



1996 HONEY HARVEST

December 1996

We hope this letter finds you and your families well. It is a sunny warm day in Iowa and the bees are flying. This honey year proved to be both humbling and exhilarating. Sadly, only one of our hives (the swarm hive) made it through the extremely cold winter. We ordered two packages of bees from York (Yoke), Georgia (Joe-ja). They arrived on schedule May 6th and we installed them in their hives on that same day. Three days later it rained six inches and remained cold and rainy all of May and June.

By the end of June we were very worried we would have no honey harvest because of the cold wet spring. Bees don't like to fly in rainy weather. They sit in their hives and sulk just like people. Beekeepers all over the state were worried about the conditions and the spread of mites which have wiped out most of the wild honey bees.

Conditions improved dramatically and when we left for the Olympics in late July, we realized our bees had recovered well. We piled on the supers and left for Atlanta.

Normally the bees are very docile until they have stored up a lot of honey. Then they become very protective of their goods. We always wear our bee suits when we work on the hives, but if we make them mad enough they tend to find a way to sting us even through our protective gear.

When you get a bee inside your clothing.....it is just a matter of time. Buzzing inside one's clothes stimulates the *strip reflex*. Even with experience it is very hard to suppress this impulse. This is why, as physicians, we have always thought the saying "it will just feel like a little bee sting", is unlikely to reassure anyone. We have both been seen running across the yard in various stages of undress trailing flung clothing and angry bees. Incidentally, this is recommended behavior when being chased by a polar bear.

However, there is one thing we have learned about bee stings, and that is that it is worse worrying about the impending sting than the sting itself. Perhaps this truth extends beyond beekeeping.

In late August two friends of ours, Kristen and Elizabeth, helped us with the harvest. At first they were a little nervous about working around the bees, but quickly overcame this. We developed a system and efficiently completed our BEST harvest ever. Our total was 150 pounds!! Twenty-five pounds went to the bakery and the rest were drafted into the army of bears.

Beekeepers across Iowa were surprised and thankful for the exceptional harvest despite the ominous start to the season. May your 1997 exceed your expectations and don't worry about the inevitable stings.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!

Tom and Lyse

