

# Lake Seminary



Aerial view of Lake Seminary taken in the 1980s (Jim Hulbert)



Jim Hulbert (USF)



Don Everett (USF)

*This narrative is based on an interview conducted with Jim Hulbert and Don Everett in the home of Jim's parents near Lake Seminary on August 23, 2001. Jim grew up on the lake and Don has lived there for twenty years. The two shared their personal experiences with the lake, as well as historical and biological information about Lake Seminary.*

## Personal History

During the interview, both Jim and Don were able to provide different perspectives about Lake Seminary based upon their personal experiences.

Jim Hulbert grew up on Lake Seminary, but no longer lives there. He first came to the lake in 1956 when his family moved there from nearby Maitland, where they had been living in a house in an orange grove. The Hulberts had bought their property near Lake Seminary many years before they actually built their home. In 1956, they moved to the lake with their four children. According to Jim, one of the reasons his parents were attracted to the lake was because "it was crystal clear at the time." He also adds that the lake provided a welcome breeze in the days before air conditioners were prevalent. As a young boy living at the lake, Jim spent a lot of time swimming and exploring. He now works as a biologist at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and credits his experiences at the lake as influencing his career choice. Jim says:

*"Another side benefit is, at the time, scuba diving was just starting in. I bought scuba gear, took lessons, and started diving. This lake was crystal clear at the time, so you could explore the whole lake...Actually, it probably contributed to my career. I got interested in things I saw."*

Don Everett first came to Lake Seminary about twenty years ago. He and his wife had been living in Miami when Don's brokerage firm transferred him to an office in Maitland. The two were "anxious to get out of the congestion of Miami" and were looking specifically for lakefront property in the area. They found what they were looking for at Lake Seminary. He says about the neighborhood:

*"...We're kind of isolated...It's a nice little community to be in. You can get access to a lot of things that are close by - hospitals, what have you."*

Don has been very active in the Floridahaven Homeowner's Association and once served as its president. He has also been involved in documenting the lake's history, both social and biological. He has kept records, legal documents, news articles, and maps, and has also written reports about the lake for the Association.

## History/Information

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Lake Seminary during the summer of 2001 (USF)



The wake of a boat in Lake Seminary during the 1970s (Jim Hulbert)

Lake Seminary is located in the Howell Creek Watershed between the cities of Maitland and Altamonte Springs. Nearby are Lakes Faith, Hope, and Charity. The surface area of Lake Seminary is between 55 and 64 acres. The maximum depth of the lake reaches 30 feet, although Jim believes the depth of the lake fluctuates. As a boy, Jim would measure the lake:

*“At the time, I could swear that I was measuring that one hole at about 50 feet. It was kind of cockeyed. I thought at the time there was just a single sinkhole over in that end. From the looks of the bathymetric maps, it looks like there might have been two sinkholes over here...those depths I was just getting by line. I wasn’t doing that by scuba gear. There were a lot of dredge holes. I don’t know how much of it was sinkhole and dredgehole. In those days, people could dredge up a beach without a permit. That was the thing to do...So offshore there’s these dredge holes that you can drop right down into, but they have sloughed in over the years.”*

Lake Seminary’s level has historically been about 82 feet above mean sea level. Don says that in the summer of 2001 the lake was “down about 3.5 feet from our normal level.” The lake has an 18-inch drainage well that goes down about 300 feet, which was drilled after Hurricane Donna in 1960. This drainage well allows the lake level to be controlled if it is above 83 feet. According to a report written by Don, during Hurricane Donna, the lake level reached 87 feet. Although none of the homes were inundated with water, many came close. In response, homeowners around Lake Seminary financed the drilling of the drainage well. The lake has been drained into the drainage well in 1960, 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1998. Don writes in his report, “Uncontrolled, our lake level would be 85.33’ and every dock on the lake would be under water” (Source: “Lake Seminary Status Report,” March 25, 1998 by Don Everett).

The clarity of Lake Seminary has changed much over the years. The Secchi depth in the summer of 2001 was 14.1 feet. Jim says about the clarity of the lake:

*“I think the most blatant thing that stood out to me was the clarity of the water... Well, I didn’t have a Secchi disk back in ’56, but I would try to measure basically with an anchor on a rope, which seemed to do the same sort of thing. It was about 25 feet visibility at the time...I noticed it’s up a little bit this year...But you can see that it’s gone down quite a bit. But it’s still one of the best available. This is one of our so-called ‘reference’ lakes or ‘best available for the region’, which the Department of Environmental Protection calls it. It’s still good quality compared to the other lakes in the area.”*

The lake has not had many problems with aquatic vegetation, according to Jim and Don. There have been occasional algae blooms, as well as some hydrilla and water lilies. Recently, a small strand of hydrilla was found;

however, it has not been seen since. According to Don, the recent drought conditions have reduced some of the aquatic vegetation that did exist. The lake has also been a part of LAKEWATCH since 1990. Currently, Lake Seminary residents Sarah and Rob Sharpstein monitor the lake on a monthly basis.

Both Don and Jim believe that Lake Seminary has been able to maintain its clarity relatively well because of two main reasons. First, there are no storm drains coming into the lake. Don says that any drainage from the streets must first go through people's yards. Second, almost half of the lake has not been developed because of a nearby railroad line and right of way. Jim believes that this undeveloped land acts as a buffer and as a result, the lake is left to naturally balance itself.

