

Au revoir to Pageants

By Reg P. Wydeven
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This summer our family was addicted to 'The American Baking Competition.' This CBS reality TV show was hosted by comedian Jeff Foxworthy and featured amateur bakers competing to make the best desserts each week.

The contestants made cakes, pies, cookies, cupcakes and sweets I never even heard of. Inspired, my kids and I made a "surprise cake," which is one cake cooked around another cake, so when you cut into it, you find the surprise.

When the summer series ended, we needed our baking competition fix. Thankfully we discovered 'Next Great Baker' on TLC. Hosted by Buddy Valastro, star of the network's hit 'Cake Boss,' the show features bakers competing by making cakes that look like works of art.

Unfortunately, we failed to turn the channel when 'Next Great Baker' ended. A show called 'Toddlers & Tiaras' followed, and like a train wreck, we couldn't look away from the horror.

The show focuses on little girls competing in beauty pageants. But the entertainment value primarily comes from the over-the-top moms who go to great lengths in an effort for their girls to win. The moms cake the contestants in makeup, give them fake tans, whiten their teeth (and get false sets to cover missing baby teeth), and even teach them to "shake their moneymaker."

It's also very entertaining to discover the winners, because that's when you see the losers have some epic tantrums. They will cry, pout, and have serious hissy fits. And that's just the moms.

The show is definitely a guilty pleasure. But it is an ego-booster; no matter how badly I screw up as a parent, after watching the moms on that show, I feel like I'm doing a pretty good job.

And apparently France agrees with me.

In a surprise vote last week, the French Senate proposed to ban beauty pageants for children under the age of 16. After being passed by a vote of 197-146, the legislation will now go to the lower house of parliament to be decided. If passed, the law will punish violators with up to two years in prison and a fine of approximately \$41,000. And that's not just for the contestants, but also parents, pageant organizers or anyone who "encourages or tolerates children's access to these competitions."

Legislators claim the law is intended to discourage the sexualization of young girls. An often cited example was Thylane Loubry Blondeau, who appeared in French Vogue at the age of 10 posing provocatively in full makeup, high heels and designer clothing.

American pageant moms contend that the competitions bring out the best in their daughters. They claim pageants build self-esteem, bring shy girls out of their shells, and allow the girls to meet tons of new friends and travel to new places. And universally, the moms all insist their daughters want to compete without any pressure from them.

Whether they're being pressured or not, lots of girls want to compete. Experts estimate that 250,000 girls compete in pageants each year, and that pageants are a \$5 billion a year industry.

In response to the legislation, Honey Boo Boo is purportedly boycotting Paris' Fashion Week.

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