

# Drownings from a Queen Bee

By Charlotte Hubbard

Editor's Note: Charlotte, who never had ANY intentions of becoming a beekeeper, has a dozen (un-smoked) hives. She is working on a humorous book to explain this, tentatively called 'Cancer Causes Bee Stings.'

In junior high, while plenty of kids were sneaking out behind the dumpsters to light up, I didn't smoke. When I was legal and easily 60% of my factory co-workers were perpetually puffing, I wouldn't smoke. (There was plenty of second-hand smoke to go around!) And now that I have a dozen beehives and need to smoke (them) ... golly, I just can't. Given my history, I guess I shouldn't be surprised.

Yep, I'm smoker challenged. There are classes for beginning beekeepers, organic beekeeping, making mead ... someone please hold a class on how to keep a smoker going! I'll be your first student.

I was recently at a beek workshop that reviewed the importance of smoking and types of fuel, but sadly did NOT cover keeping a smoker lit. The instructor then asked we experienced beeks about our smoking experiences.



## 2010 Heartland Apicultural Society Conference

Yes, we'll be at the 2010 Heartland Apicultural Society Conference in Tennessee, July 8 - 10. We'll bring your orders if that's more convenient; please let us know. And we'll be happy to meet you and discuss our favorite topic: Bees!

The grizzled grey-beard long-in-the-tooth beeks talked of special secret wood, slow smoldering pine and twine, and home brews of dryer lint and old woodenware that produced cool, puffy white smoke for hours.

I embarrassingly admitted I don't smoke my bees, but not because of lack of trying! I have a half dozen smokers, including the ones my grandfather and my mother used easily. My late husband's last Christmas gift to me was Kelley's most recommended smoker, and if I had a bee for every time I've lit that thing, well ... I'd have a lot more hives. "Smoker challenged?" How about "smoker inept?"

The grey-beard beeks rolled their eyes at my confession, and dismissed me as a rookie. The rookies looked at me with confusion. "How do you keep your bees calm then?" ventured one of them.

Well, being smoker inept, I've had to find alternative methods. But I am a daughter, with three sisters and two daughters of my own. Decades of dealing with rollercoaster mood swings and looks that kill has enabled me to understand the feminine mind – well, as much as anyone can. As honeybees are predominantly female, I sort of know how to calm them down.

Chocolate.

No, not for them ... for me. As the grey-beard beeks know, much of the battle of keeping bees calm is keeping yourself in the right mental place. I plan on spending the rest of the summer doing exhaustive research on what types of chocolate work best.

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