

***A Memorable Life: A Glimpse into
the Complex Mind of Bobby Fischer***
Audio Tour Transcript

Thank you for attending the World Chess Hall of Fame's exhibition *A Memorable Life: A Glimpse into the Complex Mind of Bobby Fischer*, which explores the life of one of the greatest American chess players. The audio supplement to the exhibition contains interviews with figures from the world of chess regarding their interactions with Bobby Fischer. We hope you enjoy listening to their recollections.

International Master John Donaldson, a chess historian, interviews the participants in this audio tour. John has served as the Director of the Mechanics' Institute Chess Club of San Francisco since 1998 and worked for Yasser Seirawan's magazine, Inside Chess from 1988 to 2000. He has had held the title of International Master since 1983 and has two norms for the Grandmaster title, but is proudest of captaining the U.S. national team on 15 occasions winning two gold, three silver and four bronze medals. Donaldson has authored over thirty books on the game including a two-volume work on Akiva Rubinstein with International Master Nikolay Minev.

All introductions to the passages are read by Dr. Leon Burke, Music Director and Conductor of the University City Symphony Orchestra and Assistant Conductor of the Saint Louis Symphony Chorus.

1. Walter Browne

A six-time U.S. Champion, Walter Browne represented the United States in four Chess Olympiads, winning four team bronze medals. His biography and best games collection *The Stress of Chess (and its infinite finesse) My Life, Career and 101 Best Games* was published in 2012. Here, Browne recounts his experiences with Bobby Fischer.

John Donaldson: A question I have for you is, I know that you went to Erasmus High School in Brooklyn just like Bobby did. When did you first meet him?

Walter Browne: Well I didn't meet him in Erasmus because he went there probably four or five years before I did.

JD: Right. You're six years younger if I remember correctly.

WB: Yeah, 5 ½, almost six years.

JD: So if it wasn't at Erasmus High School you first met Bobby where was it?

WB: I saw him at the Manhattan Chess Club. Remember when he won that tournament 11-0? I saw him around that time.

JD: Okay, so -

WB: And I saw him probably after that. That was maybe around that time of year. I saw him at the Manhattan Chess Club on several occasions.

JD: Okay, when was the first time that you actually spoke to him?

WB: Well, at the Manhattan Chess Club he tried to get me [inaudible] We played two games, and after two games he quit me. He said it was too much. I wrote about this in the book. But then he gave me the spot—I get ten extra pawns, he gets eight extra pawns. A normal starting lineup for chess, right? So in the beginning he was out 16 pawns, and I know it sounds crazy, but it was just an experiment, and he beat me at it. We played both sides, and he gave me two extra pawns on review, and it's never been played before or since that I can recall.

JD: Yeah. No, definitely. That's very interesting. Did you possibly meet Bobby also at some of the U.S. Junior Closed tournaments you played in?

WB: No, we never played in the same tournament other than Rovinj/Zagreb in Yugoslavia. That was in 1970.

JD: Right. No, what I was thinking more was when you played, that is you—

WB: In 1960—no I didn't win it. The year that I came second after I won the last game against [Sal] Matera. I went upstairs to the Manhattan Chess Club, and lo and behold, [Pal] Benko was there with Fischer and I guess they were analyzing and sitting around, and they asked me how I did, and then they actually wanted to see the game. So he actually went over the game with me.

JD: Mmhm.

WB: And Benko was there. And he said it was a pretty good game and some comments. I don't remember exact comments, but basically positive.

JD: Mmhm. So really the first time it sounds like you spent a lot of time with Bobby was when you played with him in a tournament in Rovinj/Zagreb in 1970?

WB: Well I—No, I saw him—we got together quite a few times in the mid-60s. One time he even invited me. I went to his hotel and we went over some games and you know he showed me some ideas. I remember him specifically showing me why you play Nh6 after something to do with a4 that you have the b4 square although the Knight on b4 in the Benoni doesn't really do much as we found out later, but at the time the idea of Na6 was the way for Black to play before jumping to b4. So I knew him. I saw him in Central Park one time. We got together for, I don't know, about five hours where we did incredible—we walked all the way across to 9th Avenue—are you familiar with New York?

JD: Yes, I am.

WB: Well we went from Central Park and we walked about ten blocks over to 9th Avenue around 70th Street something like that. And we stopped in the deli, we had lunch. Then we walked all the way down to the Village. All the way down to the Village! I mean that's like what, four miles?

JD: Yeah I'd say four or five miles—

WB: Right, right. He actually bought me some fresh-squeezed orange juice because he was really, you know, into the health thing. And we were talking all the time, a lot of conversation. He was almost nonstop you know talking about one thing—you know he doesn't just walk—constantly his mind's working and he's talking about something—some upcoming tournament or players or chess in general. And when we got down there we went to a restaurant. It was like a Middle Eastern restaurant or

maybe Lebanese, something like that. And then he was already preparing for the Interzonal in 1968 I think.

JD: Right, for Sousse yeah. Right, Sousse '67.

WB: Sousse '67, that's what it was.

JD: Now, when you went with Bobby and you made the trek over to Central Park over across to 9th and then down to the Village, did you visit any chess book shops along the way by chance?

WB: I think, yeah. We did stop at one but it was the one down—I guess it was in the Village or close to it. And we went in there. We might've spent an hour or so in there and he would go through different books, and you know he'd go through a lot of material. The book dealer probably knew him and told him where the key books were that he might be interested in.

JD: Mmhm. Now, so you got to spend a lot of time with Bobby on several occasions—

WB: On that particular day we did. Other times I was with him for several hours at a time. And then there was the time earlier, before that as I originally saw him at the Manhattan Chess Club the story was that he played Asa Hoffmann blitz chess, and I was just in the room at the time and a lot of people were looking and watching. Maybe eighteen people or something were gathered around. And he was betting, and he was giving Asa 20-1 money on it.

JD: Woah.

WB: So he beat him a lot of games, but finally he lost a game, and he had to reach in every pocket to find the money to pay off the twenty dollars—his pants, his jacket, everywhere.

JD: Right, I understand.

WB: So it was a funny experience. And then another time he asked me to play him a game at the club, and I played him a game, and he said to me...well, actually I think he gave me queen odds. But I was just kind of kidding around. I didn't really think, oh he could give me queen. I was probably a weak player but the queen would be a bit much probably. Anyway, he gave me queen odds, and I beat him.

JD: Whoa. That's funny.

WB: What are the odds? I mean that he'd give me a queen, that's a huge spot.

JD: Yeah it is, indeed.

WB: So those were the days back probably around 1963 when he was still hustling a bit in the sense of he was willing to play people odds, and making some side bets on the games, and so on.

JD: He sort of stopped doing that after that year, I think.

WB: Probably. He didn't do it that much I would guess after 1964. The one time I came to the Manhattan Chess Club he was playing with Larry Evans and he was spotting him four minutes to three and they played quite a few games.

JD: So, did you guys travel together to Yugoslavia in 1970?

WB: No, we didn't travel together. I saw him there at the tournament.

JD: Right. And did you spend a lot of time with him during the tournament?

WB: We had some dinners together a few times during the tournament.

JD: And tell me what was it like when you played him? Because you had him on the ropes.

WB: Well in the opening he missed his move—it was rook h3 or something. Of course I made a mistake in the opening. He was better, but he didn't capitalize on it like he could have. He should've been maybe superior. Maybe he made a mistake and then the game just completely turned around. And then it could've been equal, but he maybe didn't see the move and then I got the better of it, and then by the fortieth move, I won this game, and then it was just a question if I could win and how long it would take, but it was very technically difficult, at least for me at the time. And then I slowly improved, but it was adjourned like four times.

JD: Oh, I didn't realize that—

WB: In those days you played forty moves you know two-and-a-half hours and then sixty moves, and then you might adjourn again and so it happened like that, and the game was ninety-eight moves so it was over several days and the final version of it I had a winning position. I had seen the move, but I wanted to win too artistically so I played another move so I overlooked something and he found the repetition, and I got to a draw.

JD: But still a very memorable game.

WB: Yeah. Oh yeah, a very memorable game. What's interesting—I've learned a lot analyzing these games and I think I might have mentioned this to you—there was a line, what was it, I think it was Rook and Bishop versus Knight and Bishop, again—(to himself) wait a minute, let me see—

JD: Where there no pawns?

WB: Something you wouldn't think would be a win. But it was a win, but there were no pawns left. I had the rook, so it had to be the computer said it'd be a win. Maybe it was a win because I had king near the edge of the board, but the king was in the middle of the board, and I don't even think the king was on the first rank. And the computer's saying well that's a win.

JD: Right, it was one of those sort of table-based positions that the computer figures out. Where it probably, might take a long time.

WB: Right. Right, in those days, I mean, nobody would think that that would be a win.

JD: Right, in fact, I think Fischer annotated that game for Chess Informant, and when he did, and he got to that position, he just made the assumption it was a draw because how could you know? So after Bobby won the title in 1972 did you have any contact with him after that?

WB: So after 1972, I didn't go to the match. At the time I was playing the U.S. Open which I won, beating [Bent] Larsen and I had a great tournament. But I was following the match with Spassky on channel 9 in New York City. Shelby Lyman was narrating. It was fascinating. It was unbelievable, because you know, it was in the newspapers, you'd see it on the front page, an article, then the whole back page would be about the match. Every column. So it was an incredible amount of publicity during the match, just unreal. And I didn't see Bobby until—he was a little miffed about an article I had in Sports Illustrated, a couple of references to him, but I don't know why he did take exception, but he did. Anyway, our mutual friend though, Jim Buff basically got us together again, okay?

JD: Mmhm.

WB: And that was around 1981. He came to my house. Twice he came for dinner. We had a good time. We went over some games. I had just won the U.S. Championship for the fifth time in 1981, and he liked the games and had some positive comments. One game of pool was played. I broke the balls and then he never got to shoot. I mean how often do I run all the balls then the 8-ball? Once in a hundred games. The one time he comes to my house, I run all the balls. I guess he was a bit impressed with that. And let's see what else.

JD: He liked to make the long phone calls?

WB: Well what happened was—yeah, the first two times he came, he ate dinner, stayed for what, three, four, five hours, you know. But the third time he came, he wanted to stay overnight which he did. But the following day he was on the phone and I said, “Hey that’s a bit much.” And he got kind of upset about that and just kind of stormed out, and [I] never saw him again. As you know, I didn’t go to the match in ‘92 like Yasser [Seirawan] did, but he can fill you in on that. I didn’t see him again unfortunately. I was sad to hear about his predicament in Japan. He really lost it a bit. Like the one time we took a walk he was more disturbed, upset about you know what he perceived to be a worldwide conspiracy and so on, which we don’t have to go into details really about that. But you know how he was different in ‘81 than I had known. The guy I knew in the ‘60s was a lot different than the guy I met in 1981.

