

Fighting WI pc and firs Striding ele

After trying several activities including dance and other "girly" hobbies, Wheeler finally found her passion in martial arts in 5th grade. She has now been doing it for 10 years, and she most recently earned a 1st degree black belt.

"I practice mostly mixed martial arts, but I earned my martial arts degree in Krav Maga Israeli Combat," Wheeler said. "It's pretty much what the army uses and all the sorts of things to do combat overseas."

Being in martial arts is nothing short of challenging, and Wheeler worked hard every day to not only train, but to also get closer and closer to earning the black belt. One of these obstacles had to include Wheeler's hand... and a brick.

"One of the requirements for black belt testing is that you have to be able to break a brick with your hand," Wheeler said. "I was eligible to test for my black belt; however, I couldn't break a brick so I had to wait another year, which was kind of disappointing. But it gave me more time to grow and cherish and actually have the respect for it, and I didn't have that type of respect before."

After all the struggles and time and effort to get to her black belt, getting a black belt in itself is very exciting and shocking in a way, because you've earned it.

"I would say it was worth it, yeah." Wheeler said. "It was really awarding, and even going for your first degree; first degree is different from just your normal black belt. So even going for first degree, it was even harder because you have to push yourself even harder."

While doing martial arts gaining her strength, Wheeler also dabbled with pageants and has been able to gain confidence while walking down the runway and performing her martial arts.

"When you think of pageants you think of swimsuit models, and there's a stereotype with it. But with the pageant industry that I'm involved in, if you're a hunter and you wanna wear an evening gown that is camouflage with bright orange, wear it!" Wheeler said. "There's usually a lot of singers and dancers, but you don't see a lot of people go up there and then do martial arts. So I was able to do that for all the years I've been able to do the pageant."

In doing both martial arts and pageants, Wheeler has combined the to and has had to find a way to make this completely different activities one and her own.



Wheeler shares her experiences with participating in pagaents as well as being a first-degree black belt and how she balances the strength and power with beauty and

"I think you just have to put to mind to it because if you go into anything and say 'I'm not gonna do well,' then you're not gonna do well!" Wheeler said. "You have to go into it, not cocky, but more confident in yourself, so being able to combine martial arts with pageants, I just had to go into both of them saying 'Hey, I got it."

By doing this, Wheeler's life has been impacted and she has had some major takeaways that she can know look back on.

"In terms of self-confidence within just a normal daily life, I would definitely say that pageants have had a bigger toll on me." Wheeler said. "With pageants my biggest takeaway is to not body-shame yourself because a lot

of people go into pageants and they're like 'I'm too fat for this' or they just don't a positive mindset about it."

"Martial arts has also grown my confidence and being able to defend myself both emotionally and physically so I think both have impacted me in a positive way." Wheeler said. "I think my biggest takeaway from that is if I quit at something, I'm never gonna get the chance to win at it or even get better."

Doing this kind of stuff has even allowed Wheeler to pursue other things she's passion about and help other kids.

"There's optional competitions in pageants and there's a spokesmodel competition. You're allowed to talk about your platform and what you do, and I have always had a love for special needs kids. So I was able to start a non-profit free martial arts class for special needs kids." Wheeler said. "I've been able to impact them to grow confidence in themselves just like the pageant industry taught me to gain confidence and love yourself."

In it all, Wheeler has taken all that gives her that drive and put it together to create something beautiful, she just had to try it first. "I try and live by, just in general, you never know until you try." Wheeler said. "So with anything, whether that's martial arts, pageants, or something completely different, you never know until you try."

Defying all stereotypes, Caroline Wheeler has proudly pursued martial arts and pageants and with her passion, learned life lessons and made life-long friendships that will carry her forward.

Coverage by Malia Logan, photos courtesy of Caroline Wheeler



self-discipline to better myself and not let others affect me." –Caroline Wheeler '19

"I will use