

Buzz heard 'round world might save it

My wife built a top-bar beehive back in the mid-Nineties. Her successful effort was part of a workshop led by local apiculturist Les Crowder. During the decade since that class, we moved that sturdy, V-shaped, wooden, weatherproof box three or four times, but it remained vacant until last month.

"Honey," I screamed through the white, slenderizing bee-suit she had given me for Valentine's Day, "Any thoughts?"

"It's been ten years!" she chuckled, safely screened.

"Hmmm."

It was dusk, and so it was time to cajole a humongous bunch of suicide stingers from a wax-coated transporter-carton to the top bar. Like the bees, I would have been working entirely on instinct were it not for the sage advice of Melanie Kirby at Zia Queen Bee Company. "Just try not to squash them," she had said that morning as I hurried off to an appointment. "You'll be fine."

The rest of that day is a blur now, but I'll never forget those wonderful minutes of twilight that I now feel privileged to have experienced — that moment when I moved those bees. The kitchen knife in my right hand was not particularly sharp, but it didn't have to be. I'd need it only to cut the clear tape securing the carton to its top. I knelt before the short side of the white rectangle, prayer-style. I put down my knife and stretched my arms almost all the way around the narrow package. Then, tucked under the thick branches of a piñon tree, I stopped moving. I listened. I crouched closer to the box, stopped breathing, and focused. Nothing.

With all of the air holes on the sides of the carton, I fully expected to hear something. But the only buzz I heard were echoes in my head of the plangent media frenzy about Colony Collapse Disorder, the frightening phenomenon of disappearing bees that's now sweeping the United States and Europe. Genetically modified foods,

pesticides, cell phones, global warming, and the increased frequency of colonies being hauled across continents to unfamiliar farms are all factors being blamed for the epidemic. Although the cause seems uncertain, should recent trends continue, the fate of the human family is obvious. At best, we'll be very bored at the dinner table; at worst, we'll be extinct.

Not a sound.

Pointing my knife up against the tape, I quickly began to slice through the barrier between me and my bees. I got all the way around the perimeter of the box, no hum. I then removed the lid of the top bar to my left and even bumped the carton in the process. Complete silence.

Finally, I slid the top off the carton, and there it was, a reverberation beyond sound, absorbed more fully through hair follicles than through the auricle. Our bees were very much alive, even happy, and when I dropped them into their new home, I only squashed a couple.



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Over the years, I hope to keep you posted as to my beekeeping experiences. In the meantime I encourage you to catch the invigorating buzz for yourself because it may be that the fate of our food chain will someday depend on your work.

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