



The Queens' Corner

By Rachel Schechter



Meet Chess Queen **Laurel Aronian**: Chessplayer, Instructor, Singer, Songwriter, Media Maven—a remarkably gifted teenager, inspiring up-and-coming queens everywhere.

Congratulations, Laurel, you're so accomplished at such a young age. Please tell us a little bit about yourself.

Thanks so much for this opportunity; I'm excited to be a part of *The Chess Journalist's* Queen's Corner!

I'm a high school junior who lives in Westchester County, NY, and attends St. Luke's School in New Canaan, CT. I have a younger brother named Jack, who also plays competitive chess (he's a serious fan of four player chess too!). I played chess with my family before kindergarten, and began team tournament play with Trinity Elementary in NY and The Montessori School (Seven Acres) in Wilton, CT. My first tournament was actually an all-girls event in NYC.



My 1st Tournament in Kindergarten (An All Girls Tourney), NYC 2013. Photo Credit: J. Aronian.



Jack Aronian, THE Jonathan Corrblah (1st Coach!), Laurel Aronian, 12/18. Photo Credit: J. Aronian.

I love chess, as well as the culture that comes along with the game. I'm also passionate about music and writing. The ability to integrate these passions has been amazing and fulfilling. Playing, writing, and singing have opened new doorways for me in the chess world, whether playing chess at the Parliament in Armenia, singing the Star-Spangled Banner at US Chess national tournaments, or covering the US Chess K-12 Nationals for *Chess Life Kids* magazine.



Chess Festival at The Parliament in Yerevan, Armenia (Laurel (Blue Hat, rt)). Photo Credit: J. Aronian.



Singing The National Anthem, Opening Ceremony, US Chess High School Nationals, Wash DC, 1/23. Photo Credit: Caroline King.

Teaching chess is also a passion. I began teaching during the pandemic when Jack and I and friends designed a summer camp for elementary kids where we offered academic enrichment and chess instruction. After the program ended, the kids asked to continue with chess, so Jack and I launched a volunteer teen service initiative, Chess-

In1Day. The program provides volunteer chess instruction in public libraries, schools, and community centers. I've made strong relationships with my recruited peers as we work together, refining our approach and growing the game and the program itself.



Chessin1Day Class, CT, 9/23. Photo Credit: J. Aronian.



Chessin1day instruction. Photo Credit: K. Aronian.

The chess community truly comprises a unique group of people. The friendships I've made teaching, attending tournaments, as Teen Ambassador of the US Chess Women's Girls Club, captaining my school's chess team, and hosting cross-cultural chess events for my school, have been some of my closest. Chess has always been much more than a rating for me, and I always connect to its unique culture, even when I'm not in a head-to-head match.

We understand you're rated around 1400 and are 38th among girls under age 16. To what do you attribute your rapid improvement?

Fortunately, my last tournament at the New York State Championship was a good one, and boosted my rating to about 1450 with two wins and a draw against opponents rated 1600 and above. Before this past year, I was at somewhat of a plateau, so I began focusing more on memorizing opening lines (during sophomore year, I started



Catching up with Friends on the Chess Circuit at The Liberty Bell Tourney, PA. Photo Credit: K. Aronian

waking up about half an hour early to fit in some chess, as it was practically impossible to study in the evenings after I finished homework). I think running lines had a significant effect, as did working on tactics. Instead of simply doing Chesstempo puzzles as I had in the past, I began including lichess and Chess.com puzzles for variety (I find lichess puzzles the hardest). Taking more time on puzzles may have also been beneficial (i.e. not selecting a move until I'm quite positive it's the right one). I also started "playing up" in tournaments as often as I could. Attending the US Chess Women's Girls Club online sessions (since 2020) and tournaments was very beneficial as well. I'm not positive if a single one of these aspects launched me out of stagnation, but consistent study in itself was key.



US Chess Girls Club Virtual Meetup: Sarah Chiang, WGM Jennifer Shahade, (My profile picture is my Cat, Bonnie) Photo permission provided by Jennifer Shahade and USChess. Screenshot: L. Aronian



You and Jack received Chess Journalism's 2023 Award for Best Personal Narrative written by a junior. This, *The Sinefield Sacrifice*, ran on Chess.com vis-a-vis the St. Louis Rapid & Blitz venue. The story and photos were stellar. But could you tell us something the article *doesn't*?

