

Fenceline

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### Every Life Lesson At the County Fair

This is county fair season in Kansas. There's nothing quite like it. Nancy Nelson and I just witnessed our 28<sup>th</sup> Jackson County Fair. We've seen a lot of changes in those years, the rules come and go., as things change as to importance. The fair days have changed, from a Tuesday to Thursday to more of a Monday-Wednesday and now more events on Sunday. We used to have to avoid anything required on Sunday. Sometimes it's not fun to be the rule enforcer, but treating everyone the same, was always my mantra.

County fairs, can teach kids that all that hard work they do on their projects will pay off. Or maybe not! That is a real life lesson, even though you worked and worked on your project to make it the best you could, the judge liked something else better. I always thought my own children learned more from the white or red ribbon than the purple ribbon.

You also learn that we are all humans, and everyone can make a mistake. If you were left off of a judging roster, it's not the end of the world, how you handle it-will be your life lesson. There are some, and we'll say parents here, that will go after the show officials with guns a blazing, to right the wrong. There are others that, calmly explain the situation, and are reasonable in their response. We always try to rule on the side of the kid, but how it is handled makes a world of difference, some people show their true colors at the county fair.

In this era of entitled children and everyone with very thin skin, some of the judges we hire are skittish about giving a kid a red ribbon, when it really should be a white ribbon. So we have to think about the message that sends to the 4-Her, "you can be mediocre and still win?". I don't want that generation of "mediocre" caring for me in the nursing home!

Once, we had a horse judge give the seniors a lot of white ribbons, but the way he presented the information had all of them laughing and they all felt like winners, winners with white ribbons! At the time I wished that judge could be cloned, such a great influence and mentor.

Then there is the money spent on projects, you can throw money at a project, thinking that will make you a winner. The true winner, in my mind are those that try to learn from the project and especially with the livestock projects, make it profitable or at least break even. That is the life lesson.

After all, when these kids go off to college or begin their grown up jobs, there will be hiccups. Wouldn't you rather they face some of these challenges while they are still in living under the same roof, so that you can mentor them through it?

To quote the book I'm reading, 1927, *Under the 4-H Flag* by John F Case, "We impress upon your daughter and son that they must "win without boasting and lose without squealing". To be a member, is a challenge to the very best. It is a great honor, it has great reward."

There are a lot of life lessons at a county fair!