

Long Room at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, photo by Mark Capron.

Library Focus:

Kenneth Calitri

Interviewed by Mark Capron



What do you do for a living?

I am a human resources executive. I head up HR for Artech, the #1 women-owned IT staffing company in the United States. During my career I have been in retail management, IT recruiting, HR technology and executive HR management.

When did you begin playing chess?

I learned to play when I was 8 years old. One Christmas my older brother, Mike, received a Bohemia chess set from Richard, our brother-in-law. I opened the present by accident and was immediately enthralled. I played incessantly with toy soldiers and the wooden pieces struck my interest "What are these?" I asked. My brother-in-law responded, "They are chess pieces, but you opened the wrong present, it is for Michael.", who seemed unimpressed when looking inside the box and quickly put it aside. An hour later I traded my Christmas stocking stuffed full of candy, chocolates, and nuts for the chess set. The rest is history as they say!

When did you begin collecting Chess books?

I was 22 years old, living on my own, making good money, and spending good money on wine, women and weed, when I found my way one sunny Saturday afternoon to Fred Wilson's Bookstore in NYC for the very first time. At the time I had accumulated a small shelf of books and USCF pamphlets. At Fred's, I found myself standing in the middle of chess book heaven. I could not believe my eyes. The shelves were covered from floor to ceiling with vintage hardcovers (with dust jackets!) in various languages. My adrenalin began to pump. I felt the sweat beading up on the side of my temples. It was like going from college football to the pros, the room was spinning. I had to slow down and force myself to look at one title at a time. You all know the feeling – don't lie!

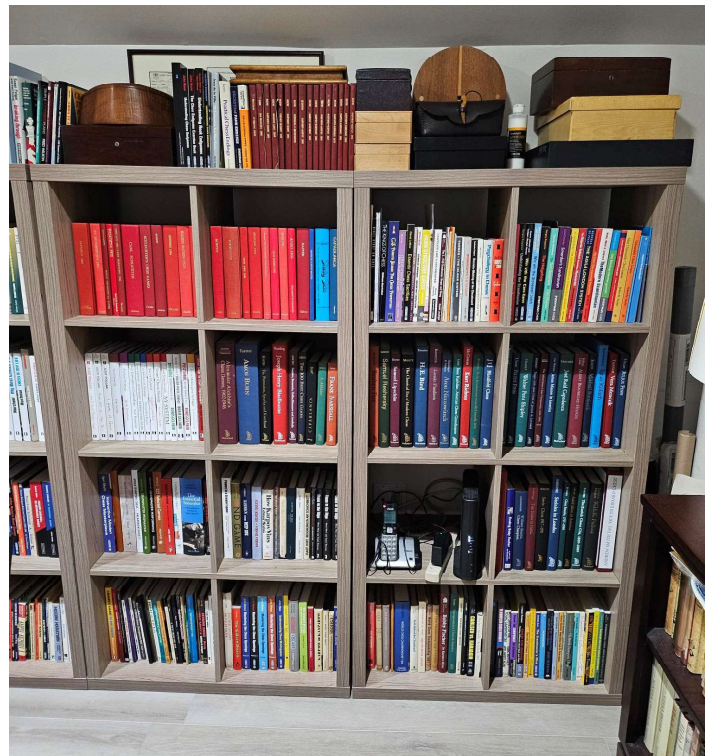
I picked out a pile of 10 books and after mulling them over picked four vintage Bell & Son hardcovers (to replace my paperback copies) and put the others aside. Fred queried me "Aren't you taking the other books?" I smiled, "Next time, I have a date tonight." Fred countered, "How much will you wind up spending tonight?" I quick calculated, "Probably a hundred or so." Fred was now in his element, "When you wake up tomorrow what will you have to show for it? You will have partied it away. If you buy these books, you will have something to show for it for tomorrow." In the face of iron clad logic, I purchased the other books, spent less partying, and on that fateful sunny Saturday at Fred's I became a chess book collector.

What logic! Fred sure was a salesperson!

To paraphrase Robert DeNiro, "Oh, he's good. He is very good!"

What draws you to a book? Cover? Title? Subject? Something else?

I like well-made hard covers. I don't like undersized or odd-shaped books. I don't like kitschy covers. My main interests are individual game collections, matches, significant tournaments, and meaningful instructional books. I focused exclusively on collecting only post-1900 books until recently.



Sounds like we are pretty similar in what we collect...for me, these days, its mostly biographical, tournaments, and matches. Early on I collected mostly opening books to supplement my correspondence play.

