

Don't Let the Sweet Face Fool You:
Little Faith Danna is Fierce
By Beth Luna

She's a giggly girl at nine years old, but don't let that fool you. When Faith Danna and her father William do taekwondo together, it is he who bows to her as she holds the higher rank of second-degree black belt to his first-degree black belt.

"She absolutely adores it when that happens!" said mom Gretchen. Granted, William is a federal agent with a black belt in kung foo, but it is Faith who shines in taekwondo, specifically poomsae.

Faith, a student at Glenkirk Elementary School in Gainesville, has sampled many activities in her short life – ballet, softball, swimming, tumbling, horseback riding, rock climbing – before finding her niche with taekwondo poomsae.

"Faith is a natural athlete and was three when she began taekwondo," Gretchen said. "When we recognized she had a talent, we moved her to US Tigers where they could really support her. Now, it's like a second home – we practically live there."

In fact, while maintaining good grades at school, Faith trains six days a week at US Tigers. "Master Charlie is her main instructor," Gretchen said. "Since 2019, she has entered fourteen big competitions, placing mostly gold with a few silver and bronze."

Last December, Faith placed second in the US Taekwondo Poomsae Metro Open International in Jersey City, New Jersey - one of the largest taekwondo federations in the US that works with the Olympics. Faith is ranked #4 nationally in her category for taekwondo poomsae.

Poomsae, or forms, is a set of choreographed movements in a particular sequence consisting of fundamental stances, kicks, punches, and blocks to help students master balance, coordination, and technique. Faith is the youngest member of the 12 person US Tigers poomsae, or forms team.

"Each form is consistent and known worldwide," Gretchen explains. "Faith knows 18 different ones. Competition is serious – each judge is looking at a different part of the body – her hands, feet, eyes, head, fingers, and then she receives a combined score."

Though part of a team, at the competitions participants are by themselves in front of the judges. Even at her young age, Faith takes steps to prepare not only her body but her mind.

"I have to clear my mind and just focus right before each competition," she said. "I get sort of nervous when I begin."

The forms are performed one at a time, lasting from one to two minutes. "As she progresses through the competition, she may have to do as many as six forms, depending on how many

people are participating, what kind of competition it is, and how many people are moving up in the competition,” Gretchen explained.

What does Faith enjoy most about competition? “The best part of going to competitions is performing!” she said. “And I tell you she likes winning too – she is very competitive!” added Gretchen.

During the closures due to the pandemic, young Faith kept training like a pro.

“She amazed me. For almost 8 months she did classes via zoom,” Gretchen said, “in addition to private lessons.”

“I like everything about it,” said Faith. “There are breaking and kicking techniques, and I taught myself a one handed cartwheel.”

Training includes 10 finger pushups, knuckle pushups, and an unbelievable amount of stretching – lots of splits on the wall, on a chair, holding techniques and more, so she can be stretched and loose and can kick over her head.

In addition to her taekwondo schedule, Faith takes swim lessons on Sundays, is a member of Vertical Rock Climbing Club, and she takes mixed media art lessons twice weekly. She also sees an academic tutor twice a week before school starts in the morning.

What’s in store for Faith’s poomsae future? There is taekwondo competition at the Olympics, but as of now that does not include poomsae.

“They are petitioning for poomsae to come to the future summer Olympics; it’s hopeful but there are unfortunately no guarantees,” said Gretchen. “Once Faith attains 4th degree blackbelt she is a master, and at that point she will be around 15 years old and she can begin teaching. And who knows, maybe she’ll be an Olympian.”

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Caption - for photo of her kicking by Washington monument
Training for taekwondo poomsae includes an incredible amount of stretching so Faith can be loose enough to kick over her head. Photo, Gretchen Danna

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Caption:

“Faith knows 18 different forms, and she goes over and over them,” said mom, Gretchen. Here she is practicing sidekick for the form Taegeuk Oh Jang. Photo courtesy Gretchen Danna

Caption - for photo of her kicking by Washington monument

Training for taekwondo poomsae includes an incredible amount of stretching so Faith can be loose enough to kick over her head. Photo, Gretchen Danna

Caption - photo at top right hand corner of p 3

"I like everything about it," said Faith of taekwondo poomsae. Here she works with head coach, Master Charlie Kim of US Tigers, on "front stance with punch." Photo, Gretchen Danna