

About Our Honey

Christmas 1995

We are happy to make a gift of our bees' honey to you this Christmas. This honey bear is filled with honey we collected from our bees this summer. Although we have previously bottled our honey in the "queenline" glass jars, we have switched to the plastic bear for ease of consumption. The main advantage of the "queenline" jar is that the honey can easily be seen, and since the jar is flattened, the honey appears lighter in color. However, each time honey is removed from a jar there is wastage. It is just easier to squeeze it out of a bear and so my mother bought us 500 bears to bottle up our honey.

We started to keep bees in 1989. One of my Ophthalmology professors, Dr. Kolder, had shown us his hives one summer and we had had some of his honey. One snowy February weekend I went to the Iowa City Public Library and signed out all the books they had about beekeeping and read them sitting in a rocking chair in front of the wood burning stove. My two favorites were by Ormond Aebi, an old beekeeper from California. His books talked about Dadant and Sons which Dr. Kolder said was close by.

Tom and I flew down to Hamilton, Illinois and we bought everything we needed to start beekeeping. We put the hives and frames together and waited for our two packages of bees to arrive by U.S. Mail from York Bee Company in Georgia. The people from the York Bee Company are always a pleasure to talk to because they are so friendly, though they pronounce York as "Yoke" and Georgia as "Joe-Ja".

Our first summer we were too enthusiastic and took off our honey in July. Much of the honey was uncapped which meant that the bees did not feel it had yet been adequately dehydrated. Much of it fermented and we had to discard it! We learned from our mistake though and in 1990 bottled up lots of good honey. A patient of mine told us about a beekeeper in Ely from whom we bought lots of queenline jars which we used until my mother bought us hundreds of plastic bears which we used instead.

We took off honey in 89, 90, 91, 92, 94 and 95, skipping 93 when it rained all summer. We gave away the honey as Christmas gifts to family, neighbors, friends and work associates. We never

have enough left of our own to get through the winter! In 94 I think we had 67 bears full of honey. Tom lined up three long rows on the kitchen table and saluted them! We keep this platoon of bears in a special cupboard which we call the bearacks.

This last winter the north hive came through very strong and in May the north hive swarmed!! Luckily Tom happened to be mowing and noticed the swarm. Quickly Tom got to work sawing and nailing and enabled us to make a hive which we could use to house the bees from the swarm. We got all gowned up in our bee suits and caught those naughty bees that were AWOL, trying to escape from our employ. One bee got inside my veil and stung me also producing hives (on me). Capturing the swarm allowed us to start a third hive.

When I checked on the third hive a few days later I could see lots of brood and eggs indicating that the queen was present and doing her job well. Later in the Spring the north hive began to suffer from loss of its queen (who left with the swarm). I had to call the Yoke Bee Company in Joe-Ja and order a new queen. Later when I received my beekeeping newsletter from the Department of Agriculture ("The Buzz"), I learned that swarming had been a big problem all over the State because of the early warm Spring leading to over-population and crowding of hives.

On August 6 we had our Honey Harvest. We harvested a total of 97 pounds of honey:

74 bears

3 3# queenline jars

32 1/2 # (2 1/2 gal) sold to Cherie B.'s
Bakery in Solon

Early in the Fall I was a guest of two little friends, Peter and Nikki, at their school, where I gave a talk about bees and showed them some frames from the hives and passed around a jar of live bees.

We hope you enjoy this honey.

Best wishes for a **Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!!**

Lyse and Tom