

## Interview with Ellis Vanderpool

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Interviewer: Mike Maniscalco

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Maniscalco: Today is May 15, 2008. We are sitting in the home of Ellis Vanderpool, and we are right outside of Arenzville, Illinois. How many miles outside of Arenzville are we?

Vanderpool: I'm inside the city limits.

Maniscalco: It's actually inside the city limits? Okay, so we're inside the city limits and we're sitting in his home. Now Ellis, can you tell me a little bit about your family and kind of where they came from and their history?

Vanderpool: Most of the kids was born here in Illinois. And, well, one of them was born while I was in the service. And so other than that, they were spread around here, they was born.

Maniscalco: How many children do you have?

Vanderpool: Six.

Maniscalco: Six. Boys, girls?

Vanderpool: Three girls and three boys.

Maniscalco: Three girls and three boys. Where are they all living now?

Vanderpool: Well, one's in Florida, the youngest girl. And the next boy is up by Chicago, Aurora. And the next boy is over here at Mason City, he works for—he manages FS, Sunrise Ag. And then Kay, Rosalee Kay, is a nurse up here at the hospital in Jacksonville. And then Ron, he lives over in Iowa, or Indiana. Oh yeah, Pam, she lives over—that's my next to the oldest daughter—she lives up here, over here, Concord. And she works for the bank over here.

Maniscalco: Now, can you tell me about your parents, who your parents were?

Vanderpool: Well, I can tell you about my mother and my father. I never really knew him. So that's all I know is my mother, she was born in Missouri, and we moved over here. And she died a few years ago.

Maniscalco: I'm sorry to hear that. Now, what sort of things did she do to keep the household going?

Vanderpool: Just a housewife.

Maniscalco: Just a housewife?

Vanderpool: Work on the farm.

Maniscalco: And was that here?

Vanderpool: No. They had a farm back over here.

Maniscalco: Down the road there?

Vanderpool: My stepdad, yeah. Back in through there.

Maniscalco: OK, and what sort of farm was that?

Vanderpool: Just an old sand farm that they raised melons and stuff like that on.

Maniscalco: Okay. Now this is your farm that we're sitting on now. Can you kind of explain what your farm looks like, what the layout is?

Vanderpool: I don't know. It's just 38.9 acre, or 38.8 acres. And we made an orchard out of it and we used to raise strawberries and et cetera like that, cherries and stuff like that on it.

Maniscalco: So I heard you said strawberries and cherries. What other things do you—

Vanderpool: We had apples and peaches—

(phone ringing)

Vanderpool: Apples and peaches here, and we used to let, pick it yourself.

Maniscalco: So it was kind of where people could come and pick their own?

Vanderpool: Yeah, we let people come pick their own strawberries and apples and also the peaches. We let them pick their own.

Maniscalco: Now, on that thirty-eight acres, what kinds of buildings were there? Were there...?

Vanderpool: There was just barn and this house and shed there, and that's about it.

Maniscalco: That's about it?

Vanderpool: Uh-huh. Chicken house out here that I use for storage. We never did raise chickens, so yeah. (laughter)

Maniscalco: Okay. Now in the orchard business, I'm sure there's some tricks of the trade and things like that. And for the things that you're growing, I mean, what are some of the things that you did that made your produce special compared to other places?

Vanderpool: Well, I don't know. They're the last, you know. We don't—we've got the orchard, ain't more, just not much to it. We've not got as many trees as we used to have. But we used to, before we let people go in there to pick, we used a special stuff on there that was—for about thirty days. It's called Basic H, and we sprayed it on there so that I was no insecticides or anything on there because the federal government used to come out and inspect your fruit to see if you had any insecticides or stuff on it.

Maniscalco: Really?

Vanderpool: I don't know if they do that anymore or not, but they never come around here. But they used to come out here and they'd get so many apples and they'd take it in and check it for insecticide on it. So we got to using that there about thirty days before we let anybody in the orchard, and that way they never did find any insecticide on ours.

Maniscalco: Now, what would happen if they did find insecticide?

Vanderpool: I don't know, I never did have them find any. But knowing the federal government, you'd imagine what would happen. Probably come in and shut you down.

Maniscalco: Wow. So that was really the only government inspection that was going on?

Vanderpool: Yeah, that was the only one I had. Until they finally come out—I think it was the State that'd come in here and said you had to take your—making the cider—you had to come in and have it sterilized or all that kind of stuff that they wanted done to it. And I just stopped making it because of that.

Maniscalco: Now did you just stop because it would have been too expensive to sterilize it?

Vanderpool: Yeah, to do it. The expense would have been too high for me to do it. I didn't have that big of an operation. I know I've got friends down in southern Illinois that they do do it, but they've got big orchards. And so, yeah.

Maniscalco: So now you also made cider. I didn't realize that.

