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Reviews - April 2020

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* When two of our reviewers review the same book, we print both reviews.

Welcoming Elijah: A Passover Tale with a Tail (Picture Book for 5-8 year-olds) (Charlesbridge, 2020)

 by Leslea Newman and illustrated by Susan Gal
 reviewed by: Nori Morganstein, Youth Services Librarian/Assistant Director

I’m not always a fan of Children’s holiday books. For starters, I like books that celebrate everyone. I would hate for any child to feel like they weren’t included in a story. Also, holiday books tend to be wordy, filled with too many morals, and hard for keeping the attention of active youngsters. That being said, I have my favorites. There are some remarkable holiday books out there that defy the odds. This is one of them.

This book is a Passover story that is truly welcoming to everyone. It takes place in one boy’s home, but it’s a Seder (special service/celebration) for a large group of people from different backgrounds. The boy’s family and friends go through the motions of the Seder with more and more cheer, while at the same time, a lonely stray kitten outside looks more and more alone. It’s a nice introduction to a Jewish holiday for people who might not be familiar with the holiday at all.

Unlike a lot of other holiday books, this book has few words. It’s not a full-length, biblical story of Passover. It’s more the story of one family and their traditions. It’s also the side story of a stray kitten that is lacking family, friends, and traditions. The juxtaposition between the brightly lit table at the Seder and the dark side of the pages where the cat is all alone really highlight the importance of love and family. Everything leads up to the boy’s favorite part of the Seder, where he gets to open the door for Elijah. When he does it this year, the stray cat comes into the door. The book ends with an “Author’s Note” page with more facts about the Jewish holiday for people to learn more about what different elements of the Seder mean.

I like what the stray cat brought to story. He made it about more than just the holiday. I liked how diverse the characters were. This wasn’t just one Jewish family celebrating Passover. It looked almost like a neighborhood of people of all different religions coming together to share a meal and support each other. I also like that there weren’t too many words. The author didn’t have to explain every detail of the holiday. She was able to demonstrate what was important with minimal words. It didn’t hurt that the illustrations were gorgeous. But, I really feel like the combination of brief words and bold illustrations did the holiday justice in a way that kids and folks new to the holiday will be able to understand. I was surprised by how much I loved this book. I’ve read it several times now. I highly recommend it those who celebrate the holiday and those who don’t. It’s a cute story about family, love, and celebration.
In the train at Germany’s border with the Netherlands, Truus sends the three Jewish children to the washroom as the Nazi border guard approaches. She has a visa for herself but none for them. She engages the guard in conversation, “You have children, Officer?” He offers a hint of a smile, “My wife is expecting our first child… Are those three your children?” Truus then produces a ring from her pocketbook, “This is something special for your wife…My father gave this to my mother the day I was born.’ She turns the ruby to catch the light, saying, ‘They’re more precious than anything, children.’” …

The Last Train to London is a bone-chilling fictional account built around the real-life rescue of 10,000 children (mostly Jewish) from the hands of the Nazis, the “Kindertransport.” Clayton focuses on two families…the Neumans of Vienna, a wealthy Jewish family, and Truus Wijsmuller of the Netherlands. …

Now successfully in Amsterdam, Truus’ with a baby in her arms and two youngsters in tow, meets her husband, Joop. Alarmed at the sight of the three children, Joop says, “Geertruida, couldn’t Frau Freier…’ She interrupts, “What’s done is done, and I’m sure the wife of that nice young guard who saw us across the border has more need of my mother’s ruby than we do. Joop: “Good God, don’t tell me you risked bribing a Nazi with paste?” Truus: “As you can’t tell the difference yourself, darling, I don’t imagine either of you will soon know.”

In December, 1936, the Nazis were firmly in control in Germany, and looking toward annexing Austria. The narration continues with fifteen-year old, Stephan Neuman who aspires to be a playwright, staring at a typewriter displayed in a shop window, hoping that his parents will give it to him as a gift.

