



Honey Letter 2014



Last winter I was not mobile because of my orthopedic situation (now totally resolved), and so I was not able to check on the status of our hives. Tom and the boys did check on them and they did not believe there was any activity. We elected not to purchase additional bees since I was not too mobile and all the work fell on Tom's shoulders.



After a very long winter it was a stormy spring. Many trees came down and Tom had a great deal of clean up work to do. There was a broken tree dangling over our two hives. Using the bucket on his tractor he tried to nudge it off into the ravine below. Unfortunately, machines and hills and broken trees being as unpredictable a combination as they will be sometimes, an unexpected situation developed and a hive fell over, spilling its contents. Much to Tom's surprise thousands of angry bees spilled out and flew around. He had to stop what he was doing, go put on a bee suit and put the hive back together. He thought perhaps that both hives were in fact alive. I suited up when I got home and found that while there were bees in both hives, one was a going hive and the other was a hive in the process of being robbed with no colony within it. We gave the living hive honey from the robbed hive and left it alone for the next couple of months.

During the summer we shipped out our 2013 honey to those who returned postcards saying they wanted honey. We had noticed in the past that bears returned to us for bad addresses were often crystallized because of the freezing cold temperatures the honey is exposed to. Honey crystallizes because it is a supersaturated solution of sugars and water. Heating crystallized honey slowly in successive baths of hot water will resuspend the crystallized glucose. So it made sense to us to wait until summer to ship our 2013 honey.

My mother had seen some miniature 2 ounce bears while at a Farmers Market in Chautauqua, New York.



We bought many empty tiny bears, filled them up and put our labels on them. Some were sold at a local market called Iowa

Grown LLC, which operates out of a stand on the Newport Road just north of Iowa City.

Our wonderful three ducks, Crackerjack, Popcorn and Peanut valiantly survived the cold winter only to succumb to some aggressive, hungry raccoons who tore open their wooden shed as if they had used a wrecking bar. It was a tragic end to a wonderfully happy experience. The boys completely cared for the ducks, letting them out and feeding them in the morning and locking them up inside their shed each night. We will never forget Crackerjack flying freely through the skies and then home again to quacking Popcorn and Peanut, or the three of them happily waddling around outside their pen.

There is an eagle nest on an island in the Cedar River that we can watch through our telescope set up in our living room. The eagle mates had a successful clutch of two eggs that grew into two huge young adults. One came and sat on a fence rail outside our living room window. Perhaps he wanted to see the telescope up close? It is fascinating to watch the pair faithfully sit on their eggs, trading off duties for months. We have watched them for several years.



Adolescent eagle from our nest

We were observers to nature, "red in tooth and claw" watching as eagles thrived and dear ducklings died. And, though those we worked hard to nurture, succumbed, those we were not even aware existed, survived handily. We checked on those bees later in the summer thinking we would harvest some honey. There was not a great deal there and so we left it to them. The other day, on a Thanksgiving hike with my mother and family, Helen Strnad and I could hear them humming happily inside their snow covered hive.

May you and yours hum happily together in your snug homes!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Aubrey, Beau, Tom and Lyse



Aubrey and Beau playing at a friend's wedding