



## What's Happening At Lancaster Extension

by Elizabeth Smith  
Summer Intern

If I could offer you just one piece of advice that would help to guide you through life's perils it would be this: Never get in the way of children and candy. Candy seems to have this unexplained effect on children causing them to act like wild animals who have not eaten in the last 30 days.

You may ask how I came upon this valuable pearl of wisdom, as well you should. After all not everyone has looked into the face of a candy-crazed child and lived to tell about it. I, however, am one of the lucky ones. I am a member of one of the toughest groups around. The few, the proud, the summer assistants.

My job as summer assistant is one of the toughest positions that I have ever held. It requires me to use all of my existing skills as well as skills I never

knew I possessed, such as face painting. Oh sure, it may sound like a piece of cake but believe me it's constant mishmash of hard work and dedication. No where is this more evident than at the Lancaster County 4-H Fair. The fair is the culmination of my job as summer assistant, the "Big Test" if you will. This is the event that will push me to my limits and test all of my skills.

One of the biggest events that take place during fair week is "Tent City". Taking place on the 1st day of the fair, tent city is an annual camp out that occurs every year at the 4-H Fair. 4-H'ers bring a tent and spend the night at the fair playing games and having fun until midnight, which is when they go to bed. The evening was organized by Katina Showman and my fellow summer assistant Paula

Marshall. In order to keep the kids entertained Paula had to come up with various outdoor games, which the children could play. The finale of the evenings' activities was to be the breaking of a piñata filled to the top with candy. This seemed like a nice calm way to end the evening, but as I would soon discover no evening can be calm when you mix children with candy.

Paula had purchased a large smiley face piñata for this year's fair and I must admit that it did look quite tranquil suspended in the air, no knowing that impending doom was coming closer and closer. Around 11:30 Katina got the kids together and announced that it was time to come inside to break the piñata. Usually getting 4-H'ers to come inside is like pulling teeth, since they would rather stay outside and play. That was not the case on this particular evening, as soon as they heard the words, "break the piñata," they came into the building in record time. Eyes gleaming they stared at the sacrificial piñata, calculating in their minds just how much candy it could hold. As Katina explained the rules of the game an erie silence fell over

the group, it seemed everyone was forming plans on how to get the most candy.

The rules of the game were really quite simple. One person would swing at a time and while that person was swinging everyone must stay behind the line to ensure that no one gets hurt. After the piñata was broken the children were to wait for our signal to tell them that they could retrieve the candy. It seemed that everyone understood the directions so without further delay our first 4-H'er was blindfolded and given a chance to whack the unsuspecting piñata. Breaking a piñata takes time since not all of the swings made contact and most of the time the ones that do aren't strong enough. So it ended up taking a little while to weaken the piñata to the point of breaking. The piñata was just about ready to burst, it had sustained massive blows on both sides and was now cracking at the bottom, surely the next hit would do it in. This was not to be the case however, the next hit only knocked out some of the candy but also managed to knock down the entire piñata, leaving us with no way to hang it back up. So with no other options Paula decided to just pour the candy on to the floor and let the children collect it that way. This seemed to be safer anyway since there was no

chance of someone being hit with a stick of flying candy. Now the key phrase to remember her is, "seemed to be a better idea."

The candy was now lying on the floor in front of the children, just ready for the taking. Following the rules every child was waiting for the signal to go. I was standing on the sidelines monitoring the children and thought that since all of the candy was out it would be safe to let the children advance, and it would have been except for one key element. These children no longer were sane individuals, they had turned in to candy-craving 4-H'ers and nothing was going to stop them from getting their sweets. I had no idea just how serious these children were until I shouted out the magic work: "Go!" Instantly the room was filled with dust as 21 4-H'ers threw themselves on the floor in a mad frenzy to grab as much candy as possible. It was an experience I will never forget.

After the dust had settled the 4-H'ers returned to their normal selves, only now they were all clutching bags full of candy, protecting them with their very lives. I must say that once again 4-H has provided me with experiences that I could never find anywhere else. Okay, so maybe I could witness something like this in the wild but who would want to travel that far?

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