

Staff reporter DON HUNTER talks to kickboxer Leah Goldstein

Her life's just one big kick

PROFILE

A Sunday series on people around B.C.

BORN: Feb. 4, 1963, at Vancouver General Hospital.
HEIGHT: Five feet, six inches.
FIGHTING WEIGHT: 118 lbs.
SCHOOL: B student in Grade 12 at Eric Hamber.
BEST SUBJECT: Phys. Ed. Worst: Math.
FAMILY: Mom, Ahoova; Dad, Sam; Sister, Iris, 22.
ADMIRE: Lorraine Segato of the Parachute Club — "she's the only thing I've ever missed a training session for."
LAST BOOK: The Thornbirds.
Last movie: Crocodile Dundee.
FAVORITE MOVIE: The Color Purple.
DRIVES: '85 Saabird.
GOAL: To be world champion female kick-boxer.

IF Leah Goldstein had been born two months earlier, she'd now be a candidate for the Israeli army.

As it is, she's chosen her own form of combat.

At 17, with a style that's already impressed movie producers, the smiling Eric Hamber student is intent on becoming the world's best female Tae Kwon Do fighter.

That's kick-boxing — right hook, left jab and a thundering foot to the ribs.

"That's my life, that's my goal," says the trim teenager.

And she sends another crunching sidekick into the heavy bag in the one-room gym at the corner of Main and East Seventh in Vancouver.

Here she spends at least three hours daily with her coach, Al Cheng, a former Hong Kong kick-boxing champion.

She's already the Canadian women's champ in her bantamweight division (118 pounds).

There's little glamor to the game and the purses are slim.

When Leah fights Arlene Webber of Albuquerque, N.M., for the world title in the new year, "She might pick up \$3,000 to \$4,000," says Cheng.

So why does she do it? "Because I was born to do it," she explains. "I love the sport. I've got a gift for it. I can't picture myself not doing it."

One thing she wasn't born for was the Israeli army — native women in that country face the draft. She was born in Vancouver two months after her parents immigrated here.

She wanted to start karate when she was six — but her mother told her to wait until she was 10, hoping she'd change her mind. "I didn't," she grins. "I couldn't wait to get started."



Staff photo by Gerry Kahrman

Leah Goldstein has put her best foot forward to kick-boxing success.

By 14, she had her black belt. And in two years, after five pro fights, she was the Canadian champ.

She figures her fighting spirit comes from her parents. Her mom, Ahoova, was born in China. When the Communists took over, the family fled to Israel.

That's where Ahoova met Leah's father, Sam. He was born in Russia and wound up in Israel via Poland.

Both parents back Leah. "Although I think her dad worries a bit more than I do," says Ahoova Goldstein.

Most summers, Leah goes back to Israel to visit relatives.

Two summers ago, she and a cousin were on a bus when another passenger dumped a parcel bomb on the floor. "They cleared the bus in about five seconds."

Every year, she's invited to join the Israeli army. "I've thought about it. But I decided that, if I was to fight for any country, it would be Canada."

Leah doesn't like the tough-gal label.

And she says she's never had to use her lethal karate skills to defend herself on the street.

"I don't know what I'd do if I had to," she laughs. "I'd probably run!"

Her trainer, Cheng, has shipped video tapes of Leah to Hong Kong movie bosses.

"They think she is fantastic," he says. "They are looking for a script for her, and she could become the first woman kick-boxing movie star."