

Skagit Valley Beekeepers



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March 2014

To be completely charmed!

The next meeting will be **March 13th, 2014 at 7:00 PM** at the Sedro Woolley Senior Center, located at 715 Pacific Street, Sedro Woolley, WA

This month we have the **Spring Potluck and Silent Auction**. We **start early, 6:00 PM** in order to enjoy the dinner and auction.

Seth Smith will also be speaking about splits and spring management

You are invited to bring items to include in the auction. All proceeds from the auction go to the Skagit Valley Beekeeper's Association. For the potluck, a **ham will be provided**, paper plates and cups plus plastic utensils as well. If you like a more substantial plate, then bring one. **Bring any dish you wish!** There's always too much, with a wide selection and it is always delicious. Label your service utensils. You can always get one from a thrift store so it doesn't matter if it is returned. **Everyone is welcome, new members and old. Spouses included!**

Things To Do This Month

- How are your bees doing? Any deadouts?
- Check weight and/or honey storage. Make sure they aren't starving.
- Clean bottom board when it is warm enough.
- Is the queen laying yet?
- Sometime this month, feed pollen patties and 1:1 sugar if you're looking to build up your hives. But if you start, don't stop until they can feed themselves

Behind Each Sting Is A Story

Working around bee hives, we're bound to be stung and I was a bit curious because for good or ill each of these stings comes with a little story. Some quite funny, some a bit amazing and unexpected and some a little scary.

My quest for stories began with an email Q&A with **Lisa Phillips** about her recent sting and her body's reaction to it but I'm not going to start out with that story, we'll finishing with it and in the meantime we'll hear a few other stories.

The first is from **Dr. Vanoy Smith**.

I was 3 years old and had been instructed to leave the bees alone. Dad had 30 hives out behind the house where we lived in Texas and there were a few hives that were really aggressive (mean). He referred to them as "German bees".

Being an inquisitive kid, I decided to watch their goings and comings, and marveling at the great pollen loads from bluebonnet and horsemint. I guess there wasn't enough action, so I sat on top of a hive in my undershorts, having been well potty trained by then, and started kicking the hive for more action.

That's when my oldest sister heard me. The story is that she came and rescued me, ran into the house and doused me in water, scraping innumerable stings out of me and herself. She says she is still a bit disgusted with such immature behavior, and the stings she got rescuing that little brat brother.

Now, a horror/thriller version by **Scott Rhodes**.

The man at Belleville Honey had made it look so easy. He hadn't even worn a veil as he showed me how to dump a box of bees into a hive.

So, I took my bees home, put on a veil, but wearing my heavy, red sweatshirt (can you see where this is going?), feeling confident, and needing all the dexterity I could muster, did not put on gloves. My son, young at the time, stood a safe distance away.

Well, you know, as it was my first time doing this, I fumbled a bit, and before I knew it there were bees buzzing angrily, swarming all around, and crawling up my sleeves.

*Then, my son, who wears an afro haircut, started screaming, "There's one in my hair!". So, I left the hive to go help him out. **That's when all the bees started streaming out of my sleeves for the shelter of his hair.***

Despite all the terror, we both ended up with only three or four stings. Still to this day, my son won't have anything to do with the bees.

Sometimes a sting comes with unexpected surprise, like this one from **Dave Neel**.

My sting story is from the first year I went down to get package bees in CA. I left my bee suit at home and the bee breeder loaned me a suit. The suit had a small tear over the right shoulder that no one noticed. After working packages all day long, the bees found the tear and 30-40 bees made it into the suit and started stinging me on my shoulder. I had no profoundly adverse reaction, just the associated pain and swelling of that many stings.

What did happen was that the frozen shoulder I had suffered for years cleared up entirely! I had been to many doctors, therapist and specialist for years with little to no noticeable improvement. This happened several years ago and my shoulder is still unfrozen.

With this story by **Chris Skeels**, after a lifetime of stings, sometimes the reaction turns out better than expected.

