



Old time beekeeper and very long time SABA member, James A. Downs Sr., 95 died on June 23, 2014. He is survived by his wife of 70 years; Marjorie of Wasilla, sons, and grandchildren.

Jim was a regular at SABA meetings, offering his expertise and experience to all who were willing to learn. He was often accompanied by his close friend, and also long time beekeeper, Janice Plante.

After his retirement from a long military career, Jim began beekeeping during the early 1970's and continued beekeeping upon moving to Alaska in 1993. He taught beekeeping in Virginia before moving to Alaska, and mentored many new beekeepers, both there and Alaska. After 37 years, and the development of some health issues, he reluctantly retired from beekeeping. He was awarded a Lifetime Membership in Southcentral Alaska Beekeeping Association upon his retirement.

***Janice Plante remembers:***

I could go on and on but ...

I remember Jim's gentle way with bees. He was always extremely careful not to hurt them during hive checks and would go out of his way, slowly bending his stiff old knees, to reach down and let a bee on the ground climb onto his glove so he could put her back at the hive entrance. He'd say, "There you go sweetheart" as she crawled off his glove.

He had a chair situated near the hives so that during the day he could sit and watch the bees. He put festive red bows on the hives in the winter.

I remember how he always got his smoker going so effortlessly while I frequently had my smoker go out during a critical moment.

Because of his age he couldn't deal with hives low to the ground so he had them up on saw horses covered with plywood. This was nice and convenient in the beginning of the season but

as the hive grew and we added box after box it got way too tall for me. Eventually we had to put a pallet on the back side of the hives so I could stand on it to work the upper boxes.

Jim would be on one side of the hive and I on the other as we inspected the hives. I'd pull up each frame and we would call out the results to Margie, stationed out of the way with a pad and pen to take notes. We'd say things like, "Frame 2 – Half capped on one side, nectar on the other" or "Frame 6 spotty brood on one side, nice football shape on the other", like that. During the nectar flow if we found a frame capped on both sides we'd pull it out and replace it with a drawn frame.

Jim usually had 2 hives and sometimes 3 so by the time we'd finished inspecting everything the back of his suit frequently looked like a bee beard as he was covered with bees. They just liked sitting on him.

Jim was a great listener and enjoyed a funny story. I loved to call him and talk bees because my hive inspections frequently involve those situations that later make a good story. He was at my house once while I was inspecting my hive ... back before I had a bee suit. A few bees snuck under my bee bonnet and I went through quite the antics getting them out, much to Jim's amusement. Soon after that he gave me his old bee suit, which I still wear.

Jim was a kind, gracious and loving person. It was my great fortune that he was part of my life.