

Fair Game

I consider myself to be courageous, which means occasionally living outside my comfort zone. Perhaps that's why, when my 10-year-old grandson Josh was visiting me in Downtown recently, I decided to take him to a fair that had set up its temporary quarters in the next town. At the first ring-toss booth, Josh was absolutely certain that he could win that five-foot tall tiger because, he told me, he was a real expert at tossing rings. And, as I soon discovered, he was also a real expert at tossing the bull. As it turns out, you could buy one ring for 50 cents, or three for \$1. But if you wanted a real bargain (I am using the term loosely here), you could get 20 rings for \$5. Of course, Josh said, we should go for the bargain. I thought about arguing with him that an expert ring-tosser like himself would only need one ring -- and would land the tiger on the first throw. But I knew that this was not an argument I would win. So I pulled out the \$5 bill and put it on the counter. 20 rings later, he still didn't have the tiger. "But now I see how to do this," Josh said. "Let's buy another 20 rings and I'll get it this time." This could turn out to be a really expensive tiger.

Well, he never did get the tiger. But there were plenty more places where we could spend our (or my) money. Josh was equally unsuccessful at the next several booths. Then he saw a sign that said, "Everyone is a winner!" This was the right booth for him, he decided. It didn't say what you would win. But after all, paying \$5 to win a \$1 keychain is worth it, right? You're a winner. And who can turn down the 100 percent certainty of being a winner? Not Josh! And thus also not I.

My wallet was getting thinner. And then we spotted it. The one booth that Josh positively could not pass up. The goldfish booth. All you had to do was toss a ping pong ball into just ONE of the many fishbowls and you could go home with your very own goldfish. Josh was sure he could do it. By now, I had a much better understanding of his aim, even if he did not. After all, I reminded myself, he can't hit the toilet, so the chances of him hitting an even smaller bowl are slim. So I stepped right up, as the carnival barker told us to do, and laid my money on the table. Just \$5 for an entire bucket of balls. Bucket sounds big. Truth be told, this was more like a dish, holding about 10 balls. Josh was absolutely certain that he was soon to be the proud owner of his very own goldfish. But getting a ping pong ball into a bowl turned out to be a feat too difficult to master. As we got down to the last ball, I was secretly relieved that I would not have to explain to his parents why I let him come home with a goldfish. But wait! It turns out that this was another one of those everyone-is-a-winner booths. Josh was going to win the goldfish after all. You see, it was the last day of the fair, and obviously this guy didn't want to have to bring all these goldfish home with him, so he was giving them away like it was Christmas. We probably could have gotten five of them if we had just asked. So, he was a winner, too, since we took the fish off his hands. Everyone is a winner. Except, of course, the goldfish.

"You're a winner!" he told Josh as he scooped a goldfish into a plastic bag filled with water and handed it over. The look of pure delight (not to mention surprise) on Josh's face made the entire fair experience one to treasure. No amount of money can buy that joy. And, I might add that

there was another advantage to this little win. Josh decided that we could not spend another second at the fair. No, we had to rush home to get the fish into a proper tank because living in a plastic bag was not a good experience for this darling little creature, which he promptly named Goldie. As an aside, Josh's sister Lexi is somewhat more creative with names. Her fish are called Gil and Finn, and she even named her Christmas tree Cris.

But I digress. Back to Josh. And Goldie. When we arrived home, it should come as no surprise that the rest of the family was somewhat less thrilled than Josh about his new fish. Fortunately, I had an old glass bowl that was quickly designated as Goldie's new home.

While Lexi cleaned up the bowl and older sisters Gabby and Brie tried to figure out what to feed Goldie, Josh decided to run off to play with a friend. So much for fatherhood and responsibility. No matter. He's the birthday boy. We didn't have any fish food in the house, but we learned during a quick online search that "goldfish owners can boil or microwave leafy vegetables like lettuce and spinach, and even peas" and feed them to the goldfish. We started taking bets about how long Goldie would survive – even if Josh was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of sharing some of his spinach with Goldie. I was the most skeptical. "An hour," I said. Brie was more optimistic. "Oh, come on. I give it at least a day." Suddenly Lexi appeared and matter-of-factly stated, "The fish is dead." Well, I definitely won that bet, I announced. Remember, everyone is a winner.

I admit that I was a bit worried that Josh might have a meltdown when he got back and realized that Goldie was no longer among the living. I had a speech all prepared to help ease his pain. But it turned out to be unnecessary. "Oh, well," he said. "Yup," I told him. "Just think of the advantages. Now you'll get to eat all your spinach yourself!"