2. Helgi Ólafsson

Grandmaster Helgi Olafsson has represented Iceland a record fifteen times in Chess Olympiads and won six national championships. He is also well-known for helping to bring Bobby Fischer to Iceland from Japan in 2005. He wrote about his experiences in *Bobby Fischer Comes Home: The Final Years in Iceland, a Saga of Friendship and Lost Illusions*. Here he speaks about his friendship with Fischer.

John Donaldson: There was a book that was produced—that was advertised on the internet—called *My 61 Memorable Games*. Did Bobby ever have anything to say about that book?

Helgi Ólafsson: As far as I am concerned, this book was published or known about this book by the end of the year 2007, and then at that time Bobby was very ill. You know, he was in the hospital during that period and died in the beginning of 2008. And I, I really don't know, I don't think he had any idea of this book.

JD: Ok. Another question I have for you is Nigel Short, at a certain period of time, was losing again and again to a certain player on the internet, and he was absolutely convinced that this player was Bobby Fischer. Did Bobby know about this and what was his reaction to that?

HÓ: Yeah. I asked—I actually brought this up with him once, you know, and he just laughed it up. He said that he would never play on the internet, you know. And so it was not Bobby Fischer who was playing this game. This I know for a fact.

JD: Ok. Now he was in Iceland between 2005 and he died in 2008. Did Bobby ever work on any writing projects at that time?

HÓ: Uh, I don't think so. You know of course, you must know, that he was a very sensitive person, you know. But he had some plans of writing about pre-arrangements and stuff like that. He even asked me or perhaps Eugene [Torre] to help him or assist him if any such project would come to realization, but I don't think he wrote he wrote anything at all, you know. I don't think so.

JD: Did he ever express interest in writing about his games? You know, *60 Memorable Games* ends in 1967. Did he ever show any interest in writing about, you know, games that he played after that?

HÓ: We, uh, actually the first time I met him, it was a time when he was staying at Hotel Loftleidir or what use to be called Hotel Loftleidir, it was probably in April of 2005. We were talking about his career, and I said to him something like this, "I think it would be very interesting if you could write your biography. Or/and your career as a chess player." And he almost stopped me in the tracks by saying,

“Yes, yes that is not such a bad idea, but first I have to, I have to come to this pre-arrangement thing and this cheating of the Russian chess players.” So that was his reaction to my, well, what can I call it, inquiry or suggestion.

JD: Right. Now Bobby was not the only strong player to suggest that the Russians had pre-arranged games between themselves. Did he know about a Valery Salov and if so, had they ever had any connection?

HÓ: No, I never heard him speak at all with, about Valery Salov or with him. No, no, not at all.

JD: Ok, now Bobby, when he was coming up, of course, I mean, there was no Chessbase. There was no use of computers. But did he ever adapt to that? I know in 1992 [Eugene] Torre was helping him use an early version of Chessbase. When Bobby was in Iceland did he use Chessbase at all?

HÓ: Well, I don't think he ever used Chessbase. But the thing is, I brought him a laptop when he came to Iceland. And I gave him, also, the Russian database, Chess Assistant And he used it a little bit. I can tell you that. I remember that we, we went through several games. For instance he...we were discussing the Olympiad in Siegen in West Germany in 1970, and he wanted to show me a game which was played by Vlastimil Hort, I think it was maybe against [Duncan] Suttles or someone like that, because he was very impressed and held his colleagues in high regard, like Hort, Bent Larsen, Lajos Portisch, and he even mentioned Laszlo Szabo in that connection. So on another occasion, because I had been playing in the Turin Olympiad in 2006, and we were discussing this Olympiad, and I told him that there was some kind of a poll about the most beautiful female chess player in the Olympiad, and we went through all the photos published on the internet. And I think, I don't remember exactly what his pick was as the most beautiful woman of that Olympiad. But she was from Africa and he told me that he very much liked ethnic women. We had found this photo then. He wanted very much to look at her games, and we did. We had found a few games and we looked at these games. But I would also tell you, because my wife met him a few times, and he was very gentleman-like, the old fashioned way, if I may add, yes.

JD: Well thank you. Now recently it has come to be known that Russell Targ, who is the brother-in-law of Bobby Fischer...

HÓ: Yeah. Yeah.

JD: He bequest, well he has, a large archive of the Fischer family, not just chess materials, but also family records and things. And they include, I would say, about 50 games of Bobby's that have never been published. Like some of the missing games of his match with [Milan] Matulović for example. I wonder, did Bobby ever mention that? Was he aware of that to your knowledge?

HÓ: Well I really don't know about that. The thing is this: He never brought up his family matters. He would never mention his sister, Joan. But I on the other hand, I noticed that he loved his mother very much. I heard somewhere that they had fallen out for some reason, but that had all been forgotten. He spoke quite often about his mother, but never about his sister or brother-in-law or his family in the States.

JD: Now. Going in a different direction... Bobby is very well known for his distaste, if you could use that word, for modern opening theory. I think that was one thing that he really didn't like and that led to the development of Fischer Random chess. And what I'm curious about is if he ever realized about what was happening in the other direction; that is with, for example, with the Nalimov Tables where all positions on a chess board, with 6 pieces or fewer, had been worked out. Was he aware of that and did he express any concern in that direction?

HÓ: Yeah, well the thing is that in something like 2006 and 2007 and even earlier in 2005 the data pages were not as good as they are today. For instance we didn't have software like Fritz, or Rybka, or Houdini or anything like that included in the packets we buy nowadays you see. And for instance he mentioned something like chess had been played out or something like that. But then I pointed out that there was a huge amount of failure in the old days, in like 1972, and he would acknowledge that and say, "Yes that is correct, there was a lot of failure back then. That is absolutely right." But you must remember that I mention a meeting he had with Vishy Anand in early 2006, and when he wanted to show about a few positions, particularly curious ones. But he brought forward his pocket chess set, you know, quite like a pocket chess set he had something like almost 40 years ago in '71 or something like that. And I think that Anand described this well, he sensed some kind of generation gap, you know, there, when he met Bobby there. He pointed one interesting thing out to me, that what he liked about chess was that there is a game where you had to find your own way, you see, find your own tricks or traps or strategy, anything like that. So he was not really fond of the computers in chess. And he was certainly not a purveyor of table base or anything like that, yes. I think I can state that, yes.

JD: Ok. One of the things that seem—I mean there were several really devastating blows that were felt by Bobby in the 1990s and just before that. One of them was at the very end of 1998. Bobby had entrusted all of his treasures that he had amassed over the years to a friend, Robert Ellsworth. Ellsworth had them. They were stored in a Bekins facility in Pasadena, California, and, of course, everyone knows that there was some miscommunication, and the payment wasn't made, and the treasures were auctioned off. According to Endgame by Frank Brady, Ellsworth was able to buy some of the items back at the auction. Then he had them taken to Budapest and personally delivered to Bobby. I'm wondering if any of that memorabilia from Budapest and also from Belgrade, did it ever make its way to Reykjavík?

HÓ: I don't think so. We actually discussed this matter when it came up—that it was possible to get something back, but Bobby didn't want anything to do with it. The thing is that he was absolutely convinced that they had probably picked out the most valuable things in his memorabilia and so he just stood firmly by his claim that this was a grand theft. He didn't want any of the old German chess books or anything like that back.

JD: What sort of library did Bobby have in Reykjavík? Did he have a lot of his chess books there?

HÓ: About the chess books he had there...I remember two books which were...He had got [Garry] Kasparov's book on the great, my great predecessors. And I think he was not so unhappy about that book even though he didn't talk very madly about Garry as you know. He, for instance, was very impressed that he had all the scores correct. And he mentioned, for instance, his game against Mark Taimanov—it has been published with some wrong concluding moves and some additions, but I'm not that familiar with this game, but I noticed that some of his scores are not quite correct. He, however, didn't like the photo on the front page. He felt it was Photoshopped so as to show him in a bad light or something like that, you know. It had something to do with some wild color in his hair. Well, that was something he mentioned. Then there was also this book Bobby Fischer Goes to War.

When he was in Japan, I sent along with the Icelandic delegation, I think it was three chess books, it was a book by Edward Winters on Capablanca, and there was a book by Andy Soltis, something called Soviet Chess 1917—1991. And I think I also sent him a book on Alekhine by Pablo Moran. So these are the only chess books I know of. He had them in his library. But his library consisted of books on historical subjects you know, like, World War II and the upcoming Nazis and socialism in the '30s and '40s. I also brought him a book about [Robert] Oppenheimer and I also brought him a book about some kind of transcript of a hearing over Oppenheimer after the atom bomb was dropped on Japan. He was very curious in this period of time, these times when, for instance, his mother was engaging in political activism in Europe or later in America. It seemed to me that he was trying to understand the motives of his mother and his father. So it was, as I pointed out in my book, it was a little bit one dimensional but he had a very keen interest in these times. I always liked that he was forming his own opinion about certain events in World War II or before World War II. During these terribly rough times in his life, really.

3. Viktors Pupols

Few American players have had longer chess careers than the Latvian-born National Master Viktors Pupols, who has been playing tournament chess for seven decades. A legend in the Pacific Northwest, Viktors is one of only three players to defeat Fischer on time. He is the subject of the book *Viktors Pupols, American Master* written by Larry Parr. Pupols speaks of his experiences competing against a young Bobby Fischer in the 1955 U.S. Junior Open.

John Donaldson: So I have Viktors Pupols here, many time Washington state champion. Viktors played against Bobby Fischer in the 1955 U.S. Junior Open which was held in Lincoln, Nebraska. Can you give us some background, Viktors, on this game?

Viktors Pupols: First of all, the tournament was scheduled so that I would qualify to play in it. I was the oldest player in this junior championship. At that point the cut-off age was 21, and I was 2 weeks away from that. But Bobby was the youngest, at age 12. The organizer was Alex Liepnieks. He was a strong player, but he was mostly interested in organizing, and that is why there were 2 U.S. Opens held a few years after this junior championship. Before that, in Lincoln, Nebraska, there was a chess club. Chess was a pastime. But Alex came from a background where you organize tournaments, and tournaments were a regularly scheduled thing. And so this changed the way chess, in Nebraska, was run.

However, imagine that you are in New York, and you are a player, and you'd like to play in the youth junior championship, but it is held in Lincoln, Nebraska. Some of us are uneasy going to a big city and finding our way around. For a player that comes from New York and winds up on Lincoln, Nebraska, it is a very similar experience. There was a committee of about four kids from New York, and most of the time you would find them wandering the streets of Lincoln, Nebraska, trying to find things to do. Now Bobby didn't have quite the same problem because just about all of the time he was involved with that chess set, with a pocket set, analyzing. Now, he was 12 years old. Just about everybody else was 15 and above. And you know how it goes with people who are that much younger in that age group. You are frozen out. You are not one of the in crowd. Not that you want to be, but you're not. Larry Remlinger was supposedly the great hope of the future. He was 13. He was accompanied by one of his parents to the tournament in Nebraska. Bobby was not. Why not? His mother was an uninvolved parent. To this day if you are age 12 or 13 and are going to go to a tournament, let's say Samuel Sevian, you are accompanied by somebody. The airlines probably won't even let you on if you're not accompanied. So this was a very unusual situation where he was not accompanied for the first time away from home. And where everybody else in the tournament was older than he was. Liepnieks had 2 daughters that were closer to age to him, age maybe 10 and 8. So he spent most of his time on his pocket chess set. Some time with Liepnieks's daughters and he had much less contact with us, the rest of the competitors. Question, John?

