

My Chess Story

Gerry's Adventures in the Chess Jungle

Thanks Pete – that was great.

Hi – I'm Gerry and I want to tell you about some of my chess adventures so that you can see how much fun chess can be.

I grew up in a small town in the USA and when I was a teenager there was a minor chess craze for a while. I was keener than everyone else and I got a chess book out of the library and studied it. After that I could beat everybody! I thought that I was really good! Then I went to university.

Hold on for a moment. Imagine that you are in a very hot, dry, sandy desert. There's no vegetation to be seen until you notice a patch of green grass and weeds behind a boulder. Amazing! Remarkable you think. Now imagine that you are in a jungle and you come across the same patch of grass and weeds. You wouldn't think anything of it, would you? You would probably walk by it without noticing it. Well in high school I was in a chess desert and when I went to university I was in the chess jungle.

At university I was a mediocre chess player – the best guys always beat me but I always beat the worst guys. The guys in the middle – well, win some, lose some. But I enjoyed playing so I stuck to it and tried to improve.

My first chess adventure was there. The university organized a simultaneous chess match – one player plays many opponents at the same time. I hadn't heard of this before but I was keen to give it a go. Donald Byrne – an international chess master – was to play all comers.



IM Donald Byrne

* 1930 (45) † 08.04.1976



Birthyear : 1930
Deathday : 08.04.1976



Nigel Eddis
New York (1985)



Here's a picture of Donald Byrne.

And here's a picture of a simultaneous match being played.



I'll tell you about the boy later. In a simultaneous match the 'chess master' – I'll call him that for brevity – is on one side of many tables and all of his opponents are on the other. The 'chess master' moves from one board to the next and makes his move. His opponents wait for his return and then makes their move. This picture illustrates a typical situation – the 'chess master' is cool and calm – gliding from one board to the next and moving quickly. But look at his opponents! Hunched over their boards, heads down, deep in thought. In my game with Byrne I thought that if I played carefully I could at least get a draw. 20 or so moves in I thought I was ok but when I made my next move I thought I saw him smirk. Smirk!!! What's going on?? I don't see anything wrong with my move and his move is just ok – it isn't great, is it? I decide my next move and wait for his return. This time when I make my move he smiles! What's that smile about? As he moves away I pour over the position – I'm lost, he's pinned my knight and I'm going to lose material and hence the game. What a lesson!

When I left university I didn't play chess for 4 or 5 years but when I came to the UK I joined a chess club. There seemed to be more interest in chess here in the UK than in the USA. For example in the newspaper there was an article about a young boy that was a real chess genius Nigel Short – the boy in the 1976 picture. In 1977 – 12 year old Short beat 10x British champ Roger Penrose.

I lived in Bedfordshire and had the advantage of being only 45 minutes from London, which is where my next adventure occurred.

In 1993, 28 year old Nigel Short played the Russian World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov best of 24 games.



Kasparov was the best chess player in the world in the 20th century. He was champion for 15 years. I managed to get tickets to their 16th game. It was held in the main auditorium of the Savoy Hotel in London. Earphones were available to hear commentary on the game. The players sat at a table on the stage – not very visible to the audience so the board is projected onto a screen at the back. The players are introduced – they shake hands and sit down. The commentators are international masters themselves, so their comments are useful and entertaining. Occasionally they make quips that make the audience snigger. When this happens, both players turn and glare at the audience – there's nothing to laugh about as far as they are concerned! An hour or so into the game the experts can see no advantage to either side but Kasparov makes a move and the commentator remarks 'That doesn't look like the best move to me!' A moment or two later Short makes his move and the commentator says 'He's got him!!' Kasparov had indeed made a poor move and Short immediately took advantage of it – but was it a winning advantage? Several moves later it is obvious that Short will win. Kasparov knocks over his king with a flick of his finger, stands up and offers Nigel

Short his hand to shake - he resigned! The audience jumped up and cheered. Being a small town boy, any trip to London is special, but that was a great adventure for me.

Twelve years later I learned that Kasparov was signing his new book at the London Chess Centre. I bought the book and got into the queue to have it signed. When it was my turn he said 'What's your name?' Gerry, I said. 'What do you want me to write' he asked. 'Give me some advice on the French Defence. Maybe even tell me not to play it.' He wrote – 'To Jerry, best of Luck' and his signature, the date and 'London'. He was a real gentleman and I was a jerk asking him for advice.

A few years later I decided to 'check out' the 'Chess Olympiad', again in London. The Olympiad is a chess tournament for high stakes – 9 of the best players in the world – all play all – for lots of money. There are many other chess related activities going on around the tournament as well. Plenty of chances to get autographs, buy books and even get to chat to some of the big stars. They also had a 'simultaneous' event – this year it was against Victor Korchnoi.



Korchnoi was known as the 'Best Player not to be World Champion' – in his prime he had played for the title several times. He was one of the first Russians to defect to the West. Russia had an iron grip on chess for much of the 20th century and they made life very difficult for him. I was lucky to be able to buy a ticket to play him. By then he was 78 but still a strong player. I too was older and wiser (I guess) because I gave him a good game and was one of the last players standing. He seemed a very crusty guy while playing but when the game was over he turned into a nice old granddad. That was a great adventure for me.

Two years later I repeated the 'Olympiad' experience only this time I played Nigel Short! He made 'Short' work of me! After I resigned, he signed the score sheet and I said that I had seen him beat Kasparov. He was very modest about it and reminded me that that was the only game he won.

These have been my adventures in chess so far – and not one win!

P.S. You may be thinking that these events can hardly be called adventures. They may not seem venturesome to you but they were to me. In fact every game that I play is an adventure - to me chess is an adventure. It is easy – but not trivial – to learn. Games develop rapidly – it doesn't take long to be breaking new ground, playing a game that no one has played before. It is great when a plan comes to fruition, and it can be just as great to be beaten by a subtle sequence of moves. You can be full of admiration and be disappointed at the same time.

Thank you for listening.

1965/66 – Byrne vs Pozzani

Byrne unfortunately best known for 'Game of the Century' losing to 13 year old Bobby Fischer (1956).

1976 – Picture of Short in simultaneous match

1977 – 12 year old Short beats 10x British champ Penrose

1993 – Short vs Kasparov

2005 – Kasparov book signing

2010 – Korchnoi vs Pozzani

2012 – Short vs Pozzani