

SHIPPING LIVE BEES

Jennifer Berry



My queens start out alive and healthy from my beeyards . . .

Back in the day, (prior to computers, cell phones, and texting), communication with someone far away was done primarily through the mail. If you wanted to reconnect with a friend from high school, there was no facebook so you sent a letter. If you wanted to wish someone happy birthday there were no Ecards available, so you mailed a card. If you wanted to see how a relative was doing, you wrote a message by hand, put it into an envelope, sealed, addressed and stamped it, walked it to the mailbox, put it in, raised the flag and waited days, weeks, maybe even months for a response. Oh, the good ole days. Over the years, as technology in telecommunications has advanced, the need for mail service decreased dramatically; information was only a

phone call away. But the Internet has probably been even more instrumental in causing the near extinction of the hand written letter. However, for some of us the mailbox used to be a treasure-trove, back in the day.

There was something magical about that ole black box possibly holding, at any given moment, that most desired, ever anticipated package or envelope - the one you'd been waiting for seemingly a lifetime. When that day arrived, you opened the mailbox and there it was - the manila package with your, yes, *your* name on it. Finally! Will it be the magic kit that you ordered with the 10 bubble gum wrappers, or the sea monkeys from the cereal box tops you'd been saving?

The mailbox also added a sense of adventure. During a recent visit with my father our conversation turned to the innocence of youth and how during his younger years the mailbox held adventures beyond imagination. My dad grew up listening to the radio with the afternoon shows geared for kids. Following those shows were ads for all sorts of "must have" items that were to protect him from the enemy. It was during the war and the enemy could be anywhere hiding out in that small town of Owensboro, KY. He had the decoder ring to decode important messages only privy to him. He had the rear view mirror ring so he could periodically see if the enemy was sneaking up behind him. If he did see someone/something suspicious he could use his whistling ring to muster up help. But if for some reason the

covert operation called for complete silence, he could write a note for help, secure it to a tiny airplane on his ring and then jettison it off to his comrades in arms (hoping of course they were only a few feet away).

Because of the times he rarely traveled out of that small town in Kentucky as a boy so the mail box was his link to the outside world. A quarter and a cereal box top was his ticket to Battle Creek, Michigan, the cereal capital of the world.

But today that ole black box is rarely used except for unwanted bills, and junk mail. Other than Christmas cards, I never write letters anymore. Today I walk to the computer, turn it on, write my note to whomever, and hit the send button. Done! But there's something impersonal about that. Maybe that's why Christmas cards are still so popular. It's the one day a year we take a moment, turn away from the computer screen and by the light and crackle of the fire, while snow flakes gently settle to earth, and dogs snuggle around our feet, we sit down, sip warm cocoa, and actually put pen to paper.

Before starting this article I "googled" information about the post office. The post office has been around much longer than I had realized. Actually, the United States Postal Service (USPS) has been around for over 231 years. Prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence a postal service did exist but it wasn't until July 26, 1775 when the 2nd Continental Congress agreed to





... but too often end up not alive at all.

appoint Benjamin Franklin as Postmaster General. That day the USPS came into existence. The principle then and now is that “every person in the United States – no matter who, no matter where – has the right to equal access to secure, efficient, and affordable mail service.” Back in the day, the postal service was the only means of communication available and “efficient” mail service may have existed. But times have changed.

Over the years I’ve found that shipping through the post office can be a real challenge but when dealing with something live, that’s a whole new ballgame. Awhile back I started raising queens, and finally took the plunge last year to begin selling them. However, the thought about shipping queens didn’t set well with me. I decided queens would only be available by pick up. Well, that didn’t work since it limited my customer base dramatically to an area around

Athens. So I looked into the process of how to safely ship queens. I called several queen and package producers to get their feel on the situation. They basically told me this; shipping queens is no picnic. And here’s why:

Shipping live animals used to be more common, but now it’s becoming more and more difficult. FedEx won’t even consider shipping live queens or package bees. Since most of their service is completed by air the company fears packages would leak during the flight releasing thousands of “not so happy” bees. A situation they don’t want to experience plus they don’t want the liability. So no option there.