Thanks so much for asking. These stories were incredibly fun for us to write and look back on. *The Sinefield Sacrifice*, which covered the World Grand Chess Tour's 2022 Rapid and Blitz, was actually our follow up piece. I'd suggest checking out the article that came first, [Autograph Signing - 2019 St. Louis Rapid & Blitz / Sinefield Cup Ceremonies](#), which briefly appeared on Chess.com's Blogs Front Page (Jack and I were super psyched about that). We wrote the piece when we were 10 and 12, so the perspective is quite different.

We do these pieces on spec, without any assurance that we'll get interviews or be in the right place at the right time. As rogue reporters, we're always in random places trying to get the interviews, photos, and find the story. For instance, in a stroke of luck, GM Alireza Firouzja (winner of the '22 Rapid & Blitz) was seated next to us at breakfast!



Laurel, Jack, & GM Alireza Firouzja, Sinefield, Rapid & Blitz, 2022. Photo Credit L. Aronian.



Jack & I Made it To The Proverbial Game! The World Grand Chess Tour, St. Louis 2018. Photo Credit: J. Aronian.



Closing Ceremony, Sinefield, Rapid & Blitz, 2019. Photo Credit: J. Aronian.



Reporting & Playing, St. Louis Chess Club. Fun Master Mike, Jack Aronian, Laurel Aronian (lt-rt), 2019. Photo Credit: J. Aronian.



Opening Ceremony, Sinefield, Rapid & Blitz, 2022. Photo Credit: J. Aronian.

A fun fact that the article doesn't mention is that we have an annual Chase Hotel pool swim relay (Super GMs present!). I'm not too sure how we'll pull it off this year since the St. Louis Grand Chess Tour events are taking place in September and December, but perhaps we'll try ping-pong (a nod to Dan Lucas' [US Chess Open Tennis](#) side event). It's no secret Super GMs are known for racquet sports and cook-offs. We haven't come across any reports on slow, relaxing sports yet (i.e., golf), but we'll keep our options open. Maybe bowling is a possibility?



Swim Relays at The Chase, 2022. Photo Credit: K. Aronian.

Do you regularly write for Chess.com? Other chess venues?

I actually have an upcoming assignment covering *The Faces of US Chess*— which I'm super excited about! It's tough for me to write regularly because of school, but I pop in and out for assignments. Still, I love juggling articles at events. Some prime photos can be taken between and after rounds! The image below was one of my favorites taken for *Chess Life Kids'* K-12 Grade Nationals cover story that didn't make it into the piece.



Chess Success: The Egelhof Family Tuckered Out Awaiting Awards, K-12 Nationals, MD 12/22. Photo Credit: L. Aronian

You also won one of Chess Journalism's Special Achievement awards for *Songwriting*, featuring chess-themed work. *Touch Move*, right? What inspired you?

"Touch Move" was about my experience at the 2022 US Open and Haring Invitational. I was flying from California back to New York, and realizing how difficult it'd be to maintain the relationships I'd made inspired me to write the song. I submitted "Touch Move" to YoungArts along with "Yours to Use," another song that drew some inspiration from chess.



WIM Ruth Haring Invitational of Girl State Champions US Open '22, Rancho Mirage, CA (close-up). Photo Credit: K. Aronian.



WIM Ruth Haring Invitational of Girl State Champions US Open '22, Rancho Mirage, CA. Photo Credit: K. Aronian.

What, in general, inspires you to write? Do you have any special or unique writing processes?

My drive to write comes largely from wanting to capture and share a moment with others. When I write articles, I want to bring the readers into the specific tournament: the random events, humorous happenings, the people, the games, and the unrepeatable energy and atmosphere. I write articles for people outside of the chess world as a window into this unique experience that they might not yet know, but may just decide to try. Similarly, I write songs because I want to share the beauty or emotion that's encompassed within my experiences.

In most of my writing, I begin with an outline, since it gives the piece a sense of direction and helps me get started when I'm staring at a blank document. I also often play piano instrumentals when writing articles, i.e. Will Halimou's chess music playlists (ironically, I never listen to these while playing chess, they tend to distract me).

Are any other chess-themed songs in the works?

I'm currently finishing a song called "*Albany*", which is about wanting to escape the present and return to Albany, a sort of haven for me as well as a tournament location. I had a wild coincidence about a month ago where I played the 145th Annual New York State Chess Tournament in Albany, and I contemporaneously competed in the 175th New York State Fair Talent Showcase Finals in Syracuse— with my song "*Albany*"!

I headed up to Albany Friday night, played round one at 7pm, woke up, drove to Syracuse for the Talent Showcase Finals at 9:30am, sang “Albany”, then drove back to Albany for my 6pm match Saturday evening.



175th NY State Fair Talent Showcase Finals, Syracuse, NY. Photo Credit: K. Aronian



145th Ny State Chess Championship, Albany, NY. Photo Credit: K. Aronian

Are there any other kinds of chess ventures in the works?