- Vanderpool: Yeah. We did that for a lot of years. But we was letting people pick their own and stuff like that. But then we stopped it quite a few years ago when that had come in, they started doing that. Yeah.
- Maniscalco: So how much were you charging for—I guess it was by the bushel?
- Vanderpool: You mean for the apples?
- Maniscalco: Yeah, for apples.
- Vanderpool: Yeah. I don't remember what. Four, five dollars a bushel, pick it your own.
- Maniscalco: And when was that?
- Vanderpool: (laughter) Ten, twelve years ago. Twenty.
- Maniscalco: Okay, okay. And then what about for the cider?
- Vanderpool: I think it was something like two dollars a gallon. Yeah.
- Maniscalco: Wow, that's not bad. Now, what about peaches? I think you said you had peaches, right?
- Vanderpool: Yeah.
- Maniscalco: How much did you charge for the peaches?
- Vanderpool: That's so long ago I don't remember. They were probably about eight dollars a bushel, I imagine, pick it yourself.
- Maniscalco: Eight dollars?
- Vanderpool: Yeah.
- Maniscalco: So then did you have a lot of people that were coming in?
- Vanderpool: Yeah. We never had to do much picking at all. People would just come in here and they'd clean them out, yeah.
- Maniscalco: How many people, on average, do you think would come through?
- Vanderpool: Oh gee. They'd come in here and pick them. If they were green, they picked them. (laughter) So I mean—though you told them differently.
- Maniscalco: Yeah. I imagine it probably got pretty busy?
- Vanderpool: Well, for us, all we did was sit around, took the money, and let them go help themselves.

Maniscalco: That's not too bad, then.

Vanderpool: No, no, it wasn't too bad at all. But I think there's some orchards down towards St. Louis that still let you go in there and pick them, yeah.

Maniscalco: So I mean, I'm seeing that you had people coming in to pick them and all these sorts of things. In comparison to the market of bringing your fruits and vegetables to some other place, to like a farmer's market, were you getting a better deal that way by having people come in?

Vanderpool: Yeah, yeah, because you didn't have the labor to do it and you didn't have to haul it no place and everything. So naturally it was more profitable to do it that way and let people pick their own. It's the same way with the strawberries. This field right out here was our strawberry field, two acres there, and it was naturally a lot cheaper to have them do that. Make more money at it than we made picking it ourselves, because you have to hire help and all that kind of stuff.

Maniscalco: Yeah. Did you ever try to do that, bringing it into the market?

Vanderpool: Yeah, we took some into the markets. We used to go to the Jacksonville Market and we hauled them up there. I never did take them to Springfield Market. Yeah, we got a friend that hauled them up there, and so he does a good job of it. I got my bees over there pollinating it, and so (laughter).

Maniscalco: There you go.

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Maniscalco: Now, I mean, you allowed the public basically into your home practically. You have to have some kinds of stories about people coming to pick stuff.

Vanderpool: Well, I don't know. The only thing that—I don't know, one time Polly, our youngest daughter, used to be our foreman and run around through the orchard and stuff. And I know one guy, she threatened to run him out of the orchard because he kept climbing the trees. We had ladders, and we didn't want him climbing the trees. And she told him about three or four times, and he still insisted on it and finally she told him she was going to run him out of the orchard if he didn't stop climbing that tree. (laughter)

Maniscalco: So then he listened after that?

Vanderpool: Yeah, he listened after that. (laughter)

Maniscalco: Very cool, very cool. And I guess one of the real reasons why we're here is bees, as you mentioned. Can you tell me a little bit how you got started in doing bees?

Vanderpool: Well, I had some strawberries first, before I had the rest of the orchard. We had strawberries a couple years. And there was an old gentleman that was going to bring me the bees so when it'd come time that the strawberries were blooming, we went to get the bees, to ask him to bring the bees—and he's had rheumatoid arthritis bad—and he said he can't pick them up, he said, You guys are going to have to move them over there yourselves. Well, we were a little nervous about that, didn't have no bee equipment or anything else. And so we put on all kinds of coveralls and everything else and went over there, and he was one of these beekeepers that didn't believe in plugging holes up in the hive. They could get out anywhere they wanted to. And so them bees flew around, and so we finally got some over here and we got them over here and decided if we were going to have to do that, we were going to have the bee business ourselves. And so that's when we started with the bees.

Maniscalco: So I imagine you got stung up a little bit?

Vanderpool: Yeah, a few stings now and then. (laughter)

Maniscalco: So you know, kind of starting out as a beginner, where did you gain your knowledge about keeping bees?

Vanderpool: This gentleman that had the bees. I got an awful lot of it from him. And then you go and you talk to old beekeepers around, and when you have a problem you go to another beekeeper and ask him what his, guys who'd been in it for a long time.

Wife: And he got some books from—

Vanderpool: Yeah, we got books from Dadants and stuff like that, and we read up on it.

Maniscalco: So really, you started in the bee business to pollinate your strawberries?

Vanderpool: That's right, that's what we started to do it for.

Maniscalco: Wow. And then were you using them to pollinate the trees as well, in the orchard?

Vanderpool: Right, yeah, oh yeah. We had them set—I always had hives, I've got hives sitting up here right now for the few trees we've got. They really work them over good. Then people started asking us to bring them over for pollination, and we'd haul them over there sometimes. We stopped that too.

Maniscalco: Can you tell me how a bee is—I mean, what's the process for a bee to pollinate a tree and stuff?

Vanderpool: They've got to visit one bloom at least six times in order to pollinate that bloom. And I'm going on what the experts say, they say it helps if you—that they have to visit that bloom six times before it's pollinated. So they just fly

around and pollinate them, and if you've got good, strong hives, you've got plenty of bees that are flying around in a swarm.

Maniscalco: And how far away are the bees traveling to pollinate?

Vanderpool: They'll go up to two miles.

Maniscalco: Really?

Vanderpool: Oh yeah. They'll fly two miles. But my bees live right up here close to it. They didn't have to go a half, quarter to them, and they were getting there thick. And they used to set on there, get on them peach trees that we had and boy, they would set every bloom on there and then you'd have to go out and knock half, three-quarters of them off because if you left too many peaches on there, they got to be little ole bitty things, see, and so if you want nice big peaches, you've got to knock half, two-thirds of them off.

