

Moved by the Bees

By

Sandra Lee Hughes

This is done so that human beings will be more engaged in our activities. So that they will see they need to help and work with us, nature, in order for us all to survive and for them to become more involved and see us more. We can manage this on our own, but this challenge has been created for human beings to give them the opportunity to see nature again. Like they used to.

The Bee Deva to the Beekeeper at The Findhorn Foundation

In January 2006 I traveled to the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland to teach, perform and attend the workshop **Manifesting Honorable Intentions – Healing the Planet from the Inside Out** focalized by Findhorn faculty member Franco Santoro. Findhorn is a non-governmental organization associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information and takes an active role at UN headquarters in New York, especially in the areas of education, sustainability, and values. It was in Franco's workshop that I first discovered the honeybees on our planet are dying in vast numbers. Findhorn beekeeper Sverre Koxvold told us this when we assisted him with a project for his hives to protect the bees in his care. The Findhorn honeybees have a profound perspective on the situation. What's in progress is an attempt on the part of the worldwide honeybee population to recruit humans to work closely with them for the good of humankind and all Nature.

The childhood I knew in the geographic entity named the United States of America was full of unrecognized initiations into realities whose significance remained unknown to me until they informed and sustained me later in life. One such rite occurred during a discrete period of time between my eighth and eleventh year. When the clover bloomed in my backyard with stems so fragile they could hardly bear the weight of the delicate, white blossoms that vibrated ever so slightly in the breeze, I'd touch my tongue to the dainty, white, feathered petals, savor the ephemeral sweetness that lingered there and note the presence of honeybees deeply engaged in their own communion with these humble flowers. These moments triggered an unexpected response. I'd find a mason jar, punch holes in its metal lid and place a cushion of green grass and clover heads in the bottom. My playmates stopped their activities, took a seat on the grass or ran to gather other youngsters to bear witness to my curious rite.

I'd remove my sneakers and begin a barefoot dance in a slow, spiral motion that eventually brought me into direct contact with a honeybee. I have no notion of how or why I selected a particular bee. Once I identified my pollinator partner I'd bend over, gently lift her up, place the bee in the jar and tighten the lid. The gang of children crept forward and gathered round me. The jar was silently passed from hand to hand. Each waited their turn with admirable and atypical patience. When the circuit was complete I'd

remove the lid and place the jar on the grass. Children fled in all directions. I ran, too, even though I wasn't afraid of the bee. This was the dramatic culmination of the rite – a place crafted in time and space where we temporarily managed to escape our fears, the multitude of real and imagined situations over which children have no control. We fled, found safety and that was the end of it. My strange actions were the catalyst that allowed us to find communal relief at the end of our flight. Later when everyone had left, I'd retrieve the jar. The honeybee was always gone.

How did this small child, myself, step into a time out of place and a place out of time to learn the ancient dance of the honeybee? My sense, then and now, is of a much-traveled path – one that waits on the edge of consciousness and is ever ready to claim us. It is bee energy in motion with a result as sweet as honey – the release of individual and communal fear with a return to the spiral dances that are common sense knowledge to honeybee and human. These are the things we children did in this country at the bare beginnings of the Age of Fear. Time to play was free to us. There were neither play dates nor the manic tendencies to micro manage our lives now so prevalent in our culture. In a society too busy to provide preparation for transformation, the bee initiated us. Nature contained the rites that connected humans to the richness and deep significance of their existence.

Recently, nature photographer Michael Birnbaum gifted me with a copy of his award-winning photograph **Kissing Bees**. This image is both within and out of time. In the heart of a flower grown too exotic in size and color to identify - amidst swirls of yellow with red and white stamens aflame - stand two honeybees. Antennas touch. The nectar-carrying device called a proboscis of one is inserted into the mouth-like orifice of the other. They did a dance, according to Michael. The bees walked in opposite directions and then began to spiral towards each other. Eventually, they met and touched antennas. A proboscis was offered and accepted. The spiral movement of the **Kissing Bees** recalls my own childhood dance with a honeybee. What forces are at work in human children and honeybees and what mysteries are yet to be revealed?

In his book of lectures called **Bees**, published in 1923, Rudolf Steiner predicted the current honeybee crisis and explains how bees were bred from wasps long ago in Atlantis. Wasp larvae were placed in a sticky sweet mixture of figs to support this process. The bees then left the ancient conifer forests to create a lifestyle based on the pollination of flowers. The honeybee transformed our earthly home into a garden of paradise. The short ecstatic existence of the honeybee is full of fragrance, beauty and the metamorphosis of fading flowers into fruits, nuts and vegetables. This simply wouldn't have happened without sexual assistance from the bees. The honeybee midwives some of our most delicious edibles into existence – foods that now add vital nutritional elements to the human diet. In October 2006, eighty-five years after Rudolf Steiner's book **Bees** was published, an ancient fossil emerged in Northern Myanmar (formerly the country of Burma) to reveal a 100 million year old precursor of the honeybee. The amber encased insect shares characteristics with both the pollen-dependent bee and the carnivorous wasps. Experts agree this specimen is more bee than wasp and offers a clear perspective on how the two types of insects managed to separate and progress on their evolutionary paths.



