

The Art of Living – Memories of Two Chess Friends

Jan Timman and Hans Böhm



The Best of the Rest



Mister Chess

How to read this book? Each chapter is introduced by Jan Timman in black Newton font. Hans Böhm is the narrator. His narration is shown in *Agency FB italic font* in the black and white version of this book, and in *blue Agency FB italic font* in the full-colour version. Furthermore, the conversations are printed in regular (non-italic) type: Hans in (blue) Agency FB font and Jan in black Newton font.

The Art of Living – Memories of Two Chess Friends

Authors: Jan Timman and Hans Böhm

Games and studies analysis: Erwin I'Ami

Translated from the Dutch by Hans Renette

© Elk and Ruby, 2026. All rights reserved

First published in Dutch in 2026 by Best in Books, Noorderwijk

Follow us on Twitter: @ilan_ruby

www.elkandruby.com

ISBN 978-1-918791-26-6 (black and white paperback); 978-1-918791-24-2
(black and white hardback); 978-1-918791-25-9 (full-colour hardback)

Contents

Foreword by Hans	4
Foreword by Jan	6
9 Nassaulaan Street, Delft, early years up to 1970	8
Contribution by Huib Knuvers	26
De Zilverberg, Room 14, Amsterdam, 1970–1974	36
Contribution by Jaap van den Herik	52
73 Weteringschans Street, Amsterdam, 1974–1978	62
Contribution by Hans Bouwmeester	78
12 Saxenburgerstraat, Amsterdam, 1978–1982	88
Contribution by Tim Krabbé	114
69 Van Eeghenstraat, Amsterdam, 1983–1991	124
Contribution by Bessel Kok	154
69 Van Eeghenstraat, Amsterdam, 1992–2000	164
Contribution by Jan Nagel	188
16 Mozartkade, Amsterdam, 2000–2001	198
Contribution by Jos Balk	204
77B Entrepotdok, Amsterdam, 2001–2003	214
Contribution by Harold van der Heijden	222
72 Beethovenstraat, Amsterdam, 2003–2007	232
Contribution by Maarten Langen	244
42 Rijnstraat, Arnhem, 2007–2026	254
Contribution by Bert Torn	282
Contribution by Geertje Timman-Dirkse	292
Contribution by Leny Böhm-Fresen	294
Acknowledgements by Jan	296
Acknowledgements by Hans	298
Epilogue	300
Contributing photographers	308
Index of games and studies	309

Foreword

Hans Böhm

When the door opened, I was a bit startled. Jan looked yellow.

“Just plain bad luck, at first they said it was pancreatic cancer, but normally you’d have back pain and I didn’t have it.”

His face had also turned somewhat gaunt, I noticed it now. We sat, as usual, at a chessboard with an interesting position, but I couldn’t have cared less about chess at that moment.

I’d brought a bottle of Barolo, because it brought back fond memories.

“I’ve had to give up drinking wine, but I’ll have a sniff. The aroma is lovely. Two weeks ago I was still giving a simultaneous exhibition, nothing wrong, felt fine. And the next morning, I woke up and I was all yellow.”

“Jan was even more jaundiced back then,” said Geertje from the sofa, “so I sent him to the doctor.”

I let it all sink in. So unexpected, so sudden.

“Yes, but... what’s the prognosis?”

Jan shook his head. “I asked for a second opinion and it turned out I have bile duct cancer. That’s no better, because only two hundred people get what I have and there’s no cure for it either. And if I do want to try some treatment, I’ll have to go back to the pancreatic cancer specialist and I’ve lost all confidence in him.”

My closest friend from all those years ago – I had no clue what to say – yet I felt an urgency to act.

“Shall we write a biography – actually, a joint autobiography, because our lives have been so tightly intertwined?”

“Good idea,” Jan said straight away.

That spontaneity, that positivity, that quick understanding, coupled with a fine sense of humour – that’s what I’ve always appreciated in Jan.

That’s what you get with real friends. Even though you don’t see each other as often as when you lived together in a student flat some fifty years earlier, but you pick up where you left off in no time.

“But then you’ll have to write a foreword and an afterword and a retrospective too, Jan, and it mustn’t turn into a chess book.”

We brainstormed a bit about the layout and chapters and agreed to think it over further, as I unfortunately had to dash off again, to a Chess Festival at the Rozet cultural centre in the heart of Arnhem, close to where Jan and Geertje live. Jan and I were supposed to be the main attractions, but Jan had duly withdrawn and arranged for Grandmaster Erwin I’Ami to stand in.

We agreed to meet again a week later.

Jan looked better. They’d placed two stents in his oesophagus so that the bile no longer flowed freely through his body, which had caused that yellow colour.

This time I'd brought along various types of fish, thinking it would be good for his insides or something.

"I can't eat fish anymore," said Jan.

"Then I'll bring some ice cream next time, or is that not allowed either? I'd rather know." Ice cream was fine.

Erwin was there this time, too; he'd brought some pineapple chunks, which went down well.

Jan started by showing us some fine chess studies. In recent years in particular, Jan had been composing more and more studies, and he was also working on a book featuring 185 of his own studies, including many prize-winners.

That felt familiar again, because, so often in our lives, with various groups of people, we've analysed games and looked at studies gathered around a chessboard.