I just finished a piece for American Chess Magazine about the 145th Annual New York State Championship, which will be coming out soon. Indeed, my Labor Day break consisted of chess, singing, and writing—busy, but fun!

Additionally, [Chessin1day](#) will host a class on National Chess Day (October 14th) at [Teachers College, Columbia University](#). We are focusing on the idea that teachers and administrators can have the biggest impact in spreading the sport; however, educators must know the game and its benefits so they can encourage chess in their classes and schools.

Which female chess players do you most admire and why?

I greatly admire WGM Adriana Nikolova for her confidence and her entertaining streams. I love WIM Dr. Carolina Blanco’s unique fusion of her passions: orthodonture and chess, along with her bilingual coaching at Girls Club. I’m awed by IM and WGM Rusa (Rusudan) Goletiani’s bravery, pursuit of chess, and financial genius which she shared with the Girls Club. I was also fortunate to play chess with her at the Girls To Grandmasters & US Chess

Chess for All

We are thrilled to present the “Chess for All” workshop at Teachers College TC Re(Unites) on National Chess Day in the United States!

Laurel Aronian, CT State Girls Champion '22, US Chess Women’s Girls Club Ambassador and Co-Founder of Chessin1day, will facilitate a hands-on chess workshop. She will be joined by US Chess CT State Delegate and TC Alum Karen Aronian, Ed.D. (*96, *97, *15).

The workshop will welcome all-comers, from absolute beginners to skilled players. Although chess is perceived as complex to learn, the Chessin1day method activates participants in just one meet-up. Chess provides social engagement with face-to-face communication that elevates focus, critical thinking, multiple literacies, and meditative flow. Chess connects young and old, near and far, from all walks of life to think deeply and to play as we endeavor toward a more “Healthy Planet, Healthy People.” This workshop will illuminate chess benefits, inclusivity, and the essentialness of Chess For All, especially for education communities.

Chess is gaining worldwide momentum, and we will spotlight teachers as key linchpins in chess education. For chess to broadly impact scholastic populations, chess instruction needs to be a part of teacher education. Chess is an ideal choice for a fill-in activity during the typical school day, uniquely offering a near-silent interaction while simultaneously providing both a social and learning experience.

Chessin1day at Teachers College, Columbia University, NY, 10/14 #NationalChessDay

Girls Club event in Central Park, NY. I met WGM Sabina Foisor (and GM Elshan Moradiabadi) in the US Chess Women’s Girls Club Room at the 2018 K-12 Nationals in Orlando Florida and see Sabina at national events every year; her coaching, commentary, interviewing, and speaking continually inspire me and other female players I know. Similarly, I’ve seen IA Sophia Rohde around the chess world for years (running tournaments I play at!), and was thrilled to finally interview her in Albany this year. She has an incredible background as a chess player, international arbiter, chess organizer and influencer. Finally, I’m forever grateful to WGM Jennifer Shahade for her tireless efforts to get more girls into the game through her courage, reinvention and determination.



WIM Rusa Goletiani & Laurel, Girls to Grandmasters with US Chess Girls Club at Central Park’s Chess & Checkers House, 2/20 Photo Credit: K. Aronian



Scholastic Nationals with WGM Jennifer Shahade and WIM Carolina Blanco, 12/19 Photo Credit: K. Aronian.



WGM Jennifer Shahade, WIM Carolina Blanco & Girls Club Teen Pizza, K-12 Nationals '21, Orlando, FL. Photo Credit: K. Aronian.



Laurel & WIM Carolina Blanco & WGM Jennifer Shahade Girls Club Teen Pizza Party, High School Nationals, National Harbor, MD 12/ 22. Photo Credit: K. Aronian.

What special challenges do chess queens face?

Personally, I've always felt a bit like an atypical chess player at tournaments. Not solely because I'm a female player, but also because I often have other objectives in mind than winning the event, like covering the tournament, performing, or recruiting for Girls Club. I sometimes feel out of



place, and question if I should have the same mindset as the players around me.

I really enjoyed the US Open and Invitationals because of the social events they offer for the attending teens and the adults. Social events like these provide space for the nuances of chess players' personalities.

WGM SABINA FOISER with Laurel US Chess Open, Rancho Mirage, CA 2022. Photo Credit: K. Aronian.

Shifting squares, were you born in North Salem, NY? Brief bio?

I grew up in North Salem, NY, but I've lived in NYC as well.

Will you be a high school junior this fall?

Yes, I'm currently a junior.

What are your plans for college and career?

