

“My Kid Has Talent? So What, She’s Only 5!”

By Julie Cross, Recreational Gymnastics Program Director for the Champaign County YMCA and author of the forthcoming young adult novel, *Tempest*.

As a gymnastics instructor, if you are faced with this situation, make a copy of the article and pass it on to the parents. This may help the parents to realize the importance of helping their child be the best he or she can be.

As a teacher I have to know each of my little gymnasts. I have to learn what they need from my class and figure out creative ways to harness energy. I need to know that for some kids, even the simplest skills are a challenge and maybe I need to find a new way to break it down. And then there’s a rare few like Emily. Emily is the star of my story. On a Monday morning, at age 5, she began her very first gymnastics class. A day that, no doubt, could have changed the entire course of her life.

I noticed during warm-ups she performed every stretch to perfection. Eyes glued to me, she paid no attention to the other children. During bars, I assisted with forward rolls over the bar. She learned it on the first try. So, I asked her to attempt something more difficult. She does a perfect pullover, on her own. Not only was Emily flexible, she’s strong. I made a mental note of this as she headed to the next station.

As the class continued, I added more difficulty to Emily’s skills, and she could do everything. I was shocked and appalled by her talent (yes, I’m using the scary “T” word) but what intrigued me more than any of the skills she had mastered was her face. Her expression told me everything I needed to know. The entire 60 minute class her face was set, serious, she didn’t smile, not even once. This girl was serious about gymnastics! As the class came to a close, I was thrilled to have witnessed this great moment for Emily. I couldn’t wait to talk to mom.

“Are you Emily’s mom?” I asked the woman



Photo by Dean Capelotti

standing beside the child.

“Yes, is there a problem?” she asked, obviously not looking at my excited face as she scrounged under the bleacher for shoes.

“If you have a minute, I’d love to talk to you about a few different programs we offer that might be great for Emily.”

I knew immediately I was going about this the wrong way, sounding more like a pushy salesman. She finally looked up at me and said politely, “Sure.”

I took a deep breath, attempting to make the best choice of words this time.

“Emily did a fantastic job today, but I think this class might be a little too easy for her.”

Mom smiles kindly, like she’s letting me off the hook. “It’s ok. We just want her to have fun. You do a great job with the kids.”

Again, she’s misunderstood me. I wasn’t looking for compliments. I knew I’d have to use the “T” word. The one that sends many parents running.

