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A Family Affair

Our area had a proud tradition of 4-H participation. From my first sewing project, an apron, sewn on my aunt's treadle sewing machine while I was on an extended visit to her home, up through our kids' involvement years later, it endured.

Michelle and Chris, actively participated in 4-H for a few years. Monthly meetings, demonstrations, club tours, pig weigh-ins, dress revues, and fairs all became part of our family routine.

During fair week, other things virtually came to a standstill, while we made each appointment for the kids to enter their non-livestock entries, standing in line to talk to the judges.

On livestock entry day, their dad helped them load, transport, and deliver their hogs to the fairgrounds, and maybe work on club booths.

The livestock part of the fair involved waiting in the hog-alleys, sometimes in nearly one-hundred-degree heat for either the hog weigh-in, or each participant's turn in the show ring.

Up to this point and all during the fair, these critters needed to be bedded, fed, watered, and groomed, as well as kept cool in the extreme heat, sometimes with a good shower from a hose.

One year, 1986 was a red-letter year for the kids. Not only did their hogs get penned near the top of their class, but their non-livestock entries did extremely well, to boot.

However, these wins were not without their problems. Michelle's hog, a lean,

muscley Chester White needed powdering to go into the show ring. After this was done, the hog had to be kept from lying down, getting dirty.

Then, there was Chris and Pig Lightning. He not only made a pet out of his black and white Hampshire gilt, but he named her after a song in “Grease,” a popular movie of the time.

He had that pig so trained; he could scratch her belly and ride on her back.

Even though the kids practiced leading these hogs in preparation for the show, neither of the animals behaved well in the show ring. They ignored any and every attempt to lead them.

Even so, they garnered blue ribbons, as well as good carcass yields.

In addition to this, because Chris had made such a good friend of his animal, he struggled as she was herded on to the truck hauling her away. I had to pry his hands off the hog fencing as he clung to it, watching her leave.

Michelle tackled her first cross stitch project of the Statue of Liberty, done in over forty hues of blue and green, as well as many tricky stitches. Day after day, night after night, she worked laboriously up until finishing it and framing it the night before entry day.

Although I thought she’d take the purple award for needlework with that project, it earned, I believe a blue ribbon. The project that did earn the coveted grand champion award for her was a painting done in her high school art class. This painting was of a dark-colored robin against a background of medium blue and chartreuse.

Quite striking.

While Chris's project was just as intricate, his materials were much cruder. He had an abiding interest in Iowa-class battleships. He decided to create a four-foot model of the USS Missouri.

After carefully sketching out his project in a notebook, he laid out his materials of split, brown grocery bags, toothpicks, slats of wood lathe, cardboard and glue on the living room floor.

Carefully, he formed the ship's shape by cutting and gluing the grocery sack hull. He then reinforced it with short cut pieces of wood lathe glued into place. Then came forming the deck and superstructure of the ship.

At one point, at my urging, I suppose, he moved the entire structure out of the living room, up the stairway, and into his small bedroom. There, he continued to work on his masterpiece.

The deck was made of more paper sacks, the railing out of carefully cut toothpicks. The operational turrets were constructed of meticulously cut and formed pieces of cardboard, fastened to the deck by some kind of tube formation.

After the ship was built to his specifications, he painted it a realistic gun-metal gray, and waited for it to dry. He then painted on all the appropriate insignia for a U.S. Navy ship.

When E-Day arrived, we carefully moved the project to the back seat of our car, while the kids, I and other projects occupied the front seat. During judging, Chris explained his interest and knowledge

of the Iowa class battleships, as well as his method for building this model.

To his surprise and elation, he was awarded the sought after purple ribbon. After it was brought

home, the ship spent a long time being suspended from the ceiling of his bedroom.

After transporting and helping the kids with their entries, the participation bug bit me, too. I soon was

entering baked goods, as well as sewing and knitting projects in the Home Activities building, as well as

entering my gladiolas and other flowers in the Floral Hall. I have to say, over the years, I didn't do too

badly.

Other great memories of the fairs were the fellowship of families and neighbors who met between

judging and show times at the 4-H stand, or the Livestock Producers Stand, where we would gather for

a quick bite to eat or a long night of coffee and visiting. These two stands, manned by 4-Hers, also gave

the kids experience in food service.

Also, not to be forgotten were the Midway, where kids could experience rides old and new, the horse

shows which featured everything from ponies to draft horses, as well as the Grand Stand. There, for the

price of gate admission, we could see everything from Demolition Derbies to big name and up and

coming country acts, such as Alabama, Tammy Wynette, The Oak Ridge Boys, Loretta Lynn, to name

a few.

The county fair, truly a family affair.