"When was that trip to Sicily with that American professor of archaeology, again?" I asked, taking a sip of Italian wine.

"1973."

Jan's memory for dates is remarkably good; it always has been. My memory works differently.

We agreed that I would drop by in the coming months with a voice recorder and then we would go through our whole lives chronologically. One period at a time.

For each chapter, Jan would then suggest a game that was memorable to him, as well as a special study.

Erwin immediately offered to help with the chess analysis, because he is not only a chess study enthusiast, he understands the dilemma of relative values that Jan has suddenly found himself in. In 2021, Erwin was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma, a form of cancer. He was thirty-five at the time and everything changed; everything became relative. He managed to recover with a rigorous course of medication and played his best ever tournament at Wijk aan Zee in 2022, going on to become Dutch champion later that year.

"Let's also hear from some people who have been important in your life, Jan; have a think about that."

The idea for a dual autobiography was born; now we just needed a publisher.

Jan has already published many books through New In Chess and I through Tirion Sport, later Kosmos Publishers.

But this time we wanted to work with a proper publisher of biographies.

I sought help from Marcel van der Kraan, head of the sports desk at *De Telegraaf*, the newspaper for which I have been writing the chess column since 2008.

He introduced me to Raf Willems from Best in Books, which specialises in sport and life stories.

A perfect match.

And that's how it all began.

Hans Böhm

Hilversum, July 2025

Foreword

Jan Timman

In May 2025, I was suddenly confronted, out of the blue, with a harsh reality: I turned out to be terminally ill. In a single moment, my world collapsed. All my long-term plans were scuppered; my future had been swept away. Whilst others could live with the knowledge that death was years away, for me it was a matter of months. I had an invitation to an endgame study tournament in honour of the fiftieth birthday of the renowned Danish endgame study composer Steffen Slumstrup Nielsen. A prestigious tournament I would have loved to take part in. However, the deadline was February 2026.

“I’m leaving the table, I’m out of the game”, sings Leonard Cohen on his final album *You Want It Darker*, which was released just before his death.

That’s exactly how it felt. I could no longer take part.

It is a strange feeling when your body turns against you, because you live in that body. You have to fight a battle that is hopeless from the outset. The sword of Damocles hangs over your head; things could go wrong at any moment.

“When death is present, I am not. When I am present, death is not,” wrote Epicurus, the ancient Greek philosopher. And Harry Mulisch once remarked – incidentally, also referring to a text by Epicurus – on why he did not fear death. He said: *“Before I was born, I wasn’t there either. Was that such a terrible time?”*

Irrefutable truths, but I could draw no comfort from them. I decided to reread the poems of Jorge Luis Borges and came across the following lines from the 1976 poem *No eres los otros (You Are Not the Others)*:

*“Dust are the words, blossoming from your hand,
or the other words, spoken through your mouth,
God’s night is endless.*

*Unbroken time is what you are,
time you are, every single moment.”*

That really resonated with me.

I decided to start living like my two cats, Artemis and Lune; they have no idea how long they have left to live. They purr and meow, live in the present and spend a large part of the day sleeping; resting from doing nothing. The latter part certainly did not apply to me, though. Hard work was the motto. I was working on a book about my endgame studies. The deadline was December. For a book of around four hundred pages containing 185 studies, that seemed a reasonable timeframe. Through hard work, I managed to put the finishing touches to it by mid-July. The study I had intended to submit to the Steffen Nielsen tournament had now been given a different purpose; it became an additional and concluding study in my book.

None of this would have been possible without the support of my dear wife Geertje. She ensured I could work undisturbed and took care of all sorts of matters that arise when your life is suddenly turned upside down.

Unbroken time: it was time for a new project. Six months earlier, I had conceived the plan to write about the first fourteen years of my life as a chess player. The working title was *From Delft to Venice*. I continued with that work. The story I had in mind: how, at the age of eight, I had learnt the game from my older brother Ton, the idyllic atmosphere in Delft, how I made rapid progress, how I went through school and decided not to go to university, eventually achieving my Grandmaster title in 1974.

Travelling had always been in my blood, but that was when my life of travelling the world really began. After the IBM tournament, I embarked on a four-month journey that started in New York and ended in Venice, where I played a tournament at the city's casino.

My plan was, in a sense, thwarted by an initiative from Hans Böhm; we have known each other for fifty-eight years and he is my oldest friend. It was with him that I travelled to New York. Hans had conceived the plan to work together on a book of autobiographical memories. I agreed immediately.

A biography of me by John Kuipers had already appeared to mark my sixtieth birthday, but I had not been particularly happy with that book. Several factual inaccuracies had crept in; the most jarring was that my mother's maiden name had been distorted to Van Leeuwen instead of De Leeuw. That painful error was partly caused by the fact that I had not authorised the biography. In this book, we have the opportunity to set the record straight. We also focus on the years I spent in Arnhem after turning sixty.

For a long time, my life was a succession of travelling, chess and writing; over the past ten years, writing in particular has taken centre stage. A full account of all my experiences and adventures would result in a book of at least a thousand pages. That is why we have opted for that other form of autobiography: personal reminiscences. This allowed us to limit ourselves to the most interesting stories.