Maniscalco: So I guess really, the idea is not to pollinate every flower?

Vanderpool: Well, you can't very well stop them from doing that. They'll go in there and if the flowers are there, they'll pollinate them. I just brought them back from a guy down at Grafton, and the few hives I do rent out, and he got a good set. He said he's going to have to go out there and thin 'em. The apples, his apples. They was on there thick, so he was going to go in there in seven and thin them down. Yeah.

Maniscalco: Interesting. Now, can you kind of explain to me how—I mean, you see the white boxes as the hives and everything—can you explain to me how the hive is set up?

Vanderpool: Well, they're set up with a main base of the hive, I've got nine sections in the base where usually the queen is at. And that's where she lays her eggs, she'll lay them from side to side. And then I usually leave an Illinois Super on top of that for her to lay in, also. And after that, I put a queen excluder on to keep her out, because she'll go plumb to the top otherwise. And then put boxes and boxes on top of that, add supers on there for her to put the honey into.

Maniscalco: Now you've mentioned an Illinois Super? What is that?

Vanderpool: Well, the shallow supers are smaller supers and the Illinois supers are bigger, considerable bigger.

Maniscalco: Now a super inside of—explain to me what a super is exactly.

Vanderpool: A super is a box so and so size—I can't remember right now what the size of it is—but anyway, it's got nine sections in it, also a foundation in it that they'll build up and put their honey in up there.

Maniscalco: Okay, now what's the foundation made out of?

Vanderpool: Wax.

Maniscalco: It's wax?

Vanderpool: It's beeswax. I get it from Dadants, they make it for me and I put it in there. I take my old wax down there to them, and they'll make it into foundation.

Maniscalco: So you get a wax sheet, kind of, and you put it in kind of the frame?

Vanderpool: In the frame.

Maniscalco: That's what it's called? And then it goes inside?

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Maniscalco: Interesting.

Vanderpool: And they'll build it out in combs like you see 'em.

Maniscalco: Now you mentioned there was an excluder?

Vanderpool: That's a queen excluder. It's made out of steel and it's big enough, the slots are big enough, that the workers can go through but the queen can't because the queen is about two-thirds bigger than the workers, see. And so she can't get through them slots but the workers can, see. Yeah.

Maniscalco: Interesting. So then, I guess, the workers can go up to the top?

Vanderpool: Oh yeah.

Maniscalco: And what's going on at the top of the hive? That's where the honey is?

Vanderpool: Yeah, in them supers that's above the queen, that's where it is. I try to keep an empty super down next to the excluder so they don't have to go up so high to get to the super to put the honey in it. Yeah.

Maniscalco: Okay. Now, you said the queen is larger. Now I mean there seems to be like a social classification for different bees?

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Maniscalco: What are...?

Vanderpool: All the workers are females. They've got the stingers. The queen is a female also and she's got a stinger also. But then the drones, which are males, they don't have any stingers, and they can't go up through the queen excluder



either because they're bigger than the workers. So that's the classifications right there.

Maniscalco: Interesting. Now I mean in terms of population, are there more males, more females?

Vanderpool: More females.

Maniscalco: More females?

Vanderpool: More females, yeah.

Maniscalco: And how do you determine what a drone is going to be? How do they figure out, you know?

Vanderpool: You can tell in the thing there. You see the size, the way their cells are and everything. They're a lot bigger, sticking out further, than the worker cells. Yeah. And the queen cells, they hang down, straight down like that, and they're about as big as your finger anyway. So that's what the queen is, yeah.

Maniscalco: So we have these three classifications of bees, and where are you getting bees from?

Vanderpool: I make my own. I'll take and get some of the queen cells and make more hives. They get a bunch of queen cells in there, I'll pick out the nice looking queen cells and I'll put them in another hive and put so many bees in there, and they'll—

Maniscalco: Really?

Vanderpool: Yeah. They'll make their own hive.

Maniscalco: Now, I've heard there's one queen to a hive.

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Maniscalco: Why would they be making more queen cells, then?

Vanderpool: Well, they get crowded, if they get crowded. Or in the spring of a year like that, it's just a natural phenomenon that they swarm. Because if you don't split them up and they start making all those queen cells, they will take off—the old queen will leave with about half your hive and take off. And so it's best to stick her into another hive or stick the new queen into another hive, and split them up so that they aren't crowded. Because if she's a good queen, she's probably laying 2,500 eggs a day or better. And so she can really build up a hive in a hurry. Young queens usually do that, they really lay eggs, the young queens.

- Maniscalco: And how often do you find that you need to split a hive, on average?
- Vanderpool: Every spring.
- Maniscalco: Every spring?
- Vanderpool: Yeah, that's why I come back from Arizona, because I already found one swarm hanging up yesterday out there. And like I said, I haven't gone through all the bees yet, and so I imagine there's queen cells I haven't seen.
- Maniscalco: So you found a swarm out there, which seems that a queen had left her hive. What do you do?
- Vanderpool: I just put her in another box and brought her home, another hive.
- Maniscalco: Well, I mean, how do you handle this big swarm of bees? What's the procedure? (laughter)
- Vanderpool: Me, I just stick the hive under there and I usually put a little honey on them, one or two sections of drone drawn comb, and stick it under there and shake them off in the hive, and it's been cool and nasty and usually they'll go in there. Because that's what they're doing, they're just looking for a home. Most of the swarms when they're there, that's what they're doing. They're looking for a home, and they'll go into your hive. Sometimes the old queen won't like it and she'll leave, but the majority of the times they stay there.
- Maniscalco: Interesting. And they just stay because you're providing them...?
- Vanderpool: A home.
- Maniscalco: The best home that they could really find?
- Vanderpool: Yup.
- Maniscalco: Interesting. Now, have you seen other bee operations around and how they do it? Are there any differences?
- Vanderpool: Oh yeah. We went down to meetings, the beekeeper meetings you have around, and you learn stuff from them too and the things they do. And every beekeeper's got a different way of doing things, so you just kind of go around to these meetings and you learn from them.
- Maniscalco: What are the big differences in your practices compared to the average guy, I guess you would say?
- Vanderpool: Not a lot, not a lot. We're all pretty much doing things pretty much the same. Some of them put double hive bodies on top of the bees and some of them—when I was out west, because I go out there and see the beekeepers out there

