

# Honey

Photos By Tina Whidden

## In Your



*Pictured above: Stanford Day proudly displaying his active hives*

# Coffee

## Written By Tina Whidden

I would like to tell you just a little bit about HONEY, where it comes from, how bees make the HONEY, and “Why I love HONEY”...

Not only is honey a healthy substitute for sugar in your morning coffee, a tip I learned from my daddy, but you can also find honey right here in your Coffee, that’s right “Coffee County.” Honey is a sweet tradition for the Day Family. Many of us eat honey with our breakfast in the morning or in some desserts that we enjoy. Around this area, it is especially good on a hot buttered biscuit. Honey is a sweet treat. But it is also good for many other things such as a cold, cough, sore throat, healthier skin and hair, helps in the treatment of ulcers. Honey is a good source of glucose and fructose. It is beneficial to athletes by reducing fatigue. Honey is also a good source of antioxidants which play a big role in the prevention of cancer as well as heart disease. If you have allergies, honey can be very beneficial. Honey is made by honeybees and nobody knows bees better than the Day family that consists of generations of beekeepers.

**What’s the Buzz?** - With my love of honey and fascination of honeybees and how hard they work, I decided to visit the Day’s Honeybee Farm near Broxton, Georgia, with an invitation of course. I know I’m at the right place when I notice the sign “Honeybee Lane.” I arrived at their home around 5:00 p.m., eager to interview the bee man, Mr. Stanford Day, to get the buzz about honeybees. I was greeted at the door by his wife, Billie Jean. “Come on in,” she said. As I entered their lovely home, there in the kitchen stood Stanford having an apple for his afternoon snack. “Hello Mr. Day, how are you?” I asked. “Just fine, I’m taking a little break. I’ve been out in the bee yard working with the bees all day.”



*Shown Above: Honeybees “Busy As Can Be”*

“Are the bees working now?” I asked. “Oh yeah, they have been busy making honey all day.”

“Well are you ready to get started?” Asked Mr. Day. “We’ll sit over here where it’s more comfortable.” Stanford, his wife Billie Jean and I all sat down and started talking about their sticky but sweet business of making honey. It all started back in 1960 with Stanford’s father, Mr. Edward Day. Stanford has been around bees since the young age of six and he enjoyed hanging out in the bee yard with his dad



*Photo L-R: Mr. Edward, Stanford & Bille Jean Day*



*Photo Above: Courageous author, Tina Whidden, poses with a frame full of active Honeybees*

learning all he could about bees. “There was always something to do to help my dad” said Stanford. As a teenager, Stanford and other siblings would work the bees every summer.

**Sticky but Sweet** - “I started my bee business in 1985 and I have around 1,900 hives.” I learn from Stanford that each hive contains at least 30,000 bees. Wow! That’s a lot of honeybees. An entire hive of honeybees will make an average of 80 pounds of honey in one year. I asked Stanford what he liked best about having his own honey business. “Well, I’ve always liked working with bees but I would have to say, ‘being my own boss,’” as he chuckled. Then he added, “Well I’m the boss until my wife Billie Jean comes home-- then she’s the boss.” Stanford and his wife Billie Jean have two children and three grandchildren.

Stanford had a hard time getting wife Billie Jean out in the bees because of her fear of getting stung, but a few years later she did venture out and help when she could in between raising her two small children and a full time job at the Broxton Garment Factory. She is now a proud employee of the Coffee County School Board.

Their daughter, Stephanie, helps out by selling

jars of honey for her family’s business and enjoys her profit from her sales. Their son, Steven, does what he can to help but being allergic to bees limits him from working in the bee yard.

Listening to Mr. Day and all his experiences with the bees was so fascinating. One thing for sure, Stanford really knows a lot about bees, thanks to his father, Edward Day, for teaching him about honeybees and giving him the opportunity to work by his side in the bee yards and the honey house. Stanford’s father still works with bees today right along with Stanford as well as other family members, Jerome Day, Ronnie Day, and Kevin Day. Like I said, “It’s a sweet family tradition.”