Chess itself could not be left out either; my best games and studies deserved a place; my friend and fellow Grandmaster Erwin L'Ami has written the commentaries. And the study for Steffen Nielsen? You will find that inside, too.

Jan Timman

Arnhem, July 2025

Chapter 1

9 Nassaulaan Street, Delft, early years up to 1970

9 Nassaulaan Street was a house in an academics' neighbourhood. It had a small front garden and a large back garden with white and blue lilacs, laburnum and a pear tree right at the back. There was also a coal shed and another, small shed. My father often sat on the terrace smoking his pipe, thinking. The houses had been built after the war. There was little in the way of comfort. It had two floors and an attic. I loved my parents very much; I had a happy childhood.

Game

J. Timman – U. Andersson Tallinn, 1973

Jan and Ulf were both born in 1951 and faced each other at the board dozens of times in the international tournament arena. The tournament in Tallinn did not go very well for Jan, but this victory, against a technical expert like Andersson of all people, must have been a particular boost.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗c6 5.♗c3 a6 6.g3 ♗ge7

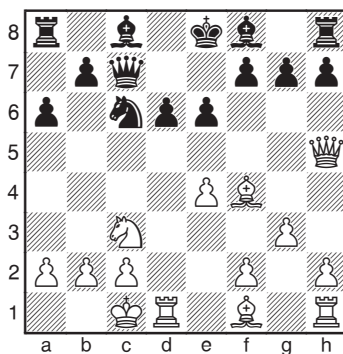
A move that has fallen out of use nowadays, to which this game undoubtedly contributed.

7.♗b3 ♗a5

Introduced by Anatoly Karpov in 1971. Jan had analysed that game in a column in *Trouw*, to which a reader subsequently suggested the following move:

8.♞h5! ♗ec6 9.♙g5 ♞c7 10.♙f4 d6 11.♗xa5 ♗xa5 12.0–0–0 ♗c6

A forced retreat to halt the advance e4–e5. The developing move 12...♙e7 would lead to immediate disaster due to 13.e5 d5 14.♗xd5! exd5 15.e6. After 12...♗c6, Black is ready to complete his development with ...♙f8–e7 and ...0–0, so haste is of the essence. How should White proceed?



13.♞c5

Brilliant! Only with this move can White maintain a significant advantage. The move forces a queen exchange, because after 13...e5 14.♗d5 ♞d8 15.♞b6, the threatened knight check on c7 deprives Black of the opportunity to capture on f4.

13...dxc5 14.♙xc7

What makes this endgame so unpleasant for Black? First of all, there is White's development advantage, which continues to play a significant role even after the exchange of queens. Furthermore, White threatens to constrict Black's position even further with e4–e5 and ♙f1–g2.

14...b5 15.♙g2 ♙b7

Black should certainly have pushed the bishop back with 15...♞a7, after which 16.♙f4 ♙e7 keeps White's

positional advantage to a moderate level. For that reason, White should perhaps have started with 15.a4! so that after 15...b4 16.♖b1! the knight can jump via d2 to c4 and Black, after 16...♞a7 17.♙b6 ♞b7 18.a5!, fails to drive the black-squared bishop out of his own camp.

16.e5 ♞c8 17.♙b6 ♖a5

Now things go from bad to worse. With 17...♞b8, which gives the bishop on b7 protection and allows the knight on c6 to play, Black could have limited the damage.

18.♙xb7 ♖xb7 19.a4!

Forces further weaknesses on the queenside.

19...♞c6 20.♙a7 b4 21.♖e4 ♙e7

The move 21...♞c7, with the idea of playing ...♞d7, is better, but after 22.c3! Black is nevertheless in virtually unresolvable trouble. 22...bxc3? 23.bxc3 opens the b-file, which White can exploit decisively after ♖c1-c2 and ♞d1-b1. A better move is 22...♙e7, but then the calm 23.cxb4 cxb4+ 24.♖b1 is very strong. Black is in a terrible mess. An example variation is 24...0-0 25.♙b6 ♞c6 26.a5 ♙c5 27.♞c1 ♞f8 28.♙xc5 ♖xc5 29.♞xc5 ♞xc5 30.♖xc5 ♞xc5 31.♞c1! ♞xc1+ 32.♖xc1, leading to a won pawn endgame.

22.♞d2 f5 23.exf6 gxf6 24.♞hd1 f5 25.♞d7!

The key point of White's 22nd move. The knight on e4 has no squares to move to, but neither does its counterpart on b7.

25...fxe4 26.♞xb7 ♙g5+ 27.♖b1 0-0 28.♞dd7

Two rooks on the seventh rank can have a devastating effect. This time is no exception.

28...♙f6 29.♙b8 ♙d4 30.♙d6 ♞e8 31.♙f4 h5 32.♙e3

This bishop has played a heroic role! Via f4, c7, b6, a7, b8 and back to f4, it is now exchanged for the strong bishop on d4. With that, Black loses control of the g7-square and his position quickly falls apart.

