

Thomas Whipps

Author's Note: My major is television production, and I plan to make travel documentaries about volunteer work in 3rd world countries. I chose this topic because it's one of my life experiences that I can look back and laugh about, even though it was very painful.

Bothersome Bees

Growing up, most of us heard our parents say, "If you don't bother bees they won't bother you." I found out the hard way that they are right. When I was in the fifth grade, I went over to my friend Ryan's house to hang out one Sunday afternoon. His house was great. There was a patch of woods that surrounded his house, and we could spend all day wandering through it, finding new places to practice our mischief. In those woods we could transform from normal fifth graders into highly trained Marines sent in to find the best route through the woods for our troops. Usually we would battle each other in a one-on-one fight to the death to see whose army would prevail.

On this day, we happened to choose large sticks, or what we called swords and clubs, to fight one another. The duel was on and it was some of the best swordsmanship I had ever seen. At one point, Ryan had pinned me against a large tree stump and was pushing me into it. Our swords were locked up, so there was nothing I could do. "Do you yield?" Ryan shouted. Before I could answer, the old stump gave way, and both of us came crashing down to the ground. We laughed as we got up and looked around the battlefield to find our weapons. There was a large piece of the stump still standing up, and we were both thinking the same thing: Let's bash this stump to the ground. So we did, and man, did it feel good. "That was too much fun," I said.

"Hey, I found another one over here!" Ryan shouted. And boy, had he ever. This stump was huge! There was a large hollow hole in the bottom of the tree, and standing back, you would think it was a passageway that led to a secret chamber below the earth's surface.

"I'm pretty sure that's where the enemy is hiding," I said.

"You know what orders are," Ryan said. I did know what the orders were, SEARCH and DESTROY. So, we both decided that it would be more efficient to skip the search, and go straight to the destroy part of the mission.

Ryan and I swung at the tree stump simultaneously. As our swords collided with the old stump, I heard a strange sound. It sounded like a dirt bike or a car with a loud exhaust pipe. What was eerie about it was the sound was muffled and seemed to be coming from far away, yet right in front of us at the same time. What was this sound? I thought to myself. The sound grew louder and louder until I found out what it really was. Thousands of bees shot out of the stump and soon we were surrounded. One bee in particular proceeded to seek me out, and began stinging me in my lower lip. I was able to swat a couple of them away before I began to run the fastest 100-meter dash in history. I could hear Ryan's blood-curdling screams, but I could not see him. Then he came into view. Half the swarm was after him. It looked like a huge thunderhead cloud was chasing him. I could only assume that the other half was right behind me, because that buzzing sound was growing louder. I kept telling myself, "Don't look back, don't look back." But curiosity built up and I had to look. I turned around to see the largest, darkest, meanest swarm of bees I had ever seen.

I knew what I was in for if the swarm of bees caught up with me. I turned back around to see a very big problem. Just in front of me, there was a fallen tree blocking the path. I couldn't go around it because it was too long. I had to go over the top of it. Before I knew it, a decision had to be made. "No time to think; just do it," I said to myself. I dove headfirst, hoping I had enough height to clear the top of the tree. Somehow I made it and as I landed, I went into a perfect forward roll. My drill sergeant would have been proud. I could still hear the buzzing overhead but it was distant, so I knew the bees were passing me by.

I had to regroup and find Ryan. I sat up and began to wander through the woods, listening for my friend's screams. I heard nothing except for the peaceful sounds of the forest and the light rain that was softly falling on the treetops above. After my adrenaline started winding down, my lower lip began to ache. For some reason, it felt like dumbbells were attached to my lip and were weighing it down. As I was walking, I heard something in the bushes. I went closer to see what it was. "Are they gone?" Ryan asked.

"Yes," I said. I helped him from his hiding place and we started to head back to his house. As we were walking, he kept staring at me. I finally got sick of it and said, "What are you staring at?"

He quickly put his head down and said, “Nothing!”

“Come on, I’m not stupid, you know.”

“Well, your bottom lip is really, really big,” he said. “I mean, your bottom lip is about 10 times the size of your top lip.” I didn’t say anything for the rest of the walk back to his house. I just tried to forget about the pain.

When we got back to Ryan’s house, his mom started to panic and called my mom right away. I heard her say that I might be having an allergic reaction to the bee stings. I still hadn’t looked in the mirror and decided that it was time for me to see what all the fuss was about. I went upstairs and stood there with the lights off. I gave myself a three count and then flipped the light switch on. I could not believe my eyes. The first thing that came into my mind was that character in *Dick Tracy*, Lips Manlis. Lips Manlis was one of the gangsters in the film who had enormous lips, hence the name. This wouldn’t do. I already knew how my fifth grade peers would treat my unfortunate facial dilemma.

I returned home and my mom took me straight to the emergency room. After a long series of shots, the doctor came to the conclusion that I was extremely allergic to yellow jackets, which are the most common bee in the United States. The doctor then told me that I was very lucky to not have gotten stung in the throat. “If you had, you would have died,” he said. It turns out that I should have a special kit for bee stings, which had a shot and some pills to stop swelling if I ever did get stung in the chest or throat.

We left the hospital and headed home. I was still worried about what the kids at school would say about my lip, but not as much now that I knew I could have died. As we were driving, my mom asked how in the world I managed to get a whole hive of bees to come after me. I told her the whole story, and then she replied, “Well, you know, if you don’t bother bees, they won’t bother you.”

“I know,” I said.

Instructor’s Note: Tom Whipps wrote “Bothersome Bees” for the first assignment in WR 115, a narrative that makes a point. Tom’s voice and sense of humor come through clearly, and he uses vivid details and dialog to keep the reader interested.

--Beth Sammons