As time moves toward the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria by the Germans, (March 1938) the situation for Jewish people deteriorates dramatically. Stephan finds himself separated from his school friends, placed in the back of the classroom, behind a yellow line. Truus finds herself being a part of the organization to transport large numbers of children out of Germany.

There are hundreds of compelling books, fiction and non-fiction, about the Nazi scourge of Europe. I don’t profess to have made a dent in them. Yet, this book grabbed me as none other, with the possible exception of All the Light We Cannot See. The development of the characters and the descriptions of each event, cast a light that illuminates each moment with terrifying clarity. The cruelty, the terror juxtaposed with the goodness and love shown provides an emotional tale beyond measure. Although dealing with a heart-rending subject, the author brings us a beautiful tale of hope and amazing love.
Don’t miss this one.

Meg Waite Clayton
A Very Stable Genius: Donald J. Trump’s Testing of America
by Philip Rucker and Carol Leonnig
reviewed by Jim Mills

A Very Stable Genius, written by two Washington Post Pulitzer Prize winning journalists, covers the first 2 1/2 years of the Trump administration. The book’s title is derived from an expression that Donald Trump has used to characterize himself on numerous occasions (July 2018, September and October 2019). A Very Stable Genius allows readers to judge for themselves whether that characterization is an accurate one of our current Chief Executive.

Mr Trump came into the presidency having no previous experience working in government or in the military in sharp contrast to previous presidents. His background was essentially in real estate and as a TV reality show celebrity. This background, as the author’s point out, was an environment where Trump received few challenges to his judgement and where he would frequently resort to litigation to resolve disputes with government and other business interests.

The author’s contacts with those in the administration and congress have portrayed a president who has trouble accepting points of views that differ from his pre-conceived notions. Attempts to provide briefing material for the president have largely failed since Trump is not a reader and efforts to make the briefings more and more concise have not worked. This Trump characteristic and his inability to accept professional judgements eventually drove experienced business and military leaders such as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Chief of Staff General John Kelly out of the government. The turnover in the Trump administration has been substantial. One major feature of the Trump administration is the way the President has chosen to fire subordinates who displease him. Generally he either uses one of his aides to bring the message or in many cases just tweets the message firing the employee with the subject finding out from the press that his services have been terminated. Another feature of the Trump administration is the widespread public denigration of individuals who have been fired usually by tweeting or making statements to the press. This behavior has made the finding of replacements more difficult. More and more those close to the President have become close political allies less experienced in government who displease the President less. These positions are frequently considered to be “acting” and the individuals are less likely to dispute Trump’s views due to the temporary nature of their posting. For example the Secretaries of Defense have been acting since January 1, 2019 and have, thus, not required Senate confirmation.

The authors also go into the investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election led by former FBI Director, Robert Mueller. The investigation did uncover Russian interference and generated a few indictments. Some discussion is provided about the manner in which the investigation’s report was eventually released to the public piecemeal. The spin coming out of the White House and the Justice Department gave the impression that the report had given Trump a complete vindication. Mueller had accepted the Department of Justice view that a sitting president could not be indicted, so that step was not taken on the obstruction of justice charges but the text of the report did not clear the President on this issue.

As the next presidential election approaches this fall the public must consider the merits of Trump’s first four years in the White House and whether another four years are in the national interest. Very strong emotions have been generated on both sides of this issue as the nation becomes more polarized than ever. A series of books describing the inner workings of the Trump White House have been published in the last few years written by government insiders and by reporters. Some of these books describe somewhat unprincipled personality traits and question Trump’s competence as President. The descriptions of Trump in these books tend to reinforce each other in the evaluation of the President. The validity of the accusations made in these books must be judged by voters come November.