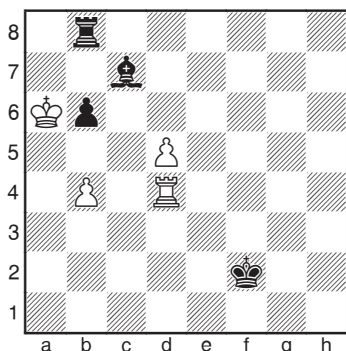
32...♙xe3 33.fxe3 e5 34.♞g7+ ♖h8 35.♞h7+ ♖g8 36.♞bg7+ ♖f8 37.♞f7+ ♖g8 38.♞hg7+ ♖h8 39.♞g5 c4 40.♞xh5+ ♖g8 41.♞fh7 ♞ee6

At this point the game was adjourned, but Ulf resigned before play resumed. Jan had sealed the move 42.♞b7.

A flawless technical performance that demonstrates the versatility of Jan Timman as a chess player. He was known for his sharp, dynamic battles, but could also hold his own against the very best in "precision" chess.

Study

1st prize, Kozlowski 100 Memorial Tourney, 2011



White to play and win

In honour of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Polish endgame study composer Szaja Kozlowski (1910–1943), a memorial tournament was held in 2011 with the theme of transitions to a pawn endgame. Jan was awarded the 1st prize for his exceptional entry.

In the diagram, Black has an extra bishop but his king is far removed from the action. Furthermore, the white d-pawn is particularly strong. Therefore, White is hardly in any danger of losing, but can he win?

1.d6

The only move that comes into consideration. Other moves allow Black to bring the king back into play with 1...♔e3.

1...♙d8

Another move that requires little comment. After all, the rook endgame

following 1...♙d6 2.♖xd6 is hopelessly lost.

2.♔a7!

The first significant finesse. White would like to move the rook via f4 to f8, but after the direct 2.♖f4+ ♔e3 3.♖f8, Black has the strong defence 3...♙c7. Then 4.♖xb8 ♙xb8 5.d7 ♙c7 6.♔b7 ♙d8 7.♔c8 ♙f6 8.d8♙ ♙xd8 9.♔xd8 ♔d4 10.♔c7 ♔c4 and all the pawns disappear from the board. It is for this reason that White first plays 2.♔a7, to force the rook to c8.

2...♖c8 3.♖f4+ ♔e3 4.♖f8

At first glance, this looks like a winning move. What can Black possibly do against the threat of ♔a7-b7?

4...b5!

Although still shrouded in mystery, this is the prelude to an extremely ingenious defence.

5.♔b7

What options does Black have left? Obviously, 5...♖c4 is not feasible, because in the rook endgame after 6.♖xd8 ♖xb4 7.♖e8+ the d-pawn easily decides the game.

5...♙c7!

Brilliant! White can now capture the rook on c8 but would then lose both the d- and b-pawns. After 6.♖xc8 ♙xd6, we also see the reason behind the move 4...b5; the pawn on b4 can no longer be saved. The resulting

rook-versus-bishop endgame is a simple draw.

For White, 6.dxc7 also offers no solution, as the pawn endgame after 6...♖xf8 7.c8♗ ♖xc8 8.♙xc8 ♙d4 is even won for Black. It is this final variation that is crucial for assessing White's next move.

6.♖f3+!!

I'm running out of superlatives! This type of sacrifice is known as a desperado. White sacrifices the rook to force the aforementioned pawn endgame, albeit this time in a slightly better version.

6...♙xf3 7.dxc7 ♖f8

It doesn't really matter where the rook goes; after 7...♖g8 or 7...♖h8, 8.c8♗ will lead to the same position.

8.c8♗ ♖xc8 9.♙xc8

We've seen this before, but then the

black king was still on e3. That makes all the difference.

9...♙e4 10.♙c7

Or 10.♙b7.

10...♙d5 11.♙b6 ♙c4 12.♙a5

White is right on time! Black is forced to move when he'd rather not, and the pawn on b4 will soon promote to a queen on b8.

A study with a magnificent cadence! After a quiet introduction (1.d6, 2.♙a7), the tension is slowly brought to boiling point, only to reach a brilliant conclusion with 5...♙c7 and 6.♖f3!!.. In the final position, most of the key pieces have disappeared from the board, leaving a simple winning pawn endgame. It is marvellous how much life there is in a position that appears so straightforward!

Bessel Kok

Sponsor of chess in the broadest sense



I know that Jan and Hans had a deep friendship in their youth, but Jan and I shared a similar friendship from 1985 onwards. At the time, I was CEO of SWIFT, a company that handled interbank transactions. We had a large building in the vicinity of Brussels. We were on an upward trajectory, but we were acquiring a mysterious reputation: what are all those hundreds of people doing in that building? They're dealing with money, but what exactly? I wanted to improve our image and was looking for a way to do so, which led me to chess. As a young boy, I always read Donner's column in *Het Handelsblad*. Through mutual contacts, I reached out to Jan. We hit it off straight away. I wanted a tournament where everything was geared towards the players, and Jan helped with that. Good prizes, good conditions, no pea soup but lobster salad. That's how the first SWIFT tournament came about, in 1986. We ran it for five years.

