

THE LURE OF THE LORELEI

I love having bees in my garden. I love seeing bees flying amongst the flowers and I love seeing our hives, in their various places around the garden, as I take my daily constitutional. From as far back as memory takes me I have been drawn to bees.

I remember as a child that I would watch them with my nose nearly stuck to the flowers. As I stood there I asked my mother if she knew that bees had furry backs. She answered that indeed she did. She would be tending to peas, or carrots, or pouring a cup of tea as she sat in the shade of the gigantic Pink Robinia. I asked her what bee fur felt like. She suggested that I tell her as she didn't have the answer to that one. "Won't it hurt me?" I queried. "Why would it?" she replied. "That bee is far too busy to be bothered about you touching her furry back." Turns out she was right. I gently patted that bee and it didn't care a jot.

I would watch bees for lengthy periods and marvel at how they sped from flower to flower deciding very quickly whether or not to pick up some nectar or pollen from each one. I watched as they did strange things with their legs, front and back and cleaned their faces and antennae a lot.

The only time I was ever stung was when at nine years of age I, inadvisedly, walked barefoot out onto the back grass which was peppered with clover. My mother never pushed a point when she knew that eventually, through a lesson of personal experience, I would do as she had suggested in the first place.

Next to the veggie patch was the enormous French lavender which was always buzzing with bees. Many dogs were to come a go over the years but the only one bothered by the lavender bees was Edward. He was a large Border Collie with a suicidal fascination for them. He would be mesmerised by them and, as if entranced by The Lorelei's song, lured slowly closer and closer until, the urge proving irresistible, he would snap at the bunch of bees hovering above. The result was instant, the noise ear shattering as he screamed with the pain of his mouth on fire. Unlike me, he didn't learn that lesson with the first and only sting but kept falling for their lure. Fortunately he wasn't allergic, just stupid.

I know my mother would be thrilled to bits that I am now a beekeeper. She 'came over all unnecessary' (her words) when she discovered that the daughter of her life long friend, who lived near me in Hurstbridge, had married a beekeeper, Roger. She accepted each jar of honey from Roger as if it was the first and last jar of honey in the world. It was as if she would never taste honey ever again. Roger would apologise if the honey had crystallised and she would pooh-pooh the suggestion that the jar contained anything less than the best.

It is rather easy to begin taking one's own honey for granted. But whenever I remember the sparkle in my mother's eyes as she took possession of each jar of Hurstbridge honey I recall my beekeeping journey with great pride.

Whether it be to become a beekeeper, partake of exquisite raw local honey, or simply watch bees and enjoy their company - the lure is strong and it is mesmerising.

