

MY FIRST MOVE



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In this column, we feature advice from your chess heroes and explore what shaped their development when they were Chess Life Kids like you!

THE EARLY DAYS

My dad taught me [chess] at four years old but it took me some time to catch on to all the rules. My mom said that my brother Greg and I kept our knights on the back rank for a while as we learned the trickiest piece movement.

FALLING FOR THE GAME

At my first international tournament in Brazil, I experienced the trifecta of chess experiences.

a. I won a beautiful attacking game against a higher-rated player, where I castled queenside, sacrificed a pawn, and mercilessly attacked her king. I started that game with such butterflies in my stomach. It taught me the value of nerves.

b. I wasn't super popular in my high school, but in Brazil, everyone seemed to want to be my friend. I



Jennifer's father, FM Michael Shahade, taught her chess when she was four. She often played against her big brother, IM Greg Shahade. Photos, this page, courtesy of subject.

went to my first discothèque and fell in love with Latin American music.

c. To prepare for the games, I often laid in bed and tried to solve studies blindfold. When I got one, the flow experience was so pleasurable that I consider solving these as my very first interaction with art.



The combination of social/cultural impact, competition, and artistic pursuit made me realize that chess was much more than a game.

FAVORITE OPENING

I always loved the Sicilian, with both colors. There was a chess tournament in Buenos Aires many years ago where each player was required to play the Open Sicilian with both colors. That sounds like a perfect chess event to me!

OVERCOMING DISAPPOINTMENT

One of my biggest chess disappointments was getting overconfident in a game in the 2000 U.S. Women's Chess Championship. I played a wonderful game in the Dragon Sicilian and traded into a king and pawn endgame that was easily winning. Or so I thought. I miscalculated by a tempo and the

totally winning endgame turned into a draw. I ended up in clear third in that event. A half point more would have given me a tie for first. That was a harsh but important lesson that you must remain vigilant, especially when it comes to king and pawn endgames.

WHAT'S ON HER PLATE

As the Women's Program Director for US Chess, I raise money and awareness to bring more girls and women into the game. It's so much fun for me to interact with girls and women of all ages at events as I work on our goal to increase our female membership.

I host a new US Chess podcast, "Ladies Knight"—conversations with top women players. We recently featured our new U.S. Women's Champion, 17-year-old Jennifer Yu, and I think that episode would be of particular interest to *Chess Life Kids* readers. Jen is an excellent student

who scored nearly perfect on her SATs—she gave some valuable tips on how to manage time. She also explained that her best friends in chess, including Carissa Yip, inspire her to work harder (*see pg. 14 for more on Jennifer Yu!*).

You can subscribe to "Ladies Knight" on iTunes and join @USChessWomen on Twitter and Instagram to join in the conversation.

HER CRYSTAL BALL

In the future, I believe we will see far more women in chess, more innovative formats and more rapid and blitz events.

MY BEST ADVICE

In addition to your weaknesses, think about what you love about chess, and make sure that you're incorporating that into your study routine. Studies and Sicilian, anyone?

“Judit Polgar was my hero growing up. Marcel Duchamp was a hero in college, as he taught me the intersection of art and chess.”

“My proudest chess moment was winning my first U.S. Women's Championship in Seattle.”



Photo: Maria Emelianova