

Dronings from a Queen Bee

A Bee in My Bonnet

By Charlotte Hubbard

There are many sayings involving bees. While I'm hoping someone can enlighten me as to "the bees' knees," you don't have to be a beekeeper for long to fully understand "busy as a bee." And, if you want a close-up view of what "like bees to honey" means, put a little honey on your nose and wander by the hives. 😊

One of my favorite bee-related expressions is "bee in his (her) bonnet." I use it frequently. I thought I understood it.

Thanks to recent events, I now have a more thorough understanding.

When I tend the hives at my Dad's farm, Dad checks my duct-taped hat/veil for gaps. Dad's taken this responsibility seriously all season long, but we're admittedly a bit lax at season's end.

In September, before I installed top feeders, Dad gave my hat the once-over. He pronounced me ready to invade the home of hundreds of thousands of stinging insects.

(Side note: there's a reason why professional sky divers check their own parachutes—they have a more vested interest. There's a lesson there.)

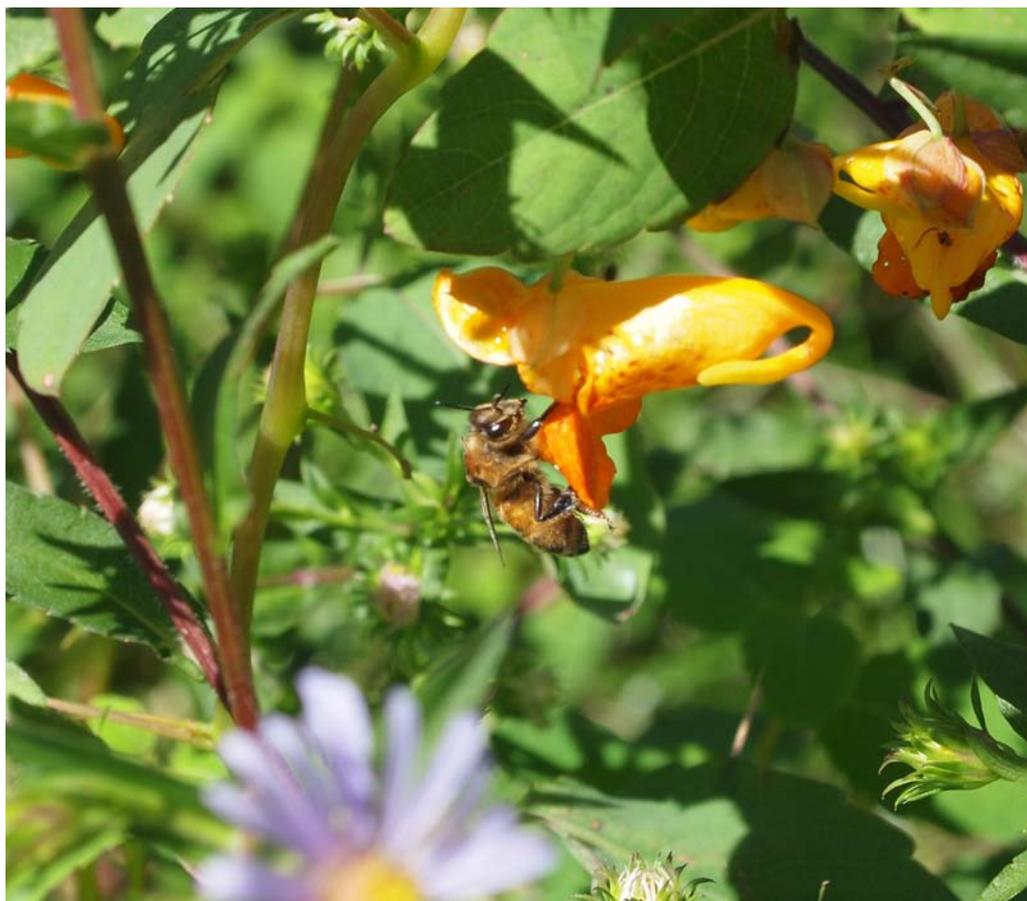
Dad's hives are atop his barn roof, a barn bordered by a concrete slab. I access the hives using a shaky stepladder from the 1930s, which we must lean against the sloping roof because there isn't room to properly open it. Yes, this scenario has danger written all over it, but when you're wearing a veil, you feel invincible, and ignore the writing.

I scampered up the stepladder...as much as one can scamper up a stepladder while wearing a beesuit. I traveled the 15 feet of the sloped roof to the flat roof with hives perched on its edge. Sure, Dad and I thought about positioning the hives back from the edge for beekeeper safety, but thought maybe the bees would like living on the edge. After all, Dad and I do. Did I mention the rickety 1930s stepladder?

The hives were very active, always a happy sign!



Exactly where are the bees' knees?



Bees knees at work.

I installed the feeders, which got me plenty of attention from the winged honeys. Had I smoked it would've calmed them down but, as you faithful readers know, keeping the smoker lit is on my beekeeper bucket list. Someday...

The bees were soon distracted by the 2:1 syrup being poured into the feeders. If given the option of swimming in chocolate versus just eating it, I'd elect to paddle around in it also, so I absolutely understand why bees dive into sugar water.

Does anyone else spend about 15 minutes trying to save every bee that goes swimming? I pulled out 40, 41 had gone in. Someday, I hope to rescue them faster than they become submerged.

While fishing out bees, I managed to get syrup all over myself, which meant I'd have a full but friendly escort away from the hives. I gathered my equipment and began slowly shuffling down the sloped roof. Gravity is a wonderful thing, but sometimes it pulls me toward the concrete a bit too quickly.

Dad was standing at the stepladder, ready to take the equipment from me. Noticing the cloud of bees about me though, he began backing away.

"Don't worry," I assured him. (Easy for me to say. I was inside a beesuit glistening with sugar water; the 200 anxious-for-sugar-syrup were outside of the suit...where Dad was.)

Oops. Not all of them were. The bee walking in front of my right eye was, I think, truly right in front of my eye.

"Dad," I said, shakily, "is that bee really on the inside?"

Dad confirmed it was, and asked what I was going to do about it. What happened to the hero of my childhood, my Daddy who took care of everything?!

To heck with the hive tool and empty gallon jugs in my hand. I forgot about the steep part of the roof where I'm extra careful, the holding on to the edge, the sitting down and sliding the final few feet to the shaky safety of the rickety stepladder. I had a bee in my bonnet, and when you have a bee in your bonnet, you don't think about anything else.

I'm not sure how I got off the roof without falling, down the stepladder and out of my suit in about four seconds...without being stung. But I did—it was the bees' knees!

Most of the time, when you're in a beesuit, you're invincible.

But when there's a bee in it with you...

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