JD: Yes, how did Bobby get to Lincoln? I mean, you mention he was only 12 years old, how did he manage to make the journey?

VP: I'm not sure because being in the older group, I really didn't pay much attention to it. However it is true that, you know, air traffic, very few people flew by air at that time. Maybe in the late 60's, yes, but in 1955, no. So he must have—I came by train...so he must have come by some kind of land route also.

JD: Right, my understanding is that he hooked up with Charles Kalme and that he traveled from New York to Philadelphia and that the two of them journeyed on to Lincoln. I would assume Kalme, being 15, he probably didn't drive, so they probably took the train and that being the case there is a train that goes from Chicago, that still goes today, the California Zephyr, goes to San Francisco, and it stops in Lincoln. So that would be my guess.

VP: That would be my guess, also, because although I flew to a later U.S. Open in Lincoln, from Seattle to Omaha, not at that time. The way that I got there would have been by train, also.

JD: So, as I understand it, you—the older boys in the tournament, they spent their time socializing together. There was actually a poker game going on, if I understand correctly, but Bobby knew in advance that he was going to play against you, and if I understand correctly, he even knew what opening it was going to be.

VP: Yes, we did know that I was going to be playing him the next day and that I would be black. We did know that. He was sitting on the floor analyzing Ruy Lopezes mostly, and double king pawn openings on his pocket set. We paid sometime attention to him. Not much you know. Whoever was not playing poker, would drop out, would make a few moves on the board. But mostly we tried to press on him that it was a waste of time to study the Ruy Lopez, because the opening the next day would be the Latvian Gambit.

JD: Well that, I understand, that is partly respect to your heritage. If I'm not mistaken there were several Latvian players playing in that tournament. Not just yourself and not just the organizer Liepnieks being Latvian.

VP: No, there were several. And of course Charles Kalme was the most prominent, and he did win the tournament. But at age 15, I wasn't quite sure what language I should address him in. By age 18 it was different. But you know how people are at 15, they are much influenced by their peer groups.

JD: Yes, they are. Now do you have any recollections of the game that you played with Bobby?

VP: Well, yes. First of all the Latvian Gambit, well, I have played it often, and I can't recall the last time I played it now. But we all do things for reasons other than the best moves. There is a Hungarian-American kid in Seattle, he plays Budapest Gambit against me, I play a Hungarian Defense against him. (laughs) We all have predilections like this which may not be professional but they are traditional, like eating lutefisk or chitterlings. Do you like them? Well, no, but traditional. So for the same reasons, you know yes, I played the Latvian Gambit and spent a great deal of time on it.

Now the game, actually, is not a good game, and you, John, have written a book about it and really taken it apart. So it's not a good game, but it's a fighting game. At one point, I try to open lines on the king's side, and I wind up with a black pawn on h3, and Bobby's king is on g2 and there is choice of going to h1 or g1 and he goes to h1. Later in the game there is a bishop on that diagonal threatening to win material at f3. But Bobby has a possible perpetual check on my king between h3 and d7. Now, the problem is that there is a black pawn on h3, and when he captures the pawn to give a perpetual check, I interpose my queen. The queens have to come off the board, and he loses material. So this happened late in the game, when we were down to 1 minute and 2 minutes of time, and once Bobby realizes that he is now going to lose material, he sits there and lets his timer run out and looks very miserable. Now what does a player do when his opponent looks miserable? You rub it in. You point out to him that triangulation is very important in a chess game, and if he had gone with his king from g2 to g1, throwing the black pawn here from h3 to h2 and then gone to h1, he would have had a perpetual check because the check on h3 would not be a capture. And because it wasn't a capture, the queens would not be coming off the board. So you point this out. And of course he looks more miserable than before.

Well, the other time when he looked miserable was a day or two later when he was on the phone to his mother. And his mother wanted him to go on from Lincoln, Nebraska, to another tournament in San Diego. And he really really didn't want to go. Because he was basically being sent on a world tour on his own. And this did not sit well with him. And he cried. But as I understand it that he did go on anyway, and these are the things that kind of shaped the way it was going to be for him. I keep thinking that Yasser Seirawan at a similar age, would hang around at the Last Exit coffee house in Seattle. And again, at first he was frozen out. He was not one of the good players, but he hung around and picked up pointers here and there, and got better and people would talk to him more and respect his abilities more. But Bobby was always shut off from this kind of interchange. Actually, he didn't do badly in the tournament. I think that might have been his only loss and I think he might have finished with two wins, one loss, and what seven draws.

JD: Yeah, he finished in the middle of the tournament and—but, you know, Viktors, the game that you won against Bobby—that was only one of two games in his entire career that he lost on time. The other was against [Samuel] Reshevsky in the Rosenwald tournament the following year.

VP: This might well be. You know it was a fighting game where we both ran short of time. But I think when you find out that you think you have a perpetual check but queen takes H3 is met by queen to h5 and the queens start to come off the board, you're losing—it's just a realization, a kind of shock.

JD: Yes. Now you mention the Liepnieks family and you mentioned particularly the two daughters, I think Sylvia and Ruta If I'm not mistaken.

VP: Yes.

JD: And oftentimes Fischer's portrayed as like a loner, without any real contacts beyond maybe some chess players as friends, but my understanding is that that experience in Lincoln in that summer of 1955, he actually made sort of a lifelong friendship with the Liepnieks family.

VP: It was a positive experience in that sense. Obviously you know he was younger than other competitors, but he was not involved in competition with Liepnieks's daughters. As I understand it, some years later, there were incidents when Fischer was still being teased for height and weight not being proportionate as he was growing up and that there were incidents. But the interchanges that he had with the Liepnieks family were positive, and not ten years later when he was playing in the Piatigorsky Cup in Los Angeles, again, he was gruff and he was difficult to deal with and he was a recluse, basically. And then Sylvia, who at that time was studying at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego, approached him and said, "Hi, Bobby! I'm Sylvia." And he opened up. So this was one of the positive things, you know. And I think they spent some time together that day and he was a different person because he was dealing with somebody who was not in competition with him and who had not frozen him out. Similarly, twenty-some years later Alex Liepnieks died and the family got a condolence card from Bobby. This is the first and the only time that I know of that he has done something that normal people do as a matter of course.

JD: I remember this. I remember that it actually appeared in the Sacha Pasaule the magazine that Liepnieks edited for so many years. They actually printed that in the final issue of the magazine which was a tribute to him. And it was a very nice thing for Bobby to do, but you're right it was not something that you expected of him but normal of course, for the average person.

VP: This, this is what people do. However, you know Bobby was so secluded from the kind of things that normal people do that it came as a surprise, but it's the human side because he was involved in chess all his of life and so was Liepnieks. So it's like the two demons have recognized each other.

4. Larry Remlinger

International Master Larry Remlinger was a great talent who grew up in Long Beach, California. A year older than Bobby Fischer, Larry finished second in the 1955 U.S. Junior Championship while Fischer placed in the middle. Soon thereafter, he gave up chess to focus on academics, but returned periodically to the game, obtaining his International Master title while in his 50s. Remlinger speaks of his experiences as a Junior player during the 1950s, the years in which he met Bobby Fischer.

John Donaldson: Bobby had about a month to burn before the U.S. Open would start in Cleveland, and he chose to stay in California. And he—of course the Junior was held in the North, but he traveled to the South and spent several weeks there. And my understanding is that you had some contact with him then.

Larry Remlinger: Yes, it was all kind of a surprise to me. I didn't really kind of know what was happening or what was going on or how things had been set up, but all of a sudden he shows up at the Long Beach Chess and Checker Club, and it's like some kind of—had been an arrangement made or something—that we were supposed to play. I wasn't aware of this at all, so anyway. So the reason I'm even talking about it was okay, Fischer's coming so we're supposed to play and what are we playing? Well, we're playing blitz chess. It's not kind of the traditional blitz chess, you know. We didn't use a clock, we used—it was just kind of move on move on move. So as soon as he would make a move, as soon as he took his hand off the piece, then I had to move, and then as soon as my hand was off my piece then he had to move. And so it was kind of a quick version of blitz I would say. It was just move on move on move on move on move on move on move. And so we had three long sessions of that. On the first day, I think we played—I don't know—four or five hours and he won the first session pretty handily I would say, as I recall. And then the second session we came out about even, which was the next day for about the same amount of time. And then the third session, I actually got the edge on him. So that was it. We didn't really—we didn't talk or engage in any other kind of activity. We didn't go anywhere together or talk about anything. Of course we had these three blitz sessions, and now that you kind of fill in the blanks it makes more sense to me. He was basically kind of going around in Southern California, he was on the road to something else and so I think he spent some time—I could be mistaken—but I thought he spent some time with Ronnie Gross and some other people that I really didn't know. I was fairly shy at that time. I wasn't really paying attention to kind of what other people were doing in the chess world. I was just enthralled with the game and totally immersed in it that I didn't kind of see what else was going on. And even when Fischer came, you know, I wasn't even all that aware of how he was doing or how he was playing, how well he was playing or kind of the direction he was going.

So that was basically it, those three encounters over three separate days, playing that speed chess. I didn't really kind of care for him, frankly. He was—not surprising it's all well documented—he was pretty obnoxious even then and very demanding. Just wasn't pleasant, he wasn't kind of nice to be around. He kind of ordered and was pushy and ordered people around. And here I was, I was just this kind of quiet little guy. And I was extremely polite of course. And so (laughs) it was quite a contrast. His whole kind of demeanor and presence was a little unfriendly for me. I didn't quite know kind of how to be with him. He wasn't easy to be with, at least for me at that time. I basically felt pretty uncomfortable around him. And I didn't really kind of necessarily enjoy the experience of playing with him because I felt so forced. You know it was some agreed upon deal that nobody had told me about. And it was like this expectation, okay well so Fischer's coming so now you've gotta do this. I said, What? What am I doing? I don't understand.

But of course now, in retrospect, I feel grateful you know that I had that opportunity to play against Fischer and at least get some sense of who he was. And—go ahead.

JD: Well I was gonna say that your performance, considering that you weren't playing that much at that time, you know basically breaking even with him over three long sessions—I mean, he was to explode that summer. He won the U.S. Open in Cleveland, that was his breakout tournament and that was just a couple weeks later. And that was—put him in the top players in the U.S. It give you an idea that you really were a talented young player, no question about it. Did you ever have any contacts with Fischer after that?

