

ARNOLD CRABTREE, THE BEE MAN

An interview with Ginger Brenning, September 3, 2008



Arnold Crabtree, The Bee Man, has been interested in bees most all of his 66 years. He was born at the old St. Ann's Hospital on Bryden Road and, although he moved around a lot as a youngster, grew up basically in the South End of Columbus where he attended high school at Hamilton, Marion-Franklin and South.

Arnold's interest in the honey bee started in the 4th Grade with a book report on "The Real Book about Bees." He was hooked, or in this case, "stung!" Arnold didn't start working with bees until he was a teenager, after he became acquainted with his grandmother's 1st cousin, Okie Hayes, who was a beekeeper. Arnold told me, "Okie knew more about honey bees, plants and small wild life than anyone he's met in his whole life." After meeting Okie, Arnold "played around with bees" until he married his wife, Darla on December 24, 1962. According to Arnold, "Darla was his Christmas present."

After marriage, Arnold realized that there was more money in the factory than working with bees, but was able to "tinker with other people's bees through the years" while he worked his 9 to 5.

After his first heart attack in 1982, Arnold wasn't allowed to go back to the factory. About that time, he found that he had a garden that wasn't getting pollinated, so he bought a couple of bee hives. Arnold says, "Darla was very nervous about that." Those couple of bee hives have grown into a hobby and business for Arnold that has brought him great satisfaction and enjoyment.

As one can imagine, The Bee Man has a collection of stories about his beekeeping experience. One of his scariest started with a man he met at a flea market near Jackson, Ohio. The man told Arnold that he had a hive at his place for years that he'd never done anything about, and he wanted it removed. When Arnold showed up, the hive was covered with an old piece of tin like a lid. Since the temperature was kind of cool, Arnold figured the bees should be somewhat inactive. So, without his smoker, he lifted the tin and moved it out of the way. Taking one step forward, Arnold's foot got caught up in a vine and he fell right into the bees. For a moment, he wasn't sure what would happen. He laid there very quietly and kept as still as possible. After their initial shock, the bees settled down and never attacked. Arnold was able to get himself up unharmed and safely remove the hive.

The Bee Man's most satisfying experiences as a beekeeper all happened in 2007. First, he grafted a queen and produced queens from it. He explained that he took a very, very small plastic cup and placed a 4-day old larvae in it. He then placed the larvae into a hive with no queen. The honey bees took over from there and all four larvae came out as queens. Also, he felt a great deal of accomplishment seeing his idea for a honey bee festival come to reality with the Lithopolis Honeyfest. And, finally, he did his very first bee beard which "was quite a thrill!"

Arnold told me that his vision and biggest goal is to start up more bee clubs in Ohio so that beekeepers don't have to travel 50 to 70 miles to reach a club. With more organizations, he feels so much can be done for the honey bee and beekeepers.

Our interview concluded with Arnold telling me, "My most enjoyable things in life are my wife first, my family second, and the bees third. One thing I know from working with the bees is that all life can't be created with just a boom. There's more to it than that. No one can spend time in a hive and not see the power of God and His presence." He finished with, "You always have to learn something new. When it comes right down to it, as long as you're learning something you feel like life is worth living."