**Sweet Success** - Honeybees have four wings attached to their thorax that beat very rapidly, giving them their distinctive “buzz.” They are flower-feeding insects that spend their day visiting flowers and other blossoms collecting

nectar and pollen. Bees are beneficial insects because they produce honey and pollinate other fruit and vegetable crops as well. The pollination from the bees will help the crops to produce more. The honeybee is very popular. It has been adopted by at least sixteen states as the state insect. Just from talking with Mr. Stanford Day, I learned so much more about honeybees than I ever imagined.

**The Bee Yard** - Stanford and Billie Jean took me out to the bee yard to check on the bees. Stanford picks up a handful of pine straw to put in the smoker (a hand held device) and lights it as he explains to me the purpose of the smoke is to calm the bees before he opens the lid on the supers (box that hold the bees). He puts on his hat & veil; he doesn’t like to wear gloves. Stanford calls me over closer to the hives as he carefully lifts out a frame from the top super so we can check the bees’ honey making progress. Hundreds of bees continue to work as I look on--- I’m fascinated. My love for honeybees just grew even more. Stanford dips out a little bit of honey from the comb to show to me. Yummy, it looks delicious. Then we walk over to more hives, he’s looking for the queen bee so I can see her. There she is with all her workers. A bee flies into my hair and others are buzzing around me but luckily I didn’t get stung.

There are many different types of bees that

live in a bee hive. But the most important is the Queen bee. There is only one queen in a single hive. She is the mother of all other bees in the hive and is the only female who lays eggs. When the queen is 5 to 6 days old, she will mate with a Drone bee, a male honeybee. He is large but slightly shorter than a queen and has no stinger. She can mate with 7 to 10 different drone bees. This is the main purpose of a drone bee, but after he mates with her one time, he will die. In 10 -14 days, the queen will lay eggs,-- as many as 2000 eggs in a single day! The queen's eggs hatch into a larva in 4 days-- it then takes 21 days to become a bee.

Then there is the Worker bee. All worker bees are female, and they do just what their name implies, they work! Worker bees have many jobs, to nurse and take care of the queen, guard the hive, scout for honey, keep the hive clean. Worker bees will visit up to a 100 flowers, making several collection trips in a single day. They will go back and forth between the hive and the flowers, bushes and other blooming plants collecting the nectar. Honeybees will only forage for nectar and pollen during daylight hours because they use the sun to guide them. Each time they enter the hive, they do so with the approval of the guard. Then the nectar is passed off to another bee in the hive that will put it in the comb. The Guard bee protects the hive. When a bee enters a hive, the guard bee knows from their smell if the bee is in the right hive. Sometimes if a bee that doesn't belong in that hive is bringing in honey, the guard will give the bee permission to enter, but if the bee has no honey, the guard will kill that bee or make it leave.

The Scout bee goes out to find the honey and then comes back does a very specific dance that tells the other bees which direction to find the flowers.

The Housekeeper bee keeps the hive clean and takes out the trash. Honeybees will maintain their hive around 90 degrees Fahrenheit. This is very important because if the queen gets too cold, she will become infertile and will not be able to lay eggs in the spring.

**Life is Sweet** - The Day Family honeybee business provides an important service for humans. Pollination is very important to humans. One-third of our food comes from plants that depend on pollination. In the US, honeybees perform 80% of insect pollination. Mr. Stanford Day will move his bees



*Shown Below:  
Beekeepers unnetting  
the Bee Supers*

around to different locations in this area, usually about 80 hives at each location. The property owners pay a fee for pollination service from the bees; this will help their crops produce more abundantly. Stanford and other beekeepers just recently sent some of their bees to Fresno, California to pollinate apricots. "Only 60 % of the bees will be strong enough to go to California" said Stanford. "We have some trucks coming in this weekend to bring back our bees, if you would like to go watch us unload them" Stanford added.

But honeybees also provide other services to humans through the products we get from the honeybee hive. The most common is honey, an all-natural sugar that we use for cooking, cosmetics, and for medicinal purposes. Beeswax is very popular for making candles. Dietary supplements, made by honeybees, such as Royal Jelly and Propolis are high in vitamins and minerals.

**Visit to the Honey house** - The honey house is where all the processing of the honey is done and Stanford explains about each piece of equipment such as an uncapper, extractor, honey pump, wax separator, and settling tanks and how they are used in the process of making honey.

