

My name is Connie Carnley, and this is my husband Danny Carnley, and we're beekeepers. We're sitting in our Apiary, which is a fancy name for a bee yard. A bee yard is any location that has beehives. Our Apiary is located North of Milton, Florida. Behind me is a beehive. This is the home of a colony of bees. This is where they live. If you'll notice, there is a large box on the bottom. This is called a brood box. This is where the Queen lays her eggs, and this is where the bees are produced. The next two boxes are called "supers." This is where the bees store the honey. And we all know about honey. Honey is the sweet thing that bees produce. Honey, as a matter of fact, is 25% sweeter than regular sugar.

Just some fun facts about bees. There's only three types of honey bees. You've got a Queen, and there's only one Queen in this entire hive. Then you have drones, those are the male bees. And then you have the worker bees, and those are all females. Bees can fly 15 miles an hour, and they beat their wings at 200 times a second. That's 200 times a second. That's why they make that buzzing noise that you hear. Now in a bee's lifetime, they will make only one-twelfth of a teaspoon of honey. And how long does a bee lifespan last? In the summer, a worker bee's lifespan is only four to six weeks. They literally work themselves to death. And so basically some of the facts are they're fun, they're fast. They will forage three to five miles from this hive to gather nectar from flowers, which is what they used to produce the honey, which is what we get to eat and have a great time doing it.

Now today we want to read from A Boy Called BAT. Written by Elena K Arnold, with pictures by Charles Santoso.

Chapter Six: Skunk Lunch

Can it spray, yet? Janey asked.

No, Mom answered. Soon he will be able to. But when skunks are babies, they can't spray as strongly as the adults.

BAT realized he didn't know a lot about skunks. He knew they sprayed a stinky smell to protect themselves, and he knew they were mammals, and he knew they were omnivores, because they ate bugs, and smaller animals, and plants too. But he didn't know very much more than that. He decided to learn everything about skunks.

What are we going to feed him? BAT asked. Can I do it?

He's too little yet to eat, so we will need to feed him formula. They don't make skunk formula, so we use puppy formula. It's the closest thing to mother skunk milk.

Janie stood up. It's a cute skunk, Mom, but I want to go to Ezra's house, OK?

OK, Mom said, Be back in an hour.

Ezra lived three houses up the block and had been Janie's best friend since before BAT was born. Janie loved Ezra. She thought he was funny, and smart, and creative. BAT didn't love Ezra,

he thought Ezra was loud, and annoying, and a mean tease. Sometimes when Janie went to play at Ezra's house, it bothered BAT that he wasn't invited, and that there wasn't a house he was invited to visit, where Janie didn't go. But right now he didn't care about Ezra or about anything other than feeding the skunk kit.

Goodbye, he said to Janie without taking his eyes off the baby skunk's tiny face. The skunk was yawning and licking his lips with the world's tiniest, pinkest tongue. Janie left.

Mom said, okay BAT, sit right there, and I'll get the formula. She went to her bag and pulled out a can like a soda can but with a picture of a puppy on it. Mom shook it, and cracked it open, and dipped a syringe inside pulling the plunger up. BAT watched it fill with a thick, white liquid.

We only give him a few drops at a time, Mom said, carrying the full syringe back over to the table. Watch me do it first.

She took the skunk and arranged him on her lap, one hand over his back and under his front legs to hold him upright, the other hand aiming the syringe full of formula at his mouth. The skunk seemed to know what was about to happen and twitched his little, pink nose back and forth eagerly. Mom slowly pushed the plunger down, and BAT watched a thick white droplet of puppy formula push through the hole at the end of the syringe. The skunk tipped back his chin and opened his mouth, licking eagerly at it.

What a good little baby, Mom crooned, pressing more formula into his mouth.

I want to feed him. Let me feed him. I want to feed him, BAT said.

Okay, okay, Mom handed the skunk back to BAT. He tried to hold the skunk the way Mom had, and then took the syringe in his other hand.

Very slowly, Mom warned him. And finally it was BAT's turn. As slowly as he could, he pressed down on the plunger, aiming the syringe tip at the baby skunk's mouth. And it worked. The skunk's little pink tongue lapped at the formula. Droplets gathered at the corners of his mouth and some ran down his chin into the towel, but most of it made it into the baby skunk.

I'm doing it, BAT whispered, I'm feeding him.

You sure are, Mom said.

BAT knew he was doing a messier job of it than Mom had done, but the baby skunk didn't seem to mind.

I love him, BAT said. He hadn't meant to say it out loud. Mom laughed.

Careful or you might make me jealous, she said.

But it's true, BAT said, I love him. Mom said they'd have to hand the kit over to the rescue center in a month, but BAT, holding the tiny animal in his arms, made a silent promise that he'd figure out a way to keep him.

