

Invitation to Save the Bees

Tuesday November 22nd at 5:30 pm we are presenting the story below by David Chamlee.

We are informing the school district that there are other options instead of killing the bees that will still protect the children.

If you are unable to make it but would still like to let the board know you support our effort to save the bees please let me know by providing your name. If you would also be willing to save the bees if they are on school district property also provide your phone number.

Info

<http://www.cusd.net/board>

The Carpinteria Unified School Board meets every 2nd and 4th Tuesday at the City Hall Council Chamber (Unless otherwise specified) at 5:30 p.m, located at 5775 Carpinteria Ave. Board meetings are televised on Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. on channels 18 and 881. The public is welcome.

Agenda

<http://www.cusd.net/board/2011-board-agendas-minutes>

Bees At Canalino School

This would have happened around late spring of 2010.

I was driving by the school, checking to see if my child needed picking up.

As I was pulling up to the parking lot entrance I saw a thick swarm of bees making it's way over Linden Ave, at about 15 feet in the air.

I quickly found a parking space, (a miracle at that time of the day), and followed it as it rose over the buildings and headed toward the playground area, like a large cloud of smoke.

Just after it cleared the last building it dropped to about 8 feet off the ground. I found myself walking in the middle of the swarm. Our family has kept bees in the past, and I have collected many swarms in the past.

The bees flew around my head. I had no fear of being stung. They were obviously a fresh swarm still engaged on the honey they had eaten before leaving their old hive.

Students were running away and being excited to panic by the play area attendants yells to flee, as I stood inside the swirling swarm.

Seeing me walking with the bees some of the students stopped in their tracks and stared.

The swarm finally came to rest in the low hanging, outer branches of one of the playground trees.

They condensed into a ball, which grew by the minute as more of the flying bees came in to land.

I stood back about 20 feet to observe them and their behavior, trying to determine the nature of the swarm and it's possible source, be it wild or domestic.

As I stood about 4 or 5 of the braver student approached to see.

I determine a safe distance, which just happened to be a wall, and that was where we sat, watching the bee beard grow. It ended up being around the size of a basketball, or about 15,000 bees.

The students recognized me from an incubator and egg project I had helped with earlier in the spring, and soon other students were gathering around. As the naturally inquisitive minds began asking questions this became a teaching moment.

The children's fertile minds came up with some of the most interesting questions and were eager for answers. Amazingly, at least to me, as each child would ask a question the other would quietly listen for the answer. At times I turned the question around on them and asked the group for their ideas of the answer. The group grew from a half dozen kids, to around 30 or so. Each child was excitedly wanting to ask a question, with most, if not all, listening intently to learn the answer. The kid's ages varied from 5 up to 12, with the older children urging the shorter, younger kids to the front where they could see and hear better. I have been around children my whole life and have taught many age groups in my church. This was a very well behaved and eager to learn group.

At one point a bee decided that my shirt was a nice place to settle for a rest. The students reacted as would be expected, pointing and talking excitedly that a there was a bee on me.

I took my hand and allowed her (the bee) to crawl onto my fingers, and up and around my hand. I turned the hand around so the kids could observe her, and held it out so they could see her up close, at least those who wanted to. As we talked another bee found a shirt to land on. It belong to one of the 5th graders. She was nervous at first but soon calmed, and in short order was showing it off to the others. When the girl tired of it, I showed her how to gently blow behind the bee's wings, encouraging her to fly off and find somewhere else to land. The students went from a fear, or at least uneasiness of bees,

to a respect and a fascination of them. I even explained about “killer bees”, as a result of one 1st grader’s (!) question, and what they should do if they ever found themselves in a dangerous situation around an aggressive hive.

At times I would approach the swarm closer to check on it’s progress, and if it looked ready to move along. They were quite happy buzzing where they were for the time being.

A couple of the students asked if they could come closer. I permitted it on two conditions; moving slowly and quietly, and no more than 3 at a time. It was funny to see the first couple kids creeping along in ‘extra slow motion’.

After all that wanted to had had their turn looking at the bees from around 10 to 15 feet away, we returned to the wall and talked some more.

In all we talked and watched for over an hour and a half.

Eventually the after school time was over and the students were picked up by their parents, some of whom were dragged out to “look at the bees” by the excited children.

Even now I meet kids around the town who remember and talk with me about “the day with the bees.”

I asked the school administration if I could collect the swarm. The swarm was so docile that I wouldn’t even need a full beekeepers suit, or even the helmet. I had tools in the truck that would have allowed me to have trimmed and bagged the swarm, and an empty hive body to put them in when I got home.

I was informed that because of insurance reasons the school couldn’t allow me to collect them, but that the district had bee equipment to collect them.

Some of what follows is from direct observation of the evidence, and some as related to me later by others.

The maintenance workers came and trimmed out all the small branches around the swarm. Then they placed a garbage bag over the larger branch, enveloping the branch and the swarm, after which they cut off the larger branch.

At this point the swarm had been collected and could have been placed into any local beekeeper’s hive body. This is pretty much the exact process used by many beekeepers, both professional and hobbyists.

Instead a ‘bug bomb’ was placed inside of the bag and the entire swarm was killed.

I was told this was because of “liability concerns”.

No beekeeper in the world is going to sue the school district because he got stung by a batch of bees given to him by the school maintenance crew.

No beekeeper in the world is going to sue the school district because he got stung while collecting a swarm from a tree branch 5 ½ feet off of the ground.

Every beekeeper knows that stings go with the territory. Some even believe an occasional sting is good for arthritis.

Perhaps this extermination 'might' have been justified if the swarm had been inside of a building wall, or from a very aggressive source.

But these bees were domestic and docile, and would have been very happy living in a hive body in some orchard or field making honey all day long.

Perhaps the school district should have a list of local beekeepers that would be more than eager to assist with advice and the removal of any future swarms.

I'll bet they would even be willing to sign a liability release just in case they should happen to get stung.