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## Monday, November 3rd, 2014

### Chess Masters Who Died Young

On July 26, 2006, Jessie Gilbert (1987-2006), a rising British female chess star, fell through a window in her room at the Hotel Labe in Pardubice in the Czech Republic. She won the Women's World Amateur Championship when she was 11. She may have been sleepwalking or committed suicide. She was only 19.

On April 17, 1945, Klaus Junge (1924-1945), one of the youngest German chess masters, was killed in action at Welle, Germany. As a lieutenant, he refused to surrender and was killed by Allied troops in the battle of Welle on the Luneburg Heath, close to Hamburg, three weeks before World War II ended. He was only 21.

Rudolf Charousek (1873-1900), a strong Hungarian chess master, died of tuberculosis in Budapest. He was only 26.

Vugar Gashimov (1986-2014), a chess grandmaster from Azerbaijan, died from a brain tumor. He was only 27.

Gyula Breyer (1893-1921), a Hungarian chess master, died of heart disease in Bratislava. He was only 28.

Igor Kurnosov (1985-2013), Russian chess grandmaster, died after being run over by a car while crossing the road in Chelyabinsk. He was ranked #84 in the world at the time. He was only 28.

In 1986, Grandmaster Georgy Agzamov (1954-1986) fell between some rocks at a beach and died. He had just finished a chess tournament in Sevastopol and was taking a shortcut to go swimming. He fell off a cliff and got stuck between two rocks. Several people heard him yell for help, but he was too deep down in the rocks and died before a rescue team could get to him. At one time he was ranked number 8 in the world, with a 2728 rating. He died a week away from his 32nd birthday.

In August, 1909, chess master Rudolf Swiderski (1878-1909) committed suicide in Leipzig. He took some poison, and then shot himself in the head with his revolver. He had recently been convicted of perjury in connection with a love affair and he was to face legal proceedings. He died a week after his 31st birthday.

Dr. Julius Perlis (1880-1913), an Austrian chess master, died in a mountain climb in the Alps. During a pleasure trip, he went astray and spent the night on a mountain. He died of extreme exposure to low temperatures during a climb in the Austrian Inntaler Alps. He froze to death. He was only 33.

Harry Pillsbury (1872-1906), a world class chess player, died of syphilis, which he caught from a prostitute in Saint Petersburg about 10 years before his death. In March, 1905, he tried to jump out a 4th story window at the Presbyterian Hospital in Philadelphia. He was stopped by several nurses and doctors. He died at Friends Asylum in Frankford, Pennsylvania. His obituary in the New York Times stated that he died from an "illness contracted through overexertion of his memory cells." He was only 33.

William Henry Russ (1833-1866) one of America's leading compiler of chess problems, died in a hospital after trying to commit suicide. He adopted an 11-year old girl and proposed to her when she was 21. When he rejected her, she shot him four times in the head. He left her for dead (she survived), then tried to commit suicide by jumping into the river to drown himself. However, the tide was out and the water was not deep enough. He climbed out of the river and shot himself in the head. He died 10 days later in a hospital, lacking a will to live. He was only 33.

Lembit Oll (1964-1999), an Estonian grandmaster, committed suicide by jumping out of his 5th floor apartment window in Tallinn, Estonia. He fell into severe depression after he divorced. He had just turned 33.

On April 20, 1932, Edgar Colle (1897-1932), top Belgium player, died in Gand, Belgium, after an operation for a gastric ulcer. He survived three operations for a gastric ulcer, but died after a 4th operation. He was a month away from his 35th birthday.

Gioacchino Greco (1600-1634), strong player of the 1600s, died in the West Indies from disease. He was only 34.

On February 17, 1940, former New England chess champion Harold Morton (1906-1940), died in a car crash in Iowa when he hit a truck. His passenger, chess master I.A. Horowitz, survived. The two were giving simultaneous chess exhibitions throughout the country. He had just turned 34.

Guillermo Garcia (1953-1990), a Cuban grandmaster, died in a car wreck on his way to the airport to catch a plane to play in the Chess Olympiad in Novi Sad. He was only 36.

On October 31, 1971, Alexander Zaitsev (1935-1971), a leading Soviet chess grandmaster, died of thrombosis (blood clot) as a consequence of a leg operation to have one of his legs lengthened and correct a limp. He was

only 36.

On June 26, 1944, world woman chess champion Vera Menchik-Stevenson (1906-1944) died in a German bombing of London. She died in Kent after a German V-1 rocket hit her home (the bomb shelter in the garden remained intact). She was only 38.

Leonid Stein (1934-1973), 3-time USSR champion, died of a heart attack in the Rossiya Hotel in Moscow (he allegedly was having an affair at the time). He was only 38.

On October 25, 1962, Abe Turner (1924-1962), an American chess master, was stabbed 9 times in the back by a fellow employee, Theodore Smith, at the Chess Review office. His body was placed in a safe and found by the superintendent of the building later that afternoon. He was only 38.

