



## THE RAW HONEY SHOP STORY AS TOLD BY TIM WALKER - JOINT FOUNDER

Back more than 20 years ago, on a hot July day, a spur of the moment decision led me down a life path I could never have imagined.

This is my story of a journey with extraordinary discoveries and experiences - that totally transformed my life. (By the way, I am Tim, the owner of The Raw Honey Shop).

Let me start by being totally honest with you. Back in the day, I'd never really been a honey fan, in fact I knew virtually nothing about it. But this spur of the moment decision led to an experience that had a profound effect on my life, and that of my partner Karen.

This is my story - these are a few things that happened on my journey.

- How the story began with the discovery of an incredible mountain paradise, right off the beaten track. A place where nature rules - and where the bees produce the most amazing range of world class raw honeys.
- The revelation. The moment which blew my mind - when I first experienced 'honey flavours like colours you've never seen before'.
- How the micro-organisms in soil help to give raw honey its incredible flavour - and protective qualities. (That's one of the main reasons why wilderness honey is so much better than honey from plants grown on chemically treated soil.)
- How to select the honeys that are most antibacterial.
- An amazing fact about the sensitivity of bees and their incredible brains.
- What I discovered about 'industrial' honey and why you must avoid it if you want the most natural honey for yourself and your family.
- Near the end there is something about a specific attribute of raw honey, that means it really isn't for everyone. (A natural quality of raw honey that many people think means it has been adulterated - but it is actually a sign that the honey is truly raw.)
- There is a precious memory that drives me on.

Anyway....let me take you back to the Summer of 98 when it began.

It was baking hot and we were in my '74 Saab, my first car. Ancient. (They only produced the model for one year before they discovered a design fault, which would make it stall at tick over, like when you tried to move off from traffic lights - embarrassing!) It was a tank. Body was absolutely rigid. The back seat was covered in

mildew.

My girlfriend Karen (who later became my wife) and I were driving around the south of France in this tank. One day the heat was just too much. We had to cool off.

Karen was looking at the map and spotted a large lake. 'Let's drive there' she said, 'It's only 'just' over the border in Spain'.

So, I started driving. I remember she said, 'We'll be cooling off in the water in a couple of hours.'

Four hours later, we were lost high in the Pyrenees mountains (between France and Spain). It was getting dark and we were REALLY tired and crabby.

Fortunately, I spotted a little campsite. We pulled in, put the tent up and fell into a deep sleep.

Ten hours later I awoke with the heat beating down. I crawled out, slightly groggy, and found myself staring at what I could only describe as paradise - the most beautiful place I had ever seen.

The light revealed that the campsite was perched on a little terrace on the side of a mountain.

Looking down I could see treetops peeping out from the morning mist in a valley below us.

Around my knees (yes, I hadn't stood up yet) were scores of bees, butterflies and other insects working the flowers that surrounded the tent. The ground was humming!

Looking up I could see a forest blanketing the mountainside, rising right up to the foot of some cliffs - a thousand or more metres above us. Higher still giant birds were circling the cliffs. Eagles I thought....

'Karen, you've got to look at this' I said.

She emerged from the tent with a grumpy look on her face but then her expression changed to one of wonder.

**I cannot tell you how overwhelmed we were with the magnificence of this mountain wilderness.**

Thus began our love affair with this haven for nature. A place little touched by man with the odd bear, marmots, chamois, even a few wolves - and many birds.

We relished our beautiful few days in the Pyrenees, in a place where it felt time had stopped - way off the beaten track.

We spent the days trekking through the mountains, exploring ancient villages and eavesdropping on a world music festival in a medieval citadel called Ainsa.

As we wound our way up the mountains towards the border with France, we stopped in the square of a little mountain town called Bielsa. I remember walking into a shop full of cheeses from the local shepherds, local wines in barrels, giant tomatoes stacked up and all sorts of mountain arts and crafts.

I was drawn to a selection of local honey.....

These were kinds of honey I just wasn't familiar with - with names

like Oak (whenever did you see Oak honey in your local supermarket?), Wild Lavender, Thyme, Orange and Rosemary.