Philip Rucker and Carol Leonnig
Quick quiz: What percentage of the children in the world under age one are vaccinated against some disease? (a) 20 percent, (b) 50 percent, or (c) 80 percent. (The correct answer is at the end of this review.) The author, a world-renowned doctor, public-health expert, and frequent speaker on TED Talks and at international conferences, begins by reporting the results of a survey he has conducted asking similar questions to more than 10,000 international leaders. Given that the respondents are mostly highly-educated and informed world leaders and the survey offers only three widely divergent potential responses, one might expect that most of the respondents would correctly answer the question.

The results are shocking. Roughly 20% of his respondents correctly answered the quick quiz. And, the respondents did little better on a dozen similar questions. In fact, dozens of diverse audiences from around the world have done just as poorly. (As the author regularly points out, chimpanzees answering randomly would have been correct about 33% of the time.)

The first part of the book convincingly establishes the facts regarding what is real and what is misperception, citing data from the United Nations, the World Health Organization and other reliable organizations. The data shows that poverty, public health, and living conditions are, on average, better than we think. And the trend is positive around the world. If you are looking for a reason to be optimistic about the future, this portion of the book is surprising and comforting. I did.

Rolfing next tackles the questions of why we are so mistaken in our impressions and why we so often error in the direction of believing that conditions are worse than they actually are. One cause is the manner in which we consume information as one cause. Media focuses on the one plane which crashed, not the ten thousand which landed uneventfully, and so do we. He also suggests elements of our evolutionary development as one root cause. For example, in order to survive, primitive man learned to pay particular attention to danger and threats.

More interesting, the author points to aspects of how we analyze data to explain some of our errors. Sometimes we predict the future by seeing trends which do not exist. If we have received increasing amounts of rain for each of the last five days, it does not mean that the next three days will bring even larger downpours. He explains how averages can sometimes be misleading; if the Red Sox collectively hit 250 home runs last year, we know nothing regarding whether they all went on a power hitting spree or whether the second coming of David Ortiz had arrived. My brother the statistician has been trained to identify similar ways in which numbers can mislead, but the book reminded me about many other ways in which I tend to misinterpret numbers.

Perhaps the most useful aspect of the book is its effort to help us think “factfully.” He discourages us from developing a worldview based upon stories of isolated tragedies or triumphs. Rolfing reports his experience of visiting North Vietnam and being surprised by a small memorial to the 1.5 million; the nearby much larger memorial commemorated the dead from nearly two millennia of intermittent wars with China. UNICEF reported that 4.2 million babies died during 2016, but more than 14 million died each year during the early 1950s. We need to not just look at absolute numbers, but reject conclusions based upon too narrow a perspective in interpreting the significance of those numbers.

Rolfing’s prose shows the influence of his experience as a public speaker. The argument is presented coherently, provides useful examples, comes to persuasive conclusions, and is not too technical. Obviously, the book is more challenging than most popular fiction, but it is a worthwhile and rewarding read which will help the reader better understand the world we live in. That lesson seems particularly timely in these early days of the coronavirus epidemic, as we try to make sense of the available information. It is well worth your time and attention.

Correct answer to the quick quiz: (c).
Call Sign Chaos  
by Jim Mattis and Bing West  
reviewed by Don Boink

This book covers the life and career of a dedicated Marine from rookie to four star general. Jim Mattis embodies the ultimate product of training as a Marine. After a full career of service around the globe, in combat and command he entered public service at the highest level of government as Secretary of Defense, being probably the most qualified person to ever hold that position.

The book does not cover the period served under Pres. Trump, where his most difficult assignment ever was to ride herd over the most outrageous person to ever hold that office. As long as he was Secretary of Defense he prevented many grievous errors that would have otherwise been committed. Unfortunately he could stand only so much conflict that his battle experience had not prepared him for and he was forced or asked to resign.

