

Lake Wildmere



View of Lake Wildmere in 2003 (USF)

The following narrative presents the story of Lake Wildmere as seen through the eyes of long-term resident, Kelly Wainscott. The account provided below was developed from an interview with Mr. Wainscott sitting on a lakeside picnic table at his home on May 28, 2003. In it, Kelly shares what he knows about the lake and what it means to him personally.

Personal History

In 1973, Kelly Wainscott, his wife Beverly and their son Kevin moved from the duplex they were renting on Evergreen Street to nearby Grant Street to live in an old cottage on Lake Wildmere. Kelly reflected on the early days:

“Yes. We lived down the street and this place was an old and run-down cottage. It was two acres for \$30,000. Probably the house was unlivable, but we fixed it up and lived in it for nine years to save money to build a house. So we bought the two acres for \$30,000 back years ago. I wanted to live on a lake and I wanted to fish. And it’s been great.”



Kelly Wainscott feeding fish in 2003 (USF)

The family bought two acres of property on the lake with the help of Beverly’s parents and moved into the small cottage sold to them by an older English woman who, according to Kelly, bought it herself from the original owner. For nine years the family enjoyed the cottage and what the lake provided. Finally in 1984, the family moved into their newly built and custom-designed house and the cottage was removed.

One of the main reasons Kelly and his family sought out waterfront property was his love of fishing, among other water related activities. About his affinity for water, he said:

“Well for me, I like to get out and swim it. My daughter likes to swim and we fish a whole lot. Fishing! My daughter fishes, my son fishes... And it is just tremendous. I feed the fish too.”

Over the years, Kelly’s children who grew up there (now 31 and 14), along with their parents, have greatly enjoyed living on Lake Wildmere. Both Kelly and Beverly are teachers, as is their son who also coaches baseball at Oviedo High School, although Kelly is now retired. Their daughter is currently in middle school. When asked what the lake means to him personally, Kelly replied:



Shoreline of Lake Wildmere in 2003 (USF)

“It’s just...well beautiful. I mean when you’re sitting out here and the wind is blowing and it’s been 90 degrees, but you feel like its 70 because the wind is blowing across the lake, I just love this place. I mean there is more noise now than there ever has been because there is so much traffic on 434 and 17/92, but it is just like being away. You can come down here and it is just another world...with all the trees and everything. It’s just neat.”

History/Information

Lake Wildmere is a 31-acre lake in the Gee Creak Watershed of Seminole County in Longwood, Florida. Lakes in this region are clear, alkaline, and hard water (www.seminole.wateratlas.usf.edu). According to a now deceased neighbor of the Waincotts, Lake Wildmere was once referred to as the Longwood Swimming Hole. Nearly perfectly round in shape, Lake Wildmere is very close to another round lake on the east end called Little Wildmere Lake, and an even smaller, and again round, body of water to its north called Lake Evergreen. About this body of water, Kelly commented:

“There’s another little lake over here, Evergreen. And they say there is no bottom to it. They say a crane fell in one time or something.”

Kelly suspects that Lake Wildmere was created by a sinkhole and is still fed by underground fresh water springs. About water levels at Lake Wildmere, Kelly explained:

“Over the past 29 years, we’ve had some real bad droughts and this one only goes down about a foot. Two years ago, it was the lowest it had ever been and that was about a foot, foot and a half. Other lakes were gone and here, nothing.”

In Kelly’s experience, water levels have fluctuated over the years, but overall have remained relatively stable. Data from the Seminole County Watershed Atlas show moderate fluctuations, varying only three to four feet within the past ten years. The water quality of Lake Wildmere is also rather good, according to Kelly, especially considering the road runoff from nearby State Road 434. About the reasonably consistent water quality, Kelly shared:

“When I first moved here, you could go out there in 5-6 feet of water and look down and see your feet. And there are times you can still do that. The other day, one of the guys fishing here was telling me he could still see his feet out there. It’s so clear. But once it starts raining...the rainy season starts, then it will cloud up a little bit. Just because of the runoff from every place else. The water from the road finally does get in here after a while.”

