

In county fair exhibits, it's every zucchini for itself

Kathy Hedberg/Lewiston

It's one thing to think that people who get all wrapped around the axle over vegetables and other exhibits they enter in their county fairs are idiots.

It's another matter entirely when you've got a zucchini on the line.

I gave up trying to be competitive at everything I did years ago, after I realized I cannot be the best at everything, even though if there was true justice in the world, I would be.

But I cannot quell that competitive urge when it comes to fair entries. And I know I'm not the only one.

On open class exhibit entry day, the hall is filled with moms and Sunday school teachers and counselors and nuns - people who ordinarily you would trust to baby-sit your children or even your dog.

Yet on open class entry day these fair exhibitors become competing machines - hauling in the bounty of their gardens, canning products, needlework and other crafts - and God help you if you get in their way.

I think this is normal. Most of us seldom have the chance to be the best at anything, much less win a prize for an accomplishment. We all dreamed of being rock stars when we were in junior high, but the reality of life is we ended up selling peanuts at the concert.

And that's OK with most of us. There's a lot of pressure being a rock star - what with the interviews and the adoring crowds and the gazillions of dollars we would make per performance. Our plain little nondescript life fits most of us, most of the time.

But once in awhile we want to be the best at something, and often the county fair is our only chance to do that.

We take pride in that plate of tomatoes or the quilt or the bottle cap collection that we enter in the fair. Not to mention the cash involved if we win a ribbon on our project. I hate to brag, but there have been times I've come out of the Idaho County Fair with nine extra bucks burning a hole in my pocket.

This year has been kind of tough for gardens and my zucchini plants haven't produced as well as they used to. My selection was limited and the only squash that was suitable to enter in the fair - bright green with an unblemished skin and evenly shaped - was 4 inches long.

I may have heard a slight gasp when I pulled it out of the bag and sat it on the entry table. The ladies checking in the vegetables looked at me in astonishment.

"You want to take that thing back home and let it grow a little more?" one of them said.

I explained that it's been a hard year for the garden and my 4-inch zucchini was the only one perfect enough to compete in the fair. Besides, I said, it's not what the squash looks like now that's important - it's what this little vegetable could look like in the future. Can't a judge have some imagination and award ribbons based, not on current conditions but on potential beauty?

Apparently not.

I didn't even get a green "thanks for trying" ribbon.

But I'm not discouraged. As a running mentor has mentioned many times when he talks about getting ready for the big race: It's not getting to the finish line that makes you a champion. It's getting to the starting line.

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