

by Damian Nash

David Reynolds 1934-2007

With sadness I must inform you that David Reynolds passed away January 24th, 2007 of an apparent heart attack. A long-time fixture of the Durango Chess Club, David was the strongest player in town for fifteen years, and the one to whom others turned for chess analysis, advice and amusement. He often brought a game from a current world-class chess tournament for the enjoyment and education of others at the club. The Durango Chess Club mourns his loss and sends condolences to his wife and son, Judith and Sam.

David had a lifetime love for the game, starting at age twelve and continuing through his last tournament -- The John Mical Memorial Melee last month -- which he won. He stayed in fine form into his seventies, gaining recognition and accolades along the way. As a US Chess Federation master, he won the state championship titles in both Ohio and Idaho. With his final ratings, he was still #29 on the USCF list of active quick chess players over age 65 (#11 in the country over age 70), and #48 in the USA in the regular rating list at 2095. His last slow chess tournament before retiring was in 2003 when he went undefeated in three games against Andy Rea, Anand Kalyanaraman and Damian Nash.

As an active hiker and local historian, David always seemed to have a spring in his step and a twinkle in his eye. The twinkle sometimes coupled with an impish grin after playing a particularly clever, game-winning move. David took great joy from a game well played, and conveyed the feeling of delight to many other players over the years. He will be missed by all at the Durango Chess Club. ☞

by Victor Spear

David Reynolds: A Personal Memoir

Five years ago, while thumbing through the Colorado Chess Informant, I noticed the name David Reynolds in a tournament score table. Could this be the same guy I used to play chess with when I was a medical student at the Univ. of Michigan? The same guy I played 79 games with in 1958, the guy I tied for first with in the Ann Arbor City Championship? Probably not, but what do I have to lose? So I wrote a letter to the magazine requesting his address and phone number, and, if this was against their policy, asked them to simply forward my note to him.

A week later, a letter arrived from Durango. It was him. We had parted ways 44 years before, but our histories were remarkably similar. He was involved in classical music, literature, theater, hiking, and chess, and so was I. He had made a killing in the stock market and so had I. He had a serious cardiac problem along with a bad family history. Ditto. It was spooky, like finding a soul mate. Hiking had been the reason we both had relocated, he to Western Colorado, and I to Northern California.

"This is the guy who hunted me down after 44 years!"
-- David Reynolds

We exchanged e-mails for a few months before I talked him into a visit. His wife Judy was a journalist for the Durango newspaper and would be covering the Ashland (Oregon) Shakespeare Festival. They agreed to make a 350 mile detour and come to Santa Rosa on the way back. How many times have you tried to revive a relationship out of the past and have it fall flat, suffering from the natural attrition that results from the drifting apart that occurs over the years? And, to boot, we had hardly known each other off the chessboard. Well, this turned out to be the opposite extreme. Time flew by like the proverbial winged chariot. It was as if we had been friends all our lives.

I am a pack rat. I save everything. I am biologically incapable of throwing anything out, especially if it pertains to chess. I still have every score sheet of every chess game I've ever played, including 79 games with Dave in 1958. I made copies and gifted him those games. Later he said, with typical honest candor, that he had never seen a more boring group of chess games. They parted with an invitation for us to return the visit in Durango.

A few months later we also went out of our way, on our way back from the Aspen Music Festival, to visit the Reynolds'. We shared a great hike in the mountains and a rehearsal concert of the Durango Symphony which Judy was reviewing for the paper. But the highlight for me was a trip to the Durango Chess Club, where Dave paraded me around like a trophy, saying to everyone with pride, "This is the guy who hunted me down after 44 years!"

We had only one more shared experience, a picnic lunch by the bay in Sausalito when they took a short trip to San Francisco. Afterward, we tramped through town searching used bookstores for old chess books. We chess geeks never quit, do we?

Dave was born and raised in Michigan. He was the quintessential academic Renaissance Man, getting degrees in astronomy, math, sociology and library science. In chess he made it to 2200, master level, and won state championships in Idaho and Ohio, as well as competing doggedly in simuls against Fischer and Reshevsky. As a hiker he climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in spite of having had coronary bypass surgery five years before. He called it "an act of defiance." As an author, he and Judy recently published a biography on an early Mesa Verde archaeologist.

Dave died suddenly of a heart attack at age 72 on Jan. 24, 2007. Hearing the news felt like getting hit with a sledgehammer. Why? Why, after seeing someone only three times in the last 50 years, did it mean so much? Is it simply an unwillingness to let go of the past? Is it because he turned out to be a kind and generous, endlessly interesting friend? No. Most of all I hurt because he was my chess buddy.

Is there anything better than that? ☞