What has Foxx learned from his sister? “How to smile. How to just be in the moment,” says the actor (with DeOndra on Oct. 15).

JAMIE FOXX & HIS SISTER DEONDRA

MY SISTER, THE SUPERSTAR

He may be the famous one, but the actor says the real inspiration in the family is DeOndra, who is living a rich and rewarding life with Down syndrome by VICKIE BANE
A nyone who knows DeOndra Dixon knows never to challenge her to a dance battle unless you're prepared to lose. At the sprawling L.A. home she shares with big brother Jamie, DeOndra and other close relatives, even famous friends like Demarcus Washington and Chris Brown, cede the spotlight to DeOndra when the music starts pumping. "They just watch her," says Fonz. "It’s such a sight!" And Fonz — no slacker when it comes to wowing a crowd — admits he was hardly outmatched by his sister, 27, when the two took the stage at a recent fund-raiser for the Global Down Syndrome Foundation in Denver. After Fonz performed his song "Love Brings Change," in honor of DeOndra and others with Down syndrome, the battle was on. Tuning her hair and grinning broadly, DeOndra bent back her 4'11" body near parallel to the floor. "I always lose the dance battle," Fonz said after the show, "because she's got the good moves."

She also has the kind of confidence that comes from the support of a loving family, including her proud, Crime-stalking big brother. "I don’t want to think about it," Fonz says, looking at her brother. "These kids are so beautiful. This event allows them to shine."

DeOndra has done just that, appearing in Fonz’s "Blame It" music video, dancing at the 52nd Annual Grammy Awards in front of 26 million viewers and now taking a leading role as the 2011 Ambassador for the Global Down Syndrome Foundation. "She is a credit to her family," says long-time family friend Hannah Abeinader. "I will be running around town with all these things to do, and DeOndra will walk up, grab her and hug her, and we’ll stand there for 10 minutes hugging her. It brings tears to your eyes."

"DeOndra is the only thing I’m talking about all the time," Fonz adds. "We weren’t thinking about the fact that she had Down syndrome."

DeOndra was diagnosed with Down syndrome at age 1. "We weren’t thinking about the fact that she was one," she says. "She was the little chocolate ball." Growing up in Dallas and Fonz’s hometown of Terrell, Texas, DeOndra was treated like any other member of the family. "My mom was like, ‘You get on the bus with the regular kids, go to the regular school, do your thing,’" recalls the actor. "In the neighborhood, that’s how it is. We just got along."

By the time DeOndra graduated from high school in 2006, Fonz had made it big in L.A. "I said, ‘I’m going to live with me,’” remembers Fonz, who already had his sister DeOndra, 24, a dancer, in his nocoast, living with him. Then the couple that he calls Fonz and his mother moved in as well. "Glowing my family in with me is nothing but nontop.
DeOndra's high school graduation in 2002: laughter and kickin' it,” says Fox. “And a little work.”

The work comes in part, from DeOndra, who recently left the Tierra Del Sol Foundation School, where she was employed in the school cafeteria and collected a regular paycheck. The brother and sister enjoy outings together that include birthday bashes at the Congo Room and regular movie nights. DeOndra also shares Fox's wicked sense of humor. “I call it Chetto Down,” he explains, recalling how he questioned her about something she took from the refrigerator and she said, “If you know I got Down syndrome... it just happens.” Fox admires her confidence and hopes it leads to more dancing on videos and maybe even a movie role. “I hope she lives the most regular, carefree and fun life,” says Fox. As for DeOndra, “I'm happy to have a big brother to count on,” she says simply, “who I love every day.”

DOWN SYNDROME

Occurring in one out of every 601 births, Down syndrome is the most common chromosomal birth defect in the U.S. Babies born with it have 47 chromosomes instead of 46, which hampers physical and mental development. Life expectancy has increased dramatically for those with the disorder, from 25 in 1983 to 60 today. But in recent years, the National Institutes of Health have defunded research on DS, at the same time, prenatal genetic testing has led, in part, to an increase in parents who opt to end pregnancies involving DS. For more information, visit globaldownsyndrome.org.