I thought honey was just honey, a sweet thick liquid. Nice but nothing special. I couldn't have been more wrong!

I bought a selection of these honeys as gifts for friends - and some for ourselves - and packed it away in the boot of the car.

Didn't think about it again until I got to properly unpacking the car a few weeks later.

Then it sat in the corner of our dark basement kitchen for a few more days.

Then we tried it. WOW!

As I said, I had believed honey was just a pleasant sweet liquid.

This was completely different from any honey I had ever bought in the supermarket.

Yes, it was thicker, but it was the flavours that amazed us.

I hadn't realised that there were radically different types of honey.

These had flavours that were like colours you've never seen before. I felt like a colour blind man seeing red and green for the first time - colours that used to be grey.

The Oak variety was rich, deep and strong - and not as sweet as the supermarket honey I had been used to.

The Orange, on the other hand was much lighter in flavour, and it had a beautiful citric zing to it.

These honeys had complex flavours, like fine wines or special coffee blends.....

True connoisseurs call these flavours "notes." Some of them linger. If you sample a world class honey, you'll notice that the flavours go on and on - with a complexity that delight the tongue.

You'll find that, like with wines, certain honeys go with certain foods.

I realized that my previous honey experience was that of a complete Philistine. Literally something came to life that had lain dormant.

I began to enquire. I had never known, until this point, that the plant or tree the bees visit affected the flavour of the honey. The flavour of a spoonful of forest honey can be nuanced by the mere presence of a patch of blackberries growing close to the hive.

And a person whose tastes are sensitive can notice that difference. (Even on toast.) The beekeeper puts the hives close to a plant or tree species that is in flower - so for instance, in a Chestnut

forest in June and with Oak trees in July.

The environment, especially the soil and climate also have a big effect - the French call it Terroir (pronounced Terwa).

Two of the same types of honey from different regions will taste

utterly different.

This is even influenced by the fungi in the soil. The fungi that grow in the soil form a rich ecosystem. The symbiotic fungi next to the roots of a plant will protect it from predators and disease.

Those fungi, in turn, influence the nutrients in the honey itself and lend support to your immune system.....

(You can see why it's important to get your honey from the wilderness - places where they don't use chemicals on the land, that kill the life in the soil and even leave traces in the honey.)

The initial flavour hits your tongue but then a series of other complex flavours come through and then more follow on. With a really top quality honey the flavour trail will keep on coming.

Take the Oak from Thomas, which comes from high up in a place called Rentina, on a mountain side. Its strong mineral flavour reminds me of blackstrap molasses. When I close my eyes the dark sweetness of dried fruits such as prunes and dates comes through. But what is special about this honey is its high antibacterial rating. Consistently year after year it has an Active 20+ rating, like a strong Manuka that would cost £150 plus.

(If you want the best antibacterial honeys then select one of the dark ones - like Oak, Chestnut, Heather, Buckwheat, Manuka and Thyme that tend to be the most active and antibacterial. They also contain oligosaccharides, which can have a prebiotic affect, aiding the good bacteria in your gut, which scientists are discovering has a profound effect on your physical and mental health..)

The strong overall flavour makes it perfect for those who love dark, strong honeys.

Next time you eat Greek yogurt (plain, not that stuff loaded with sugar that you find in some supermarkets) or a good Spanish cheese like Manchego, pour on a spoonful of Thomas' Raw Organic Oak Honey and the yogurt or cheese will come alive in your mouth.

The discovery of this information was the start of a deep dive into honey and more importantly the world of raw honey.

I began reading everything I could about honey.

I discovered that the honey you buy in the supermarket bears little resemblance to the stuff that comes out of the hive.

Most honey is highly processed. Pasteurised and fine filtered and then blended. (Like really cheap tea.) This alters it profoundly from the original substance the bees worked so hard to produce.

If you examine the label of a honey on the shelf at your local supermarket, you will often see the following phrase: "A blend of EU & non-EU honeys."

Most of the honey you see on supermarket shelves is a bland blend of honey from all over the world - from places like China, Argentina, Ukraine, India and Turkey.

