



## 1998 Honey Letter

It is early December in Iowa. Somebody threw a switch and we went from the low 70's and sunshine to the low 20's and snow. The bees went from flying one day to their winter cluster the next. I hope they had enough time to get themselves organized. Bees don't hibernate. They form a cluster around the queen, buzzing constantly to give off heat to keep her warm all winter long. They maintain her within a narrow temperature range (the low 90's) all year long. In the summer, they keep her cool, bringing in droplets of water which they fan to evaporate to form a type of air conditioning. All throughout the hive there are fanning bees moving the cool air through the hive. In the winter it is critical that the queen is warm, because if she is chilled, her sperm sacks will be damaged and she will only lay unfertilized eggs which will hatch into drones. As

amiable as the drones are, they do not do any work, and a hive will not survive without workers.

As the winter goes on, the cluster of bees consumes its honey stores, slowly moving up into the top of the hive until all the honey is gone. This past year I added a super of honey to each hive in March, giving them more fuel to get them through until they could start gathering nectar in the Spring. This tactic seemed to work as all three hives survived the winter and were very strong in the Spring. They were inspected by a Bee inspector and all hives were found to be free of bee disease and very strong. This inspection was unannounced but the nice report was welcome!

Well, you can imagine that I was feeling like a very good beekeeper indeed after all this internal and external evidence of excellence in apiculture! You

would think that our harvest would be rich and smooth and successful, would you not? Surely my bees could have some respect for such a worthy mistress?



But our middle hive did not get the message. When we opened it up they got really mad and started just losing it! When Tom started to get a bunch of bees in his veil, he toughed it out at first, getting a few stings. But then he got a bee right inside his ear canal, and it sounded like a 747 waiting to sting him, so then he had to bail out. The bees were just furious and even long distant bystanders got stung. Everyone, except our Goddaughter, Alex, and her father, Peter, got stung!

These bees in the middle hive were so nasty that I decided

that at some point I just had to replace that queen, so that the workers have a better attitude. The problem is that I just have not found the courage to open that hive again. I am going to wait until Spring when I have only 10,000 bees to deal with and not 100,000. I have to open the hive, carefully search through all the frames until I find the queen, and then replace her with a new young well mannered queen.

The harvest, if not graceful, was rich with 208 bears bottled up and a few more quarts besides. We thank Michele, Ryan and Frances, all sting victims who helped bottle the honey. Tom wanted to stake Peter in front of the hives until he was stung too. But he was spared.

We hope you have a cozy winter in your respective clusters.

Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Lyse and Tom

The Queen