When Jim first moved to Lake Seminary in 1956, "it was mostly all pines." However, many of those were lost after Hurricane Donna in 1960. According to Jim, the general area has undergone some major changes in terms of habitat. He says about the natural history of the area:

*"If you look at old time pictures of the Orlando area, it was a pretty bleak natural habitat. They changed it along the way. It was a pine fire climax community. As long as fires were not controlled, pines would come in. They were very sparse. Then they started planting oaks and controlling fires. So they changed it more to somewhat of a deciduous forest."*

Currently around Lake Seminary there is a diversity of trees. Some of the trees found around the lake include pine, oak, maple, camphor, cypress, and melaleuca. Both Jim and Don have planted a few of the cypress trees around the lake. Jim planted one in his family's yard in 1956 as an experiment to see how fast it would grow. He says about the cypress he planted, "That thing has grown like crazy. It put knees all over the place." The Homeowner's Association has also planted pine trees along the lake; however, some of these were torn out by a tornado. The melaleuca trees are found on the southeastern shore of Lake Seminary. As exotic trees that are known for drawing down water, they are not welcome additions to the lake. With the help of some neighbors, Don has cut down these trees recently to control the problem. He says, "I'm sure they'll be growing up, but it will be easier to contain them."

The wildlife seen around Lake Seminary has decreased since the 1950s. When Jim was younger, some of the wildlife he saw included raccoons, turtles, and snakes. He says that there were lots of snakes when he first moved to the lake. What has surprised Jim the most about the animals around that lake is that he has never seen any alligators. He says about the alligators:

*"I have never ever seen an alligator on this lake. I used to think when I was growing up here that I would see them, but when I would check it out it would be a soft-shell turtle. A soft-shell turtle, if they're swimming, looks like a small baby alligator."*



*Children playing in Lake Seminary during the 1970s (Jim Hulbert)*



*The cypress tree that Jim planted in the 1950s (USF)*



*The cypress knees that have grown from the tree (USF)*



Don says that only recently have the numbers dropped of visiting birds at the lake. He says about the birds:

*“Permanent residents are the blue heron and egret. The big white egret. We used to have a lot of wood ducks here. One time, as many as sixty in a flock. More normally about twenty-five. I haven’t seen a wood duck here in quite a few weeks...It might be that they prefer other lakes because this lake is clearer. Since it’s dropped down we’ve lost a tremendous amount of vegetation on the side. I think that’s affected their choice in which lake to go to. I’m sure that all that stuff will come back as the lake begins to fill up, but it might take some time.”*

## Development

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*A view of Lake Seminary in 2001 (USF)*

The written history about Lake Seminary and its surrounding areas begins in the late 1800s. According to an Orlando Sentinel article, the lake was named after a school that was opened by Episcopal Bishop B.H. Whipple, who came from Minnesota to Florida in 1877 (Source: “Confederate General’s House a Token of Florida’s History” by Jim Robison, The Orlando Sentinel, February 23, 1997). In the “Lake Seminary Status Report,” Don writes that nearby Lakes Faith, Hope, and Charity received their names from the same school. The Orlando Sentinel article also documents that Lake Faith, which is southwest to Lake Seminary, was the site of a home built by Alfred Iverson, Jr., a Confederate general. In 1877 he began construction of his home and planted citrus groves in the area. Iverson gave up on the groves after the ~~1894~~<sup>1895</sup> freeze, which killed most all of his trees. He then sold the property to Sumter Brock Hill, a prosperous Maitland businessman, in the late 1800s. The Hills built a new house in the early 1900s and demolished the original structure. This home still stands. During the 1950s, Jim and his friends played in the basement of the house. He says, “We used to play in it. It was like a haunted house. That’s what we thought of it as.” According to Don, even after the great freeze, the Hills continued to operate citrus groves in the area.

Before World War II, Don says that Lake Seminary was used as a holding pond for the Parker Lumber Company. When Jim went scuba diving in the lake during the 1950s and 1960s, he came across some of the logs that had become waterlogged and had sunk to the bottom. At the same time that the company was using the lake to hold logs, there were already a few houses that had been built on the lakefront. Don believes that these houses were used as hunting lodges and were not permanent residences.

Major residential development of Lake Seminary did not begin until after World War II. Claude and Mayme Roosevelt owned the land around the lake and were the developers of the Floridahaven subdivision. According to Don, the lakefront homes were the first to be developed, followed by the homes on Lake Seminary Circle and Roosevelt Place. Those homes not on the lakefront received access to the lake through a boat ramp supported by the Homeowner’s Association. The lakefront homes have been developed only on the northern and western sides of the lake. The land on the eastern and

southern shore of the lake was not suitable for development because of the railroad. About 6.5 acres of the lakefront property on the southwestern shore belongs to another subdivision called Stonehill. This subdivision reaches Lake Faith and was developed by the Hill family.

There are currently 35 lakefront homes and an additional 40 without direct lake access. According to Don, about 64 homes are members in the association. Most of the homes in the neighborhood were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s. There have been a few cases of homes in the neighborhood being torn down and replaced with newer and bigger homes. This, however, has only occurred in a few instances and does not appear to be a trend.



*A view of Lake Seminary in the summer of 2001 (USF)*

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## **FUTURE ISSUES**

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Both Jim and Don do not foresee any major threats to the health and sustainability of Lake Seminary. Don believes that there are some health concerns with matters of chemical drainage and lake usage. He is concerned about the pollutants caused by jet-skis used in the lake. He would like to see them banned from Lake Seminary for the sake of the lake's health. Jim believes that as long as undeveloped land around the lake remains as it is, then the lake will be relatively well protected. If, however, the train tracks were one day removed, opening up the eastern side of the lake to development, then the influx of people might cause environmental damage to the lake. With the continual involvement of the residents, the future of the lake will likely remain stable.

**Written By: Christiana Schumann**