LR: No, I never did. I never did. You see, we never really had any kind of—we never just had any time where we talked or were together. It was, even at the tournament, the U.S. Junior or those three sessions, but we never became like friendly or anything. We never had any kind of future contacts at all.

5. Aben Rudy Part 1

Expert Aben Rudy was a good friend of Bobby Fischer when they were young. Rudy reported on Fischer's meteoric rise to the top of the chess world during the mid-to-late 1950s in his column in *Chess Life*. Rudy also drew Bobby in two tournament games in 1956. Rudy reminisces about the New York chess scene, in which a young Bobby Fischer thrived.

John Donaldson: One question I have for you, Aben, is—I know that you wrote a column for Chess Life for a couple years, for the editor there, Montgomery Major, and in one of them you wrote about Bobby and some of his special skills. And particularly, one was his competence at table tennis and tennis, but another you mention was his excellence at ventriloquism. Is that correct?

Aben Rudy: It's correct that I mentioned it. It was sort of a joke between us, his ventriloquism, because I don't think I ever heard it.

JD: I see, okay. Now, the Hawthorne Chess Club with John Collins and his sister running it when it was based on Lenox Street in Brooklyn, my understanding is that you did not go to that club when it was in that location. Is that correct?

AR: That's correct. I stayed at the Manhattan Chess Club, but I didn't wander into Brooklyn.

JD: But when John moved, or as you called him, Jack, John Jack—when he moved to New York—Do you know when he moved to Stuyvesant Town by the way?

AR: When, or?

JD: Yeah, roughly when he did—was it after his sister Ethel died?

AR: Oh! No, no it was way before then.

JD: Okay, so they both lived in Stuyvesant Town?

AR: Yes, same apartment.

JD: Okay, would that have been like in the early 1960s or...

AR: Well, by 1971 he was definitely there.

JD: Okay, because you mention you attended some of his Christmas parties or New Year's parties, I should say. Is that correct?

AR: Yes, that's correct.

JD: And what sort of people would attend those?

AR: Well some artists like—well who owned the Chess Club, who played at London Terrace?

JD: Marcel Duchamp?

AR: Yeah, Duchamp. And John Cage, the composer. He always was there. And he made wonderful potato salad.

JD: Ah ha! That's something that people would not know about him, they know he was an artist, but he was multifaceted in his skills. Now, were there also—would you find Bobby [Fischer] or [William] Lombardy, Byrne brothers, people like that—would they be attending as well?

AR: Yes, they would be attending. I don't know if they all ended up at the same party, but from one party to the other you'd see all the top American chess players.

JD: Now, when was the last time that you saw Bobby?

AR: That would be just before his match with [Tigran] Petrosian. So that would be 1971.

JD: He had beaten [Mark] Taimanov and [Bent] Larsen by huge scores, but did he express any concerns about Petrosian as being a more formidable opponent?

AR: Yes. It surprised Collins and me; he seemed quite concerned about playing Petrosian. Even so, Petrosian was in a different league from the other two, which maybe no one else thought, but he did. And it was Petrosian who broke his winning streak eventually.

JD: It was. And played him on even terms for the first half of the match. Before Bobby took over.

AR: That's true.

JD: Now, one thing about Fischer you always hear, especially from non-chess players, and from chess players as well, he was kind of hard to [get along with]. There's the good Bobby if you will, the Bobby that is a chess player, that you know is the young guy, who's friendly, but there's also Bobby and his

later tirades, you know, if you will. What was your experience with Bobby? Did you ever experience any sort of anti-semitism or observe it in his behavior?

AR: No, I didn't. He always got along with me very well. And he had several Jewish friends so it was very peculiar to me that he was anti-semitic, and he was at times. It didn't show up with me or Bernard Zuckerman or any of the Club's friends who were Jewish. Raymond Weinstein was also Jewish.

6. Aben Rudy Part 2

John Donaldson: Did you ever play Bobby?

Aben Rudy: Yes, I played him twice in some reserve tournament at the Manhattan. Two draws.

JD: And do you remember anything about playing him in those games that struck you? I mean, at that point did everybody already expect that he would be a big star?

AR: No, I never even saved the scores. He was just a young player who played better than most young players. Nobody looked at him as a knight in shining armor or a comer.

JD: Well, I guess when you played him it would have been about the summer of 1956 or so, would it have been about the right time?

AR: Um, he won the Junior '56?

JD: Right. In Philadelphia.

AR: Okay, so it was months before that.

JD: Okay, so he probably wasn't more than like, maximum strong expert, maybe 2200 strength.

AR: Me?

JD: No, Bobby at that time.

AR: Yeah, that's probably what he was.

JD: Right. So he hadn't made that huge quantum leap that he would soon make, you know by September of '57, he had won the U.S. Open. You know, that's quite a leap. 350 points probably in playing strength at least.

AR: Even at U.S. Junior, [when] I had gone down for the Rapids, he was not the favorite. Arthur Feuerstein and Charles Henin were the favorites and his win was quite a surprise.

JD: And was that played at the Philadelphia Mercantile?

AR: I don't know where it was played.

JD: Were you there at the end of the tournament, when his last round was adjudicated against David Kerman?

AR: Was that the same tournament?

JD: It was, yeah. It was a last round game against Kerman, and it was pretty tight and they had to adjudicate the last round. I guess the tournament—they just had to get home or something.

AR: No, I wasn't. I came down for the Rapids, which was somewhere in the middle.

JD: Okay, gotcha.

AR: Then I went back to New York.

JD: Are there any other stories you'd like to share with us, Aben?

AR: I once went to the race track with Bobby. That was strange. I was told by a Jackie [Beers] to bet on a certain horse in a certain race, and we got to the track and it was like the fourth race or something we were supposed to bet on. And Bobby bet on the first race. I said, "Don't do that."

(laughter)

He lost his money and then he wanted to leave so we left. So, I don't know if I'd be a millionaire today on that fourth race.

JD: Right, right. Beers must have been upset that you weren't able to place the bet. But thank you for sharing that story and thank you for taking your time to share all your memories with Bobby. I really appreciate it.

7. Anthony Saidy

International Master Anthony Saidy is perhaps best known as the man responsible for ensuring Bobby Fischer arrived in Reykjavik, Iceland, in order to compete in the World Chess Championship. Saidy played United States Championship eight times and represented his country in the 1964 Chess Olympiad in Tel Aviv. He was also a member of the 1960 United States team that won the World Student Team Championship in Leningrad. His book *The Battle of Chess Ideas* has gone through several editions. Here, Saidy recalls his relationship with Fischer and his family.

John Donaldson: This interview is with International Master Anthony Saidy, the strongest chess-playing doctor since Siegbert Tarrasch. So, Tony can you tell me the first time that you met Bobby Fischer?

Anthony Saidy: I ran into him in one of the New York Clubs when he was about eight years old. And which club it was, I couldn't tell you because I was a member of the Marshall, he was a member of the Manhattan, but I went to the Manhattan pretty often for blitz tournaments and so forth. Rapid transit really, we called it then.

JD: Now, if I understand it correctly, you started playing around 1948, about a year before Bobby, is that correct?

AS: That is correct. It took him about eight years to catch up with me, which led my mother to think that I was the second greatest chess genius. There is a fallacy in her reasoning.

JD: Well, first off, you were a great talent, there's no question about it. You played on many of our student teams including the team that won the gold medal in Leningrad in 1960. But it took Bobby a long time. When did he pass you? Would it have been probably when he won the U.S. Open in Cleveland in August of 1957?

AS: Exactly, because earlier that spring, I had managed to win a tournament ahead of him in New Jersey, and by summer's time it was obvious that he was leaving me in the dust.

JD: So how would you explain that then, that it took him what—the better part of about seven years to catch up with you?

AS: Well it's a very simple explanation. He learned the game at age six, and the six-year-old brain does not compare to the eleven-year-old brain, which is what I had when I started. So naturally, it would take a little kid a long time to catch up and learn all the intricacies of the game.

JD: I wonder though, if that might also be indicative of the time? You know in the '50s, you're only going to improve at chess by direct experience by playing or by reading chess literature, whereas today with computers, it might be possible for players at an earlier age to develop faster.

AS: Seems to be happening. In fact, the adolescents today are some of the most fearsome opponents I can find!

JD: I know you still play, and you know I hope that when I reach your age, your distinguished years, that I will be playing as well. Now, in 1956 you played along with Bobby at the U.S. Open in Oklahoma City, and all historical records have you as Bobby's sort of chaperone for the trip. Is that accurate?

AS: Yes, his mother fixated on me at the Club as being one of the more responsible young men and someone with whom she could entrust her son. So technically, I don't know what the law says, but a thirteen-year-old could not travel from New York to Oklahoma unescorted. So I guess I was nominated.

JD: And as I understand it, the two of you drove with Jeremiah Donovan to the tournament, is that right?

AS: I seem to remember Jerry Donovan was the chauffeur at that time.

JD: And while you were at the tournament in Oklahoma City, both of you stayed at the home of former Oklahoma Champion Dr. Ernest Gill do you have any memories of that?

AS: I know we were staying at a private home, I couldn't fill any details in.

JD: Now you mentioned to me once that either immediately before that trip to Oklahoma or immediately after that Bobby actually spent a week vacationing with your family. Is that right?

AS: Uh, yes I think it was about a month after the tournament. Our family used to vacation in Martha's Vineyard during the summer, and he came up and spent a week with us, and it was a lot of fun.

JD: And so he got to know your whole family—your parents, your brother, your sister?

AS: Correct.

JD: And, I wonder did they see him again for the near future or was the next time they renewed their acquaintance-ship with him in 1972 right before the [World Chess Championship] match in Reykjavík?

AS: The latter.

JD: The latter, okay. So, but they weren't strangers to him. He knew them because he'd vacationed with them.

AS: Yes, and he certainly wouldn't forget any individual.

JD: Now, did you ever have a chance to visit Bobby's home when he lived in Brooklyn at 560 Lincoln Place?

AS: Yes, indeed.

JD: And can you describe to us what it was like? I mean what sort of neighborhood was that like in 1956 or '57 or whenever you visited him around that time?

AS: I think it was a working-class neighborhood. It didn't impress me in any particular way. It wasn't that far from Prospect Park, and I think it was a second-floor walk-up. It was fairly spacious. And I got to know his sister, Joan, as well as his mother, Regina.

JD: And what was Regina like?

AS: Regina was a wind-up energizer doll. She was always on a campaign of some kind, usually political, or perhaps a scheme to get Bobby to do something for publicity. She enlisted my help in getting him to appear on NBC News one weekend, telling me that if she suggested it he wouldn't do it. So she needed my help.

JD: Ah ha. Do you remember roughly when that—what year that would have been?

AS: Not exactly, I would have to think about that. But Regina was an unusual person and she was relentless. When she had a goal she would plow forward until the goal was achieved, and don't stand in her way.