As a kid in Spokane whenever I got stung I would swell up really bad. Last year I completed my beginners class and bought two ten pound bee kits. When putting them in the hives I got stung around 6 times.

Yep you guessed it. I could not see the knuckles on my right hand. So I realized that I was still allergic to the bees that I was going to start raising.

Just the day before I had planned on flying out to AZ to bring my mother back to stay with us I had the wife come out to the hives to help me feed them. Of course no hood or gloves. Had been feeding them for a month with no problem of them getting mad so I felt good about it. Even with the wife saying that I should have protection. I told her it was cool. She was watching the activity of the bees as I started to pour the sugar water in and she said it looks like you are getting more activity and it's not looking good.

Just then one of those sweethearts buzzed my head and hit me right in the tear duct of my left eye. I wanted to wet my pants it hurt so bad. And did it ever swell up. I rode the plane the next day to AZ with only one eye to see out of.

So here is something different. After I took the honey from their hive or honey supers I had a lot of pollen that was mixed with the comb. I started eating it and chewing the wax.

*A week or so after that I got stung again on the hand and the neck and neither place swelled. **I have been eating the pollen from them since and have been stung several other times and the same result.** Little or no swelling. Have you heard of this? Or am I getting used to bee stings?*

Then there's a bit of a scary story from **Patrick Knowles**.

As most beekeepers can tell you, the occasional sting is not uncommon. The usual swelling, followed by the itching and eventually the disappearing. No big deal.

One day though, things were a little different. My friend Laura came over, as we occasionally did, to get together and tend bees. Whether it was her bees or mine, we enjoyed working the bees together. Our common bond. We suited up and started working the hives. We'd checked out the first two hives without incident and then turned our attention to the third, a somewhat "hotter" hive.

*As we pulled out a couple frames the bees came out to greet us. I felt a sting and didn't think too much of it. My ear had come up against my veil and a guard bee nailed me at the upper tip. After just a couple minutes I felt like something was different. **I said "somethings wrong --- I need to get to the house".** By the time I got to the house I felt dizzy and my vision was fuzzy. I stood at my counter looking at things and couldn't find the Benedryl that was right in front of me.*

Laura helped me get to the couch where I laid down and started producing copious amounts of sweat. I had never had a serious reaction to a sting before so this was quite "interesting". Laura called 911. While I was waiting for them to get there, I tried to hold a conversation. It made more sense saying it than it did to listen to it I guess, and my heart was going crazy.

*Laura is an ICU Nurse but couldn't find a pulse. When the EMT's got there approximately 17 minutes after the sting, my heart rate was 185 and they couldn't find a pulse --- anywhere. They finally found a weak pulse in my ankle. They were at the same time hitting me with epinephrine and whatever else. One of the EMT's recognized my mini Dachshund from a party we'd both been to earlier in the year (in my foggy mind, that was one of the highlights of the day). The other highlight was the trip, lights and siren, to the hospital. The shakes from the Epi were interesting too. Hours later they released me to return home. **A few more minutes without medical attention and I wouldn't be writing about this.***

This brings us to the interview with **Lisa Phillips** where she recently had an adverse reaction to a bee sting.

What happened the day you had a reaction?

Usual day. We were re-hiving a colony that was in a box that had deteriorated to the point of collapse. Was with the home owner (non beekeeper) and Clyde Caldwell.

*Got stung on my shoulder when I had taken off my hood and a bee got on my shoulder and stung me. I drank some water and took two benedryl. Then went back to work. **In under 10 minutes my nose started running like a faucet.** Seriously, like a faucet. I didn't know I could do that. Then the back of my throat was raw. Just the upper part behind nose. I also got a bit light headed. That was when I thought about using my Epi-pen. If they had gotten any worse I would have used the pen. As it*

was I was trying to figure out how bad it should get before I had to use the needle. I HATE NEEDLES. After 30 minutes the symptoms subsided. I was told the only reason I didn't have to go to hospital was because I took Allergra that morning. The Benedryl took affect after the 30 minutes. The doctor informed me that would not have been sufficient to save me without the Benedryl.

Why did you have a reaction?