Chapter Seven: Every-Other Friday

The next morning was an “Every-Other Friday.” On “every-other Friday,” Mom drove BAT to his school, and Janie walked to her school, just like usual, but in the afternoon Dad would pick them up. First BAT, whose class let out 20 minutes before Janie's. And they would all go home to his apartment for the weekend. “Every-other Fridays” made BAT uncomfortable, like his skin was on too tight. BAT liked it when things follow a pattern, and “every-other Fridays” broke the pattern. This “every-other Friday” was the worst one BAT had ever experienced, because it meant that it would be three days until he saw the skunk it again. He had begged Mom to let him take the skunk to dad's house, but Mom refused.

The baby skunk needs to be with me, she said. I take him to work, and the vet techs can watch him while I'm with patients. Besides, BAT, I don't think your dad is a fan of skunks.

BAT even tried pretending to be sick, so that he could stay home instead of going to school. He told Mom that he had a sore throat and achy ears. BAT hardly ever lied. It made him feel itchy. But even though Mom's patients were animals rather than humans, she was still a kind of doctor.

She shined a light into his ears and made him say “aah” as she looked down his throat.

You're not sick, BAT, she said, you just want to stay with the skunk kit.

He needs me, BAT whined.

BAT, Mom warned, don't let yourself get all worked up, okay?

Sorry, sorry, said BAT.

We can help raise the kit this month as a family as long as you keep on doing all the regular stuff, too. School and dad's and homework and everything. If the skunk kit is too big of a distraction, then I can get Lawrence to take him home in the evenings.

Lawrence was BAT's favorite vet tech at Mom's clinic. He could juggle five juggling clubs, and even though he had enormous hands big enough to hold all five clubs at once, he was gentle. He had the deepest voice BAT had ever heard, deep like space. But no matter how much BAT liked Lawrence, there was no way he was going to let him take the kit home after work.

My throat feels better, he said, much better.

Mom, and Janie, and BAT all left the house together. Mom locked the door behind them.

She kissed Janie and said, look both ways. Have a fun weekend.

Okay, Mom, Janie said, see you on Monday.

BAT climbed into the back seat of the car and fastened his seat belt. He liked to sit in the middle seat, because someone had once told him that it was the safest seat in the whole car. That was one of the things he didn't like about every-other Fridays, his Dad's car – a fast, little yellow convertible – didn't have a middle backseat. It just had two side back seats with a hump in between. Mom placed the box with the skunk kit on the front passenger seat. Then she started the car and backed down the driveway. It wasn't a long drive to BAT's school. The distance from their house to his school was exactly two point three miles. BAT knew this, because he liked his mother to push the button on the dashboard each morning. The one that reset the trip meter. BAT spent the entire two point three miles trying to come up with a reason why he shouldn't go to Dad's, even though it was an every-other Friday, a reason that wouldn't make his Mom give the kit to Lawrence. But he couldn't think of anything. They arrived at his school.

You'll take care of kit, BAT asked Mom.

Honey, Mom said, I'm a veterinarian. Taking care of animals is my job. I promise.

BAT nodded. He unbuckled his seatbelt, slid across the back seat and got out of the car.

Wait a minute, Mom called after him through a roll down window. Aren't you forgetting something?

He had his backpack. He had his lunch. He had his earmuffs.

No, he said.

Mom smiled. You forgot to kiss me goodbye.

Oh yes, said BAT. He walked back over to the car and stuck his head through Mom's window. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him close. Her wavy, brown hair tickled his nose.

Goodbye little BAT, she said, I'll miss you. Then she kissed his cheek.

Goodbye, BAT answered. He walked to the school's front door, then turned around. Mom was still there in her car watching him. He raised his hand and waved. Mom honked the horn at him, three light, happy honks, and then she drove away.

Okay, we just wanna talk a little bit just a few minutes and talk about the different types of careers and jobs associated with beekeeping. Well, the number one thing of course is honey, the production of honey. Bees produce honey, and one of these "supers" can produce up to thirty to fifty pounds of honey. So one of the things a Beekeeper does is they harvest the honey and they bottle it and they sell the honey. They can sell it to individuals, or they sell it to grocery stores. Another thing that bees produce is wax, and wax is used in a lot of different ways. It's

used in makeup. It's used in a lot of household products, like furniture polish; furniture polish has beeswax in it. And you can sell wax to those companies that produce those different types of products. Propolis is another thing that you can get from a beehive. Propolis is made by bees from the nectar from buds of plants. It's kind of like Nature's cement. Bees use it to sanitize and seal up the cracks in their hives. And people take pollen and propolis as health supplements.

Something else that beekeepers do is they take their hives and use it for agriculture. One of the big agriculture businesses with regard to beehives is the almond industry in California. Every year you will hear in see thousands of beehives being taken to the California almond fields, so that the bees will pollinate the almond trees, so that we end up having almonds. If it wasn't for the bees pollinating the almond trees, there would be no almonds. Bees pollinate thirty-five percent of all of the food products that we as human beings eat. So not only are they helpful as far as selling the products that they themselves make, but they also help in developing and producing other products that we eat and consume. Just a couple of things that you can do with bees. And aren't they amazing?