The bulk of the book is dedicated to the sequence of his training and how he developed his abilities to search out reading material pertinent to the subject at hand. That was his first response to tackling a question or problem. Consequently he was better able to understand the heart of the matter. His dedication to the Marine tradition was exemplified in his oft quoted phrase “A Marine is the best kind of friend and the deadliest enemy”. If anyone is contemplating a career in the Marines or any other branch of the armed forces this would be an excellent hand book of advice.

Tightrope: Americans Reaching For Hope  
by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn  
reviewed by Don Boink

This is a grim book telling it like it is. Starting with what has happened in his home town of rural Yamhill, Oregon Kristof tells how half of his school bus friends have died because of one malady or another due to the conditions that have affected their lives. It is a strong indictment of our lack of adequate healthcare, stagnant wages, weak education and poor decision making. Loss of jobs, the opioid crisis, have combined to increase stress that has had a devastating effect on the community. This is not the only community Kristof found as he traveled about the country, that shows similar problems. Upward mobility has collapsed

On a more positive note he also found instances of hope and resurgence. “While the present state may seem grim they issue a clarion call to strengthen America by strengthening each American so that this country can again compete at the “top of its game”. To do this requires that we demand better of our leaders, our business executives, and ourselves.

James Mattis

Nicholas Kristof  
and  
Sheryl WuDunn
Nicholas Kristof is a columnist for the New York Time, with a special concern for social issues, and his wife, Sheryl WuDunn has been a foreign correspondent for the Times. They shared a Pulitzer Prize for Journalism for their news coverage in China in 1990. **Tightrope** deals with the steady decline in the well being of working class American citizens over the last forty years. The authors document long term trends such as the loss of many blue collar jobs impacting the livelihood of workers primarily those with a high school education or less and their families. This impact has continued for multiple generations.

Kristof grew up in Yamhill, a small rural town in north-eastern Oregon, with a population that through the years has ranged from 500 to 1,000, where he graduated from high school in the late 1970s. In much of **Tightrope**, the authors look into how well Kristof’s classmates made out later in life. This investigation turned up very disturbing trends. Many of Kristof’s friends spent their later life struggling with alcoholism, drug addiction, violent behavior and repetitive incarceration. This downward spiraling syndrome has been continuing for several generations with children being locked into the lifestyle of their parents.

As the authors point out, we think that we lead the world in the welfare of our citizens. The reality is quite different. Out of 146 countries studied the US ranks: 40th in child mortality, 32nd in internet access, 39th in access to clean drinking water, 50th in personal safety, 61st in high-school enrollment, and 25th in overall welfare. The US is wealthier than most of the other nations listed, the difference is our spending priorities. One sociological factor in declining welfare is teen pregnancy and the rise of single parent families. While American and European teens have sex at about the same rate, European girls are only 1/3 as likely to get pregnant since the Europeans offer much better sex education and easier access to reliable contraceptives. In one quote from **Tightrope**: “Contraception is the most powerful anti-poverty measure we have… Contraception allows a woman to finish school, plan a family, pursue her life goals.”

A major factor in the decline in the welfare of our citizens is our widespread dependance on addictive drugs. The authors offer a comparison of decisions that the US and Portugal made in the 1980s in dealing with an increasing drug problem plaguing both countries. Portugal decided to treat drug addiction as a health issue, the US dealt with it as a criminal problem and resorted to law enforcement solutions. In 1980 the number of deaths from illegal drugs in the US was 6,100 compared to 68,000 in 2018. In Portugal the rate of drug addiction has fallen by 2/3 rds and the rate of drug addiction deaths is 6 per million. In the US the rate is 348. The cost of the US war on drugs so far is one trillion dollars (that’s one million million). As the authors point out: “The war on drugs has been perhaps the worst single policy mistake of the last half century.” Another legacy of our drug policy is that 70 million Americans now have a criminal record. The high cost of maintaining an addictive drug habit is a major factor in US crime levels. These individuals as a result have a more difficult time getting and holding a job. The early treatment of drug addiction, which has been greatly underfunded, could provide a significant payoff for the nation. It is estimated that every dollar spent on treatment results in $12 in reduced crime, court and medical costs.