As well as all the fun and talking about literature and all the other things that interested us, we also discussed the structures within FIDE during our holidays together. During the 1986 Olympiad in Dubai, at a historic gathering of hundreds of players, the idea of a players' union emerged: the Grand Masters Association (GMA). We wanted to set up a new series of tournaments in collaboration with

FIDE, to be called the World Cup, and also organise the World Championship. I was president, Jan vice-president, and Kasparov, as World Champion, was closely involved. Jan and I signed a contract with President Campomanes at the FIDE office. We secured good sponsors worldwide and organised six World Cup tournaments. All events were played under the auspices of FIDE in return for a fee. But Kasparov wanted to take over FIDE. ‘Do you want to start organising chess for the deaf, the blind and seniors as well, Garry?’ I asked, but he kept digging his heels in. We held a vote among members and our proposal received broad support. Then Kasparov resigned, and that is why the GMA eventually ceased to exist; it couldn’t function without the World Champion. It’s a shame about all the good work, not least Jan’s.

I never had any major differences of opinion with Jan. I did, however, feel that he handled defeat poorly. ‘Isn’t he just better?’ I asked in 1990 when Jan lost to Karpov in Kuala Lumpur. That annoyed him. Perhaps that is the reaction of someone who wants to be the best, who is ambitious.

In 1990, Jan and I met Bobby Fischer in an otherwise empty restaurant. He insisted on it. The discussion was about the controversial Fischer-Spassky match in 1992; I wasn’t interested. Bobby and Jan, however, were busy playing chess on one of those pocket chess sets.

In 2006, Jan helped me in my bid to become FIDE President. We ran a good campaign, but we were no match for Ilyumzhinov’s blatant vote-buying. The ‘*one country, one vote*’ system was our undoing.

Jan is sometimes described as an idiosyncratic Mozart who drifts through life, but his contribution to structural improvements for chess players is underestimated.

Bessel Kok

Prague, 15 September 2025

Fischer-Spassky

“Fortunately, things went a bit better at the Olympiad in Manila. There was a good atmosphere in the Dutch team, even though we didn’t perform well. But there was a lot of commotion that year because of the Fischer-Spassky match, held, in all places, in Yugoslavia, which was embroiled in a civil war. The multimillionaire arms dealer Jezdimir Vasiljevic put five million dollars on the table as prize money.”

“Spassky has always remained grateful to Fischer. This made them financially secure. That first game was impressive, with that tripling of major pieces on the a-file.”

“Yes, that game was excellent, but later in the match the standard was too low for a World Championship. Fischer was still very sharp, even though he hadn’t played for twenty years. When I met him in 1990, he still had exceptional insight. He showed me some extraordinarily interesting things he had discovered. He really had something of a genius about him.”

“Didn’t you have something to do with that Vasiljevic once?”

“He wanted to sponsor my match against Nigel Short for a lot of money. FIDE President Campomanes and Short were quite taken with the idea, but I turned it down. An arms dealer — that was a bit too much for me. At the time, I was also being hounded by journalists who wanted to know what I thought of Fischer and all that business. And then there was a computer company, Hegener & Glaser, which had offered a million for the first Western player to challenge Kasparov. So that was either Short or me. I had discussions about that, too, even with Short, at their headquarters in Munich. Nothing came of it. They did pay something, though. All sorts of complications I could have done without.”

“You didn’t have a manager. Well, Ilse, but that’s another story.”

“She was a self-appointed manager. I also had to put up with a lot of nagging at home about everything under the sun. No wonder I started having trouble sleeping again.”

Best Sports Stories

I sometimes had to defend myself on popular TV shows, because as the face of the VROM environmental adverts, I was asked questions about the car I drove. It was a Mitsubishi Sigma and I had a phone in the car with a proper handset you had to pick up, and in the boot there was a box of equipment. Car phones were still in their infancy in the Netherlands. A book was published called Best Sports Stories. I contributed a piece about a tournament in San Bernardino in 1992. I hadn’t studied chess since 1985 and had started giving my books away at simultaneous exhibitions. Which I still do. But because Werner Widmer planned to stop organising the event, he asked whether I would like to play in it one more time

and write about it for his magazine SchachWoche, which was the little brother of Schaakbulletin: stories, but without the polemics. I made an exception for that tournament in the Swiss mountains. I describe a game against the Hungarian Grandmaster Istvan Csom in which I am completely lost, take risks because I have nothing to lose anyway, recover slightly in time trouble, seal a bizarre move at the adjournment, and finally even win. "I felt sorry for him, something I'd never felt for an opponent before." I remained unbeaten in that tournament and finished among eight Grandmasters: 1= Hort, Hodgson, and Spraggett 7/9, 4= Epishin, Chernin, Csom, Callagher, Van der Sterren, and Böhm 6.5. It surprised me that I held my own among active players.

Disappointment

"1993 began with my match against Short. In San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain, near Madrid. The prize fund was 300,000 Swiss francs and I said to Ilse: let's declare that straight away here for tax purposes, it will save us a huge amount. She didn't do it, even though she said she would. That made a difference of about 40,000 francs later on, the difference between twenty-five and sixty per cent."

"There was something else, too, you've mentioned it before, something to do with the staff."

"Yes, that was another incomprehensible episode. Ilse didn't want to go to the prize-giving ceremony because the staff were underpaid. But if you don't turn up at the prize-giving ceremony, they don't have to pay; that's a FIDE rule. So that wasn't an option. I got a lot of nagging about that. In the end, I lost that match rather unluckily. The ninth game was crucial; it was 4-4 at the time. It was a real shame, because I was actually ready for Kasparov as I'd clearly beaten him at Immopar in 1991. Now I had to psych myself up for yet another World Championship, in 1996, when I'd be forty-four."