JD: So in some ways, Bobby inherited some of his drive from her?

AS: Definitely.

JD: Now when you visited Bobby's home, do you ever recall his chess library? Did you see it—was there a room, his bedroom perhaps, where he had all his chess archives?

AS: There was nothing special at that time. All of us in that era had approximately the same books that were available on the American market by [Fred] Reinfeld and [Al] Horowitz and Alekhine maybe by Marshall. There wasn't a great selection at the time, and we had the magazines—Chess Life, Chess Review. We seldom saw a foreign magazine in those days.

JD: And when you visited him later, I mean say like in the early 70s when he moved to Los Angeles, did you ever visit his home there?

AS: Yes, I was in there a couple of times. I think I was. I don't really remember much about it. We'd usually meet at a restaurant.

JD: So you don't recall—obviously his library had grown a great deal, but I was wondering if like there were any specific books? I know that you're probably one of the combination strongest players, most active bibliophiles on the planet, and with a collection I would say of what, like five thousand books you might have, and journals?

AS: I have a lot of chess books. (laughter)

JD: That you do, Tony! I can attest from personal observation. So the question I would have is when you and Bobby met, were there any books that you ever remember discussing with him, that he really loved, that he thought were something special?

AS: At that time, are you talking about after he won the world title?

JD: I would say first going back into the '50s and early '60s.

AS: Well, let me make clear that he and I were close up until 1959, and then we had a decade of estrangement, and then we became close again for a few years. And after 1978, we never spoke again. So my expertise on Bobby is limited to those decades that we were together.

JD: So taking that into account, do you recall any books or magazines that he highly prized?

AS: Not in the way of chess. Although I did see segments of the famous Bekins-Fischer Chess Heist. I saw some literature from that at a book fair in Los Angeles once, got the card of the seller, lost it, and have no way to trace it. I'm referring to the notorious seizure of his property by Bekins Storage Company.

But the books that Bobby and I spent more time discussing had to do with his right-wing and anti-semitic views. And I kept trying to show him that the protocols of the Elders of Zion were not genuine, things of that type. We kept the discussion calm, but I could see where it was going.

JD: And when did that trend first start to develop?

AS: I was not aware of his anti-semitism until after he was World Champion. Others apparently were aware of it. It was rather odd since he was a Jewish kid who had a bar mitzvah. His mom was Jewish. His biological father, as we later learned, was Jewish. Not Mr. Fischer. So his philosophy requires an awful lot of explaining.

JD: Understood. Now one last question for you. You've played a lot of world champions. I know you played [Mikhail] Tal, you played [Paul] Keres, I believe you played [Tigran] Petrosian?

AS: Oh, Keres says, "Thank you for the promotion."

(laughter)

JD: Okay. I know you played a lot of World Champions, including of course –

AS: [Boris] Spassky, [Anatoly] Karpov.

JD: Karpov. Perhaps [Vassily] Smyslov as well?

AS: I missed him.

JD: Okay. But you played quite a few. You didn't play Bobby. The last time you played him was in the end of '68 in a match between the Marshall and the Manhattan. So you never actually played him when he was World Champion but you played him when he was—you know had won multiple U.S. Championships. And so my question for you is, when you played him and analyzed with him afterwards, how did that compare to playing some of the other world champions?

AS: I would say that the others gave me monosyllabic comments, and Bobby exceeded that with no comment!

(laughter)

JD: So these guys are not known for extensive post-mortems?

AS: Uh, no. It's—I don't think you have a post-mortem with your inferior unless you're in a very generous mood. I do know that during a critical game in the U.S. Championship, the first one that I played him, where I conducted a sterling attack for thirty-nine moves and achieved a winning position, and on move forty and in time pressure I blew the whole game, I know that he approached my fiancée at the time on his way back to the board and he said, "Now I've got your boyfriend."

(laughter)

JD: I see. Now one last comment about playing all these World Champions—Fischer—You've played a lot of other great players. I know you played Korchnoi. How would you say Fischer's behavior at the board compared to theirs?

AS: I would say that Fischer lived up to his own statement prior to leaving for Iceland. Namely, I don't believe in psychology. I believe in good moves. He didn't try to unnerve his opponent with any gestures, distractions, some of the ploys that you're very well familiar with on the tournament circuit. He just played the board.

8. Yasser Seirawan

One of the strongest American Grandmasters in the post-Bobby Fischer period, Yasser Seirawan was a twice a Candidate for the World Chess Championship. A four-time U.S. Champion, he has represented the United States in ten Chess Olympiads and one World Team Championship, winning four team and four individual medals. Seirawan is the author of over a dozen books on all aspects of the game including *Five Crowns*, an account of the 1990 World Championship match between Garry Kasparov and Anatoly Karpov. In this passage, Seirawan speaks of meeting Fischer during Fischer's 1992 rematch with Boris Spassky.

Yasser Seirawan: Let me just start myself. I'll start with the idea that—or the premise, I should say—that when I started to play chess in the summer of 1972, Bobby Fischer was the hot topic of conversation. He was on everybody's mind and chess players most especially. Front-page news and the whole works, and essentially I grew up in the Bobby Fischer era where he was front-page news and on the television, and it was a very very exciting time. So besides the normal seduction that chess holds for its practitioners, there was this guy, this was this World Champion—American World Champion beating the Soviets. And don't forget, of course, this was the time of the East versus West rivalry of communism versus capitalism and our guy won. So it was a really, really exhilarating time, and it's very hard to speak about it in a way that you can capture the full flavor of just how powerful this whole thing was. And I really just got caught up with it, and thereafter I was of course a Bobby Fischer—not a worshiper or something of that nature—but he was definitely definitely a hero of mine and a great inspiration for me in playing chess.

Time goes by, and Bobby stopped playing, and a lot of people started wondering, well he's gonna have to defend his World Championship title in three years, in two years, in one year. And now there's the challenger, another Soviet this time, a different Soviet, Anatoly Karpov. Where would they play? How much would they play for? And all of these questions were swarming and had been swarming around in the clouds of chess players' minds for years. And suddenly and out of the blue, the United States Chess Federation's magazine published a letter, I think it was through Larry Evans' column, where Bobby gave a list of demands including a ten-game must-win match system for him to defend his title with Karpov.

And so that sent out another frenzy of discussion and mathematicians were getting involved with Bobby's changes. Were they more fair or less fair to a challenger? Was twenty-four games the right figure? How would organizers budget for a match that could go on for—basically forever? And all kinds of things. And then suddenly FIDE [Fédération Internationale des Échecs], you know, insisted on a different match system, a six-game match system proposal. And bang! Before you know it, Bobby was forfeited. And then after that, I mean everybody was shocked and angry and upset.

Amongst chess players—and I was rising through the ranks—you know, we always thought, “Okay so Bobby has a beef with FIDE, but Bobby will come back and play in a private tournament, a big-money event, do something with chess.” And as the years kept going and going and going, this hope this dream that Bobby would return to chess was basically ebbing away. And the whole Bobby Fischer parade—all of those people, I’m going to say my generation—our generation that was caught up in the parade were just kind of left wondering, “Who’s leading the parade anymore?” And it was like FIDE had returned to normal Soviet dominance, and it was a very very strange feeling. Yet throughout all of it, in the back of my mind, there was Bobby. And Bobby was this enigmatic figure. There were always rumors and stories there was a Bobby sighting. Bobby had been seen. Bobby was in Pasadena. Bobby this and that. And I reveled in these stories. I have close relationships with Eugene Torre, Miguel Quinteros, Anthony Saidy, and many other people who were friends and close with Bobby, and I would ask them to tell me this story, “What was Bobby doing? What was he like? Was he studying chess?” So in all of my childhood—well not childhood, teenage-hood imagination—I was you know was like having this picture of Bobby in my mind, and I really wanted an opportunity to meet him. And of course, I never had such an opportunity.

Then 1992 came by, and there was this announcement. Bobby was going to play Boris [Spassky] in a rematch. This was unbelievable, and I was extremely skeptical. I had heard so many stories in the past. I just couldn’t believe that they were true, but they were. And I didn’t make plans to go to Sveti Stefan [then part of Yugoslavia] until after game one had been played. And sure enough they played game one, and it was a great game! Bobby played perfectly. And then came game two and he was black and he played great through like sixty moves. His first hundred moves at the chess board were perfect after twenty years of absence, Bobby was playing again. Well I got on a flight, went to Sveti Stefan, watched him from afar and then spent a day with him. Now you can ask your questions.

(laughter)

John Donaldson: Thank you, Yasser. Thank you very much. So I think you covered one question already that I had for you which is, had you ever met or corresponded with Bobby before Sveti Stefan? And it seems like the answer to that is, No. Is that correct?

YS: A definitive, big no.

JD: Okay, so you’re in Sveti Stefan, you’re watching the match. How is it though that you got to meet Bobby? I mean, how was that arranged?

YS: Exactly. Certainly not by myself. I was watching the games and they had their schedule and one day there’s a free day. And Sveti Stefan is absolutely beautiful and obviously on the ocean, Adriatic, and I say, “Well let’s go to the beach!” So sure enough, off we go to the beach. We’re splashing in the water,

I go, and I flop on the towel, and I'm just basking in the sun, virtually falling asleep, and Yvette [Nagel, Seirawan's wife] gives me a sharp elbow and she says, "Bobby's swimming with Eugene Torre!" So I kind of like perk up, I look. I see this white whale-like figure; there's Bobby. He's waddling over into the ocean, playing with Torre, swimming. Great. I fall back to sleep. Another sharp elbow fifteen-odd minutes later, "Bobby's coming over!" So now I really wake up. And I stand up, and there's Bobby, and he's walking towards me, big smile, big grin, holding out [his] big hand, and I shake his hand. And as I shake his hand I—it's not like I separate from my body or something like that—but I have this very strange realization that my hand just disappeared!

(laughs)

He had big hands, and my hand was just enveloped. I could hardly see my hand. And he just starts a conversation like, "Hey really nice to meet you. Thanks for coming." And from that moment forward, for the next five minutes, at least, he just praises the book I wrote, the first book that I wrote *Five Crowns*, to the sky. I mean, he's just this and that, and he just doesn't stop talking. And I'm just like, "Uhhh." My mouth open as I'm getting praise after praise heaped on my shoulders from this guy who's been, you know, my teenage hero. And I'm thinking to myself, "Damn. Thank you Fred Kleist, thank you Jonathan Berry, thanking all my editors, including Dan Bailey. Anybody that had worked on the book at all, you know. It was like, just great. I'm just glowing with the joy of these compliments that are washing—raining over me.