He gives me a full tour of the honey house showing me some beeswax and a storage room with supers stacked to the ceiling; meanwhile the honeybees are still just as "busy as bees" making honey right outside. Stanford shows me the jars that he uses to feed his bees before everything starts blooming. "I start

feeding my bees sugar water in January; the bees will suck it out of the jars which are placed upside down on top of the supers (boxes). I usually go through 150,000 pounds of sugar which I buy in 100 lb. bags.”

**Busy as a bee** - “Bees start making honey around the 1st of March unless we have a late frost, then we have to feed the bees longer,” Stanford explains. In April the bees are working Titi bush where they will get a lot of honey. The next crop will be the Poplars. Both Titi and Poplar honey are considerably darker in color and is a stronger tasting honey. Around April 15th it’s time for the Turpleo honey, then the Gallberry bushes around the 2nd week of May. Turpleo and Gallberry honey are both lighter in color, but the Gallberry (native to this area) is a member of the holly family. Honey comes in many different colors and flavors. From what I’m hearing from the Day family—everyone likes the Gallberry honey best! As we leave the honey house, Stanford and his wife Billie Jean surprise me with two jars of honey. “Sweet!” My family loves honey. His wife Billie Jean reminds me of a Honey Tip: Honey does not need refrigeration, it will not spoil but sometimes it does granulate—if that happens just put the jar in a kettle of water and heat it gently on the stove. The honey will come back to its liquid state.

**Unloading the truck** - The Days get the important phone call; one of the trucks is on its way back from Fresno, California, and should arrive in Broxton, Georgia around 9:15 p.m. on Friday night. With this job, you have to be ready night or day, rain or shine! I gladly rush right out to meet Stanford and his wife, Billie Jean, at the unloading destination. The semi-truck loaded with 720 bee hives are safely here. It’s so exciting! As I stand back and watch, the men get suited up for their protection, even the driver has a jump suit. And here I stand without a suit, taking photos and wanting to “bee” right in the middle of it all! Two men climb on top of the loaded semi and start to untie the netting, as another worker walks around the truck sending puffs of smoke to calm the bees. After the netting is removed; thousand of honeybees are flying all around the truck and us. I’m a little nervous but too excited to worry about getting stung so I continue to go closer to take my pictures. The beekeepers use their forklifts to unload the hives. The supers are stamped with each of their names. The pallets are stacked neatly for the beekeepers to come back the next day and load on their flatbed trucks to take home. The truck is unloaded, another job well

done, men! And I’m happy to say, I didn’t get stung.

**Buzz!** It’s Saturday; another truck will be here at 6:15 p.m. Once again, I meet all the beekeepers. Today, I am even more excited. Everyone suits up, with one thing extra today- a raincoat. Stanford hands me a rain poncho, I gladly put it on.

Mr. Edward Day arrives again today to oversee the unloading of the bees. He decides to go ask the Broxton police to help out with traffic since it is raining harder now. The semi tractor trailer pulls in and we are all hoping he doesn’t get stuck in the mud.

I’m standing with Mr. Edward Day; I can tell he is proud of Stanford, Jerome, Ronnie and Kevin. Bees buzz around us as we talk about the old times and when Ann Kaiser from *Farm Woman* magazine in Wisconsin did an article about him back in 1986. Mr. Stanford Day has a history with the bees and successfully raised nine children with his honey business.

Stanford and the others start to unload the bee hives, that’s my cue to start taking pictures. Here I go running around in the rain trying to get that perfect snapshot. I can’t stand it; I have to go closer and closer to the hives as thousands of honeybees swarm around me. I feel one on my arm, then my head. I blow one from in front of my lips as a take a picture. I’m not even nervous today, I’m enjoying the honeybees. I hear the truck driver say, “Look at that girl--- she sure is brave.” Stanford and the others just laugh and continue to unload their hives.

I stayed until the last bee hive was unloaded from the truck. Wow, I didn’t get stung! Another experience I can “bee” proud of accomplishing.

The honey business is definitely not easy, but it makes for a “Sweet Living” and the Day family has shown me why they work so hard to keep this family tradition buzzin’.

✠ CCM

**The author would like our readers to know that this article was inspired by her Daddy who is 81 yrs. young and has been putting honey in his coffee for many years!**