Since the 1970s the US has fallen far behind other advanced countries in health care being the only one without universal coverage. This lack of access to health care has been another factor in the declining prospects of working class Americans. In the American system the lost of a job also means losing health insurance. The US has the most expensive health care system with health results far inferior to that of other developed countries. Along with so many of the factors described in **Tightrope**, our health care system is another result of political decision that through the years have had a very debilitating effect on the lives of many of our citizens.

The authors sum up the US prison situation: “The United States now accounts for almost one-quarter of the world’s incarcerated people. Its national incarceration rate is six times that of Canada or France, twelve times that of Sweden.” The major expansion of our prison population dates back to the 1970 and 80s with the “three strikes you’re out” philosophy and the widespread use of imprisonment in dealing with our drug problem. The widespread use of imprisonment has had devastating effects not only on the prisoner but also his family creating problems that extend for generations. So many of these (continued on the next page)
issues have been tied up in political wrangling for generations, and have not been addressed even though there is an emerging consensus on how to gradually rectify the situation. The problem is that solutions cost money and the benefits take years if not decades to pay off. The experience of other nations in dealing with social issues should be a guide in addressing our own. The authors end their book by summarizing steps that we as citizens can take to help improve our lot. Any reader concerned with the decline in the wellbeing of our fellow citizens will find reading *Tightrope* to be a rewarding experience.

**Time To Build**
by Yuval Levin
reviewed by Don Boink

I will begin by stating the author’s premise. “The argument of this book is a conservative one that beings are born as crooked people prone to waywardness and sin, that we require moral and social formation, and that such formation is what institutions are for.” “This is not a time for tearing down. It is a time to build”. We have seen the effect of frustration with the, so called, establishment on the part of those who feel left behind. A pied piper appeared and promised to tear down the offending system and build a new and better one. So far we have had a lot of destruction but very little construction. Our author discusses the various institutions that stand in need of reconstruction.

First we have to define what institutions are and how they serve as formative structures that are necessary in order to know how to approach problems in order to successfully solve them. The author is meticulous and extremely incisive in how he develops his case. It is this ability that fascinated me the most. He takes each of our institutions, such as the Congress and discusses its importance and its formative effect in regard to establishing ground rules to guide deliberations. The nature of politics is such that In order to achieve success there must be a measure of mutual respect for opposing points of view. For instance, to disregard or disallow the role of compromise is to defeat any chance of achieving a resolution.

He goes through the several institutions, vital to democracy, such as judicial, religious, medical, legal, educational and scientific. What we call the professions, are distinct from other occupations because they are institutionalized. They have formal training and certification usually, specialized knowledge, some degree of self regulation, and an important social purpose that the profession exists to serve, a strong internal ethos among practitioners. In uncertain situations, a professional asks himself, “What should I do here, given my professional responsibilities? His profession will generally have an answer to that question. Under the conditions imposed by our culture war the status of respect for the professions has waned. Expertise is associated with elitism. Fake news has become the mantra of the “would bees” as they make their erratic statements.

Journalism has come under attack by those without moral or competent wisdom. Mass communication and concentration of power in many venues of our society is also discussed. This all makes for a deep and challenging book. The practice of those in responsible positions to act irresponsibly is symptomatic of the failure of our vital institutions. That failure is in need of correction. That is where the rebuilding has to occur.

Yuval Levin
A great fan of playing and winning at Monopoly, Elizabeth Holmes, knew from a very young age that her life goal would be to make money. An excellent student, she chose Stanford and chemical engineering. Just before her sophomore year she developed a patent application for an “arm patch that would simultaneously diagnose medical conditions and treat them.” Her college professor, Channing Robertson, supported the idea, she dropped out of college and filed an application to start a company. A graduate student of Robertson’s, Shaunak Roy, although doubtful of the arm patch, became her first employee.