Next is UPS. They will ship live animals but won’t guarantee live delivery. In other words UPS won’t insure their safety. UPS however will guarantee that the package will arrive on time, just not alive. The USPS will

insure live delivery, however will not guarantee arrival time. Arrggh! Hence the frustration!

Each time a queen is caged a thought crosses my mind. Will she actually make it to her final destination alive and well? Once I put her into the envelope and hand her over to the postman, I no longer have control over the situation. It is now up to the post office to process the package properly, get it to its final destination on time, and then for the beekeepers to NOT do something stupid like leave the package in their garage for days because it was just too hot to go into the hives, or leave them on the dash of the car while stopping for a bite to eat, or leave them on the kitchen table for their cats to munch on or . . .

Rearing queens is not an easy task. If you have done it yourself then you know the time involved to successfully raise a quality queen. By the time a queen is caged there’s not only the minimum 45 days invested into her, but the time and money invested into a whole series of things; the breeder colonies she was grafted from, the starter finisher colonies she was reared in, the mating nucs she was housed in, and finally the drone mother colonies in which the drones she mated with were produced. So when I hear the comment “Relax lady, it’s only a bug” after losing queen/s in the mail, I don’t take it so lightly. Also it hurts my feelings when someone doesn’t treat packages labeled **Live Honey Bee Queens** with just the normal amount of care.

In the past year I have lost a total of 38 queens in the mail due to mis-handling, carelessness, or other inefficiencies. That’s almost 10% of the total number of queens I’ve shipped so far. That to me is insane. Some queens were left in mailboxes ↩

(black mailboxes in full sun during the Summer months even though it states very clearly all over the package **PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE IN MAILBOX or IN THE SUN**), some in the bottom of a bag, some never made it to their destinations, some took weeks to arrive, some were on time but just dead. And here's the kicker, since these queens are insured I have to wait 90 days before a file can be claimed and usually they want the customers to file the claim, not me.

Last year I sent several queens to South Carolina, a destination that would have taken me four hours to drive to from Athens. The queens were mailed two to three day priority, on a Monday and arrived 10 days later, the following Thursday. Fortunately, they were still alive. Queens sent to a customer in Montana mailed priority took 14 days and again the queens were still alive. Queens mailed to Huntsville, Alabama, a three hour drive from Athens, arrived in 12 days after the said delivery time. Those girls were not so lucky. Because of these and other negative experiences with the post office I've decided to switch to UPS even though they don't

insure live arrival. Here's a bit of information I found on the web about their history.

UPS got its start in 1907 in Seattle, Washington when a young James E. (Jim) Casey borrowed \$100 to establish the American Messenger Company. Out of their basement headquarters messengers ran errands, delivered packages, carried notes, and even delivered trays of food. Jim's brother along with numerous other teenage boys, ran these assignments by foot or bicycle since automobiles were not as common then as they are now. Yet as advances in technology increased so did the abundance of autos and telephones, hence the need for a messenger service quickly faded. So the company focused more on package deliveries primarily for department stores. As time marched on so did the company. By 1919 the company expanded beyond Seattle to Oakland, California. The company also changed its name to United Parcel Service and in a few short years expanded to Los Angeles and then to all major cities on the Pacific coast. By the 1930's the company had reached across the US

to include cities on the East coast. Quickly it became a leader in the parcel business, adding air service across the country and today across the world. A near 12 million envelopes, packages, boxes and crates are shipped daily through UPS.

I have not yet dealt with UPS on a professional basis so the jury is still out. Hopefully my experience will be better, if not, maybe "pick-up only" will be back on the table. But it still saddens me to see that ole empty mailbox, with it rust spots and floppy flag not standing at attention.

See ya! **BC**

Jennifer Berry is the Research Coordinator at the University of GA Bee lab. Contact her at Jennifer@BeeCulture.com.