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Saratoga County Fair, and a bear-inflicted injury

Don Lehman Jul 24, 2017

My daughter and her friend wanted to go to the Saratoga County Fair, so Friday night we went down. We got there early enough (5:30 p.m.) to beat the bulk of the crowd, and after paying \$12 a head (even for two 14-year-olds) we set out.

We go to the Washington County Fair every August, but hadn't been to Saratoga County's incarnation in a decade or so. Having gotten used to the bigger Washington County Fair with far more offerings, we were pretty much done in less than three hours.

The one thing we all wanted to see was the grizzly bear show, which drew a large crowd to the southwest corner of the park. Apparently the Florida-based organization "A Grizzly Experience" brought two bears to the show, but only one bear was scheduled for the evening show.

A young grizzly, who the handler said was two years old (**corrected**), came out, and was doing fair well, getting treats and standing at attention. But it kept nibbling at one of its paws, and seemed a bit agitated, repeatedly pawing at the handlers pants pockets for the first five minutes.

At one point, the handler fed the bear a marshmallow that he (the handler) placed in his mouth, the grizzly delicately nibbling it away.

Things got ugly seconds later. I looked away for a split second, but looked up when I heard "oohs and ahhs" and heard the bear starting to make a weird noise. The handler was holding his face, blood streaming from it, the two of them walking into the trailer where the bears stayed, which was attached to the fenced-in performance area.

The poor bear was making a braying noise, which I think was probably crying as it realized it had hurt its owner. My daughter and her friend said the bear clawed the handler's face.

The woman who was narrating the show ran into the trailer, then ran back out and announced that the show was cancelled. We never did hear what happened. But as I watched the show before the injury, I thought of all the things that could go wrong when you take a 500-pound omnivore and treat it like a circus freak.

We saw one of them.

-- Don Lehman

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