The company was first named “Real-time Cures” and later changed to Theranos, a combination of the words therapy and diagnosis. In her first promotion piece she described an “adhesive patch that would draw blood painlessly through the skin using micro-needles.” This was rejected by several venture capital firms. None-the-less, Elizabeth managed to attract investments and by 2004 the company had raised $6,000,000. Roy, who at first had been doubtful about the efficacy of the arm patch, became more hopeful. The company had developed a device that tested blood for a wide range of problems with a simple finger prick, sidestepping the normal process of drawing one or more vials of blood with a hypodermic needle in the arm. If viable, this machine would revolutionize clinical trials.

Theranos grew rapidly and after 10 years or so was worth several billion dollars. However, as the “Edison”, the name of the device that tested drops of blood, wasn’t always reliable, the company utilized machines from other companies for most of its testing. Unfortunately, the company that had been based on a very hopeful concept was unable to produce the dreamed-of results. By maneuvering around various surveillances the company continued to attract investors. Whomever had the courage to question the company’s practices or policies, was immediately let go and forced to sign non-disclosure papers. Elizabeth and her boyfriend/sidekick Balwani, kept everything under wraps.

In 2014, an article in *Fortune* “vaulted Elizabeth to instant stardom.” This was followed by *Forbes* who listed her with the richest people in America. She was linked with Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. Her worth was placed at 4 ½ billion dollars. With all of this publicity, some of the people who had been negatively impacted by Theranos: Alan Beam who left because he realized Theranos was breaking the law; Richard Fruiz, a former friend of Elizabeth’s family who had been sued for stealing a patent; the widow of Ian Gibbons who had committed suicide because of his concerns… joined together and tipped off John Carreyrou, a Wall St Journal reporter as to what was really happening at the company. This book is the result of his three and a half year investigation.

This saga is mind-boggling. The ease with which Elizabeth escaped authentication and reached the billion dollar mark with large investments, staggers the imagination. She had people like George Schultz and Henry Kissinger falling under her sway. Rupert Murdoch invested $121 million dollars in the company. They were convinced that she and her company were the real thing.

The story is very heavy with names and medical/chemical information. Yet it reads like a detective story. One asks, when and where will this end? How will they put a stop to all this fraud. We will all find out the final results in the fall of 2020. Holmes and Balwani have been indicted on two charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and nine counts of wire fraud. If convicted they face 20 years in prison, fines and possible restitution to the victims. Their trial will begin on July 28, 2020.
A Bookshop in Berlin
by Francoise Frenkel
reviewed by Jim Mills

_A Bookshop in Berlin_ was originally written in French in 1945, a few years after the events in the author’s life described in the book. Recently re-discovered, Frenkel’s memoir was published in English only in 2017. Born a Polish Jew, this memoir describes the author’s harrowing escape from the Nazi’s during the Second World War. Prior to the first war, Frenkel lived and studied in France. Following the war she worked for a time in a bookshop in France and in 1921 decided to open a French language bookstore in the heart of the former enemy, in Berlin.

This business prospered for years since there were many French speaking emigres particularly White Russians who had escaped the communist takeover in their native land. Following the start of the Nazi regime in 1933 life began to become more difficult for Frenkel. For a while she was somewhat protected from attacks being made on other Jewish establishments since her store was foreign owned and the regime was concerned about retribution on German businesses abroad. The massive attack on Jews in 1938, known as Kristallnacht, was only narrowly avoided when she pointed out that her store was French and the leader of the assault gang realized that her store was not on his list. Frenkel’s existence in Berlin became increasingly tenuous and with war only a few days away she managed to flee Germany in late August 1939 moving back to Paris only days before the German invasion of Poland.

