

My First Move



Dr. Alexey Root, Woman
International Master and 1989
U.S. Women's Champion

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

In the beginning...

I learned to play chess from my dad when I was five years old. He let me win, which I liked. When I was nine years old, I asked him to play “for real.” I was able to defeat him as he was not a tournament chess player. Then my dad drove me to the Lincoln (Nebraska) Chess Club, where I learned rules of chess that my dad did not know, such as *en passant*.

Maintaining interest

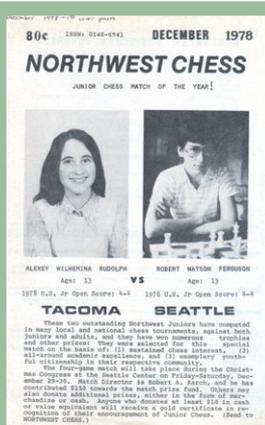
It was fun and exciting to try to figure out what move to play next in a game. Also, I was successful in chess tournaments as a child. For example, one other player and I tied for first in the 1976 Nebraska Elementary Chess Championship.

Multiple U.S. Women's Championship competitor

I played in 10 U.S. Women's Chess Championships—in 1981, 1984, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, and 1995. I was 15 years old for my first one. This served as a great source of



Alexey, age 10, playing against her dad in their Lincoln, Nebraska home.



Left to right: at the Chicago Chess Center in 1982; on the University of Texas at Dallas campus; 1978 *Northwest Chess* cover.

acknowledgement and motivation to reach the master level and aim for the top.

On becoming the 1989 U.S. Women's Champion

A reporter quoted me on the day I won the tournament as saying, "I've never been in the lead so much. Every game was so tense. Everyone is trying to beat you." I finished with seven out of nine points—five wins and four draws—in the 10-player round robin tournament.

Other notable achievements

I earned my Woman International Master title by winning the U.S. Women's in 1989 in what was called a "zonal" year. I also earned the US Chess national master title in July 1989. I played for the 1990 U.S. Women's Olympiad team that placed sixth in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. I also

played in the 1990 Women's Interzonal tournament in Malaysia.

How chess influenced adult choices

Chess influences me today because I have connected chess to my career as an educator. During the fall and spring semesters, I teach online courses about using the game of chess in education. These courses are mostly taken by students at The University of Texas at Dallas, but some of my students have been from as far away as Qatar. I also teach chess to children at summer camps and

give simultaneous exhibitions. In addition to writing books about chess, I also write for chess magazines and websites and sometimes play in a tournament.

Favorite openings

My first chess coach, Loren Schmidt, had me play the Danish Gambit as White and the Center Counter as Black. Now I play 1. d4 as White, and for Black I play the Modern Defense, the French Defense, or the Dutch Defense.

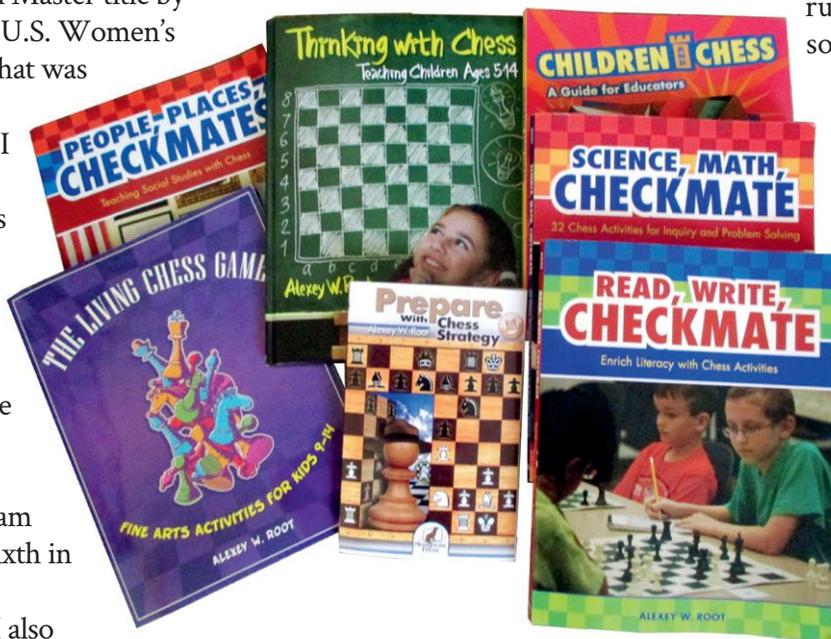
Favorite books

My favorite book was *How to Win in the Chess Openings* by I. A. Horowitz. I loved Horowitz's "chess movie" for each opening. As a chess writer, I review many books. A favorite of the many books that have been mailed to me was Judit Polgar's *How I Beat Fischer's Record*.

My best chess advice

In my 2006 book, *Children and Chess: A Guide for Educators*, I quoted Edmund Burke, "Our antagonist is our helper." That quote means that your opponent is helping you when he or she plays well against you. It's like running: You will run faster if someone is right on your heels, chasing you. You will play better chess if your opponent is playing good moves too. To sum up, my advice is that young chess players should hope that their opponents play the best moves!

Dr. Root has written seven well-received books about chess in education. Shown here are covers from her books.



All photos courtesy of subject