Appearance fees

Wim Duisenberg, then President of the Dutch Central Bank, is speaking at the opening ceremony of the 1993 VSB tournament. The draw is being conducted by Paul, the strongest policeman in Europe, who, in a tight-fitting trouser suit and in a crucifix position, holds up two fifteen-kilo bags of money. The players have to do the same, with two kilos. Later in the week, I play a game on Dam Square with live pieces acted by children from the East German chess village of Ströbeck. I'm sitting on a high tennis umpire's chair and my opponent is DJ Erik de Zwart.

"But you didn't take part that year, Jan. While we were there at the very start of the VSB tournament! You asked for a higher appearance fee at the very last moment and the organisers wouldn't accept it."

“I didn’t ask for that. In this case, it was Gerard van Lennep, who sometimes sorted things out for me. Ilse did that too, asking for higher appearance fees, but that happened behind my back. If I had a direct line to the organisers, as with Interpolis, they’d ring me and we’d stick to the agreed amounts. I found negotiating over money a nuisance.”

“It’s a short-term gain, anyway. I always did a bit more than was contractually agreed; a good relationship with a sponsor always pays off. I did a lot of work outside the tournaments as well. I know from so much personal experience that you’re not directly interested in money. How many envelopes containing appearance fees and/or prize money have we found in chess books that we happened to pull off the shelf? And in the old days, we shared our money freely; whoever had money on them would pay.”

“Money is more a form of recognition for what you do; in itself it isn’t interesting.”

“Ilse was becoming more and more your manager. That’s probably why she started getting involved in all sorts of matters. Having your own wife as a manager isn’t a good idea. Then you end up having to discuss incidental issues at the kitchen table again.”

“She may have done it to help me, but it actually caused me more trouble. Ilse also wanted me to step down as chair of the GMA for some strange reason. I was constantly being interrupted whilst preparing, including for that match against Short. Just to get the nagging off my back, I went ahead and did it. I don’t want to use it as an excuse, but it did have a major impact.”

“Because you were regularly away for tournaments, that irritation would subside each time.”

“It’s also a hassle to resolve a situation like that once and for all, and when you’re abroad for a while, you do indeed think, ‘Oh well, it’ll be fine again.’ Fancy a drink?”

Chess songs

In Oak Dat Nog!, I sang a song from time to time. The composer was Diederik van Vleuten, who also gave me some useful tips during the recording sessions. I asked Diederik and the writers if they’d like to contribute chess songs on a specific theme. And that was how De Knieën van de Genieën (The Knees of the Geniuses) came about. It contained five songs: De Verjaardag (The Birthday) by Erik van Muiswinkel, Genieën (Geniuses) by Jan Boerstael, Gekke Japie (Crazy Japie) by Jos Timmer, and Sleur (The Daily Grind) and Ik hou van jou (I Love You) by Han Kooreneef. The CD was released by Polydor, and the entire Oak Dat Nog! team was present at the festive launch. Sylvia Millecam received the first copy because she inspired me to lip-sync well. At the opening ceremony of Interpolis 1994, I sang the song Genieën live with two dancing backing singers.

The Professional Chess Association

“During Linares 1993, it became clear that Kasparov and Short would play their World Championship match outside the FIDE framework. They were dissatisfied with FIDE’s choice of city and prize fund. The initiative came from Short. They withdrew from FIDE and founded their own association: the Professional Chess Association (PCA). They later went on to organise their own World Championship matches, leading to chaos.”

“And then a FIDE World Championship had to be held after all, and they asked Karpov and you to play in that alternative World Championship.”

The 1993 World Championship

“According to the regulations, we were next in line. It turned into quite a hassle to organise that match, as you can imagine. Oman came into the picture.”

“There, they’d found a chess set via satellite images during excavations on an old caravan route. I remember that well, because I used that story many times. They didn’t know whether it was from the outward or return journey, so the origin of that set wasn’t certain. That made it interesting.”

“That was in ‘the abandoned triangle’, near the lost city of Ubar. So suddenly there was interest and they wanted to exhibit that set and organise the match. Campomanes didn’t want that, however. He offered the first half – twelve games – to the Netherlands, assuming that sponsorship wouldn’t be a problem. He wanted a higher prize fund than in London for the Kasparov–Short match, purely for prestige. It was an idea born of frustration, because Kasparov was clearly the world champion. There was interest in the Netherlands in organising it, but setting the prize money kept being put off. At the opening in Zwolle, the podium caught fire during Mayor Loek Hermans’ speech; that was a sign of things to come. There are photos of that.”

“A lot was wrong with the organisation. They used students and did little to nothing in terms of public relations. That annoyed me. You’ve got a World Championship on your doorstep – well, an alternative World Championship, but a World Championship nonetheless – and then you make a mess of it. I’ve worked with many tournament directors who couldn’t play chess, but who put on a brilliant tournament. You do need to work with experts and be able to delegate.”

“That match naturally received poor press coverage, but there was more to it than that. FIDE needed an official champion. FIDE had previously feared that Kasparov might do something like this, so they had amended the regulations in 1989; this was done by the English lawyer David Anderton.”

Sanctions

“What were the sanctions again for Kasparov and Short?”

