

Gene Killion Speech at 2020 ABF Conference

Thank you Matt Sanchez and the Marriott family for what you are doing for the citizens of the world to make this a better place on this earth.

I met Chef Matt and his boss executive Chef Joe Natoli a few years ago when I gave a presentation at the ABF convention at the Sawgrass Marriott Resort in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida and we became the best of friends due to the world of the honey bee.

Since that convention of 2016, Matt has strived very hard and successfully obtained his certificate of "Master Beekeeper" which makes him the first Master Beekeeper of the 100's of Marriott's throughout the world.

I believe that Matt also has the distinction of being the first "on staff" beekeeper among all of these other Marriott's. He is now training staff members in other Marriott's the art of beekeeping. We should all be very proud of what Matt is doing.

I would like to give everyone here a little bit of history.

Do you realize that we are holding this conference in someone's bee yard?

Years ago, I used to deliver loads of comb and chunk honey to Mr. Ellsworth Meineke who was a beekeeper and also made honey candy. His business was out in the country and at the end of his career he told me that he was selling his home and acreage to a developer who planned on expanding the small village which is now Schaumburg.

The civic center here and many other parts of Schaumburg are now named after the Meineke family.

As I look around the room today, I do not see very many familiar faces due to the fact of my age. However, I do see one and that is my son Mark who drove me up here.

Mark was allergic to honey bee stings and was not able to pursue this career and so he became a structural engineer. I received an email the other day from Dr. Shimanuki and I quote "Don't give them your age; just say you're just 4 years from being 100".

Historically, I have seen, met and been associated with many pioneers in beekeeping such as the,

- Dadants
- Roots
- Kelleys
- Dr. Eva Crane
- Dr. Dyce
- Dr. Morris
- Dr. Dunham
- Dr. Fergola
- Dr. Milum....etc.

I saw in person Mahatma Gandhi, Amelia Earhart and even listened on radio to the flight of Charles Lindbergh. I'm a friend of your president Tim May, his father Phil and even his grandfather George who then was just starting his bee business.

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For those of you who haven't heard of the Killion Family, I am going to say a few words about us and hopefully this will not sound like I am tooting my own horn.

I have been around honey bees all of my life. In 1942 I enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force at age 19. At that time I had a few colonies of bees. I recorded that I sold my extracted honey to my father for a good price at 5 cents a pound.

When I returned from service in 1946 my father stated to other beekeepers that honey would sell at \$1.00 per pound some day. Some thought he was a little crazy.

My father Carl and I produced section comb honey for over a 100 years. We sold the comb honey to every large honey producer in the United States. I still have the producers' rubber address stamps, shipping labels and letters to verify this.

We were the first beekeepers in the world to sell pollen traps and pollen supplements. We were the first to package honey in plastic.

In 1951 we broke the world record of averaging 336 sections of comb honey on 100 hives and that record is still current. We had the first stainless steel extractor made by A. I. Root Company.

When my wife Katy and I went to Medina, OH to pick it up, the Roots were making hundreds of galvanized 2 frame extractors for the new country of Israel.

We were also the first to learn how to remove moisture from comb honey.

My father and I ran the bee inspection program of Illinois for 50 1/2 years.

I personally planned on getting a PHD in entomology under Dr. Vern Milum of the University of Illinois but his recommendation to me was that I work with the bees while my father ran the inspection program for Illinois.

I started with a few colonies and ultimately increased the number to 1,000. Dr. Milam's idea was that I could learn more about the bees from hands on experience than I ever could from sticking my nose in books. So I jumped in with both feet and my father would help me on weekends.

I never finished my degree nor do I have a "Master Beekeeper" certificate but during all those years I had my nose and ears down in a beehive all day long during the summer months. So my education was basically "Trial by Fire" and I feel fortunate that it was.

Before I retired from the state in 1988, I was appointed as Extension Specialist in Beekeeping for the University of Illinois and held that position wearing 2 hats for another 18 years.

