Boys on Beehive Hunt Get a Stinging Retort

MY FRIEND LARRY and I used to get a fruit jar with a metal lid and meet behind his house. Stabbing three holes in the lid with a pocketknife, we were ready to capture bees.

Once we had four or five bees, we'd shake the jar, put the lid next to our ears and listen to the angry buzzing.

One day, in 1946, Larry came up with an idea. "Let's follow the bees back to their beehive and get the honey," he suggested. As a fellow 7-year-old, I liked the idea.

We followed bees from flower to flower, from front yards to backyards, and ended up roaming our whole Seattle, Washington neighborhood without finding a hive.

After chasing bees for hours, we were cutting across a large field behind Larry's house when we noticed a dirt mound in a bare patch of grass. We saw three bees fly into a hole at the top of the mound and decided to sit and watch their coming and going. We had found a beehive!

Larry and I went home to get shovels, and we each started digging on either side of the mound. A couple of bees came out of the hole and buzzed around us, but we weren't worried.

Once we had done enough excavating, we pushed down on our shovel handles and lifted part of the hive out of the ground.

A thousand angry bees suddenly swarmed up out of the hive looking for revenge and attacked us. Howling from the stings, we took off running for home, swatting at the bees on our arms and faces.

We flew into my house through the back door without stopping to shut it, ran into the bathroom and slammed the door. What we didn't know was that there was a long line of angry insects that followed us into the house.

We were swatting at bees on each other in the bathroom when I heard my sister Pat screaming in the living room. Suddenly, she was knocking on the bathroom window, yelling, "You little brats! Why did you bring all the bees
into the house?"

Pat opened all the doors and windows to let out the angry pests. Twenty minutes later, she knocked on the bathroom door, and when I opened it, she had a worried look as she looked over the mass of red bumps and our swollen faces. "Oh, no," she said. "What am I going to do with you two now?"

After a call to our mother at the drugstore where she worked, Pat drew a bath and put a box of baking soda in the water. Soaking in the tub, Larry and I pulled stingers out of our arms and foreheads. Meanwhile, Pat swatted the remaining unwanted houseguests with a flyswatter.

One thing we learned that day is there's a big difference between foraging bees and soldier bees.

—John W., Walla Walla, Washington