Do you recall what the first Chess book you ever had was?

My first chess book was *Bobby Fischer Teaches Chess*. I loved it. You didn't need a board and Fischer's comments to the more intriguing positions were a precursor to reading his annotations in *My 60 Memorable Games*. Bobby was adept at capturing the key moment when he sensed a tell emanating from his opponent. My second book was *Bobby Fischer's Chess Games* by Wade/O'Connell, a birthday present from my oldest brother Henri. My third book was a beat-up copy of *The Russians Play Chess* by Chernev (since replaced with a nice copy). Alekhine's trilogy of Best Games 1908-1945 and Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games* followed. Then I received a copy of C.H.O'D Alexander's book on the 1972 Fischer vs. Spassky Match, an unexpected present

from my father. I cherish the Fischer books I received as presents. I was 14 years old at the time and heading into high school.

Being able to see those tells, perhaps Fischer should have tried poker?! In chess, sometimes that can be a critical position. Have you read the book *Critical Moments in Chess* by Paata Gaprindashvili?

I have it in my library and have only skimmed it. He is a serious writer, and it isn't for the faint of heart. I played Susan Polgar in a simul at a US Open back in the early 2000's and at a critical moment in the middle-game she sensed me perking up as she reached to move a piece and then made another move. I still kick myself to this day for not keeping still 😊.

Do you collect other genres of books or just Chess?

Chess books are my collecting passion. I have a library of books, but these are not a collection per se. I like reading modern literature, biographies, I have some favorite poets, I like books on Bauhaus and mid-century architects, furniture design, and art books. My library is very eclectic.

Why do you think you decided to collect Chess books?

I found it fascinating, for example that a chess game played between Alekhine and Bogoljubow could come alive in your mind as if you were watching a video replay of it through the game annotations of one or both players. I fell in love with it. I especially liked the clash of 1-1 chess matches. I was also in awe of the chess master's from these bygone eras, who dedicated their lives to chess and made livings from it or tried to. Comparing how difficult it has been in my lifetime to make a living from chess, it was infinitely more difficult in those days. In some cases, they simply died trying with no social support systems available to fall back on. I started collecting partly to honor the players who came before us who gave much if not all their life to chess. I think this is why I focus more heavily on individual game collections.

What are some of your favorite books you have collected?

This is a tough one to answer. There are so many great books. First, I try to buy only quality books I want to keep for a lifetime. I know many collectors try to collect everything interesting across many chess genres, but this doesn't interest me. I am also constantly curating my collection, weeding out old and new books that either don't meet my quality standard of whether it is truly a must have book or if I consider it a classic for one reason or another.

Without going to my shelves and cherry-picking titles to impress the readers, extemporaneously, I love the following books: 1) *Chess for Budding Champions* by Jesper Hall 2) *Excelling at Chess* by Jacob Aagaard 3) *The Inner Game of Chess* by Andy Soltis 4) *Improve Your Chess* by Jonathan Tisdall 5) *Simple Chess* by Michael Stean. 6) *Positional Decision Making in Chess* by Boris Gelfand 7) *The Russians Play Chess* by Irving Chernev 8) *Fischer v Spassky 1972* by C.H.O'D Alexander 9) *Alekhine v Euwe 1937* by Alekhine & Euwe 10) *The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal* by Tal.

If I was going to be castaway on a desert Island and could only bring ten chess books with me I would choose the following: 1) *New York 1924* by Alekhine 2) *Zurich International Chess Tournament 1953* by Bronstein 3) *Keres Best Games* by Keres (published in single volume by Arco) 4) *Alekhine's Best Games 1908-1945* by Alekhine & Alexander (published in single volume by Batsford) 5) *The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal* by Tal 6) *Positional Decision Making in Chess* by Gelfand 7) *Tal v Botvinnik* by Tal 8) *My Best Games* by Karpov (Olms edition) 9) *Bobby Fischer's Career & Complete Games* by Mueller 10) *Encyclopedia of*

Chess Combinations by Chess Informant.

Nice list of books. The desert island is an interesting thought. It is so easy to go to our shelves and just pull off anything we are in the mood to read.

A funny story, I was visiting Fred Wilson's book stall one year at the NJ Amateur Team Championship in Parsippany and I was standing next to Jonathan Edwards and we both had books in our hands and were thumbing through them. Jonathan says to me with a huge smile on his face, "There is nothing like being surrounded by chess books!"

Do you have lots of your books autographed?