Another interesting piece of information about Lake Wildmere is that it connects to a series of lakes by way of an underground water channel.



A cypress tree planted by Kelly (USF)

Maps show that water in Lake Wildmere travels south to Fairy Lake, Lake Kathryn, and into North Triplet Lake, eventually ending in Queens Mirror Lake. Kelly related the following:

“Well, I’ve been out here in the afternoon and old timers will be out here fishing for crappie or something in the winter. They would tell me that this lake... this one goes into Fairy, which goes into Katherine. And they said this one is connected to the underground river to the St. Johns. That this is connected to the St. Johns!”

Abundant at Lake Wildmere is wildlife, although the types and numbers have changed throughout the 30 years Kelly has lived there. Plentiful in the past, but not so much today, are raccoons, fox, and quail. Regular fowl include blue jays, black birds, osprey, bald eagles, and a hawk that visits in the winter. Kelly has even spotted a few large owls.

Regular visitors to Kelly’s backyard are otters, which according to Kelly are: “Beautiful, yet hard to see. You have to get up early or on a winter day and maybe you’ll find them.” Other critters that call Lake Wildmere home include turtles, various types of duck, clams, and multiple fish including bass, crappie, and brim. There is also the occasional alligator that once seen are often taken out. Kelly shared a story about one alligator that was spotted:

“When my son was playing little league baseball, we used to play on that property. I had a batting cage up there and we had baseball practice over here and one morning before practice, we came down here. And there was a gator, about seven feet, sunning itself on the bank. And dummy me, not knowing how fast they were, went down and I touched it. And it jumped almost past the lily pads. It was some explosion. I made a mistake. I was younger and dumber...” He later added, “We still have gators. There will always be gators.”



View of Lake Wildmere from Kelly's home (USF)

Development

Historic land use around Lake Wildmere is unknown to Kelly, except that he knows his own property was once a chicken ranch and that a family named Carlson owned much of the property nearby at the time. Also known to Kelly is that the only current vacant area along the lakeshore was once an orange grove. This area is the location for the future United Heritage Bank and three new houses. And although Kelly has been on the lake since only the 1970s, a now deceased neighbor once showed him an aerial photograph of Lake Wildmere in the late 40s, early 50s. He described the view then as such.

“There were no oak trees and there are oak trees now. There were pines, not as many as there are now. And it was a white sand bottom all the way around the lake. There were no weeds, no lily pads. It was beautiful.”

When Kelly and his family first moved to Lake Wildmere, only four homes lined its shores. Today, there are more than double, with roughly 11 directly on the lake and 5-6 others across a street that border the northern side of the lake. If there is any current building, it is the trend of replacing older and smaller houses, with new and bigger homes. In this regard, Kelly shared: “You see the one over there has been torn down. It was a little fishing camp and they made it into a home...tore it down and built a big old house.” This trend has happened more than once.

The Future



Lake Wildmere in 2003 (USF)

Predicting the future of Lake Wildmere is difficult to do. One change that is soon to manifest and will likely be significant is the plan for development along the lake’s northern shore. Kelly and some of his neighbors did attempt to lobby the City of Longwood, but were unsuccessful in stopping construction of the three-story bank and three new homes. When asked what is the biggest threat to the health of the Lake, Kelly expressed concern about the impact of this particular project.

Although there is officially no formal organization with a main mission of protecting the lake, Kelly and his neighbors work towards preservation of its ecology nonetheless. As Kelly reported:

“Well, usually we’ll get together with different neighbors...get together and find out what we can do. If something happens over here, we’ll go to City Council.”

With continued concerted action and environmentally sound use of the lake by its residents, Lake Wildmere should continue to bring the peace and solitude to others that it has provide the Wainscotts over the past 30 years.

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