

## November 2001

The Webgoddess, in a slightly desperate effort to spruce up the Site, suggested we write our autobiography, knowing full well that if anyone else composed it, it wouldn't be our auto...etc, though of course it would certainly be more tastefully done. But... since we cannot be judged by the contents of this bio ("A man shouldn't be judged by the way he lived, but by how he died"), and because, frankly, we are in no hurry to pass on just to give some philosopher a reason to recap the meritorious moments of our death - be it sublime, a la Braveheart, or pitiful, a la Billy the Kid.

You know of course that we're delaying the moment when we must write, in bold letters... **Pouj's Autobiography**

(Have you noticed how everyone's biography starts with the birth and the elementary school years, and the High School and the College years and the married life / lives, etc.? Well we're going to start from today and work our way back... If it's all right with the Webgoddess...)

As most of our students know, 2001 brought on our 61st birthday, and for someone who, as a kid, never thought he would make it to 60, that's quite an accomplishment. From the pinnacle of our 61 years then we look back and notice what fantastic amount of luck helped us get to where we are today. This fencing Salle, our fencing Salle, which boasts 4 strips, electric of course was at the beginning a one-strip job with borrowed reels and a machine which only worked on foil - thanks, Helen and Cynthia - for that's all you could get for \$300/month.

And for the amount of students we were training - 4 - one strip was plenty. That was some 14 years ago and a Salle which even our family knew was doomed to fail has turned out to become one of the most respected organizations in the USFA inasmuch as respect is there to be dispensed...

These fourteen years have been full years and even enriching ones (if you discount the monetary aspect of our small business); we have made friends and enemies and we know (ain't we wise) who they are. We also don't expect them to switch camps any time soon. And the Paranoids are out to get us. OK. So we run a successful Salle mostly thanks to the truly incredible luck which brought us fencers who could have excelled in any sport - Jason Todd, Ben Hill, Sean McLain, Neil Mittal, Helen Valkavitch, Hans Schaatz, Michael Lindsey, Cassidy Luitjen, Sherice Gearhart, Chris and Kat Snider, Edward Kelley and his buddies...

Lord, some Salle go years without ONE good project, and look at us... Ain't that something? And in San Antonio, the Basketball stronghold of South Texas!

Of course, these athletes didn't turn out as well as they did without some quality coaching and nudging along the path to glory; for the quality coaching part, we have profusely to thank the original Pouj, our father, for being so adamant about leaving his knowledge of Fencing with us; we also have to congratulate ourselves for finding the key to bringing that knowledge to the realm of today's brand of Foil, Epee and Sabre... The hardest part, of course, was to find a way to interest all those new students whom Lady Luck under the guise of "The Princess Bride", "Star Wars", "Robin Hood, Prince Of Thieves", "Zorro", etc., brought to our humble portals. And we must have - for 14 years - thanks to the parents of young established fencers who didn't mind sharing their view of fencing and of its benefits.

To be able to "modernize" our father's concepts of Fencing had to take some personal understanding of the sport, understanding which we were able to glean along the way of a career which now spans 56 years and has seen us win 3-weapon championships in Europe in 1957-58 in the Junior category, has given us the opportunity to study at NYU with a Fencing scholarship, has applauded us when we won and comforted us when we lost ("...to treat those impostors just the same..")

After the 1969 Pentathlon World Championships during which Pouj, Jr. assisted Pouj Sr., the latter suggested we go to France and study to become a Master ; upon our agreement, he arranged it - being the highest-ranked Master in the world at the 4th echelon didn't hurt - and we went and did just that in the summer of 1971 in Joinville, a stone's throw from Paris (for all the good it did us - a gym is a gym and a classroom is a classroom and a dorm is a dorm).

In 1977, Pouj Sr. asked us to move our family from El Paso where we'd started a good program at UTEP to San Antonio where we were to assist him in coaching the Juniors and Women and get them ready for the 1977 World Championships featuring Women's Competition for the first time ever... And one of our students, Gina Swift won the gold in the overall competition after taking the fencing in a masterful fashion (pun intended); and our Juniors took the bronze as a team and Harvey Cain the silver as an individual.... These results, if they didn't seem to phase the powers that be at Pentathlon - back-stabbing demands rigorous focus - did impress the French coaches who were visiting enough to suggest we seek a higher echelon for our mastership and seek we did and since then we have boasted a third echelon alongside our Master's title.

My Lord, we kind of lost control here, didn't we? Even the brightest of teachers need bright students the way the proverbial seed needs a fertile loam to grow and develop; and in the last 14 years we have had no shortage of smarts among our students; we've had some pretty stupid ones too but they never lasted very long; it must be hard to remain interested by something we don't understand...

We've also been lucky in gathering "recreational" fencers without whom the younger fencers would never get to practice with someone better than they; without whom the floor would very seldom get swept and mopped and the strips repainted (yep, Deena, you know I'd find a way to mention you...)

And after 14 years of full - time coaching, from the pinnacle of our 61 years, we cast our stares toward the future and it's never looked brighter and now we'll have Neil - the best student we've ever had, as far as UNDERSTANDING Fencing is concerned - right by our side, ready to help us see it through. And what more can an old, grumpy, quasi bald, Master hope for? A good death? Get outta here!

(Note: Since 1965, when we first started coaching, we have met many people most of whom have a better memory than we; if you should remember an anecdote that has anything to do with Pouj Jr. or the Salle, please e-mail them to the Webgoddess sticks3000@hotmail.com and I'm sure she'll be glad to include them in this poor excuse for an autobiography. Thanks. Be well, POIJ)