I would guesstimate I have around 100 or so signed books.

Any good stories about getting these autographs?

I have a few which are special to me. I wrote Frank Brady and asked him to sign and inscribe a first edition copy of *The Life and Games of Bobby Fischer* which he graciously did, and he also shared via email upon request his method for pulling together material for a new book and how he creates an outline, which was especially nice of him to do. I wrote Dr. Anthony Saily who had purchased books from my eBay store and asked him if he would sign and inscribe a first edition copy of his *The Battle of Chess Ideas*. His warm reply was, "It would be churlish of me not to!" I attended a chess lecture by GM Boris Gelfand at a Russian restaurant in NYC after he lost the WCC match v. Vishy Anand. During intermission Boris signed books and boards and spent time, five minutes or so, with each person. He signed and inscribed my copy of *Positional Decision Making in Chess*. Boris is such a nice person, intelligent, humorous, talkative, a real gentleman. I have signed copies of almost all the books Fred Wilson has edited and/or written and it is always special when the author is a friend. Fred also inscribes them to me with a funny note about how I need to improve which always gets me going 😊. When you know the author or have met them numerous times it is always special to have them sign them in person: Pete Tamburro, Joel Benjamin, Larry Christiansen, and Jonathan Edwards are a few who come to mind.

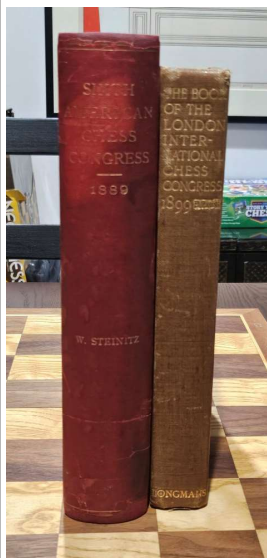
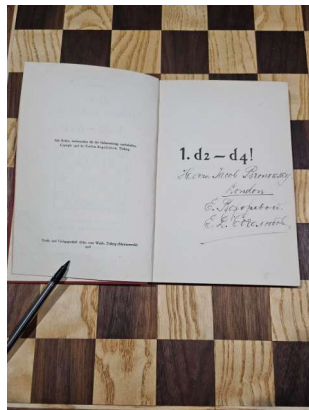
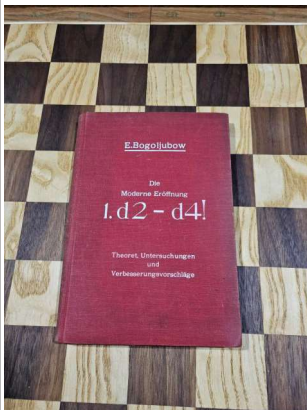
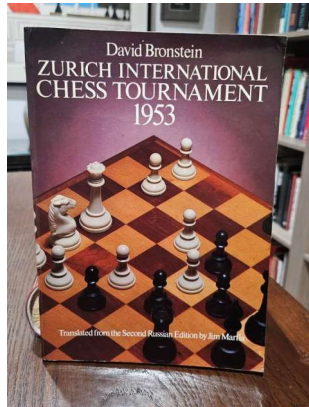
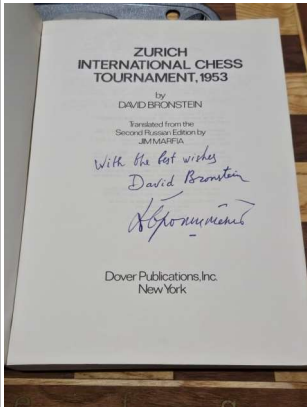
Did you plan your conversation with Boris Gelfand before the event or did you do more of a spur of the moment conversation? Any particular topic/question besides "how's the weather back home?"

I always have books inscribed to Bogo which is my nickname among my chess friends. Boris got a kick out of this, and we had a nice moment talking about Bogoljubow and Alekhine. Boris was pleased to hear I rooted for him against Anand, and we talked about the rapid playoff in which Boris was winning in two of the games. I have a picture of us together which is nice to have (see below).



What's your most prized possession?