“There was a meeting of the FIDE board in Athens which I attended, and there they came up with the idea of stripping Kasparov and Short of their ratings. Anderton was furious and resigned from his FIDE positions. But it did happen. You’ve got the same thing now with Kramnik in connection with his accusations against Naroditsky. That’s nonsense, too. Someone can do things wrong, and what Kramnik did was overly aggressive, but you can only strip him of his rating or title if he does something wrong at the board.”

“So you play the first half in the Netherlands and there’s no prize fund. Then the second half still has to be sold.”

“Oman was still willing to host it, but didn’t offer a prize fund either, because the Netherlands hadn’t done so. I only heard that at the opening ceremony, by the way, which wasn’t encouraging. I then conducted negotiations, partly on behalf of Karpov, for FIDE itself to provide the prize fund. Then Campomanes and other board members had to pay that out of their own pockets. According to the regulations, it had to be one million Swiss francs, and we settled on 800,000. You needn’t feel sorry for him, because when Campomanes left FIDE in 1995 he helped himself generously to the coffers.”

“You were in a better position in several games and yet you were trailing 7-5. The second half was in Jakarta; Oman had pulled out. No prize money?”

“No, it had by then become clear that FIDE would foot the bill for that, and there was far too little time. So there was only money to cover the organisational costs. I eventually lost 12.5–8.5. A bitter disappointment, and once again I had to pick myself up for the next World Championship cycle.”

School chess

In 1994, after six years, the VSB school chess programme came to an end. Over those years there had been parties, with chess in aircraft hangars, amusement parks, open-air museums and swimming pools. There was a dedicated school chess newspaper and, according to official figures, thousands of children had taken part in the many activities. There was even an extra course for parents and teachers. Of course, we wanted to end on a high note. We took around a thousand children to Hellendoorn Adventure Park and made a successful attempt at a Guinness World Record for gong chess. A move had to be made every seven seconds. I oversaw the whole event from a central stage. We captured the whole thing neatly with photos taken from a small plane. When I drove back that evening, it was past a waving line of happy parents and children.

Interview

"You recently gave an interview in *De Gelderlander* and there was also a report on Schaaksite stating that you no longer wish to play chess actively."

"I saw in one of the many comments that they want to organise a tournament with me and other older players. That's exactly what I don't want to do anymore."

"Still, it's lovely to see all those positive reactions. By the way, you are sent warm regards and best wishes for a speedy recovery from the whole Piket family."

"Playing competitive chess is too demanding for me now. I carried on playing until I was seventy-three. That's longer than most chess players. I'm now busy composing studies. And writing for *New In Chess*. It's fine as it is."

"Any news from the hospital?"

"No, but Geertje has found out that two per cent of people with what I have are still alive after five years. So that's a possibility. It's not much, but it does make it a competitive challenge. I might still become a Grandmaster in composition and beat that two per cent. Ha!"

"A Grandmaster of survival. Ha!"

De Meeste Stemmen Gelden (The Majority Rules)

I was given a new TV programme: De Meeste Stemmen Gelden. It was about jury trials. We received hundreds of disputes. There were some harrowing cases among them, such as a man who had been estranged from his wife and children for years and had gone on a prolonged hunger strike because he wanted to bequeath his estate to a charity. The law mandates a percentage for family members; you cannot disinherit your children. During the broadcast, Hans Hillen, who worked at the Ministry of Finance, came on to explain the law, and following his commitment to do something about this emotional problem, the man ended his hunger strike in tears.

Interpolis 1993

"At Interpolis, they stuck to that knockout system. I made it to the third round and lost to Beliavsky. Nothing out of the ordinary. I was already preparing for my next Candidates match against Joel Lautier. That was due to be played in early 1994."

Political party

From 1994 onwards, Leny and I were part of the think tank of the new political party Leefbaar Hilversum. Jan Nagel was the founder. The think tank produced

proposals such as open, interactive discussions on important issues. We held these at Grand Café Gooiland; everyone was welcome, and Mayor Kraaijeveld-Wouters and a councillor were usually present. We held sessions on the construction of an underground station with an architect who had previously overseen such a project, on public security with a senior police officer, and on the value of election promises. I was allowed to moderate the discussions, and afterwards there was food and drink.

“Around the same time I was a symbolic candidate at the bottom of the electoral list for the Greens. Roel van Duyn asked me to do it; he played chess too, by the way, and liked to play 2.a3 against the Sicilian. Then there were meetings with Simon Vinkenoog and other interesting people. I thought they were a good party with sound views. Their plans were idealistic, though, not realistic. They wanted to build homes over the motorway. That sort of thing. In China, they actually do that, by the way, to neutralise emissions or something like that. I voted for the Socialist Party for a very long time.”

“After looking at various voting guides, I ended up with Volt. They have a European outlook. That’s really the only way to tackle major problems.”