When Matt learned that he would be a presenter at this years' ABF convention, he asked me to be on the program with him. Since we are good friends, I accepted. Not that Matt needed any help, I accepted because I could learn something from Matt and other beekeepers in attendance.

So my thoughts return to Dr. Vern Milum who wanted me to be "one with the honey bees".

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To learn their behavior, not by reading books or studying theories, but by observing and working with them in their natural habitat.

Therefore, my understanding of the honey bee has come from hands on experience. It has also come from interactions with novice beekeepers as well as seasoned ones. I guess you can say that my philosophy is that we can all learn from one another. Books and course work do have their place as long as they are intimately combined with keeping your nose in the hive, learning from others, and above all...keeping an open mind.

- Have you ever noticed the odor of bees when you open a hive or their alarm pheromone? It smells like peeling a green banana.
- Have you ever put your ear to a hive at dusk and hear the bees building the honey comb; a ticking sound?

Here are 2 examples of field knowledge that we can learn from each other.

While I was working in Venezuela with a group of scientists on the Africanized bee program, they were studying the location of AHB drone congregating areas and the time of day they arrived. The second day out, everyone in the group were anticipating the arrival of the drones and speculating when and from what direction the arrival may occur.

I pointed to a spot on the horizon and informed the group that the drones would be arriving in 2 minutes. I was greeted with wide eyed stares and comments like "we don't see them or hear them!".

The drones did arrive in 2 minutes and I was immediately hit with a barrage of questions.

I informed the group that the day before I had noticed a flock of scissor tail birds following drones and eating them. I could hear the popping sounds as the birds caught the drones.

So that day, I saw the flock of birds in the far distance and knew the drones were coming.

I would like to change the subject and mention something that happened to me a couple of years ago. A very popular Master Beekeeper on the web saw my book "Honey in the Comb" and a photo in it showing my father and I standing next to one of our world record comb honey hives.

We had placed 11 supers on the hive indicating how many supers that one hive had produced. This photo was taken prior to our world record which averaged 14 supers per hive.

Anyway, this beekeeper thought we were leaving 11 supers on this hive before removing any.

They wrote an article on their website about this and said that I was on the verge of insanity for working a hive that way. If they had only read my book, they would have seen my chapter entitled "Supering" where I go into great detail regarding the proper sequence and removal of supers.

This is one example where the beekeeper did not stick their nose in the book nor in the hive.

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Here's another example of how we can learn from one another.

I was training groups of veterinarians for the Mexican Dept. of Agriculture who would then instruct the peasant beekeepers in Mexico the art of beekeeping. My father and I had a technique for removing the covers.

We would use a hive tool to gently dislodge the cover and then remove it with our bare hands. As I was working with my students, I lifted off the cover with my bare hands as usual on the first hive.

As I was approaching the second hive, one of the students ran up and took the hive tool from me and placed the hook end under the cover and lifted it up completely and gave it a close inspection. He looked at me and said "Scorpions".

This was a good lesson for me.

When I was a child my father would often times have a group of queens to ship out the next morning laying on the kitchen table. I would slip into the kitchen and with the lights out lay my chin on the table and begin making a high pitched "Beep Beep Beep" sound.

Pretty soon I would have all of the queens making this same sound and it was not unlike a church choir. In later years I tried this piping sound after locating several queen cells in a large colony and needed to find other queens that had eluded me.

I would place my chin on the hive and began calling the evasive ones to the top of the frames.

We are just now beginning to study the sounds and other remarkable characteristics of the honey bee.

Did I have success at calling the queens to the top of the frames or do any of you think that I'm on the verge of insanity as well?

I am asking all of you to be mentors and help novice beekeepers in this beautiful endeavor to help the earth and all living things.

We should all feel lucky to be able to work with such a valuable insect.

Thank you so much....

Gene Killion