How could you know anything about the source of the honey if it came from so many different places?

Was it produced close to pollution sources?

Was it produced in a place where crops are sprayed with lethal poisons?

Did the beekeeper treat his bees well and leave them enough honey?

Which flowers was it from?

The result is a bland honey which has no character. It's like a cheap instant coffee compared to real coffee from carefully roasted beans.

I also learnt that there were some appalling practices in the production of 'industrial' honey - like killing the bees when the honey is harvested; taking all the honey and replacing it with sugar syrup and giving the bees all kinds of chemical treatments, which undoubtedly compromise future honey.

So, it became clear to me that the production of industrial honey was completely different to a more traditional style of beekeeping by artisan beekeepers - those with no more than a few hundred hives, who really care for their bees.

(Bees are smart. They are very sensitive to their environment, and their brains have ten times the neuron density of a human brain.)

So began my personal raw honey obsession.

I became enraptured with the importance of bees to our entire ecosystem. (There are many bee species, who all play a part.)

The mountain wilderness in the Pyrenees became our regular holiday destination. Each year we would return to Brighton with more and more honey - as gifts for family and friends and to last us until the next trip.

By 2006 we were supplying a large circle of friends and family.

One day Karen said: 'Maybe we should try and set up a little business selling raw honey. There just don't seem to be any honeys like these available in Britain'.

So we made contact with the beekeeper Ramon, who the original honey in the mountain shop came from.

Next was Antonio Simon - he truly looked the part. A short man with curly grey hair whose organic hives are in a Biosphere Reserve in the mountains north of Madrid.

(His Oak is fabulous, recently it won Platinum in the London Honey Awards as well as in the Great Taste Awards in 2022.)

The obsession with raw honey just kept growing.

Soon we were visiting other beekeepers, seeking out more kinds of raw honey.

Then there was Luisa, our first female beekeeper - who runs an

apiary with her daughter Olaya and son Mario.

She produces a few varieties of dark tree honeys in Asturias, a green and forested region in northern Spain.

(Her dark, dark Forest has deep, full bodied, slightly smoky, earthy tones, that deliver a more savoury taste than most other honeys. It has a slightly bitter taste.)

Now there are maybe eight or nine artisan beekeepers who we regularly get honey from - like Thomas and his amazing beekeeping family in Greece.

They craft mainly thick dark honeys with a very low moisture content - like his thick Mountain Oak. A honey that gradually eases off the spoon, like a slow-moving lava flow.

And there's Asterios, who has an amazing network of artisan beekeepers in Greece. Each year he organizes for me to travel round and meet beekeepers, who have unique honey varieties from high up on mountains like Mount Olympus or deep within Fir Forests, where you get very potent honeys.

Through these beekeepers our commitment is to raw artisan honey, mainly organic.

To wrap up, let me tell you that there are five of us at The Raw Honey Shop office in Brighton - Prue and Kish who deal with most of the calls and emails. Claire, who manages our newsletters and other communications with you and other customers, Eva who manages the accounts. Finally, there's myself (Tim).

We have a little warehouse in Uckfield where our team pack the honey, 25 minutes from our Brighton office.

I will end by saying I hope you have had fun discovering some of our honeys and I am glad to have had the opportunity to thank you and share my story.

If you've got any comments I'd love to hear them - perhaps you've had your own honey adventure? Just drop me a reply at [tim@therawhoneyshop.com](mailto:tim@therawhoneyshop.com)

And if you have any specific questions about the honeys then contact Prue or Kish at [info@therawhoneyshop.com](mailto:info@therawhoneyshop.com). Or you can call 01273 682109. If it is urgent put URGENT as the subject so we can be sure to respond straight away.

All the very best to you.

*Tim*

Tim - Owner, The Raw Honey Shop.

POSTSCRIPT: The Raw Honey Shop was a joint venture between my wife Karen and myself but sadly she died after fighting an illness for 3 years. She wanted me to carry on after her passing and that is what I am now doing. The precious memory of Karen drives me on. I greatly appreciate your custom in enabling me to do that.