lived in or near the creek and the space where they could experience numerous adventures. Martha remembers:

“We used to scare each other going down that road at night. It was pitch-black out there- there were no lights. You’d go down that highway with just the little light on your bicycle, shaking the whole time because there was all this moss hanging down and the wind is blowing and the trees are going ‘rwoooow’ and you’re yelling ‘Let’s get home, there’s something behind us!’ Yeah, we had a blast.”

Mary Lou also appreciated the distractions the creek created for the kids:

“It kept them off the street and interested in things other than smoking, drinking, and they loved the creek, loved it. One of my neighbors, he was my oldest son’s best friend, and he said, ‘When I die, bury me in the creek.’ And I said, ‘In what? In a trash can?’ But he said he wanted to be buried out here because they had so much fun when they were kids.”

History/Information

Double Branch Creek is located in the Double Branch Creek Watershed. It is 49,672 feet in length, has five segments, and its mouth is in Old Tampa Bay. Double Branch Creek has a rich diversity of wildlife and vegetation that has made it an attraction, particularly for kayaking. Martha remembers swimming in the creek years ago when it was less polluted. The Klieves also enjoyed fishing and had once trapped crabs. Mary Lou and Martha listed off a variety of wildlife that lived in and near the creek, including ospreys, eagles,
red-tailed hawks, palliated woodpeckers, cougars, hens, panthers, alligators, redfish, trout, mullet, catfish, clams, mussels, mud sliders, leatherback snapping turtles, white herons, egrets, blue herons, sandhill cranes, manatees, coyote’s, rabbits, cardinals, hummingbirds, and quail. They also have a variety of snakes including: rattlesnakes, coral snakes, red rat snakes, black snakes, ring neck racers, and most water snakes except water moccasins. Flamingos fly over once a year, according to Martha:

“The flamingos fly over going to Busch Gardens. Once a year you’ll see a big old pink bunch in the sky and think, what...?”

According to the Klieves, Double Branch has already seen a significant impact from the surrounding development that has resulted in the loss of birds, animal life, and fish. Many animals that used to frequent the area have been missing or significantly depleted for several years now including gray and red foxes, swallows, kingfishers, yellow-bellied sap suckers, meadowlarks, red-winged blackbirds, blue jays, titmice, and ducks. Martha remembers the swallows and the red-winged black birds:

“The swallows used to come and the sky would just be black. It was like a cloud; the sun would be blocked out... [And there are] no red-winged black birds anymore. And that’s a big thing to lose. Those are quite prevalent birds. It would be like losing seagulls. They were a huge population.”

Red and white mangrove trees line Double Branch Creek. The origin of the name for Double Branch came from its original characteristics, Martha explains:

“It used to have two branches before they closed it off and dug it. It used to have two branches. Way back. This was all woods back here. We were one of the only people who actually lived out here.”

Martha believes the springs that feed Double Branch are located past Racetrack Road. Flooding has been a constant problem for the Klieves on Double Branch Creek. One major flooding event coincided with Hurricane Elena in 1985 over Labor Day weekend. Elena never made landfall, but caused problems by affecting the tides. Mary Lou remembers:

“It just set out in the Gulf, and the tide would come in and the water would come in, and then the tide would go out, and then it would come back in again with even more water. That’s what did it. It never really did hit here, but it just about drowned us. And after that we started filling in this, our property here. And we brought it up higher. But the house is not too much higher. I think we’re only 6 feet above flood stage. You know I think if I ever built another house, even if it was inland, I would build it on stilts. Big cement pillars! Let it run through!”
When Mary Lou moved to Double Branch Creek there were three other houses on her road. Today the area is changing quickly. Mary Lou and Martha are deeply concerned about the effects the development is having on the environment and their surroundings. Martha states:

“Big development has been recent. The Bezars Homes development, that just happened in the last two years. And then this [development] back here we fought against because it’s the last floodplain. They just flattened it and it was the last floodplain for this whole area, now the whole area here is gonna be a big bowl of water anytime it floods... The road is full of ruts now from the heavy trucks coming in, and it hasn’t been resurfaced.”

Mary Lou remembers the creek being dredged around the time the railroad came through, but she doesn’t believe they ever dredged up as far as their home. Martha remembers how shallow the creek was near their home:

“We used to swim in the creek, years ago when it was clean... we could walk way out hip-deep in the middle.”

Mary Lou also remembers an incident a few years back that illustrates her fears of increasing development:

Flooding has varied at Double Branch, increasing significantly in recent years. Martha comments:

“It’s probably been twice in twenty years that the water has come up really high. And now it comes up every other year or three years in a row.”

Regardless of flooding problems or development, the Klieves have always enjoyed their natural surroundings. Mary Lou comments:

“The kids collected any kind of monster that was around. Any kind of turtle, fish, snake all came to my house so I could see it.”

Martha also remembers the local nightlife growing up:

“There used to be a black panther when we were kids. God, that thing would scream and scare us, and it just sounded like some woman wailing. And of course we’d all scramble and run. Where we were running I don’t know, because it’s dark and you want to stay by the fire!”
Mary Lou and Martha continue to enjoy Double Branch Creek and the beautiful environment that surrounds it. The creek will remain a haven for nature lovers and kayakers, but the inevitable advance of developments and subdivisions in the next few years will take its toll on the creek. Mary Lou and Martha are disappointed by the indifference many feel toward the affects of development on the creek and are apprehensive about the possible future of the creek, but for now they enjoy what they have and hope for the future.

Written By: Alexis Broadbent-Sykes

“The Future

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