

Love for bees stings professor, makes honey a lifelong career

By Bill Graf

Some children are born with a silver spoon or under a lucky star. But, Cliff Walstrom was born into a life buzzing with bees.

Walstrom slashed the air about two feet from the ground and said, "That's how big I was when I got into bees."

Walstrom's father raised bees before Walstrom was born 56 years ago. Since then he has lead a honey of a life.

But no matter how sweet the honey, getting stung is usually a major event for most folks. But Walstrom is so used to bee stings that he will force a bee to sting him just to show an onlooker how a stinger pumps poison into its victim.

On a day when the bees are restless, he may get stung 100 times, he said.

But he added, "The first one-eighth or sixteenth of an inch of the stinger is from the bee, the other two inches is your imagination."

After one bee refused to sting him, Walstrom grabbed another, which stung him almost immediately. With the stinger in his finger, he described the different parts of the stinger.

At the top of the barbed stinger is a small muscle which pulsated, pumping venom through the center of the stinger and into his finger.

"If you're stung, take a knife blade or your fingernail and scrape the stinger off. If you grab it and pull it out you'll just be squeezing the poison into yourself," he said.

While Walstrom handled the bees he kept his "smoker" nearby. He explained that the smoke relaxes the bees.

Smoke screen

One theory on why the smoker keeps the bees from stinging is that the smoke makes the bees think their hive is on fire, he explained.

Walstrom said the bees will load up on honey before leaving the hive if they think it's on fire. Because they must double up to sting, the load of honey makes a sting impossible.

"It's like Thanksgiving when you get up from the table and have a hard time tying your shoes," Walstrom added.

Walstrom explained that bees have an interesting social order within the colony.

Making up most of the population are the worker bees, he explained that workers are sexually imperfect female bees.

The workers are the bees that do all the work of collecting pollen, building the comb and producing honey.

There is only one queen bee per colony. Although she has special status, Walstrom said she is "nothing more than an egg laying machine."

Royal jelly

The queen is conceived in the same manner as a

worker, he said. But if a colony needs to raise another queen due to the failing of their queen or the death of the colony's queen the workers will pump "royal jelly" into the cell of a developing female bee.

The addition of the "Royal Jelly" shortens the gestation period from 21 days to 16 days and the queen is twice the size of a worker.

Walstrom said that a queen will leave the hive five days after birth and mate with as many as five drones (male bees) while in flight.

"The drone is a free loader. He's insurance for the colony in case he is needed to fertilize the eggs," Walstrom said.

But he added, "Few ever mate and once they do, they die. Also since they're freeloaders the colony won't support the drone during the winter. In the fall the drones are forced out of the colony to die."

"That's not much of a future for the doggone things," he said with a laugh.

Pollination

Although bees are most commonly thought of in connection with honey and beeswax the most important function of bees is pollinating plants.

Some beekeepers raise bees primarily to be hired out to farmers to help pollinate a wide variety of crops, Walstrom said.

Bees can be hired for \$15 to \$20 a hive, he said. Considering that a healthy hive contains 50,000 to 80,000 bees, the per-bee wage is pretty low.

Besides the bee business, Walstrom raises angus cattle and farms near Davey, Neb.

"I puddle around in a little of everything, but bees are the main thing," he said. Walstrom keeps 1,300 colonies of his own.

Walstrom served as the state entomologist for 23 years, then in 1958 he was called on by UNL to teach a course in beekeeping.

"Ol' Prof. Bare died and there was no one to take over. If I didn't take the job, I don't know whether they'd still offer the course," he said.

"You don't graduate (from the course) until you've been stung," he said jokingly.

Many of Walstrom's students have a passing interest in beekeeping. But with the price of honey at about \$1.20 retail, Walstrom said it is possible for a person to make a fair living in the honey business.

"Used to be in the old days a colony of bees would produce 100 pounds of honey per year. But anymore a colony will produce 60 pounds a year."

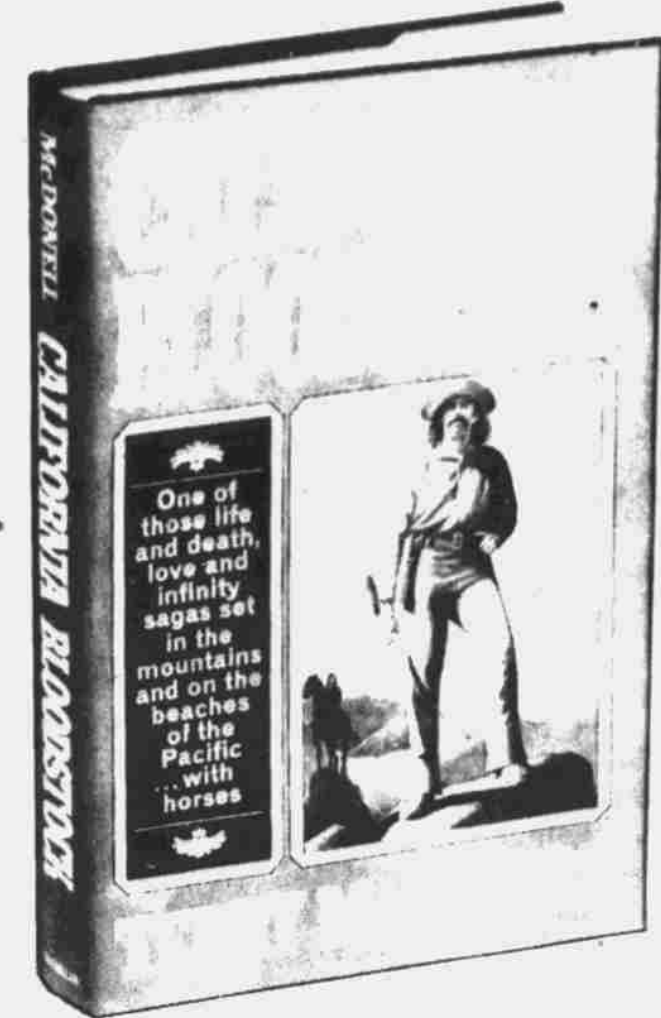
Walstrom explained that the difference in production is because farmers used to plant their fields with pollen rich sweet clover to revitalize the soil. But farmers now use artificial fertilizers and farm the same ground year after year, thus reducing the bee's pollen sources.

HOUSE of FLOWERS

Come in and let us help you
with your spring wedding
flower arrangements.

Free consultation.
call 476-2775 226 S. 11th
EAST OF THE BRANDEIS PARKING LOT





CALIFORNIA BLOODSTOCK
Terry McDonell

A madcap tale with its culprits, coolies, worm eaters, shamans, rotos, whorehouses, peyote pods, and Zorro—the Robin Hood of the West—that explains why California turned into the crazy place it is today. **\$8.95**

Open Monday-Friday, 8-5:30, Saturday, 9-5:30

We're more than a bookstore

NEBRASKA BOOKSTORE

12th & R Streets in Lincoln Center 476-0111

The Connection

118 No. 14th
14th between O & P
474-5764

SALE

Skirts & Shirts
from \$9.99

We also have a fine assortment of
-Ladies' clothing, casual tops, gifts,
bedspreads and lots of paraphernalia.

Open Mon-Fri 10-9 Sat 10-5:30

This weekend

SOUR MASH



Fri., Sat. & Sun.
May 2, 3 & 4





108th & Pine Lake Road 423-2532

Before You Choose An Engagement Ring...

... visit with Wright's Diamond Experts

Wright's

JEWELERS

CORNER OF 13th & P

"The Bright Idea"