too, in Texas and places like that, and most of them run double hive bodies. Some of them are running triple high bodies. But me, I just use one hive body and a super on top, an Illinois Super on top. And that makes them strong enough that that's about all I want to mess with. (laughter) You get too many bees there and then they get sassy. (laughter)

Maniscalco: Well, bringing that point up, how do you deal with them trying to sting you and things like that?

Vanderpool: I've got an Africanized bee suit that I wear.

Maniscalco: Really?

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Maniscalco: And then?

Vanderpool: They can't sting through it.

Maniscalco: Really? What's it made out of exactly?

Vanderpool: It's nylon with some kind of a spool and stuff inside, and then it's got two layers of nylon and that's stuff's in between it, and they can't get through it. So once in a while, one of them, I'll get bent over of something and stretch it and one of them will let me have it, but not too often. I don't have too much trouble with the bees trying to sting me, no. They get your scent and they kind of put up with you.

Maniscalco: They get to know you?

Vanderpool: Yeah, yeah. They put up with you as long as you don't go in through the bottom. You go in through the bottom and that angers them. But usually you go in through the top and they'll tolerate you.

Maniscalco: Is there ever a time where you would find you need to go through the bottom?

Vanderpool: I usually go from the top down.

Maniscalco: You always go—

Vanderpool: I'll go from the top down. The only time I ever went in the bottom is if the bottom board falls off or something like that, yeah. Then you (laughter). You've got a problem. Because of that bee suit I've got, I don't have to worry about it. But they come at you pretty good then.

Maniscalco: Really?

Vanderpool: Yeah. (laughter)

- Maniscalco: Is there a warning that they'll give before they're getting ready to sting and attack you?
- Vanderpool: Not really.
- Maniscalco: Not really?
- Vanderpool: Not really. (laughter)
- Maniscalco: You just hold on tight?
- Vanderpool: Yeah. (laughter) Just go on and ignore them, and if you ignore them and you're not afraid of them, well then they usually don't attack you very much. Yeah, yeah. But those Africanized bees out west, now that's another story. That's a whole different ball game. They come at you en masse and they'll kill you. These bees we've got around here, they're probably, maybe two dozen at the most will come after you. Them Africanized bees out there, they'll be a thousand or some come after you, one shot, and then they just keep coming.
- Maniscalco: Now that's making me think. How many bees are in a hive, on average?
- Vanderpool: They run all the way between sixty to a hundred thousand, depending on how many bees you've got. I've got a friend over there, I think he's using double hive bodies and I'll bet he's got 100,000 bees in that hive. (laughter) Because boy, that old queen's laid eggs both hive bodies full, and I know he gets around them sometimes and they get pretty sassy.
- Maniscalco: Wow. And you also mentioned before that your loaning or maybe renting some of your hives out?
- Vanderpool: Yeah, I rent ten hives down there to an orchard in Grafton.
- Maniscalco: Now, does that make you pretty good money?
- Vanderpool: Not really, not this year anyway. He gives me fifty dollars a hive, but it's a hundred miles down there, and these gas prices and the old truck, I don't get that good of gas mileage. But he's a fellow orchard man, so we kind of work together. If I need apples, I can go down there and get apples. (laughter) So it all comes out in the wash, you know?
- Maniscalco: What's involved in moving the hive?
- Vanderpool: Well, I've got special doors that I slap on the front of mine. I'll go out there early in the morning before they get out and I'll put these trap doors on there, see, and then I usually got one or two supers on top of them, and I'll steeple them together and then we just pick them up, put them in the truck, and move them. When you go let them out, you better have your bee suit on because if

you've got your own hives like we've got, they don't like being bounced over the road for a hundred miles or fifty miles, and by the time you get ready to let them out, they're very angry so you'd better have your bee suit on. We used to haul them up to Tazewell County up there to the pumpkin fields, and I saw many a farmer up there standing around and watch us, and they were quite a ways off and they got zapped anyway. Because they come out of that hive and they are mad.

Maniscalco: Really?

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Maniscalco: And how long do you think they would last that they're angry?

Vanderpool: I don't know, one day? I wouldn't mess around them for one day. So yeah.

Maniscalco: So they kind of don't forget?

Vanderpool: Yeah, they forgive you after about a day. (laughter) If they're strong hives, and we always, we never rent them out to a person unless we've got good strong hives.

Maniscalco: Now, let's talk about one of the other things that these bee hives are producing, and that's honey.

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Maniscalco: And your honey business. Now, you make different types of honey. What?

Vanderpool: Yeah. Well, see, we've got these, I've got some bees set in here, and I've got bees two places across the river over there towards Rushville and beyond that, and then I've got them across the river down here. We've got bees setting everywhere around, and it just depends on where the things at—and I kind of keep track of where there at. And then when we get the certain kinds of honey, well then we just take it and extract it, kind of keep it separate.