Documentary

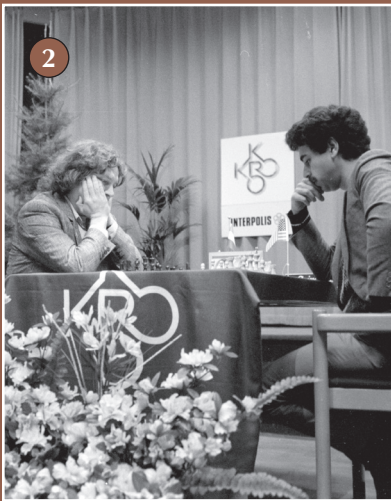
Because of all my work for radio and TV, the appearances around the country and all the writing, a half-hour documentary about my life was released by the KRO. Featuring a song, of course, but also old footage of Jan and me as chess players and going back even further.

Another Candidates match

“In early 1994, I played another Candidates match to qualify for the 1996 FIDE World Championship. That was during the Hoogovens Tournament in Wijk aan Zee. My opponent was the Frenchman Joel Lautier, who was the World Junior Champion in 1988. I won 4.5–3.5, but I was tired. I hadn’t played for a while. Well, a simultaneous exhibition at the Binnenhof, that sort of thing, but no major tournaments for a bit. So I didn’t take part in Linares either, where Karpov achieved one of his best results with 11/13, ahead of Kasparov on 8.5. ‘I am the best chess player,’ he said at the time in an interview in *NRC Handelsblad*.”

“That was the only time after 1985 that Karpov, the FIDE champion, could say that, even though Kasparov, the PCA champion, had a higher Elo rating. But you carried on playing in that Candidates cycle.”

“Yes, against Valery Salov from Russia, and we played in Sanghi Nagar in



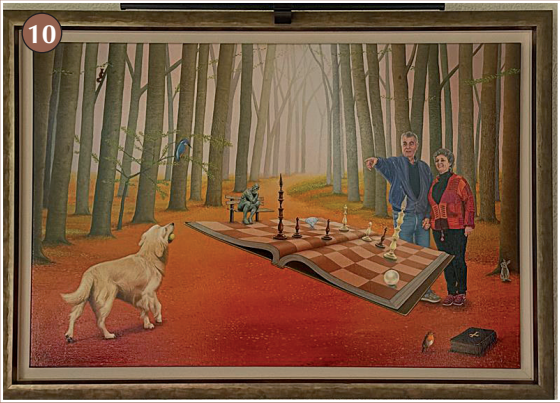
1. The interviewer and the chess player.
2. The KRO match 1990, Jan versus Yasser Seirawan. There was fruitful collaboration between KRO and the insurer Interpolis.
3. Count Schakula in his cave with his two young pupils: Tygo Gernandt and Tatum Dagelet.
4. Thanks to the Teleac/NOT course *Ledereen kan Schaken* (*Everyone Can Play Chess*), 1997–2001, thousands of schoolchildren took up chess.





5. Poster for the 1993 World Championship in Amsterdam, Zwolle, Arnhem, and Jakarta. Usually, the champion's name is mentioned first.
6. Recordings for the chess CD *De Knieën van de Genieën* (*The Knees of the Geniuses*). Leny sometimes joined in the background chorus for my songs.
7. Interpolis 1991. Jan again with that dreamy look and a cigarette. He mainly smoked after the game.
8. Many sub-sponsors at the 1993 World Championship.





- 9. Jan and I shared our personal memories of Bobby Fischer in the garden of art dealer Simonis & Buunk in 2022.
- 10. When Leny turned sixty and we had been married for thirty years, Tjerk Zijlstra created a painting featuring Jan and me with the pool study.
- 11. A major exhibition was held at the Rietveld Pavilion on the occasion of 150 years of the KNSB.
- 12. In 2023, Jan and I played a game with living pieces in Dieren during the Dutch Open Championship.





In the field of music:

Bob Dylan: from a young age, I listened to his music endlessly. I gained a great deal of wisdom from his lyrics.

Frank Zappa: I met him in Frankfurt in 1992. He was the Dali of music. I have always greatly appreciated his sometimes bizarre music.

Jan Timman

Arnhem, January 2026

Index of games and studies

J. Timman – U. Andersson, Tallinn, 1973	28
1st prize, Kozlowski 100 Memorial Tourney, 2011	30
J. Timman – A. Karpov, Bugojno, 1978.....	54
1st prize, A. Belyavsky 80 Jubilee Tourney, 2015	56
L. Polugaevsky – J. Timman, Bugojno, 1980.....	80
Special Prize, Vlasak and Polasek 60 Jubilee Tourney, 2023	82
F. Gheorghiu – J. Timman, Malta Olympiad, 1980	116
Special honourable mention, Pervakov 60 Jubilee Tourney, 2020	118
A. Karpov – J. Timman, Mar del Plata, 1982	156
1st prize, Kalandadze Memorial Tourney, 2021	158
J. Timman – B. Spassky, Hilversum, 1983	190
3rd prize, World Cup, 2021	192
J. Timman – N. Short, Belgrade, 1987.....	206
1st prize, Prusikin 45 Jubilee Tourney, 2023.....	208
J. Timman – J. Piket, Amsterdam match (2), 1995.....	224
Study intended for the Steffen Nielsen 50 Jubilee Tourney, 2025.....	226
J. Timman – L. Van Wely, Breda match (6), 1998.....	246
3rd prize, Botvinnik 100 Memorial Tourney, 2012	248
J. Timman – J. Polgar, Hoogeveen, 1999.....	284
Special mention, Kasparyan 100 Memorial Tourney, 2010.....	286