And finally, John, it took forever, but finally he says to me, "But you know, there's two mistakes." I'd made two analytical errors. I happen to know those mistakes because I had read and reread the book countless times. And you know this book is really chock full of detailed notes. So for somebody to find these two mistakes, you really have to study the book extraordinarily carefully. I'm not talking forty hours. I'm talking close to two hundred and five hundred hours type of thing. So I go, "Well what were the mistakes that you found?" And he tells me the first one, which of course matches my own. And he tells me the second one, which matches my own. So we both mutually had found the two mistakes.

So I kind of go, "Wow, so there was only two mistakes!" You know 240 pages of detailed notes and analysis and he goes, "Yeah!" And he goes, "You don't by chance have extra copies with you?" And the strangest thing was of course I did because I was gonna hand out some to my friends Zoran Ilic and others. And I said, "I do back at my hotel!" He says, "Well, could I have five?" I said, "Would you like ten?" He said, "Yeah!" And I go, "Alright!" So we're getting along really famously and you know, whatever whatever whatever. He says, "Why don't you and Yvette come over for lunch at the suite?" I said, "I'd love to do that. I would love to do that." So we go back to our hotel, shower and change. And as I'm coming down, there's Svetozar Gligorić. "Hey, Gliga. Nice to see you." You know, chit chit chit. And he says to me, "You know by the way, Bobby's sore at you." I go, "He's sore at me?" He goes, "Yeah." I go, "Well, why?" Because I was just glowing from having met him, not more than half

an hour earlier. He didn't mention a thing. He says, "Yeah, you called him the Ghost of Pasadena. And he said, "Why did Yasser call me a ghost? I'm not a ghost. I'm a man." You know a very literal interpretation.

Just a second, Yvette just walked in... (talking in background) Say hello to John Donaldson.

Yvette Nagel/Seirawan: Hii!

YS: She says hello. Big hug. Toodle-loo. And I'm thinking and I go, "Oh yeah, maybe in some Inside Chess editorial I'd written "The Ghost of Pasadena." Of course, I meant it tongue in cheek, not in a literal sense. But okay.

So then I'm going from my hotel to his hotel. It's about a twelve-minute walk, fifteen-minute walk. And somehow when I get to his hotel I run into Eugene Torre, and Eugene Torre basically repeats exactly what Gligorić had said. So it's clear that Bobby's had separate conversations with the both of them, and I go, "Gosh. Bobby's harboring a grudge against me. I gotta do something about this."

So I come into his suite and he's been analyzing with a second, the Montene—the Grandmaster from Montenegro, um...

JD: Would it be Ivanović maybe?

YS: Božidar Ivanović. Yes. So they're analyzing and looking at this chess clock, this new prototype chess clock that he had developed, the Fischer digital clock, and he gets up and he walks over. And the handshake again. And he puts out his hand and I said, "Bobby, by the way," Now I'm shaking his hand, and, "Bobby, by the way I owe you apologies." Now as I'm talking, he's trying to pull his hand back, but I'm not letting his hand go, I'm just shaking it up and down, just holding on. And he's trying to pull his hand away, but I got a good grip, man. I go, "I owe you apology. I called you the Ghost of Pasadena and it was wrong of me to have said that. I'm very sorry." And I'm holding his hand, shaking his hand up and down, and I apologized. And I could see from Bobby's expression like he wants to get his hand back, but I'm not letting it go. And he knows I'm playing kind of a game with him, I'm not letting him go until this situation get resolved. And he says to me, "Okay, let's forget the whole thing." And I said, "Done." And I instantly released his hand. So then he says, "I gotta show you my chess clock." So we come over and then we spend the rest of the whole day together, analyzing, talking about his clock, going off to dinner, and everything like that.

But it was very interesting, John, that only in hindsight had I realized what I had done was actually "the perfect move." Bobby harbored a grudge, and I had to address it, and I did it directly and just you know, flat-out apologized. That was it. And he forgave me. He forgave me. And thereafter we had a

great time together. One of the things that also, again in hindsight, but not so much in hindsight, I was aware of it at the time as well, was an extraordinary thing happened during let's say the next ten, twelve hours that we were together with one another was that he was incredibly funny. Just funny. I wasn't expecting that. All of these you know, many many many stories I had heard over the years about his behaviors and things like that—one of the things that that just didn't necessari—I mean some of the circumstances that he got himself into were humorous, and they were laughable, but I didn't realize how much fun we had together. He was cracking jokes, and he was telling stories. And just things happened around him like in a continual way that we just had a great time together.

Let me fast-track for just a moment. Later, much later that evening, we had all gone to Budva for Chinese dinner, oh like fifteen persons. Yvette, myself, and all of his retinue I would say. And you know, it's a Lazy Susan kind of Chinese dinner with, you know, like all of these dishes, and man, did we eat. God, we were just all stuffed and Marlene [Torre] and Eugene had long given up as did Gligorić, as did other people. They'd had enough. And when we were all stuffed, I mean completely stuffed, the cook brought out the coup de grâce, a marvelous large silver tray and there was this enormous Peking duck. I think it was a Peking goose. I mean that sucker was big. And everybody just groaned. It was like, "Oh you've gotta be joking." You know, they couldn't believe that more food had arrived on the table. And after everybody had laughed, Bobby and I ate the whole thing. (laughter) We finished it. We were just absolutely toasted and yet, we were good eaters, and we finished it. One of the funny things happens to people who over-eat like they're really really funny, or they're really really full, pardon me—is they get giddy. It's almost a kind of chemical reaction. Well we were really lightheaded and the cook came, he was the owner of the restaurant, and he also brought a guestbook, and he asked Bobby if he could please sign the guestbook. And behind the cook was this little boy, seven-year-old hiding behind his papa's apron, you know, looking at the big movie star at his papa's restaurant, and Bobby was playing games with the little boy like, looking at him, and the boy would run around his daddy and then smile, and they'd look again at each other. And Bobby was really generous. I'd always read these stories about Bobby didn't want to sign anything, he didn't like giving autographs, la dadadada. Here he was, writing this effusive note like, "Wonderful dinner. Great food. Absolutely enjoyed myself. Sincerely yours, Robert James Fischer. World Chess Champion." The cook thanks him, takes away the thing and says, "I have a gift for you." And he comes out with a porcelain—I wouldn't call it a bottle so much as it looked like a flower jar or something—porcelain thing and he said, "Homemade Slivovitz." And he gave it to Bobby, "My gift." And Bobby thanked him and we're walking through Budva back to the car and Bobby's carrying this porcelain gift and he hands it to Gliga [Svetozar Gligoric] and he said, "Gliga this is for you." He says, "Just save me one taste at the end of the match." (laughter) I mean, it was like the present came to him and it immediately flowed through his hands outwards—like he was just this transitory station so to speak between the gift giving.

And that was another thing, in many of these stories I'd read about Bobby, it was always kind of a very, very selfish person when you talk about Bobby Fischer. And there was just no suggestion that he could

or was generous. And yet here I was just witnessing it right in front of me. It was happening—he was this generous person but very very humorous.

Going into my meeting with Bobby just a few nights before I hadn't spoke with Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam, the New in Chess editor, and he had an interview that really went foul. It was just a bad interview and Dirk said that Bobby has issues. Well as we later would find out, but as we already knew, he did. And there were certain monkeys that he had: Jewish people, the U.S. government, and you could just add whatever else. And so for basically the whole of our time together I was devoid of these topics. I was instead we were talking about Motown music, which he knew hundreds of songs, Bruce Lee movies. I'm a big fan of Bruce Lee, and he mimicked Bruce Lee, "Aaah!" you know doing tosses and things of that nature. And so when we avoided those areas where we were sure to get into disagreements about, he was absolutely fine. And the only time we really—it wasn't like we had any cross words or anything like that, but one of the monkeys that he had was that Garry Kasparov and Anatoly Karpov, the two of them, were criminals. Full stop. End of story. They were criminals. And when one asked why they were criminals, it was because, "every move of every game of every match they played was fixed." OK. So I said to him, "Bobby that's great, that's wonderful. You've got this great insight. Now please tell me the details, exactly how they did it. Obviously, if every move of every game of every match was fixed, then they were merely actors." "That's correct," says Bobby. "They were actors, they were just acting." I said, "Then somebody had to write a script because as an actor you've got to follow the script. So who wrote up the games, who created these?" "Oh, in Moscow they have lots of Grandmasters to create the games." I go, "I agree. That's perfect. You're right. Now then, as an actor following a script, when was the script delivered to them?" So I said, "Let's imagine we were in Seville in 1987. The match is tied 11-11 after twenty-two games. Two games left. Game 23 is adjourned and the script is delivered because obviously that evening, you know, you got to memorize the moves, right? And we gotta imagine we're at Anatoly Karpov's room and he gets the script. "Yes, yes! My loyalty to the Communist Party is being rewarded. I win the game!" And there's Garry, "Why must I lose to this idiot?" So I'm of course playing to the audience and everybody's laughing, Eugene Torre, Gliga, Bozidar, Yvette and everybody's laughing as I'm hyping it up. I'm trying to play the situation for all it's worth, and Anatoly wins.

Then comes game 24, you know, Anatoly [Karpov] sees that he's going to get into a bad adjourned position, that he's got to see that on move 40 that he's got this move that not only saves the game, but he's not even worse. So Bobby, do they follow the script? And then of course, he gets the script for the adjournment—he loses the adjournment. Oh! You know, like, "I'm a loyal member of the Communist Party. This punk Garry Kasparov has renounced the Party. Why do I have to lose?" and so I hammed it up. But this was the one area where Bobby and I essentially discussed this monkey on his shoulder, and he was kind of taken aback because most people I don't think, had just put him on the spot and said, "Okay. I agree, you're right, but just give me the details. How exactly did they do it? Take me through it step by step by step from the games themselves." And instead they said, "Oh yeah, well either

you're right. You're 100% right," or, "You're 100% wrong." "I'm not wrong." No, I didn't get into that. I said, "You're 100% right. I accept that they're criminals. Now just tell me how they did it." (laughter) And here, he kind of had a problem, right? But that was the only time that we were—not cross, not at all with one another or we weren't in sync. We were fencing, if you will.

JD: I've got a question for you, Yasser.

YS: Sure.

JD: About the match. I want to thank you for sharing all your recollections of that. The question is this. I would say that most chess players, particularly grandmasters they were really impressed with the first game of the second match, you know the beautiful—the A file, Alekhine's Gun he really calculated everything really very nicely and played really well in the second game as well. There were some other highlights in the match, but I would say that the general impression of most commentators was that the Bobby Fischer of 1992 was not the Bobby Fischer of 1972. Twenty years had passed, and he was older and was rusty and just really wasn't quite the same player. The question I have for you though, is one of the things commentators sometimes don't take into account is that they used the Fischer time control. But the Fischer time control that they used for that match is not what they use today, which is commonly—for example, forty moves in ninety minutes and then increments of one minute since move one. Maybe fifteen or thirty minutes for the remainder of the game, let's say, when you reach move forty. It was something quite different, it was—

YS: Right.