Maniscalco: Now what sorts of crops produce what types of honey?

Vanderpool: Well, the best I've got is sweet clover, but you don't have sweet clover anymore. It seems as though some of the people in USDA got the idea it was a noxious weed and they weren't going to let the farmers plant it anymore. Until I got a hold of our congressman, who's on the Agriculture Board in Washington, and he got hostile and called them all up and told them that they weren't supposed to be telling the farmers that. And so hey, (laughter). He said if they heard anybody saying that anymore, to let him know and he'd straighten them out. But that's the best you can get around in this area, other than the black locust. And this black locust is just not very dependable. We

hope it blooms this year. It hasn't bloomed yet, but the black locust honey is in great demand.

Maniscalco: What kind of honey does it produce?

Vanderpool: It's a light honey, it's a mild honey and it's got a wonderful taste to it. Heck, we sell out of that stuff. First thing we do is sell out of, that black locust honey. Got people standing orders, waiting to get it. So you know. We even charge extra for the black locust and they still, that don't phase them at all. They'll take it over the other honey. And then we used to get buckwheat down here. There's a farmer down here that plants buckwheat along the river to duck hunt over because ducks like that buckwheat seed, and it seems like last year and the year before we just didn't get any of that either, much. We got a little but not much. So everybody seems to go for that too. I don't like it. It's strong honey. Yeah.

Wife: It's too dry.

Warren: It's my favorite.

(laughter)

Vanderpool: What's that, buckwheat?

Warren: Yeah, I've got buckwheat and I think black locust from you I think, last fall.

Vanderpool: Yeah, we got some but not much. And then we'd soon run out, we run out. Yeah.

Wife: We had five gallon barrels of that a couple—

Vanderpool: Fifty-five gallon barrels.

Warren: Really?

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Wife: For five years, I bet. (inaudible) I said, Well, why don't you take it to the farmer's market? We were just practically giving it away, and then it became popular and I said, It costs us as much to produce that as the others, I guess we'll—the five gallon barrels were not enough. (laughter)

Vanderpool: I had them setting out here and I didn't know what I was going to do with the stuff, so finally we tried taking it to the farmer's market, and people got so they liked it. Me, I usually don't sell anything I don't like myself. I taste all my honey, and if I don't like it then I just figure everybody else don't like it either.

Maniscalco: Well, what do you look for?

Vanderpool: Usually I'm a mild honey eater, and I used to get a lot of soy bean honey until they got this Round Up Ready soy beans and the bees won't touch it. And so I used to eat a lot of soy bean honey and that's a really good honey. We do get wild flower honey, which is a darker honey but it's got a fairly good taste to it. But usually the lighter honeys is what I go for and stuff like that. Usually the wild flower honey is the darkest that I—and then buckwheat, which everybody wants, I usually don't mess around too much anymore. We used to not keep goldenrod, and then we found out how we could take the smell out of the goldenrod honey by just irritating it, putting it in a barrel—

Wife: Aerating it.

Vanderpool: Aerating it, just putting them in a barrel and let it sit for a couple, three days, and the smell of the golden rod will leave.

Maniscalco: Really?

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Wife: And it's good honey, too.

Vanderpool: It's really got a good flavor to it, but that odor that came from it when you first got it, it turned everybody off.

Maniscalco: Really?

Vanderpool: It did. (laughter) But now, hey, we found out how to handle it and people buy it; in fact, they ask for it.

Wife: Some people just don't make (inaudible speech), until discovering that, there was an older guy that was not in the business anymore...

Maniscalco: Now, you know, I've heard the fifty-five gallon barrels a couple times. How much honey are you producing a year?

Vanderpool: Well, at that time I had about 250 hives of bees, and these last few years I've been losing hives. Now, I'm down to this year about sixty hives is all I had left when I got back from Arizona this year. They were all good strong hives, but the rest of them just died. I don't know, the weather and stuff like that, but I just have to build them back up. It don't take long to build them back up. If you've got sixty hives and you split them one timed, you've got 120. But I used to have about 250 hives of bees. And then, like I said, there was a lot—soy bean honey, I got a lot of that. Some of the neighbors down here used to plant yellow sweet clover, we'd get that. And bees can really get a lot of honey out of them in a hurry.

Maniscalco: Now, you mentioned that you're finding that you're losing bees.

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Maniscalco: And I've seen a few articles on disease called Colony Collapse Disease. Have you heard much about that?

Vanderpool: No. Oh yeah, I've heard all about it, but that ain't what I'm losing mine from. Mine, I think what I'm losing it from is I haven't been replacing the queens every two years like I used to. I'm getting older and I'm getting lazy, and if I replaced the queens every two years—I used to get my queens out of California up there, one big beekeeper up there and I always got good queens from them and I'd replace the queen every two years. That way you got a young queen and she keeps the hives all built up real strong, and they survive these Illinois winters a lot better. Once you let a queen get old and in the wintertime she dies, and then the hive's gone, see. You've got to keep replacing your queens. If you don't replace those queens every two years, you're asking for trouble.

Maniscalco: So I guess there's kind of a life cycle to a hive, then?

Vanderpool: There is. The queen will last about four years, up to four years, but other than that—and some of them will last longer than that, but they don't really produce good.

Maniscalco: Well, how do you go about replacing a queen? I mean, it seems like there's one bee in thousands of bees here and you've got find the right one.

