

Chess for Life

Even at 91 years old, BH Wood's former opponent from his trips to northern Spain, Eugene Salomon, still likes to play not just chess, but also bridge

One year ago, the day before my 90th birthday, I wrote: "90 Years of Coincidences, that's what life has been: 19 years in my native Spain, 13 years in Cuba, and 58 years in the good, old USA. A chess passion of 75 years and a 65-year career in business. Reflecting about tomorrow, when I will become 90 years old, I realize that I'm just a drop of water in the large ocean of immigrants that die any given day, proud of their heritage and equally as proud of the legacy they leave behind – in my case, four children and seven grandchildren."

A few weeks ago my friend Luis Mendez Castedo sent me a copy of the September *CHESS*, in which he and his brother Pedro, co-authors of *The Gijón International Tournaments 1944-1965*, wrote: "The book has been enriched by a foreword from Eugene Salomon, the living legend of Spanish chess and the last survivor of the 1947 Gijón tournament."

No, I do not pretend to be a legend; I just had the fortune of having three true legends as my chess teachers: my father (my first teacher, my 'hero'), my uncle and chess poet Dr. Rugarcia, and the chess genius of all time, Alexander Alekhine, who so much helped me with his wise advice about chess and life.

A few weeks after returning from a 'memory lane' trip to Madrid and Gijón (the birthplace of my chess career) this summer, I gave a lecture at the Toms River Chess Club, New Jersey, and as a follow-up, wrote an article about what I had learnt from my three chess teachers.

Then, reading in these pages about 'Mr. Chess', BH Wood, brought a lot of memories about the IV Gijón International in which we both participated. Moreover, the last time I had seen this publication was exactly 72 years ago when the September 1947 issue contained an article with a photograph of BH Wood, myself and the other 12 participants from Gijón, which I read in Madrid just a month before leaving for Havana.

I still conserve an original of that issue and reproduced the article in the Ebook I co-wrote with Steve Pozarek and Wayne Conover: *40 Years of Friendship – 100 Games of Chess*. That September 1947 issue of *Chess* has travelled with me from Madrid to Havana to New York, and it's now here in my home in the company of the chess pieces that Alekhine used at Gijón in 1944.

Nowadays I like to write and I settled on the above title because a few years after retiring from competitive chess, at the age of 70, I



Eugene Salomon is still going strong at the age of 91, pictured here at his local Tom Rivers Chess Club in New Jersey. Eugene is hoping to again play in the legendary U.S. Amateur Team Championship next month, an event which attracts well over a thousand players each year.

discovered in Duplicate Bridge a good way to continue cultivating my competitive spirit. Moreover, I realised at the same time, just as you can find true poetry in chess combinations, the same pleasurable sensation when you learn how to exploit the 'distributional value' of the hands you have been dealt.

Back to the main subject, chess at 17 and at 70, and here is one of my favourite games which I won as a teenager.

J.M.Fuentes-E.Salomon
Madrid 1946
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6
5 ♖e2 b5 6 ♗b3 ♗e7 7 ♗d5 ♘xd5
8 exd5 ♗b4 9 ♖e4? ♗b7 10 ♘c3 0-0

11 ♔d1? f5 12 ♖xe5 ♗f6 13 ♖f4 ♗xc3
14 bxc3 ♘xd5 15 ♖d4 d6 16 ♗e1 c5



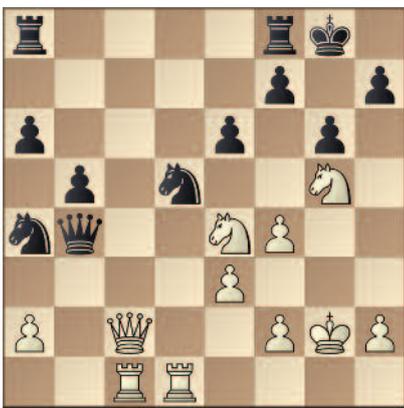
17 ♖h4 ♗xc3+! 0-1

Completing the powerplay. 18 dxc3
 ♟xf3+ picks up the white queen

This and plenty more games can be found in the aforementioned Ebook, including the way I ground down John Watson at the 1996 World Open, as well as the following effort.

E.Salomon-L.Murzin
 World Open, Philadelphia 1998
Catalan Opening

1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 ♟f3 ♟e7
 5 ♟g2 0-0 6 0-0 dxc4 7 ♟a4 a6 8 ♟xc4
 b5 9 ♟c2 ♟b7 10 ♟f4 ♟d6 11 ♟bd2
 ♟bd7 12 ♟g5 ♟xf4 13 gxf4 ♟xg2
 14 ♟xg2 c5 15 dxc5 ♟xc5 16 ♟fd1 ♟e7
 17 b4 ♟a4 18 ♟de4 g6 19 ♟ac1 ♟d5
 0 e3 ♟xb4?



21 ♟xd5! exd5 22 ♟f6+ ♟g7 23 ♟c7 ♟b2
 24 ♟xd5 ♟ac8? 25 ♟e7 ♟xc1 26 ♟e6+
 ♟h6 27 ♟g5# 1-0



Eugene meets Garry Kasparov and impresses the great man by showing him a photo of himself and one of his chess heroes, Alekhine.