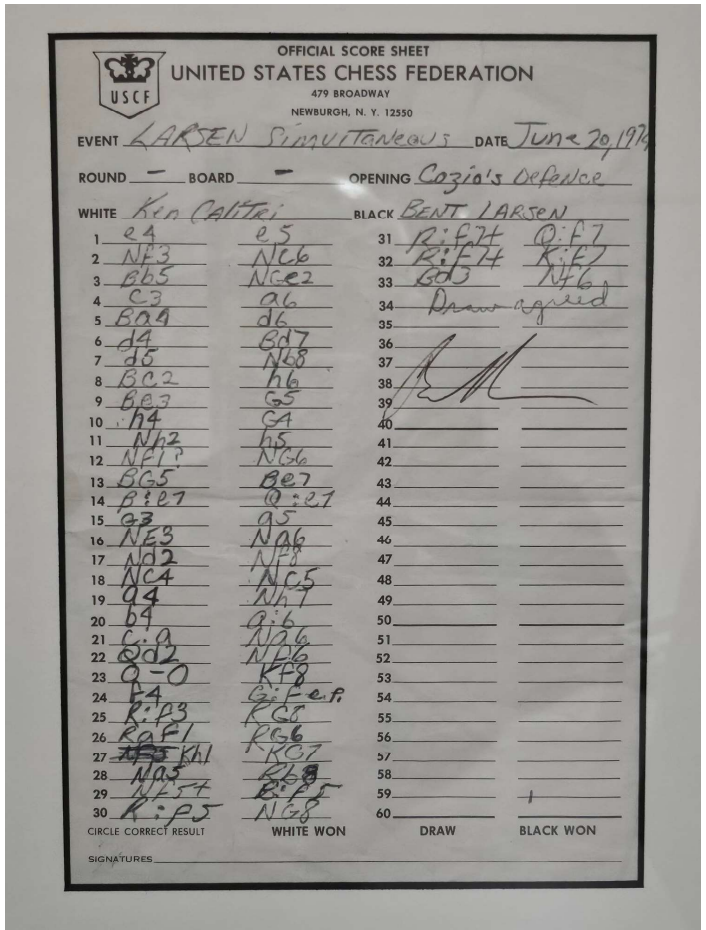
Zurich International Chess Tournament 1953 signed by David Bronstein, which is his magnum opus. Bent Larsen's Selected Games signed by Larsen. I also drew Larsen in a simul and have a signed scoresheet. He was a very impressive individual in person. I have signed copies of Spassky's and Euwe's red book and a signed copy of Bogoljubov's Die Moderne Eröffnung 1.d2—d4! Inscribed to a famous mathematician. I have numerous books signed by World Chess Champions and other chess greats. More recently I have purchased very nice 1st edition copies of *The Book of the London International Chess Congress 1899* and *The Sixth American Chess Congress 1889*.



Some of David Bronstein's games and problems are amazingly beautiful. Not sure if you saw it, but last January, we featured a game and some problems by Bronstein in our issue dedicated to Art in Chess.

Bronstein was a chess innovator besides being a colossal player. He was a promoter of rapid chess decades before it was introduced in the late 1980's. I am convinced Bronstein was pressured to let Botvinnik back into their 1951 match. Much

like Frankie Pentangeli was influenced by his brother's presence at a senate hearing to reverse his testimony against Michael Corleone. Bronstein's brother was in the audience during game 23. I believe Bronstein when he said it was up to him to decide to give in to those pressures.



What strategies have you used to obtain books?

No special strategy. I have been buying books from Fred Wilson for 40+ years now 😊. I have a few dealers in England who I am very fond of dealing with. I follow chesslund.com auctions. Online I purchase on EBAY and ABE mainly. Andy Ansel, who needs no introduction, is another person I am fond of dealing with. I have met nice people in the Chess Book Collectors group on Facebook and with several of them have bought, traded, and sold books.

What is your favorite bookstore to purchase from?

Amazon.com. Chess4Less.com. NewInChess.com. Houseof-Staunton.com. Sometimes directly with QualityChessBooks.com.

Are there good used bookstores in your area?

Fred Wilson's Chess Book Store in NYC on East 17th by Union Square. Fred has a great store right across from the Union Square Market. It is easy to find parking and there are also lots of good places to eat in the area as well.

Do you have a favorite publisher?

Elk and Ruby, Quality Chess Books, New In Chess, Thinker's Publishing. I wish Everyman and Gambit would do more biography/game collections. All of them should publish books in both hardcover and paperback.



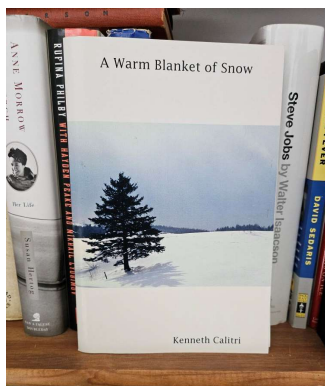
Fred Wilson's Book Store

I agree with the hardcover. It's always disappointing when you find a book you really want, and you can't get it in hardback. Unfortunately, I am hearing rumors that MacFarland may be moving to mostly paperback.

