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BEES & MR. EARL

by Marsha Hebert

Mr Earl and Mrs Margaret Johnston have lived in Plantation Estates for many years. Mr. Johnston keeps bees and makes honey. 40 years ago, a friend who was a beekeeper called Mr.

Johnston to tell him that one of his hives had swarmed. His friend said that if Mr. Johnston wanted to get the bees off the bush they had swarmed onto he could have them. He's now 90 years old and has had bees ever since that day.

I asked him how he managed to get the bees off the bush. He placed a beehive his friend had given him under the ball of bees hanging on the bush. He grabbed the end of the bush and shook it. They all fell into the hive. He wasn't worried about the bees attacking him because they were literally just hanging out until the scout bees came back from trying to find a new home.

So, why did Mr. Johnston decide to say "yes" when a friend called and asked if he wanted bees? His father raised bees...black bees.

Mr. Johnston and his 3 brothers were always afraid of being stung.

"I had never considered raising bees before my friend called me. I was not interested in getting stung." Mr. Johnston's bees are Italian Bees.

The bees don't require very much effort or time. Each spring, he inspects the interior of the hive and the welfare of the bees, the bee population and the amount of nectar and pollen they've brought into the hive. If there is enough nectar and pollen in the hive, he inserts some starter combs into a box on top of the hive. The bees fill the cells of the comb with the nectar and pollen to make honey. When the cells are filled the bees will then cover each cell with wax to ensure the honey doesn't come out of the comb.

Honey harvest time is in mid-June. Mr. Johnston describes it as hot, hard work. Of course, living in South Louisiana, anything you do in mid-June is hot work; but with the garb he has to put on in order to avoid being stung it feels even hotter. The first step is to remove the wax from the cells of the comb. He then has an extractor that slings the honey out of the combs and from there it finally ends up being transferred to jars.

When asked if he puts a piece of the comb into the jar, he replied that he doesn't. "Younger generations don't know what the comb is or what to do with it." However, if you want some of Mr. Johnston's honey, he will put a piece of the comb in your jar.

"I think the structure of the hive is amazing. It really shows there is a Creator because the way it is organized couldn't happen otherwise." The queen is the absolute dictator of the hive. The hive as a whole gets everything from the queen...even mannerisms. The worker bees are all female and do all the work. They forage for nectar and pollen, feed the babies, and even cool the hive by fluttering their wings. The drones are all male. Their sole purpose is mating with the queen. Before the men reading this get their chests all puffed out, you should know the instant they mate with the queen, they drop dead. The queen and drone mate in midair, the drone drops to his death, and the queen goes into the hive to lay her eggs.