JD: It was like an hour and fifty-one minutes for the first time control, and then they got another forty minutes at move forty and then another thirty minutes at sixty and so on. And on top of one minute added to their clock for each move they made, not thirty seconds which is the norm today. So the result was some of the games were incredibly long. I think there was one game that was 84 moves that Bobby failed to win in a queen ending two pawns up. The game must have lasted eight hours. How do you view that match in 1992, and how do you think the Fischer time control affected the play?

YS: Well, absolutely right. A lot of the commentators were blissfully aware of that very important detail we call the time control. One of the clauses in the contract that Bobby wanted, and then essentially Boris [Spasky] agrees to everything of course. Bobby wanted some clause that because the audience were buying tickets to the match that they had to quote put on a show for four hours or longer. If a game was drawn before four hours of play, then they would continue the next game. In other words if you play a twelve-move draw, you're Boris Spassky as white, I'm Bobby Fischer [as] black, and we make a draw in one hour. We'll play another game after a half-hour break, let's say. So one particular game, Boris forgot about this clause and offered a draw. And Bobby said, "Yeah, okay. But we haven't

played four hours so we have to start another game.” And Boris was like, “No, no, no, no, no! I definitely don’t want to start another game. Let’s continue playing until the four hours are reached.” And that’s what happens.

In the contract, immediately after the game the players were [to be] interviewed for a short interview on camera—a post-game interview so to speak. And for some strange reason—I don’t know exactly how it happened, maybe I was in the press room or something—I got squeezed into a hallway where Bobby was being interviewed. And it may have been after that particularly exhausting game. And I wasn’t listening to what Bobby was saying. He was saying something like, “I was close to winning ba dadada.” But I was looking at his face and he had literally soaked his face, it was wet with sweat. It looked like he had come out of a sauna, and understandably so. It was an incredibly incredibly long game, and he was exhausted. And I think that Bobby had overestimated his own energy resources. You know, in his own mind he was fit, and he was ready to play. And he was hungry to play, and he thought that, you know, Boris wouldn’t be able to stand up to six, seven, eight hours of pressure or what have you. And previously in Bobby’s whole experience, life-career, with the exception of some Swisses obviously, he had an adjournment—he had five-hour sessions. And this was very hard on him because he didn’t have this experience of literally playing to a finish. Again, with the exception of the Swiss tournaments and I think he over-estimated his own energy levels and didn’t realize that he was going to—like Boris Spassky—crash toward the end. And you saw some mistakes slipping into his play at the very end of game two, which allowed Boris to save the game. So you’re right, nobody wanted to—you got rid of the adjournments, that’s fine, but nobody wants to play eight-hour games in a row. That’s why you know, to your question—the common time control was ninety minutes plus ninety minutes for the whole game for both players plus thirty minutes with an increment of thirty seconds from move one, and it’s very, very rare to see a game lasting six hours today. So I think that Bobby, again with hindsight, probably regretted that the time control probably wasn’t a little bit more faster paced.

JD: One last question for you, Yasser. Did you have any contact with Bobby after that game in Sveti Stefan?

YS: Uh, yes and no. The direct answer is no. But following the match itself and—Oh by the way at the closing ceremony, Bobby and I spent like an hour or two hours just chit-chatting together as they were moving the second half of the match to Belgrade. He, Bobby was very very keen—or so he said to me—that he wanted to play either Judith Polgar in a match using Fischer Random chess or Viswanathan Anand, you know Vishy. And he had a friend, a close friend of his, Grandmaster Gerardo Barbaro. Gerardo is a Grandmaster from Argentina who had married a Hungarian lady and was living in Budapest at the same time that Bobby was in Budapest. Bobby was asking Barbaro a lot of questions that Barbaro would ask me. I would answer them. I’d get back, “Oh Bobby loved that idea! It was really good. That was really cool.” So I never had a phone conversation with him after 1992, but we had this correspondence between Barbaro and I, and then remarkably, very sadly, Barbaro died very

young. I'm not sure if it was a cancer or something. He died—I'm just gonna throw out the year 2000. I just have to check it, check the actual date. And then it was like I didn't have another bridge to Bobby except through the usual Eugene Torre stuff. But I didn't have any contact with him at all basically after Barbaro died.

9. James Sherwin Part 1

International Master James Sherwin very likely has the best record of any non-Grandmaster to ever compete in the U.S. Chess Championship. The highlight of his career was finishing third in the 1957 Chess Championship behind Bobby Fischer and Samuel Reshevsky.

This qualified him to play in the 1958 Interzonal in Portoroz, Yugoslavia. Sherwin was the President of the American Chess Foundation during its golden period, offering strong support to top American players. Sherwin recalls his experiences with Fischer from the 1950s through the 1970s.

John Donaldson: So I have with me here James Sherwin, International Master, multiple plus score in many U.S. Championships, Interzonalist, and President of the American Chess Foundation during its golden period. Jim, can you tell me what the first time was that you recall when you met Bobby Fischer?

James Sherwin: It's hard to pin that down. I met him when he was probably nine or ten I saw him at the club or something. And when he was about eleven probably he used to come over—maybe ten, I don't know—he used to come over to my apartment and we'd play chess for three or four hours with his mother, Regina watching. And we'd play blitz actually. And so it was some time around then, when he was ten or eleven probably. We played at Oklahoma City together. Arthur Bisguier and I tied for first in that tournament. And the U.S. Open. And he also played in Montreal in the Canadian Championship with me. That I think was won by Larry Evans. And Bobby lost to Evans in the last round, and Bobby finished somewhere down in the pack. So we played in a number of those tournaments together, but those are the two I remember particularly. And so I knew him for some years. I mean, we must have spent a lot of time playing blitz at my house. We used to play at a bridge table with bridge chairs, and he'd turn the chairs around so that he was facing the back of the chair in front of the table. And it used to drive my then-wife crazy because she thought he was going to break one of the chairs. (laughter) But he was a good kid.

JD: Now, according to Mega Database you played Bobby nine times from a victory you had over him in the Log Cabin Championship match in 1957, to the last game you played in the '66 U.S. Championship. Does that sound about the right number of games? Do you recall any events you might have played, like training games or anything like that that would be—

JS: No, we never played any training games. But we played ten games actually. The first game was a fifty-minute game when he was thirteen I think in the Log Cabin, and he overstepped the time limit in that game in a completely drawn queen and pawn endgame. I just put him over the time. And then the second game we played was another fifty-minute game which was also probably in New Jersey. And that one was a very exciting game. It's been published. The first one I could never find or at least I lost it somewhere, but the second one was the one where he missed a brilliant mate in four. We were both in

terrific time pressure, and I managed to win after that. When he missed the mate it was lost. But that one I still have somewhere and I think that one has been published as well.

JD: It has. But definitely the first one hasn't because, until you just mentioned it, I thought the only games he had ever lost on time were to [Viktors] Pupols in that '55 U.S. Junior and to Reshevsky in the '56 Rosenwald. So this would be—

JS: No, it's not true. This is a third one. I definitely beat him in that first one, it was a disgrace to win the game, but I did win it. Yeah, that was the first game we played actually. I mean the first tournament game we played. And then the third one was the one, which is the first game in his book. So it was sort of a coming of age for him, and that's why he put it in there I think. But I think it was also nice of him to put it in. We liked each other, I mean, you know, I only knew Bobby in the days when he was really a terrific kid and fun to play chess with—well it was no fun to lose to him of course, but I mean I had fond memories of Bobby, and I was really broken hearted when he died a couple years ago through not taking care of himself, I guess.

I lost contact with him after about '72 or '73, and then I had only good memories of Bobby. There's a nice picture of Bobby and me and my first wife Judy in the Portoroz tournament book.

JD: Now speaking of Portoroz, prior to qualifying for that event, you played in the '57 U.S. Championship, and you did very well. You were a strong third with 9 out of 13 including Reshevsky. Just a half-point behind him and a point and a half behind Bobby. Do you remember what it was like to play in those U.S. Championships?

JS: Well, how do you mean?

JD: How were they organized? Were the players all professional? Was it held in a hotel, or the Manhattan or the Marshall?

JS: No, no. Almost invariably they'd hold them in the Manhattan. The first Rosenwald was held in the Manhattan. The other ones—some of them were played in the Marshall. I remember the famous game that Bobby beat me with Qf1 in response to a check, he put his queen en prise—that one was played in the Marshall. So they were played at the Manhattan or the Marshall, I think without exception. I can't remember anywhere else. And you know, the players were not all professionals. In those days it was possible to still be an amateur. I mean, I don't know how you'd call [Arthur] Bisguier, who was an accountant by profession, but he was playing chess most of the time. But Donald Byrne who played in a lot of them, then he went to college, and he was an English professor. I think Robert [Byrne] by that time had given up teaching philosophy. I think in the days when he was playing he was probably a chess professional as Larry—as certainly Larry Evans was. But let's see who else...Hans Berliner who

played in a couple of them I think was a computer science—a computer person who later became a professor of computer stuff at Carnegie Mellon. And who else?

JD: [Pal] Benko was definitely a professional.

JS: Benko was certainly a professional, [Samuel] Reshevsky, although he dabbled at accounting, I guess was a professor. I think you'd have to say he was a professional. So there were a few amateurs, I mean Ed Turner played the—in one or two of them. He was a chess professional too. [William] Lombardy was sort of a semi-priest. He was I guess you might say that Lombardy was not a chess professional, but he did become one I think at various points, probably not in those days though.

JD: Tony Saidy was probably not a professional he was—

JS: Tony was not a professional, no. And then there was what's his name—beginning with a W—

JD: Weinstein—Raymond Weinstein?

JS: Weinstein. Raymond Weinstein. Raymond was not a—I don't think he was a chess professional. He may have become one, but he went crazy first unfortunately. So I think that sort of covers the list of the people that were in and out of that tournament. There was also someone who qualified. I don't remember, some short name—beginning with an A, I think who qualified from the U.S.—winning the U.S. Junior. He was certainly not a professional either.

JD: Right, Robin—

JS: Oh, that's right. Then there was Bill Addison. And in those days probably—I don't know, Addison may have been becoming a chess professional—he probably wasn't one but I'm not sure if he was or he wasn't. The line wasn't clear.

JD: Right, but in your case, you were just basically would work a full day and then basically going to the U.S. Championships in the evening and play.

JS: Yeah, that's right.

JD: That's not an easy row to hoe. But you did very well in '57, and you tied—you finished third and you qualified to play the Interzonal with Bobby who was making his debut. What was that like, playing in Portoroz?

JS: Well it was a nice tournament. I mean, it was my second international tournament. I'd played at the World Junior in Copenhagen I think in '53, and I finished fifth there out of eight, tied for a fifth—

JD: Right, if I remember right that tournament had [Oscar] Panno and [Bent] Larsen and—

JS: Panno and Larsen and [Klaus] Darga and [Friðrik] Ólafsson and [Borislav] Ivkov.

JD: Pretty strong.