This would be hugely disappointing to collectors.

Have you written any books yourself?

A poetry book! I have several books in the planning stages. A hint: a fiction novel and two chess books. As Boris Spassky would say when asked to divulge what he was planning to write about, "It is Top secret!"



Do you read everything you have collected?

Yes. That is my story, and I am sticking to it. In truth, I do read many of them cover to cover, but I don't go over all the games move by move. Also, chess books are like magazines. You can pick them up, leaf through them at your leisure and learn different things each time. The purpose of collecting isn't necessarily to read them all. My wife Susan once said to me when I was questioning myself why I have them if I don't read them all. Her answer to my angst was 'Why can't it just be a collection?' When I retire this year, I will be able to plough more of them!

My plan exactly. I retire(d) in March (2024), and I am looking forward to reading at a much higher pace. It still may take until I turn 279 before I could finish all the books I have though 😊. I like your wife's comment, I will have to use it the next time my collection is brought up. LOL.

My son's name is Alexander Alekhine Calitri! I tricked my wife when we were naming him. She suggested Charles Alexander. Charles is her brother's name. I said I love him but wasn't sold. She said, "I like Alexander." I said, "Ok. If you get to choose the first name, I should get to pick the middle name." She said, "Ok." 😊

What a great story! I love it!

What draws you to want more books?

Obsession. Compulsion. Addiction. I am constantly culling my collection. Having downsized a few years ago, I have started to adopt the rule (and I am not following it religiously) for every new book I buy, one must go. I think it is important to cull and decide what is most important to you to have. For example, I remember one collector said this about games collections – "I only collect game collections by the World Champions. Why would I want any by players who were not good enough?" There is of course a certain logic to this viewpoint. I constantly battle my own demons and I am constantly rethinking what to collect and which books to cull. Of course, the perverse aspect of this is there are some books I have bought and sold five or more times in these culling exercises.

What inner fortitude and strength to cull your collection so much. Buying the same book more than once probably happens to many more of us than each of us is willing to admit. If a book looks that good though...

Who is your favorite player (let me guess...Alekhine?) Ha Ha

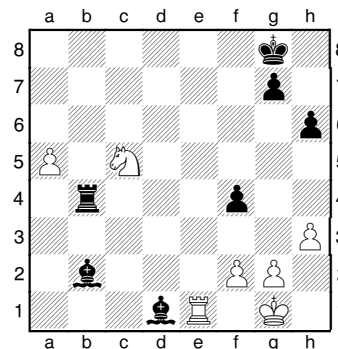
Yes Alekhine, but also Bogoljubow. They are my one and two. They are inseparably linked together for me. I was a huge Viktor Korchnoi fan during his runs at the world championship and then became a Karpov fan during his epic matches with Kasparov. He broke my heart when he didn't play 33.a6 in game 41 of their first match and when he lost game 24 of the Seville match. During the 1970's I was a diehard Benko, Kavalek, Larsen and Svidler fan when they wrote their wonderful tournament travel stories for *Chess Life*. I have a soft spot for Morozevich and Gelfand. Of course, I root for Fabi and Hikaru, but I am pulling for Nepo to get another shot at the title and take it down. I was also a huge Kramnik fan when he was playing, and he broke my heart when he missed the perpetual against Ivanchuk in the Candidates Tournament which would have pipped Carlsen. Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't mention I have a huge KRUSH on GM Irina Krush. I am a big fan of hers. Besides following her as a player, her instructional videos are terrific. Her chess knowledge is amazingly deep, and her instructional delivery is world class. I encourage chess players to listen to her DVDs and YouTube videos.

Karpov, Anatoly (2705) - Kasparov, Garry (2715) [C42]

World-ch30-KK1 Karpov-Kasparov +5-3=40 Moscow (41), 14.01.1985

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♗f6 3.♜xe5 d6 4.♗f3 ♜xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♗d3 ♗e7 7.0-0 ♜c6 8.c4 ♗b4 9.♗e2 dxc4 10.♗xc4 0-0 11.♜c3 ♜d6 12.♗b3 ♗f6 13.h3 ♗f5 14.♗e3 ♗e8 15.a3 ♜d3 16.♗b1 c5 17.dxc5 ♜e4 18.♗c2 ♜xb2 19.♗xd8 ♗axd8 20.♗xb2 ♗xc3 21.♗xb7 ♜xc5 22.♗xc5 ♗xc2 23.♗xa7 ♗d1 24.♗e7 ♗xe7 25.♗xe7 ♗d3 26.♗g5 ♗b2 27.♗b4 h6 28.♜e4 f5 29.♜c5 ♗d5 30.♗e1 f4 31.a4 ♗d4 32.a5 ♗xb4

in the following position 33.a6! is winning.



