

Bear Gully Lake



Dick and Barbara Teti (USF)

The following narrative presents a perspective on Bear Gully Lake from the point of view of long-term residents of the water body – Dick and Barbara Teti. The following account was developed from an interview with Dick and Barbara in their home on Bear Gully Lake on July 18, 2003.

Personal History

Each on a subsequent marriage, Dick and Barbara merged families over 19 years ago. Although both now retired, Dick worked for NASA as an engineer, while Barbara worked at various public relations positions. Eventually the couple and some of their seven children combined, moving into a house on Bear Gully Lake. Although the children are now grown and some have moved away from the Orlando area, Dick and Barbara continue to live in a house along the southwestern edge of the water body. Dick related the following story about how he came to purchase the home and its adjacent empty lot on the shores of Bear Gully Lake:



View of lake from the Tetis' home (USF)

“The real estate broker was holding a lakefront Open House at the time I was looking for Glenn Turner’s castle on Bear Gully Lake. I thought, well... I’ll go down this street, look at the house and see if I can find the castle too. The broker was banging a ‘For Sale’ sign in the ground while I was going by the property. I stopped my car and asked him if this was the house for sale. He said, ‘Yeah, but don’t bother me. I’m fishing on the lake.’ However, he showed me the house with its view of the lake. I thought the property was worth investment and I purchased the home in April 1972.”

Over the years, the lake has been a place of many good times for the couple. Near it, they raised children, created family memories, and now enjoy retirement. Barbara shared:



View of Bear Gully Lake’s shoreline (Seminole County)

“When the kids were younger and they all lived in town, we took advantage of lakefront living. Now only two of our children live in town. There was always something going on here. There were picnics, birthdays, holidays, entertaining friends and family, and special events. We would spend a lot of time outside so the lake ambience has always been especially nice.”

Barbara’s current connection to the lake lies in the personal pleasure it provides her. She loves the view seen from her home’s picture windows and porch and describes Bear Gully as “a pristine lake.” She shared:

“I love the serenity of the lake. I like to sit outside and read or dine outside. I really enjoy that. It’s like living in the country on a very peaceful piece of land.”

Whereas, Dick has a more recreational connection to the water body, enjoying boating, swimming, and water sports such as jet and water skiing. In addition, Dick said: “It’s a great way to cool you off on a hot summer afternoon.”



*Shoreline of Bear Gully Lake in 2000
(Seminole County)*



View of Bear Gully Lake in 2003 (USF)

History/Information

Bear Gully Lake is a 139- acre lake in the Howell Creek watershed of Seminole County in Winter Park, FL. On the northwestern part of Bear Gully Lake is a small island with a rope swing on a tall tree. Unnamed according to Dick, the land mass has been there as long as he can remember. Dick does not know the origin of Bear Gully Lake’s name. However, there is likely to be a connection to nearby Bear Gully Creek, which connects to Bear Gully Lake on its eastern edge.

Although now officially a City of Winter Park post office address, Bear Gully Lake is also part of a place called Goldenrod, which was first settled in the 1870s. The settlement consisted mostly of orange groves with a freight station and nearby railroad line. Now Goldenrod is a small and unincorporated town of seven square kilometers. For more on Goldenrod, see <http://goldenrodchamber.com/history.htm>.

The only history Dick and Barbara were able to recall was that Bear Gully Lake was once a popular recreational place. Before the current residential development, people from Orlando used it as a weekend or summer getaway where small homes or cabins were built to house family members boating, fishing, and swimming. As Dick reflected on the early days: “This was country.”

Today, some of that country continues to exist. Over the years, the Tetsis have spotted many rabbits, turtles, various fish, and seemingly endless birds like mallard ducks and white egrets. The couple said alligator sightings are rare and in their 31 years there, Dick has seen only two. One was dead and very small and the other much larger one was taken away by wildlife officials. In terms of vegetation, Dick describes his shoreline as “grassy.” Also lining the lakeshore are cypress trees, as well as magnolia, orange, palm, and laurel trees on the rest of the property.

Water levels of Bear Gully Lake have fluctuated over the years. Dick explained how the water recedes, then comes back varying a maximum of 10-20 feet in shoreline. Water quality has also changed during the time Dick and Barbara have lived on Bear Gully Lake. Dick said that although he does not analyze the water in any valid way, the quality of the water has deteriorated. Of some consolation to Dick is the fact that new large homes on the lake tend to have city water and sewage service, causing less damage to the lake than from the septic tanks of the older homes and orange grove fertilizers.

Development



View of the lake in 2003 (USF)

The earliest known development near Bear Gully Lake, as shared earlier, was that of summer and weekend cabin-like structures used for recreation. According to Dick, the start of permanent residential development was likely to have begun in the early 1950s. As he shared:

“A neighbor down the street has been here a long time, longer than me. His father lived here and built a home for him in 1953 on the lake. It was probably one of the first ones, but I don’t know if it was the very first one.”

According to Dick, one famous resident with a connection to Bear Gully Lake was Glen Turner – a once well known American entrepreneur with enough money to build a stone castle for his beloved wife Alice. However, when Turner was incarcerated, his castle and boathouse never went into full use. The cylindrical boathouse continues to exist as a home in itself, while the castle was torn down to make way for residential development. On the 70 acres Turner once owned, are now million dollar plus homes in a gated community called Bear Gully Pointe.

In the time that the Tetis have lived on Bear Gully Lake, the number of homes on its shorelines has increased. Dick said many new homes have been built since 1972. Some of the newer homes are part of housing developments that flank the lake. However, access to the lake is restricted to only those living in the homes directly on the shoreline. Housing developments very near Bear Gully Lake include Bear Gully Pointe, Bear Gully Bay, Cypress Reserve, Quail Run, and Antigua Point. Dick explained:

“These developments contain many homes that are not directly on the lake. Although, they are in the development areas, just the people who have lakefront lots have access to the lake. There are a small number of empty lakefront lots remaining and several off the lake lots available.”

One of those available lakefront lots belongs to Dick. A development trend that Barbara has noticed is the replacement of smaller homes on the lake with much larger structures. The Tetis home was built during the early 1950s and was added on to in the 1960s. As Barbara related:

“A lot of the houses on the lake have been knocked down and replaced with new structures. Huge, I mean very huge homes and that’s changed the appearance of the lake.”

Another development trend not directly on the lake, but in the surrounding area is the transformation of what used to be farms into residential zones. According to Barbara and Dick, land now being developed both commercially and residentially once grew oranges, celery, and other crops common to the area. For example, ten acres where the creek meets Bear Gully Lake, was recently converted into a housing development.

The Future



Bear Gully Lake in 2003 (USF)

The Tetis are hopeful of a positive future for Bear Gully Lake. Their optimistic view is based on the fact that the lake is completely private with no public access and that its residents are concerned and active in maintaining the lake. As Barbara related: “It is a very well kept lake by its residents.” There is the Bear Gully Lake Committee, of which the Tetis are due paying members. This group monitors the lake and works together to help solve local problems. For instance, the organization is currently doing water and vegetation analyses to maintain water clarity and quantity. Such concerted action undoubtedly assists in ensuring a healthy future for this lake and its residents.

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