Vanderpool: Well, the way I would replace mine was that I would take these hives and go into there—I'd call them up from California because they'd send them right to me. It'd take two days for them to get here, and I'd order twenty-five queens and then I'd go up there to them hives and I'd take the old queen out. I'd leave them without a queen. By the time they got back, the other queens got here and they had realized they were out of a queen, and before they could make queen cells, I stuck that queen in there and then she'd come out that—because they come in a little box about that long and ye wide and that thick, and they got about two or three bees in there with her. And you stick them in there and they've got a little candy on one end, and they'll get in there and eat that candy out of there, and in about 24 hours they'll release her and accept her. I've never had any not accept the queens by doing it that way. And I seriously thought about getting me some queens this year from that company out there.

Maniscalco: What's the purpose of having a couple other bees in with the queen?

Vanderpool: Well, I guess it's to kind of feed her and also to keep her company I guess, or something. Because they always put two to six bees in there with her.

Maniscalco: Interesting. And then they also eat that little candy?



Vanderpool: Yeah, yeah. It's got about that much on the end of it, probably.

Wife: Just like a little plug.

Vanderpool: Just a plug in there, yeah.

Maniscalco: Interesting. Now to kind of get back to the topic of honey, how exactly do you get the honey out of the hive?

Vanderpool: I've got a honey shed out there that I've fixed up, and it's got a stainless steel extractor in it, and you cut the top off the sections that's on there and then you put it in there and spin it out.

Wife: Works electrically.

Vanderpool: Yeah, cut it off with an electric heated knife and then you spin it out.

Maniscalco: Now, there's probably some wax that gets in the honey. Is it strained?

Vanderpool: We run it through cheese cloth. Twice through cheese cloth, yeah. Double run it through there, yeah, and that takes all the impurities out of it. It's still raw honey. We don't heat our honey, we just—it's like it comes out of the comb, that's what you get. Yeah, and people will notice a difference between honey that's in the comb and honey extracted. When you extract it, you take some of the flavor away from it. And it tastes better when it's just right in the comb. I have cut comb honey, too, and so it tastes better when it's in the cut comb like that than it does the extracted honey. That spinning it out, it seems to take some of the taste out or something. It gets that flavor out some way or the other. I don't know what it is, but I always thought it tastes better when it comes right out of the comb.

Maniscalco: And how much do you charge for your honey?

Vanderpool: I don't know what we're going to charge this year. We've got some of it in the grocery's shelf up here, the county market or festival foods, and we're charging—what is it? Three dollars and—

Wife: Eighty-nine cents.

Vanderpool: Eight-nine cents for one pound, I think it is.

Maniscalco: How long a process are we talking about to get honey out of the hive? I mean, is it a day long process?

Vanderpool: Yeah. It depends on how many supers you've got. You can go through them pretty fast, but it just takes so much time.

Wife: Like a day or two to get the supers all in, extracted, a couple more.

Vanderpool: If the honey flow is on, well, you can take them supers and put them right back on and they'll fill it back up in a hurry, in the honey flow. It seems like they like to fill that up faster than they do the ones when you're just fresh putting it on. Yeah.

Maniscalco: Now we were talking a little bit about disease and this Colony Collapse disease. Are there any other big disease fears out there for honey bees?

Vanderpool: Well, you've got foulbrood in Illinois, which you've got to watch out for.

Maniscalco: What is that one?

Vanderpool: American foulbrood.

Maniscalco: foulbrood?

Vanderpool: Yeah.

Maniscalco: What does it do?

Vanderpool: It gets in there and it kills the new bees and everything, and as it dies off it gets a terrible smell to it. And you can tell when you've got it. Looking after it so long, looking at it, you can tell by looking at the sections whether they've got foulbrood in them or not.

Maniscalco: And how do you deal with that?

Vanderpool: Destroy the hive.

Maniscalco: Really? That's got to be a hard thing to do.

Vanderpool: Well, hey. It's better to destroy one hive than to have all your bees get it. Because they can transport from one to the other. When the hive gets weak, the other bees will go in and rob it and then you've got it in another hive. So the best thing to do is just destroy the hive. You don't have to destroy the box and everything like that, but you've got to kill the bees and then you take them and pile them out in a hole in the ground and set them on fire and burn them so the other bees can't get to it—the honey and everything. Because them spores get in the honey and everything. I've got a torch out there, and we burn the torch and I take it and I scorch the inside of the hives and the lids and everything to make sure there ain't no disease left. But I haven't had any foulbrood for several years now because we stopped using chemicals and stuff on our bees, so we don't use chemicals anymore. And we don't have any mites and we don't—just kind of got away from having the bees, the trouble with them.

Maniscalco: Now what would you use chemicals for?

Vanderpool: To kill the mites. And for that foulbrood and stuff like that. A lot of people are using lots of that there.

Maniscalco: So are there any other hazards for bees besides those ones?

Vanderpool: I've had people run in, deliberately run into them with cars. I had one this year when I got back from Arizona, some guy had rammed into them and turned them over. One of the hives died but the other ones, they were just very angry but it wasn't hurt.

Maniscalco: And, I mean—

Vanderpool: Just devilment.

Maniscalco: And the one that survived, I mean how did they survive? It was probably a couple days before you—

Vanderpool: Well, when the hive turned over—yeah, I don't know how long it had been, more—when the hive turned over, it didn't fall apart. It just stayed all in one, together, see. But the other one fell apart. The cold weather and stuff got in there and killed them.

Maniscalco: So it seems like the hives are very sensitive to temperature.

Vanderpool: Yes, yes they are.

Maniscalco: What kinds of maximums, minimums can they handle?