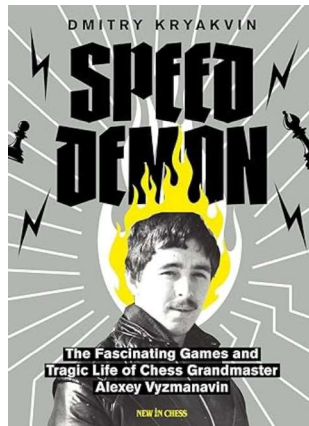
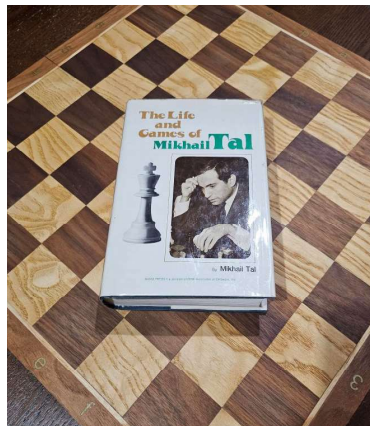
33.♗xd1 ♗d4 34.♜e6 ♗a7 35.♗d7 ♗b1+ 36.♗h2 ♗xf2 37.♜xf4 ♗a1 38.♜e6 ♗xa5 39.♗xg7+ ♗h8 40.♗f7 ♗e3 41.♗g3 ♗d2 42.♗d7 ♗c3 43.♗f3 ♗g8 44.♜f4 ♗f5 45.♗e4 ♗f7 46.♗d8+ ♗h7 47.♗d3 ♗e7+ 48.♗f3 ♗b2 49.♗b3 ♗c1 50.♜d5 ♗e5 51.♜f6+ ♗g6 52.♜e4 ♗f5+

53.♙e2 ♖e5 54.♟b4 ♗e7 55.♟c4 ♖e8 56.g3 ♘b2 57.♙f3 ♖e6 58.♟c5 ♘d4 59.♟d5 ♘e5 60.♟b5 ♘c7 61.♟c5 ♘b6 62.♟c8 ♘d4 63.♟g8+ ♘g7 64.h4 ♖a6 65.♙f4 ♖a5 66.♟e8 ♟f5+ 67.♙e3 ♖e5 68.♟g8 ♗e7 69.♙f4 ♟f7+ 70.♙g4 h5+ 71.♙h3
1/2-1/2

Kasparov, Garry (2740)–Karpov, Anatoly (2700) [A14] World-ch33–KK4 Kasparov–Karpov +4–4=16 Seville (24), 18.12.1987
1.c4 e6 2.♗f3 ♗f6 3.g3 d5 4.b3 ♘e7 5.♘g2 0–0 6.0–0 b6 7.♘b2 ♘b7 8.e3 ♗bd7 9.♗c3 ♗e4 10.♗e2 a5 11.d3 ♘f6 12.♙c2 ♘xb2 13.♙xb2 ♗d6 14.cxd5 ♘xd5 15.d4 c5 16.♟fd1 ♟c8 17.♗f4 ♘xf3 18.♘xf3 ♙e7 19.♟ac1 ♟fd8 20.dxc5 ♗xc5 21.b4 axb4 22.♙xb4 ♙a7 23.a3 ♗f5 24.♟b1 ♟xd1+ 25.♟xd1 ♙c7 26.♗d3 h6 27.♟c1 ♗e7 28.♙b5 ♗f5 29.a4 ♗d6 30.♙b1 ♙a7 31.♗e5 ♗xa4 32.♟xc8+ ♗xc8 33.♙d1 ♗e7 34.♙d8+ ♙h7 35.♗xf7 ♗g6 36.♙e8 ♙e7 37.♙xa4 ♙xf7 38.♘e4 ♙g8 39.♙b5 ♗f8 40.♙xb6 ♙f6 41.♙b5 ♙e7 42.♙g2 g6 43.♙a5 ♙g7 44.♙c5 ♙f7 45.h4 h5 46.♙c6 ♙e7 47.♘d3 ♙f7 48.♙d6 ♙g7 49.e4 ♙g8 50.♘c4 ♙g7 51.♙e5+ ♙g8 52.♙d6 ♙g7 53.♘b5 ♙g8 54.♘c6 ♙a7 55.♙b4 ♙c7 56.♙b7 ♙d8 57.e5 ♙a5 58.♘e8 ♙c5 59.♙f7+ ♙h8 60.♘a4 ♙d5+ 61.♙h2 ♙c5 62.♘b3 ♙c8 63.♘d1 ♙c5 64.♙g2
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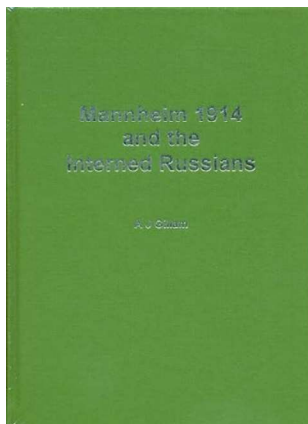
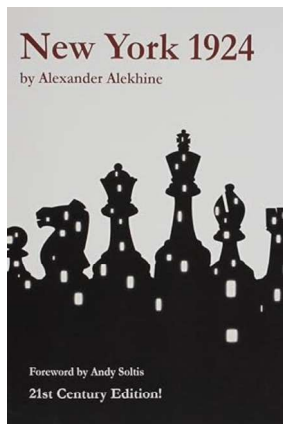
What is your favorite biography book?