In May 1940 German forces invaded France and late in the month were converging on Paris. Once more the author managed to escape to the south of France living for a time in Avignon, Nice and Annecy. Initially the southern part of France was ruled by the pro-German Vichy-French government with the Germans occupying the North. This rule provided an initial breathing space for Jews living there but the Anglo-American invasion of North Africa in 1942 triggered a German occupation of the entire French nation. Only the region of south France near Italy was spared with Italian forces as the occupiers. This detail would turn out to make a significant difference to the Jewish residents, Frenkel included.

Most of _A Bookshop in Berlin_ describes the author’s efforts to escape across the Swiss border. It would take three separate attempts. She would only be successful with the help of many caring French citizens providing sanctuary from the repeated searches instigated by the Germans and carried out by the French authorities. The compassion of some of the French and Italian forces was also instrumental in her survival. Throughout this period the author tells of many of her friends who were swept up in the frequent raids ending in being deported to the death camps. The period in late 1942 and early 1943 was one of Frenkel being forced to be continually on the move to avoid arrest as reports on her whereabouts became known to the authorities. Her description of this period is a harrowing one. Her final escape from the Nazis was never assured with her survival resting on chance and the aid of many caring individuals. From 1943 to 1945 she remained in Switzerland only returning to France after the collapse of the Nazi regime. This story of survival over seventy years ago has only recently become available to the English speaking world and is well worth reading. Only by knowing the potential depths of human depravity can we be alert to its re-emergence in the future.

Francoise Frenkel
The fascinating history of bees with their golden nectar and man is covered in this captivating chronicle by author and beekeeper, Holley Bishop. For millennia man has joined other creatures such as bears in raiding beehives, such is the lure of honey. Until recent times honey was the sole sweetening agent used by humans before the advent of sugar derived from cane or beets. Going back to the time of the ancient Egyptians, man has made efforts to domesticate bees building artificial hives in order to participate in the bee’s produce.

Holley Bishop’s interest in becoming a beekeeper led her to visit Donald Smiley, a professional beekeeper in the Florida panhandle. Smiley runs a very large scale operation with hundreds of hives generating a number of honey varieties based upon the plants visited by the bees at different times of the year. The premium honey, bringing the highest prices, is that derived from a non-native tree imported from China, the Tupelo. Through the year, as weeks go by, the sequence of the blooming of various blossoms makes it necessary for the beekeeper to be constantly on the move, a major operation with so many hives involved.

Early beekeepers were in the position of having to virtually destroy their hive to be able to extract the honey. Around 1850 a new modular bee hive design was introduced that allowed the keeper to remove the upper sections and extract the honey without unduly disturbing the bees. The author describes the modern equipment used to uncap (remove the wax cover from) the honey cells and to separate the honey from the wax structure. The use of smoke, protective clothing and experience handling bees has greatly reduce the handler’s susceptibility to being stung, though that danger is always part of the job.

The author has provided an engrossing description of bee society and the structure of the hive. Bees have a complex society with the queen, drones and workers dedicating themselves to their repetitive tasks. Recent studies have interpreted the complex dances worker bees employ to show other bees the location of nectar bearing flowers. From an evolutionary point of view the survival of the bee colony is the most important factor not the survival of an individual bee. As a result worker bees will readily sacrifice their lives, since the use of their stinger is fatal to a bee, to protect the hive. Each individual follows its mindless instinctive behavior with the resulting whole being a fully functioning colony.

The creation of honey and beeswax are only part of the benefits that humans derive from bee colonies. Many of our basic foods come from plants that require pollination by bees for their basic survival. This pollination is another service that the bee keepers provide to society. Recent diseases that threaten bee populations also threaten our essential food supply. This function by necessity requires the continually movement of the service bee colonies to the widely spread agricultural fields on a timely basis. As the author points out the work load on bee keepers is never ending with demands placed on the keeper year round insuring the health, viability and mobility of countless bee colonies, operating within the restraints of unpredictable weather patterns. *Robbing the Bees* is a captivating story of a world mostly hidden from us, a world so necessary to the quality of our lives. This book is not new, published in 2002. Several copies are available from CLAMS.