No one knows why you will suddenly be allergic to bees after a number of years. The professionals say it doesn't matter how long you have worked with bees it could happen any time. I was told that if I have anything like that happen again I need to administer the shot immediately and not wait to see how bad it will get.

How do you cope with your possible allergic reaction when working bees?

I am going to an allergist to get shots for this problem. It's actually a bit more intense than I thought. I am presently up to a two bee regimen but as you know we don't work with only two bees at a time. If I were to get stung several more times than that I would be in big trouble. I will take an Allergra every morning before I work with the bees and probably an anti-anxiety med for the first few times in order to get me over the hurdle of opening the hive back up. I will never work bees without gloves and a full suit. I love this hobby and will be sad if I can't continue.

Your therapy?

Therapy consists of getting shots twice a week for months then once a week for more months, then once every other week, finally leading up to shots once a month. It's not precise and there can be set backs. That means you have a reaction to one of the shots. The ideal is to not have to do shots for that long. In my case they will keep giving me shots for a long time because I am going to be constantly exposed to the insect. I have an appointment in March to discuss the details with the doctor. I need to have more information about what to expect if I have a reaction out in the field.

What are the consequences of using the Epi-pen?

I always thought you got the shot and all was well. Most of the time that's true. BUT you must always go to the hospital after you administer a shot. Sometime the epinephrine causes your heart to get out of rhythm. It can be just as deadly as the allergen. In my case I was considering all that as well as whether or not the ambulance could get to the field I was in or the two older gentlemen I was with could drag me out of there.

People have been dealing with bee stings for tens of thousands of years and while allergic reactions are serious, it is nice to know that sometimes there are simple things you can do to make a sting a little less harsh.

Here's a little reminder from Chuck Howell

Usually I remove stingers with my credit card or hive tool as instructed in bee class. That is, scrapping the stinger out without touching it. Consequently, not much swelling, pain, or itching occurred.

On occasion, I purposely remove stingers by grabbing with my fingers or fingernails and pulling (just checking my resistance). Swelling and soreness is always greater and pain lasted longer than scrapping method. And, as you know, this is because by squeezing the stinger, it releases more venom into the area stung by the bee.

Lesson: use a credit card or hive tool to scrape away stinger barb.

And lastly a tip from **Michael Jaross**

Just wanted to remind folks that common **plantain weed, broad-leaved or long-leaved, is a good remedy for bee stings.** It's found in grass and weeds everywhere.

For the pioneering types, just pluck a leaf after you get stung, chew it up to mush, then plop it on the sting site. The sooner the better and don't forget to scrape the stinger off first. A bit of tape helps to hold the mush on. It usually takes the sting away in 5-10 minutes on me, reduces swelling, YMMV. Keep the wad of plantain mush on the sting site as long as you can manage.



Plantain (*Plantago major*)

photo (c)Betsy Kirkpatrick used with permission

For the more civilized, pluck a few leaves, chuck in the blender with a tiny bit of water, just enough to make the blender work. Make a paste, you can add any thickener you'd use in the kitchen if you want or just use straight. Keeps in the refrigerator for a week or two. I freeze some in ice cube trays and take one out every couple weeks and move to the refrigerator and discard the old stuff. Works the same way; plop on sting site and tape down. Works the same, but not as immediately available as chewed up plantain weed next to the hives.

While many folks spend lives and fortunes trying to get rid of these weeds, I save seeds and plant a few around my hives so they are close at hand. The minute I get stung I head for the plantain.

Just my two cents.

Oh, here's an extra penny. While some veteran beekeepers work in t-shirts and shorts and often are photographed without even a veil, I personally don't like the pain and shock of a sting, takes my mind off the bees. Also upsets the bees. **I am calmer and more concentrated when working my bees if I don't have to worry about a sting.** So, I always suit up and have any onlookers be sure to suit up in full-length suit, gloves and veil and make sure their ankles and wrists are secured from bee-entry. Call me a weeny, but I don't feel that bravado and bees go together. Plus, I always have an EpiPen on hand, just in case.