At one time the honeybee was thought to have first appeared in Asia. But once the bee became the fourth insect to have its DNA sequenced, it was determined that honeybees, like humans, came into being in Africa and then traveled into Europe. When humans left they took the bees with them. Itinerant beekeepers in Lower Egypt loaded their wicker hives covered with clay onto boats and traveled north to pollinate flowering plants. Aristaeus, the Greek patron of apiculture and especially beekeeping, was constantly on the move in the ancient world. Wherever he went in pursuit of his agrarian activities he took his bees with him. The emergence of the honeybee took place far and away from my hometown. That I was able to dance with a honeybee at all is a bit of a geographic miracle –as honeybees are not indigenous to North America. Settlers brought a western European subspecies to North America in 1622 and a Mediterranean subspecies was imported in the mid-1800s. An African subspecies was brought to Brazil in 1956. Today honeybees pollinate many of the crops that comprise the current food supply in the United States. A vast migratory bee industry moves honeybees from place to place in an attempt to address the human need for food. These tiny insects, now considered livestock, have become more important as the wild bee population in the U.S. has dwindled.

Recently, Colony Collapse Disorder has plagued commercial hives in the U.S. According to a government report in March of this year, 27 states and their commercially pollinated crops are affected. In some cases commercial beekeepers have lost 80% of their hives. The cause of this die-off of hives is mysterious and unknown with a number of possible factors suspected such as mites, beetles and pesticides. A profile of human interference with honeybee life in commercial hives has begun to emerge. Some believe these factors have contributed to the current massive death of our commercial bee population. They include: clipping the queen bee's wings, moving hives over long distances and moving larvae to artificial cups, then cages for transport.

For those of us who reside in the U.S. one of every three bites we eat is attributed directly to honeybee activity and two of every three bites are made possible by the bee's contribution to the survival of the animals many of us consume. The honeybees have provided a startling wake up call to move us to discover appropriate actions to take on behalf of our own species, the honeybee and the Planet Earth. In this way we can continue to participate in the connected recognition and cooperation that moves throughout the cosmos and is reflected in the spiral dances of honeybees and humans.

For more information on the honeybee crisis visit: www.thebeeproject.org



Sandra Lee Hughes - bio

Sandra Lee Hughes is a writer, speaker, international workshop facilitator, performer, director, choreographer and teaching artist. Her work includes arts, education and community presentations and projects that focus on the worldwide plight of the honeybee www.thebeeproject.org as well as presentations on world human consumption. She is the Founding Artistic Director of Gateway Performance Productions and The MASK Center in Atlanta. www.masktheatre.org and a recognized organizer of the United States Social Forum. She's also presented performances and workshops using *Masks for Personal and Planetary Transformation* by invitation at the Findhorn Foundation - a United Nations recognized training center for planetary sustainability located in Scotland and at Eastlake Commons in Atlanta - winner of the 2000 Annual World Habitat Awards of the Building and Social Housing Foundation of Leicestershire, England and the 2001 American Institute of Architects, Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary's Award for Mixed Use/Mixed Income projects.

Sandra writes for the stage, television, radio, print and online media. She also presents writing workshops nationally and internationally for educational and community venues. Recognitions, awards and accomplishments include a screening at the American Film Institute Video Festival in Los Angeles with nomination for the Robert Bennet Award, a regional EMMY for "Outstanding Entertainment Program of the Year" with national distribution on Public Television, two grant awards from the Georgia Council for the Arts for playwrighting, first place award at the Desert Playfest, three writing residency fellowships awarded by the Hambidge Center for the Arts and Sciences, grant support from the Fulton County Arts Council in Atlanta for her radio play *The Final Draft* with broadcast on WABE Public Radio in Atlanta and KSFR Public Radio in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Sandra's articles have been published in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Atlantic Celtic Quarterly* and online at *The Grapevine Art and Soul*. She co-founded the Writer's Gym in Atlanta and was a founder and board member for the Southeast Playwrights Project.

Sandra's plays and original performances pieces for the live stage have been presented in 30 states in the U.S. and 12 other countries. Highlights include performances at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts/NYC, the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian/NYC, and with the Cleveland Orchestra and the Akron Symphony. Her work has received developmental support and awards from the Southeast Playwrights Project and the Santa Fe Playwrights Lab. Her plays inspired by the Irish Mummer tradition premiered in Belfast, Northern Ireland and are included as items of significant cultural merit in the Irish Theatre Collection housed at Ohio State University. Sandra has taught mime, acting and contemporary performance for the theatre departments at Antioch College, University of Akron and Lake Erie College and workshops in mask performing for Marcel Marceau's Advanced Mime Seminar at the University of Michigan. The [Sandra L. Hughes Theatre Collection](#) at Ohio State University documents Sandra's career in professional theatre and her contribution to the emergence of the art of mime as a major theatre form in the U.S. during the last half of the 20th century.