On October 27, 2003, Esam Aly Ahmed (1964-2003), an International Master and Egypt's top chess player, died of malaria after returning home from the All Africa Games chess tournament in Nigeria. He was bitten by an infected mosquito and was incorrectly diagnosed in Egypt after becoming ill. He was only 39.

Max Pavey (1918-1957), an American chess master, died of leukemia and radiation poisoning in New York City. He was only 39.

In 2007, Grandmaster Maxim Sorokin (1968-2007) died a week after a traffic accident while on his way from Elista, Kalmykia to Volgograd. He was only 39.

Henry Buckle (1821-1862), strong amateur chess player, died of typhoid fever in Damascus. He was only 40.

Richard Reti (1889-1929) died of scarlet fever in Prague. He had just turned 40.

In 1944, Salo Landau (1903-1943), Dutch master, was gassed by the Nazis in a German concentration camp in Poland. He was sent to a forced labor camp in Graditz, Poland and died in November, 1943. He was only 40.

Karen Grigorian (1947-1989), Armenian International Master, committed suicide by jumping from the highest bridge in Yerevan. He was only 42.

On March 11, 1952, Jan Foltys (1908-1952), Czech International Master, died of leukemia in Ostrava. In 1951, he qualified for the Interzonal tournament in Saltsjobaden, Sweden, but died before it took place. He was only 43.

Grandmaster Aleksander Wojtkiewicz died of intestinal hemorrhage in Boston. He was only 43.

On December 27, 1918, Carl Schlechter (1874-1918), leading Austrian player, died from pneumonia and starvation in Budapest, Hungary, during the war-imposed famine in Central Europe. He never mentioned to any of his acquaintances that he needed food or money. He was found in a room without any money, heat or food. He was buried in Budapest on December 31, 1918. He was only 44.

Louis-Charles Mahe de La Bourdonnais (1795-1840), strongest player of the 19th century, died of a stroke. He died penniless in London, having been forced to sell all his possessions to satisfy creditors. He was only 44 or 45.

Donald Byrne (1930-1976), American International Master, died in Philadelphia of complications arising from lupus. He was only 45.

Johannes Zukertort (1842-1888) died of a stroke while playing chess at Simpson's, a London coffee-house. While playing a chess game with Sylvain Meyer, Zukertort fainted. Instead of calling for medical help, he was taken to the British Chess Club in an unconscious state. They then took him to Charing Cross Hospital where they diagnosed the problem as a cerebral attack. He never regained consciousness, and died at 10 a.m. the next day. The cause of death was cerebral hemorrhage. At the time, Zukertort was also in the middle of a tournament

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at the British Chess Club and was in 1st place. He was scheduled to play a match with Blackburne on June 23, 1888 and Bird on June 26, 1888. He was only 45.

On September 3, 1941, Alexander Ilyin-Genevsky (1894-1941) died during the siege of Leningrad by the Germans. He was on a barge on Lake Ladoga, east of Leningrad, trying to escape the city, when a German aircraft bombed the barge. He was the only one killed on the barge, which was displaying Red Cross flags. He was only 46.

Tony Miles (1955-2001), English grandmaster, died of heart failure and was suffering from diabetes. He was only 46.

Paul Morphy (1837-1884) died of a stroke while taking a cold bath at his home in New Orleans. He had taken a long walk during the afternoon and returned for a bath. He remained so long in the bathroom that his mother grew alarmed and went up, to find him dead in the bath. The cause was congestion of the brain following the shock of cold water to an overheated body. The funeral took place very quietly the next day. Only some relatives and a few friends were present. He was only 46.

Lionel Kieseritzky (1806-1853) died penniless at a charity hospital for the insane in Paris. He was only 47. He was buried in a pauper's grave. Only one person came to his funeral, a waiter at the Café de la Régence.

Aron Nimzowitsch (1886-1935) died of pneumonia. He was only 48.

On November 11, 1932, Frederick Yates (1884-1932) died in his sleep at his home in London from a gas leak due to a faulty gas pipe connection. It was not suicide. A gas company official proved that no gas tap was turned on. It was ruled an accidental death. He was buried at Leeds on November 16, 1932. He was only 48.

On September 25, 1968, Russian grandmaster Vladimir Simagin (1919-1968) died of a heart attack while playing in a chess tournament in Kislovodsk, Russia. He was only 49.

Thomas Wilson Barnes (1825-1874) died after going on a diet and losing 130 pounds in 10 months (he originally weighed 220 pounds). No one really knows the cause of death and some suspected stomach cancer. He was one of the strongest English chess players in the 1850s. He scored more wins than anyone else against Paul Morphy, defeating him 8 times. Morphy considered him the strongest player he had ever encountered. He was only 49.

On December 9, 1983, Janos Flesch (1933-1983) died in a car wreck in Whitstable, England. He was returning from the Kasparov-Korchnoi match in London to a tournament in Ramsgate when he became involved in a car accident. He and his wife died in the crash. He was only 50.