I'm currently visiting schools—checking out their chess clubs and academic departments (i.e., music, psychology, humanities, philosophy, education). I hope to keep chess in my life and integrate it with my academic fields of study.

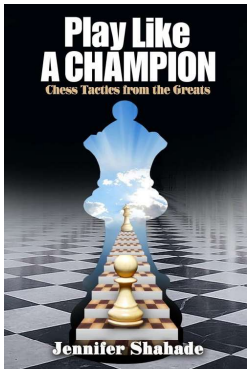
What advice do you have for other up-and-coming, young chess-related women?

Overall, I'd say that if you have a goal, stick with it through the hard times. Many girls drop out of chess due to conflicts, (i.e. school and friends), and it can be hard to continue with the game after said barriers impede improvement. However, if you truly love the game and/or the chess culture and friends you've made, stay with it. I've realized over time that when I'm unsure about something, it helps to "hold on loosely, but don't let go" (38 Special), rather than quitting. It's always important to take positive action!

As mentioned, there are many ways to connect to the chess world rather than aiming to be among the best players. Commentary, writing, and teaching are just a few options. I think many people quit, because they're not the best at the game, yet you can be your best in other aspects of the game—there are more wins than simply over-the-board. And there's room on the board for everyone.

I've also found that it's important to have confidence in your choices, and also consider the game from your opponent's perspective. In tournaments I'll often take a look at the game from the other side of the board to get an idea of what my opponent is planning. This strategy has helped me find many of my best responses. Similarly, I've been hesitant about playing an insane or dubious looking move, despite its obvious benefits, since I'm worried about what my coach or peers will say upon review. However, trusting my instincts and following through with the move has led me to the right decision more frequently than worrying about others' judgment.

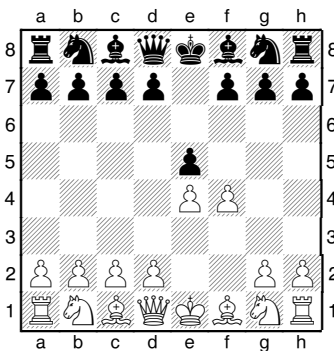
What's your favorite chess book?



Play Like a Champion by Jennifer Shahade

And your favorite chess opening?

I used to play the *King's Gambit* but stopped because it was too risky.



Finally, shifting squares again, what's your favorite tea?

I'm pretty much guaranteed to be seen with a water bottle of room-temperature green tea at chess tournaments (ITO EN's Sencha + Matcha blend). However, my actual favorite tea is *English Tea Shop's* White Tea Blueberry & Elderflower.

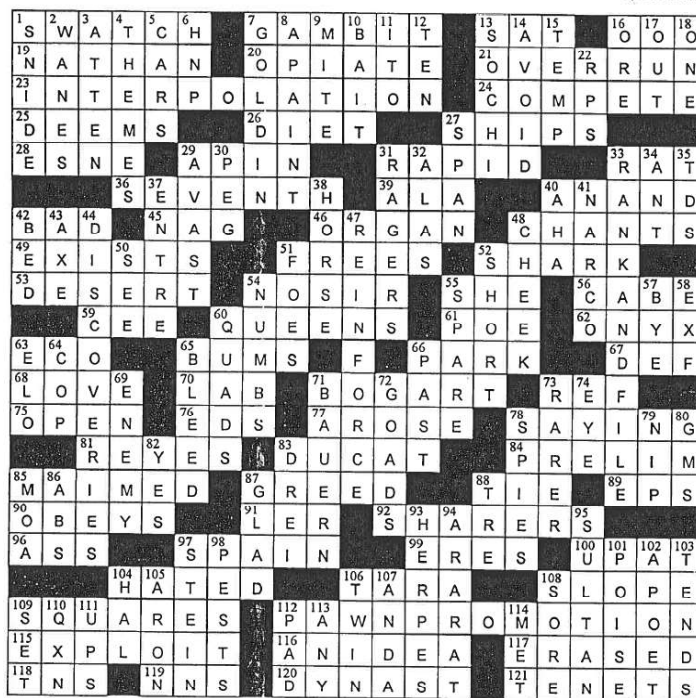
Thank you so much for including me in *The Queen's Corner*, it's a great spot on the board!



Back in the day at Montessori Chess, Jack (left), Laurel, & Chess Mates. Photo Credit: The Montessori School, CT

Thank **you**, Laurel Aronian for being such a stellar example for future young chess queens everywhere! (When we meet, I'll bring the tea.)

The Chess Word Crossword
by Bob Basalla



Aug 18, 1999 - Crosswords Plus