Life and Times of Mikhail Tal by Tal. *Max Euwe* by Munninghoff. *Paul Morphy – The Pride and Sorrow of Chess* by Lawson. *William Steinitz, Chess Champion: Biography of the Bohemian Caesar* by Landsberger. *A. Alekhine – The Agony of a Genius* by Moran is a favorite too. Also, I would like to mention *Speed Demon: The Fascinating Games and Tragic Life of Alexey Vyzhmanavin* by Kryakvin. A more recent book which is a sad cautionary story of a talented player.



What is your favorite tournament book?

New York 1924 by Alekhine. Also, *Mannheim 1914 and the Interned Russians* by Gilliam is an amazing book.



What's your favorite opening book?

Tango! by Palliser. *Understanding the Scandinavian* by Kasparov. *The Jobava London System* by Simon Williams. *The Makogonov Variation* by Lakdawala/Hansen. *Play The Barry Attack* by Martin. Anything by Sverre Johnsen, especially *The London System. A Strategic Opening Repertoire* by Watson. *A Cunning Opening Repertoire* by Burgess.

Simon Williams is a very interesting author. Do you have many books by him?

Only one at the moment – his book on *The Jobava London System* is very good.

Do you have a favorite endings book?

Chess Endings by Balashov & Prandstetter. *Secrets of Pawn Endings* by Mueller and Lamprecht. Silman's *Complete Endgame Course*. *Practical Chess Endings* by Keres. *One Hundred Endgames You Must Know* by De La Villa. Nunn's endgame books are excellent. Averbakh's *Comprehensive Chess Endings* volumes 1–5. I used to say you only need one endgame book, but you can't go wrong with a core of solid ending books. I have been getting attached to collecting these volumes. I am getting around to the point of view, if you have all of Nunn's endgame books you don't need any others.

What is your favorite tactics book?

Blunders and Brilliances by Mullen and Moss. The Complete Chess Workout books by Palliser. There are several others by Gambit which were good, but these volumes come to mind.

Do you have a favorite book overall?

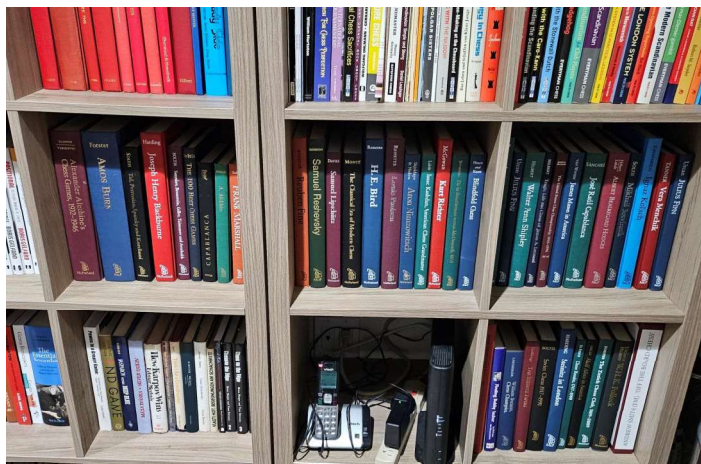
Hands down – *The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal*. Great player, great character, great writer.