On November 25, 1955, Herman Steiner (1905-1955) died of a heart attack after a California State Championship game in Los Angeles. He was defending his state championship title and finished his 5th round game (a 62-move draw against William Addison). He then said he felt unwell, so his afternoon game was postponed. About two hours later, around 9:30 pm, Steiner had a heart attack while being attended by a physician and died. He was only 50.

Alvis Vitolins (1946-1997), Latvian International Master, committed suicide by jumping onto the frozen ice of the Gauja river from a railway bridge. He was only 50.

On April 18 1942, Karl Leonid Kubbel (1891-1942), a chess problemist, died of starvation during the siege of Leningrad. He was only 51.

In 1942 Ilya Rabinovich (1891-1942), Russian master, was evacuated from Leningrad, but died of malnutrition in a hospital in Perm, Russia. He was a few weeks from his 51st birthday.

Baron Ignatz von Kolisch (1837-1889) died of kidney failure on April 30, 1889, yet his obituary does not even mention chess, even though he was one of the top players in the world. From July 1867 to November 1868, he

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was ranked as the number one chess player in the world. He died a few weeks after his 52nd birthday.

On March 24, 1946, Alexander Alekhine (1892-1946) choked to death on a piece of meat (see picture). He was found dead in his hotel room in Estoril, Portugal on the morning of March 24. The cause of death has been attributed either by his choking on a piece of meat or by a heart attack. His body was found by a waiter when he brought in breakfast. He was only 53.

Viacheslav Ragozin (1908-1962), Soviet grandmaster, died of a heart attack in Moscow. He was only 53.

On December 20, 1944, George Sturgis (1891-1944), president of the US Chess Federation, died of a heart attack in Boston after returning from his honeymoon. He was only 53.

On April 14, 1891, George Mackenzie (1837-1891) was found dead at a hotel in New York. A hotel worker called at his room and found him dead in bed. He had terminal tuberculosis before his death. The day before, he visited the Manhattan Chess Club and was arranging to challenge the winner of the forthcoming match between Blackburne and Gunsberg. William Steinitz reported that his death was from an intentional overdose of morphine. This rumor was started by a doctor who refused to sign a certificate for an insurance policy because the doctor had not been paid a fee. He died a few weeks after his 54th birthday.

Fred Reinfeld (1910-1964), American chess master, died from a ruptured cerebral aneurysm. He was only 54.

Elena Akhmilovskaya Donaldson, once ranked as the second-best woman chess player in the world, died from brain cancer. She was only 55.

Tigran Petrosian (1929-1984), former world champion, died of stomach cancer in Moscow. He was only 55.

Mikhail Tal (1936-1992) died of kidney failure in a Moscow hospital. He was only 55.

Simon Webb (1949-2005), British International Master, was stabbed to death in the family kitchen by his son during an argument. He was only 55.

On March 8, 1942, Jose Capablanca (1888-1942), died after watching a skittles game at the Manhattan Chess Club. The cause of death was given as "a cerebral hemorrhage provoked by hypertension." He died at Mount Sinai Hospital, the same hospital that Emanuel Lasker died a year earlier. Capablanca's body was given a public funeral in Havana on March 15, 1942. He was only 56.

Rosendo Balinas (1941-1998), Filipino grandmaster, died of liver cancer. He died a week after turning 57.

Isaac Boleslavsky (1919-1996) died after an operation. He had slipped on an icy sidewalk, fracturing his hip. He contracted a fatal infection while in the hospital. He was only 57.

Mikhail Chigorin (1850-1908), Soviet grandmaster, died of diabetes. He was only 57.

Semyon Furman (1920-1978) died of stomach cancer in Leningrad. He was only 57.

Paul Leonhardt (1877-1934) died of a heart attack while playing chess at a chess club. He was only 57.

Grandmaster Igor Ivanov (1947-2005) died of cancer in St. George, Utah. He was only 58. Three weeks before his death, he took 1st place in the Utah Open.

Dawid Janowsky (1868-1927) died of tuberculosis. He was only 58.

Johannes von Minckwitz (1843-1901) committed suicide by stepping in front of an electric car near Biebrich, Germany. He lost both arms and died May 20, 1901. He was only 58.

Louis Paulsen (1833-1891) died of diabetes. He was only 58.

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On June 5, 1975, Paul Keres (1916-1975) died of a heart attack in Helsinki, Finland, while returning home to Estonia from the World Class Championship in Vancouver, B.C. He had just won the event. Doctors had warned him earlier not to play competitive chess due to health concerns. He was only 58.

Ricardo Calvo (1943-2002) died of esophagus cancer. He was only 59.

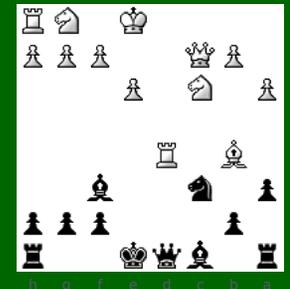
On May 26, 1967, Gideon Stahlberg (1908-1967) died of a heart attack during the 1967 Leningrad International chess tournament. He was only 59.

– Bill Wall (still alive)

Posted by bill AT [Monday, November 3rd, 2014](#)

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