JS: It was strong and Penrose—the other ones were [Jonathan] Penrose and [Dieter] Keller who was the Swiss player. I think those were the finalists. I actually beat Larsen in the preliminaries. I think I was undefeated in the preliminaries, but then I lost to Ólafsson, Darga, and Panno in the finals. So I only managed to beat Ivkov in a Brilliancy Prize game. But yeah, the Portoroz was my second international tournament, and it was a lot of fun to play there. I didn't take it as seriously as I should have because I was doing well against the top players. I should have drawn with Fischer in that ignominious rook ending which was a complete book draw so much so that the Russians accused me of throwing it, and I certainly didn't throw it, but he just wore me out. I think it was the third session. And besides I actually didn't know the rook—pawn endgame. (laughter) I was in time pressure for like the third time or something.

But in any event, I drew with Benko in a game which was completely winning and I beat Ólafsson and [Svetozar] Gligorić which were nice games actually. And I drew with [Mikhail] Tal and I lost to [Tigran] Petrosian and [David] Bronstein and drew Averbakh and lost to Szabo also. Anyway, I could have done better if I had been better prepared, but in those days you could just get by on what you knew.

JD: Now, did you guys—did you and Bobby share Lombardy as your second?

JS: Well technically Lombardy was supposed to be my second, but he never suggested a single thing to me and he sort of was—you know, how shall I say it—he was helping Bobby occasionally, but Bobby really didn't need his help and didn't necessarily want it. So Lombardy was sort of a free agent there. I mean he never really contributed anything to my stuff. I mean maybe we had occasional analyses together, but I don't remember Lombardy helping me at all.

JD: Now moving forward a couple years, again in the '60 U.S. Championship you were third, this time equal with Raymond Weinstein. And I was—that '60 U.S. Championship might have been the strongest bunch—Reshevsky was only fifth. I was curious—wasn't that even also a qualifier for the '62 Interzonal?

JS: I don't think so. I don't think I qualified the second time for another Interzonal. I don't recall that, John. I don't remember the disappointment of not playing in an Interzonal that I could have played in. But it's conceivable, and maybe I just couldn't take the time off by '62. Was that '62—it wasn't '62 when was it?

JD: I think it was 60/61. That was the 60/61 U.S. Championship where Bobby won it again, Reshevsky was second, and you tied for third with Weinstein.

JS: Oh. Didn't Reshevsky and Bobby play in the Interzonal?

JD: You know the funny thing about—Bobby won it in Stockholm. I'm not sure that Reshevsky played. Bisguier I think ended up playing in it, so maybe it was a different U.S. Championship. Maybe I'm confusing the two, although I will double check that. But it also brings up the question—you had several—almost every single U.S. Championship you played in except for maybe one or two, you had a plus score. Why was it you never played in any of the Olympiad teams?

JS: Well I thought I indicated that in my email to you, but I was working the whole time, I was a lawyer. I was a young lawyer and you were expected to put in the hours which I did. I enjoyed it actually. Hard work but I enjoyed it. And so I never—I was certainly qualified for some of the Olympiad teams, but I never had the time. I couldn't take the time off because it was at least a month, and then you know I'd have to train for it and so on. I mean, it just was not possible to combine those things with a serious career. So I could never play. I always liked the idea of playing in an Olympiad. You'd meet a lot of nice interesting people and famous chess players, but I couldn't do it.

JD: Understood, yeah.

JS: And I mean also by that time I probably had a family to support. I was married in '55 and we must have had children by '60 something, so—

JD: Now, it looks like you can see, looking at your career using Mega Database—really by like '66 you were winding things down. I mean that was the last U.S. Championship you played in. Did you notice a big difference in strength when you played Bobby from playing in the late '50s and then playing him again for the last time in '66?

JS: Well, Bobby was getting stronger. There was no question he was getting stronger the whole time. I didn't—you know, after the two games that I beat him, I lost seven out of eight. I drew one of them which was a famous Sicilian let's see where I thought I was innovating something with h4 in one of the main lines of the Najdorf. And he was all ready for it and we played a lot of moves that were probably vastly prepared, but in any event, I did have one other good position against him in a French defense,

but I messed it up. That last game I played him in was a massacre. But in any event I—Bobby was getting stronger the whole time, there's no question about it. But you know—I used to feel that I was tactically able to play with anybody and Bobby was always one move deeper and one move more inexorable than even my, at that time, very decent tactics were. So he was getting better, there was no question about it. And he was getting more professional, and he was getting more confident and so on. Bobby was definitely tremendous. He really was a calculating machine in the days before computers. Very well prepared. There was nothing that he didn't see, he just saw everything, so no matter how profound you were tactically, you couldn't quite keep up with him. I never had that feeling with anyone else I played, actually.

I mean Reshevsky used to out-combine me occasionally with his one-move tricks but I mean he was also very strategically good of course but Bobby just was pressing you the whole time and you couldn't get everything right against him and if you didn't get something right, you were gonna lose. (laughter) You had to be perfect against him actually. You know with either color.

10. James Sherwin Part 2

John Donaldson: Yes, yes. Now do you have any stories about Bobby that you would like to share with us? You've already mentioned this wonderful image I have of him playing blitz in your living room with him turning the chair around and your wife (laughter) nice furniture's gonna get broken in two and he's gonna go collapsing to the floor but do you have any other stories you'd like to share with us?

James Sherwin: I don't know. I mean I liked Regina also, actually. I never got involved in those controversies that Regina had with the media. We were friendly but we weren't—I can't particularly think of any stories. I mean after the—I don't know if it's quite proper for me to say this or not—but now I guess he's passed on now—after the Reykjavík match someone was trying—the guy who was filming the match through a keyhole—

JD: Chester Fox perhaps or—

JS: Yeah, it was Chester Fox. Bobby called me up and asked me if I would represent him in a suit against Fox for having done this. And he claimed that Fox was being a traitor to the country and he wanted to bring a suit on that basis. And I told him that treason is not a civil action it's an action brought by the government, punishable by death and that I couldn't bring such a suit because it didn't have any legal basis and he was—he said that he would look elsewhere for someone to represent him and I think he did get a lawyer named Marshall or something to eventually sue Fox. I don't know what happened to the case, but in any event I didn't represent him in that case. But Bobby and I until that very time were still friends actually. But I think there was some—I mean his idea about the case was to some extent unfortunately a manifestation of his paranoia. I mean there was some—of course he was entitled to be annoyed by it but it rose to a level beyond that. So by that time he was already I think starting to show evidence unfortunately of his illness. Well, he may have shown it before but now to me it was—I hadn't been close to him because I had moved to Europe in '69 for a couple of years and I hadn't seen him for three years, four years, something like that.

JD: Right. So I think that your images of Bobby are more from the 1950s and the early to mid-1960s when he was just a very pleasant person?

JS: Yeah, when he was just a kid who loved to play chess. I wouldn't say he was a pleasant person. He wasn't an unpleasant person, but I mean he was a kid who was consumed by chess. That was what - that's a likeable manifestation after all.

11. Walter Shipman

International Master Walter Shipman made his national debut at the 1946 United States Open in Pittsburgh and for the next decade was among the top fifteen players in the country. However, professional responsibilities and family kept him from being awarded the International Master title until 1982. One of the great gentlemen of American chess, Walter is best remembered for introducing Bobby Fischer to the Manhattan Chess Club in August 1955, and for being one of this country's greatest chess historians. Here, Shipman describes his encounters with Bobby Fischer.

John Donaldson: So you first ran across Bobby in August of 1955.

Walter Shipman: That's right.

JD: And in 1957, you drew with him in the last round of the U.S. Open that was held in Cleveland. Do you have any memories of that event?

WS: Yes, very clearly. Going into the last round Bobby and Bisguier were in contention, Robert Byrne. But by offering—Bobby offered me a draw after 18 moves in our—he was white in a Ruy Lopez and by taking that draw, that guaranteed him at least a tie for first. Later, as that round proceeded, Bisguier beat Donald Byrne. So Bisguier tied with Bobby for first but Bobby was awarded first at that '57 Open on a tie break.

JD: But as I understand it, initially the reverse was thought, and Bisguier actually believed he had won the tournament, and it was only a little bit later that Fischer had the better tie break. Is that right?

WS: I don't remember what Bisguier thought, but I do remember it took a little time before Fischer's title was officially awarded. I knew there was some confusion at the beginning, but maybe Bisguier knows more about that.

JD: Right, I think it had to do something with one of the two—Bobby had a forfeit win in the first round. And I think also one of the two players played James Bolton, and there was a different—Bolton played the whole tournament, but he had somebody he had beaten by tie break. There was some question about how they calculated wins that were not wins over the board, but were forfeit wins, and that made it a little bit more eventful in calculating the tie break.

WS: I think you're confusing the Bolton tie break with the tournament in Los Angeles.

JD: Oh! I think you're right. Or was it Long Beach '55?

WS: Yeah, Long Beach where the argument—[Nicolas] Rossolimo and Evans and the award of the automobile and so forth.

JD: Right, the car that was won by—Rossolimo got the Buick and Reshevsky was the odd man out.

WS: Right. (laughter)

JD: The game Bisguier—or the game between Rossolimo and Evans going on and on until—

WS: Until they decided what the appropriate results should be.

JD: Exactly, exactly. Now after 1957 and your draw with Bobby, you didn't play him again until I believe the two blitz games you played in '71. But did you have any contact with him in that period between 1957 and '71?

WS: I had occasional contact with him in the latter part of 1965. I played ping pong with him on several occasions. I remember I beat him several times in ping pong he said, "I'll get you next time." But casual. I didn't really know him that well.

JD: Now you played him after his victory in Buenos Aires over [Tigran] Petrosian. The Manhattan organized a blitz tournament and if memory serves me right, it was a twelve-player event, double round-robin, and you were one of the participants in there. In fact you were the only person to nick Bobby for a draw.

WS: Yeah, I think he had a score 21 ½ to a ½, and I got the ½.

JD: Yes, you did. And in fact, do you remember that game? You were white, and it was a—you got into a rook endgame and it was four against five—but it was hard for him to make progress because your pawn on d5 really held a lot of space. And he kept trying to win, and he got it down to 2-1, and he thought he was making progress, but then he allowed an extra attack, and you won his rook.

WS: Right and then I'd only less than thirty seconds left, and he had more time and kept playing and I realize that I'd go over unless I mated him, and so I offered a draw which he accepted.

JD: Okay. Alright, so that's what happened. And were many moves played after you won the rook?

WS: maybe ten or fifteen but nothing was taken down.

JD: Right the official score that's been published, it ends in a draw about two or three moves after you've captured the uh—

WS: Maybe that's right, yeah. I just didn't have time to take advantage of the rook, so I had to offer the draw.

JD: Right. Now after that blitz tournament in '71 did you have any further contact with Bobby?

WS: No, that was the last time I saw Bobby. The last time I talked to him. I never saw him again.