Whether readers are curious enough to check out my other games or not, I certainly want to share the most emotional game of my life, which was analysed in depth by my opponent. It was half a century ago when my first chess teacher and hero, my father, passed away at the end of January 1968. I had been retired from chess for 16 years (eight in Cuba while I enjoyed an exciting professional career, and another eight in the U.S creating a new business career and, most importantly, starting a family).

All of a sudden I felt the need to play chess again. Why? I will never know, but there was a strong inspirational force and I played with a

mental intensity I had never felt before or since. I entered the New Jersey State Open and my first game was against one of the strongest youngsters in the state, Steve Pozarek, who recalls:

"In 1968, I was an 18-year-old chess player with an Expert rating and ambitions of becoming a Master, and, just before the beginning of my sophomore year in college, I entered the New Jersey Open. My opponent in the first round was Unrated, meaning that the player had not played in any rated tournaments (in the US!) and was usually very inexperienced at chess. It hardly seemed like a very fateful moment, but as I recently read, 'Fate would not have the reputation it has if it simply did what it seemed it would do.'

"In my youthful enthusiasm, I missed some of the indications that my opponent was no ordinary Unrated player. First of all, he wasn't a young kid; he was a serious looking man in his 30s or 40s. Second, he kept score of the game, not in the usual American notation, but in a language I did not quite understand. Finally, he moved the pieces with a confidence of someone who has done it many, many times before.

"Ignoring these warning signs, I opened as White with the Queen Pawn, something I almost never did at the time. When he defended with the King's Indian Defense, I countered with the Saemisch Variation, a line that I had never played before (and have never played since!). After all, what was the harm? He was Unrated.

"As early as moves 8 through 10, my opponent maneuvered his two Knights in a way that seemed unusual to me. I think I took it as further evidence of his inexperience, but in fact it was a clear indication of my unfamiliarity with the nuances of the position. Very soon after that I realized that I was getting into trouble. Flustered with the sudden change in events, I played several moves without purpose, while my opponent powerfully realigned his pieces. By move 26, I was two pawns down and my position was collapsing on all fronts. My resignation at that point was probably the only time in my life that it came as a disappointment to the player on the other side of the board. My 'inexperienced' and unrated opponent had calculated a very pretty checkmate in 5 moves that I had not allowed him to demonstrate in the game.

"And that is how I met my lifelong friend Gene Salomon! As I pouted after the game, Gene consoled my father (also a very good chess player) with the information that although Unrated in the US, he had been a strong Master both in Spain and in Cuba. The only reason that he didn't have a USCF rating was that he had not played in any tournaments in the United States since his arrival in this country some 10 years earlier. He had not played in any tournaments at all in over 15 years. However, in that NJ Open, Gene went on over the next 5 rounds to contend for the NJ State title, losing out only in the final round when an unfortunate misunderstanding about the schedule forced him to play without sufficient time. He

achieved a provisional rating of USCF Master as a result (a title it took me over 10 more years to earn)."

S.Pozarek-E.Salomon
 New Jersey Open 1968
King's Indian Defence

1 c4 ♟f6 2 ♟c3 g6 3 e4 d6 4 d4 ♟g7
 5 f3 0-0 6 ♟e3 e5 7 d5 a5 8 ♟d3 ♟a6
 9 ♟ge2 ♟d7 10 ♟d2 ♟b4 11 0-0 f5
 12 exf5 gxf5 13 f4 ♟xd3 14 ♟xd3 e4
 15 ♟d2 ♟c5 16 ♟d4 ♟e7 17 ♟xg7 ♟xg7
 18 ♟b5 ♟f7 19 ♟ed4 ♟d3 20 b3 ♟d7
 21 ♟e3 ♟c8 22 a3 ♟f6 23 b4?! c6 24 ♟c3
 ♟g6 25 ♟ce2? cxd5 26 ♟g3 ♟xc4! 0-1



And the finish I had been hoping to execute? The idea was 27 ♟dxf5 ♟xf5 28 ♟xf5 ♟xg2+ 29 ♟h1 ♟cc2! 30 ♟xg7 ♟xh2+ 31 ♟g1 ♟cg2#.

You might also be wondering how I thought sharing that game would serve as a homage to my father and to my love of chess? I certainly have a debt of gratitude for all the ways in which chess has enriched my life, from bonding with my father to bonding with my sons to precious friendships to invaluable lessons about reasoning, so important in business and in life.

I must mention too that my father was a volunteer who fought with the British forces against Hitler. When he insisted in playing chess with me every night back in 1942, he would talk to me between games about life and his experiences. I will never forget all about his fighting the Nazis as a volunteer in the British Army prior to Dunkirk, as well as his subsequent journey, escaping Hitler to return to Spain. It is a story about how the winds of life blow us from place to place – just a leaf in the storm, as Lin Yutang would say.

And, finally, in February I hope to play as part of a team of 'super seniors' in the U.S Amateur Team Tournament, which usually contains over 1,300 players and will again be run by my good friend Steve Doyle who has now been at the helm for 30 years. Chess truly does continue to enrich our lives.

Ed. – If you would like to read more from Eugene, do check out his articles at www.historiadelajedrezspanol.es/articulos/salomon_eng.htm.