Vanderpool: Well, they usually don't leave the hive much after it reaches forty degrees. They usually don't leave the hive too much after that. The best temperature I've found for working my bees was between seventy and eighty degrees. And I'm a warm weather person so for me, that's all right. (laughter) I've been out there in ninety degree weather working my bees, and everybody says, you're going to get heatstroke. But hey, that's when I like to work them.

Maniscalco: Now speaking of working your bees, I've seen people use smokers and things like that. Is that what you do?

Vanderpool: I use a smoker but I don't use it—I use it sparingly. If they're not rowdy and coming at you strong, I don't use a smoker much. That irritates 'em and I'm sure that's what makes them get angry if you go using a lot of it, yeah. But of course like, I said, I've got that bee suit and they can't get to me anyway, so I just sometimes go in there and just ignore 'em, because they can't get to me and they really ain't coming at me anyway, just a dozen coming up there and so I don't pay attention to them much.

Maniscalco: Now what about government regulations on bee keeping? Are there any?

Vanderpool: Well, there's state. There ain't too much of the federal; there's state. You can't move them from one county to the next without getting an inspector to come out and inspect your hives and stuff like that for foulbrood. It's a good law, keep foulbrood from being spread around. We've had to bring in from out of state, and some of them have got foulbrood in them. So it's a good law, you know?

Maniscalco: So let's say you're deciding to move a hive. You have to call the inspector?

Vanderpool: Yeah, she'll come out and inspect it and check to make sure there ain't no foulbrood in it, and then they'll give you a certificate that you can move it wherever you're going, and they're pretty good at it. The only thing is the State of Illinois now, they're cutting the bee inspectors down so much that they're not going to run—I think there's three or four bee inspectors now is all we've got for the whole state, and they're liking to run them to death. And most of these bee inspectors are older people, they ain't young people. So hey, and they don't pay them nothing much.

Wife: One had a stroke the first of the year. Yeah, he's in his wheelchair and getting therapy, but I think his bee inspecting days are over. He's the Treasurer of the State Beekeeper Association, too. We didn't know it until word got back to us from a friend.

Vanderpool: Yeah, so that's about the only regulations you've got. And then of course the state's got the regulation on the honey, you've got to have a certified honey house in order to go selling it at farmer's markets or some place like that.

Maniscalco: Really?

Vanderpool: You know, some of these here are local health departments, they've got their own rules and regulations, so I got my honey house inspected through the State of Illinois and that way they won't bother me. Because if they do, they've got to go fight the state. (laughter) I found out that you don't win when you go fighting the state, yeah.

Wife: And we always thought that if you didn't have an inspected honey house, a State-okayed honey house, that you could sell honey and people came to your door and bought it. But last November, our State Beekeeper's meeting, Elizabeth Watkins from the State Health Department was there and she said, No, even that is illegal.

Maniscalco: Really? So I guess they kind of have limited you to your market that you sell in?

Vanderpool: Well, you'd better get you a registered honey house.

Wife: If you don't have a registered honey house, you're not allowed to sell honey.

- Vanderpool: I even sell it in grocery stores, like up there, the State can't control that, I guess, because that's interstate commerce or something.
- Wife: But we had to register that with the USDA, though, that we were doing that.
- Vanderpool: Well, that's true. And then Homeland Security, we had to register with them. (laughter) We had to register with Homeland Security because we sell at to the grocery store.
- Maniscalco: Because you sell your honey to a grocery store, you had to register with Homeland Security? Interesting.
- Vanderpool: Which is no big deal. I just had to fill out a form and send it in and that was the last we heard of them. But they got to know in case somebody goes and gets sick on the honey, and then they'll check it out or make sure some of these geeks from overseas don't come over here and poison it or something. I've got nothing to—got no complaints about that. I mean, you know, it's for the welfare of everybody that you do that.
- Maniscalco: Interesting. Now you've said that you sell a little bit to a grocery store around here.
- Vanderpool: Yeah.
- Maniscalco: Where else are you selling your honey?
- Vanderpool: Other than farmer's markets, no place—or if somebody comes up here and wants honey, I'll sell it to them, yeah.
- Wife: Springfield Farmer's Market.
- Vanderpool: Springfield Farmer's Market, yeah.
- Maniscalco: Do you go to any other farmer's markets?
- Vanderpool: Well, we used to but not anymore. I used to go to Macomb up there. I don't know whether I'll go back this year or not, but I might.
- Maniscalco: So what's the fun stuff to do at the farmer's market, then?
- Vanderpool: Well, you visit with people and in general you have a good time.
- Wife: It's a good outlet for—[honey]
- Vanderpool: It's a good outlet for it, yeah. You visit with your customers and you get so that your customers know you're there, and if they want honey, they'll come there and get it. Every once in a while I've got an observation hive, and every once in a while I'll put some bees in it and take it up there so that people can see it.

Maniscalco: Really? Well, that must be pretty neat.

Vanderpool: It's fun. (laughter) The kids get a bang out of it.

Maniscalco: I'm sure. Now, none of your kids are involved in beekeeping?

Vanderpool: No, they went to college and so they don't have to mess around with bees like I do. They've got good jobs. (laughter)

Maniscalco: I mean, would you have liked them to get involved in the orchard and the beekeeping?

Vanderpool: Well, I more or less let them do the choosing. We didn't insist that they do that or something like that. We more or less insisted that they go to college, but other than that we didn't.

Wife: Of course, it's a lot of work, you know. Labor, manual labor.

Maniscalco: I imagine.

Vanderpool: And really, the profit end on it ain't that great, but it's all right.

Maniscalco: And am I kind of gathering that you're not really growing anymore fruits up here?