For pleasurable reading – honorable mention goes to – *The King* by Jan Hein Donner and *The Essential Sosonko*, which are colossal prose books.

Do you have a favorite book series?

McFarland's Chess series in hardcover. Caissa Editions in red cloth hardcovers. Pergamon Russian Chess Series in hardcover. Quality Chess Books hardcovers (bios, matches, soviet instructional), New In Chess hardcovers (signed). Elk and Ruby are setting a new standard as well. Let us not forget Chess Informant has an amazing run going on!





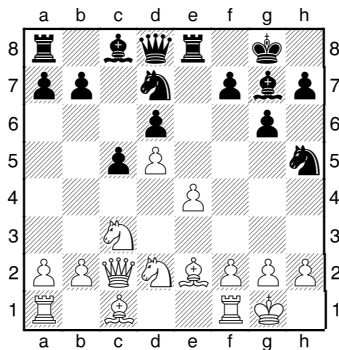
Do you have a favorite game somebody's played?

As a fourteen-year-old, falling in love with chess, watching Game 3 Spassky v. Fischer where Fischer uncorks Velimorovic's ♖h5 novelty in the Benoni on PBS, live with Shelby Lyman and crew annotating as the moves came in all day long. If Fischer doesn't win this game the course of chess history would likely have been changed.

Spassky, Boris Vasilievich - Fischer, Robert James (2785)

[A77] World-ch27 Fischer-Spassky +7-3=11 Reykjavik (3), 16.07.1972

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 c5 4.d5 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♗c3 g6 7.♗d2 ♖bd7 8.e4 ♗g7 9.♗e2 0-0 10.0-0 ♖e8 11.♙c2 ♖h5



12.♗xh5 gxh5 13.♗c4 ♗e5 14.♗e3 ♙h4 15.♗d2 ♗g4 16.♗xg4 hxg4 17.♗f4 ♙f6 18.g3 ♗d7 19.a4 b6 20.♖fe1 a6 21.♖e2 b5 22.♖ae1 ♙g6 23.b3 ♖e7 24.♙d3 ♖b8 25.axb5 axb5 26.b4 c4 27.♙d2 ♖be8 28.♖e3 h5 29.♖3e2 ♙h7 30.♖e3 ♙g8 31.♖3e2 ♗xc3 32.♙xc3 ♖xe4 33.♖xe4 ♖xe4 34.♖xe4 ♙xe4 35.♗h6 ♙g6 36.♗c1 ♙b1 37.♙f1 ♗f5 38.♙e2 ♙e4+ 39.♙e3 ♙c2+ 40.♙d2 ♙b3 41.♙d4 ♗d3+ 0-1

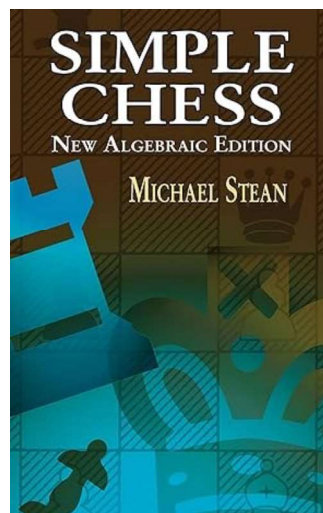
Do you care if your books are in descriptive or algebraic notation?

No – I happily collect both.

Anything else you would like to tell us?

My favorite book story is not about collecting a book, it is about saving a book! Many years ago, I stopped by Fred Wilson's one Saturday and Fred mentioned he was working on a project to recommend out-of-print chess books to Dover Publishing who were looking for chess titles to buy the rights too and republished them. He asked me if I had any recommendations. I emphatically said, "Fred, *Simple Chess* by Michael Stean is an unsung classic and it is out-of-print. It is a great book." I gave Fred a paperback copy, he read it, and made it so. The rest is history. I think saving

Stean's book is my biggest contribution to chess so far, but I feel my greatest contributions are yet to come!



I hope your readers enjoy getting a glimpse into my modest chess collection. I am certainly a minor collector compared to many others who have much bigger libraries. At the same time sometimes less is more! Hopefully, for those starting to collect, the books in my collection will further spur their interest!

Thank you, this has been fun learning more about you and your book collection.