Vanderpool: I've got a few apples and peaches back here, but other than that we've just kind of got alfalfa planted on the berry fields and stuff like that. So we've got a few apples and a few peach trees, but other than that we—

Wife: (inaudible speech)

Vanderpool: Chemicals got so expensive that you just have to charge so much that it really is not very profitable anymore, yeah.

Maniscalco: And in terms of keeping bees, have you kind of been pulling back a little bit?

Vanderpool: Not really. Mother Nature's been doing that for me, but I keep trying to build them up. I've got bee equipment all over the place out here. I've got enough bee equipment for a thousand hives of bees, and so I don't know. Just Mother Nature thins them out and then I try to build them back up because I like to work the bees. I get along with them good, and people like to have them around. I have a lot of farmers that like to have them setting around, and so— I've got plenty of places to put them, I just haven't got the bees to put.

Maniscalco: Now, do you ever—I mean, bees sting people of course. Do you ever hear from people, "Hey, I'm getting stung by the bees from your hive," and things like that?

Vanderpool: I don't believe I ever have. Because I always watch and don't put them close to somebody's house. I like to set them out away from their house. The only way they get stung is if you go out there and kick a hive. And you go out there and kick a hive, and they're going to come out and sting you. It's like I told one guy, I said, If I come up and beat on the side of your house with a baseball bat, you're going to come out and say "stop it," and if I don't stop it, you're going to belt me one. Well, they're the same way. You come up there and beat on their hive, and they're going to come out and usually they'll warn you, they'll fly around you first. And if you just keep it up, they'll go to put it on you. (laughter) Yeah.

Maniscalco: What do you see in the future of beekeeping?

Vanderpool: Well, there's not too many younger people getting into it. There is a few, but I'll tell you something. You see, we belong to the County Market and all that kind of—not County Market, the—all those things, the federal government and stuff like that. But the federal government does not come in and give the beekeepers any support whatsoever. We're just flat on our own. Like I lost a bunch of these hives last year, I lost about sixty hives of bees and I went up and asked them if they had any support, if they could help me replace those bees, and they said no. I said, well, all the farmers around here have gotten support. If they have a disaster, you give them support. Yeah, well that's farmers. You're not a farmer, you're a beekeeper. So hey. (laughter) That's why I have got to the point to where I don't give very many interviews. I say, "Hey, nobody's going to help me, why should I do an interview?" Yeah, so that's it. I see that unless something happens—because our congressman up here did get kind of concerned about this disappearing disease. He was asking me if I was having any of that problem because he was kind of concerned, because out in California they couldn't get enough bees to pollinate their almonds. And I don't know how they're going to do this year, but it got pretty bad among those guys. But like I said, I and the young man I taught the bee business to, we don't use chemicals so we haven't had the problem. I think that might have been part of the problem, but I wouldn't know.

Maniscalco: So you've mentored somebody to kind of take over on some of your hives?

Vanderpool: Yeah, he's a gentleman over here I taught the bee business to. He's only selling now, but at one time he had 150 hives too. But I think he's down this year to about sixty-something. The winters, them cold winters really get to you, them bees, yeah.

Maniscalco: Is there anything you can do to try to keep a hive warmer through the winter?

Vanderpool: Well, we wrap them in black plastic, but I think what we probably ought to do is get some of this insulation board and make a little thing that goes over the outside of them, that might do a better job of it. We'll have to see.

Maniscalco: Interesting. And what about the future of people who keep orchards like you've kept?

Vanderpool: Well, I don't know. If they haven't got bees to pollinate them, well, you've seen these apples that's kind of lopsided and stuff like that? It means they're not pollinated, because what it does when you're pollinating, you're pollinating the seed inside that apple. And if you don't pollinate the seed in that apple, if it don't develop, then you're going to have a lopsided apple. So let's hope the bee industry keeps up enough that they can pollinate these orchards.

Maniscalco: So that was kind of one of the larger problems that you've found with some of your orchard stuff and that's why you entered into beekeeping?

Vanderpool: No, I just got into beekeeping because of my strawberries out here. That started it and it started building up, and then people started giving me the bee equipment and I finally got more bee equipment than I would know what to do with, and so when I taught this young guy the beekeeping business, he didn't have to go buy equipment. I had so much of it I didn't know what to do with it.

Maniscalco: Well, that's pretty cool. We're kind of coming down to the end of the interview and I have a question that I'd like to ask everybody. And this is kind of a personal question for you to answer, and the idea is that this interview is going to be a part, going to be a historical document and is going to be kept for a very long time. And one day down the road, somebody might walk into the museum and say, Hey, look, there's great-great-grandpa Ellis' interview that he did and he's talking about beekeeping and orchards and life on the farm and everything. What would you like to put in here for them?

Vanderpool: I don't know. (laughter) I think I told you about everything I know.

Wife: One thing, a few years back, a beekeeper from Russia worked with us and learned beekeeping.

Vanderpool: Yeah. We had a beekeeper from the Soviet Union come over here and they were with us for a week, and he went around to the hives and stuff like that, seeing how we'd done it. And it was nice and he was a nice guy, yeah, so we enjoyed having him. Yeah, that was several years ago.

Maniscalco: Cool. I think we're just about finished up with our sit-down interview here, and thank you Ellis. It was great to sit here and interview with you.

Warren: Very interesting. Okay.

Vanderpool: If you want to go out and see them, I'll be glad to take you up there. It's up to you.



Warren: We'd love to see the honey house, and if there's an opportunity to maybe film some bees we'd like to do that, too.

(End of file 1)