was nearby, in Windsor Terrace, at the home of Giancarlo Roma. Giancarlo, a fourth grader, was more respectful of Pandolfini than Fabiano had been, though his playing style was no less aggressive. They went over a game that Giancarlo had recently played on the Internet. He had used the Traxler Counterattack in the Two Knights Defense, a highly tactical line in which the slightest misstep can lead to a quick defeat. "You can get away with taking his pawns," Pandolfini said. "Pig out if you wish. There's nothing wrong with a little piggetry."

"When Bruce comes, we put out wine and cheese and then leave the two of them alone," Giancarlo's father, Tom, told me. "But I once sat at the top of the stairs and listened to the whole lesson. I find extreme beauty in the way Bruce describes chess moves, in the way he creates a story out of each game. I teach photography, and I've always told my students that chess is one of the highest art forms. But there's also something frighteningly narcotic about it. I don't want chess to overwhelm Giancarlo.

"I remember during the Fischer-Spassky match, Spassky was quoted as saying, 'Chess is like life,' and Fischer was quoted as correcting him, saying, 'Chess is life,'" Tom went on. "Fischer was cheating himself by taking the game that seriously."

In 1970, Pandolfini dropped out of graduate school—he was studying chemistry at the University of Arizona—to play in the National Open Championship in Reno, Nevada. "Needless to say, my parents weren't happy," he said. "My father knew how hard it was to make a living at chess, and my good Jewish mother wanted me to become a doctor or a lawyer. I had ended up studying to be a chemist because chemistry was the only A I got my first semester in college. But my heart wasn't in it."

At the National Open, he reached the last round tied for second place, only half a point behind the leader, the legendary grandmaster Larry Evans, a former United States champion and sparring partner of Bobby Fischer's. In the final, Pandolfini played Evans on Board One; if he pulled off an upset victory, he would tie for first place. They each had two hours to make their first fifty moves, but the position was so thorny—Pandolfini, in what's now called the Grand Prix Attack, sacrificed his king's bishop pawn to open lines for an early assault on Evans's king—that both players consumed considerable time working through the maze of possibilities. By the end, they were in deep time trouble, and each had to make twenty moves in one minute. Dozens of spectators closed in around them, standing on chairs to get a better view.

"I kept glancing at the clock, watching the seconds tick away," Pandolfini said. "I had a winning game. In fact, I had four different ways to win. I saw this beautiful winning combination. Just as I reached out to make it, Evans offered me a draw, which wasn't fair, because I was thinking. The rules require that he offer a draw only when it's his turn to move. I don't think he was trying to bend the rules, but who knows? I think he was just nervous and afraid of losing. Anyway, I declined the offer. But my mind blanked. By accident, I still played one of the four winning moves. But it was the least good of the four. I managed by a miracle to pull off a perpetual check and draw the game."

Pandolfini ended up tied with five other people for third place. "My prize was fifty dollars, and I lost that at the blackjack tables that happened to be in my way as I walked back to my hotel room. 'Why am I doing this?' I asked myself. Here I had dropped out of school, driven hundreds of miles, and poured my heart into the game and gotten so little, neither money nor satisfaction," he said.

Afterward, Pandolfini went to Berkeley to visit a chess-playing buddy from the Marshall, and found himself confronted with the same questions. "We were playing speed chess at two or three in the morning," Pandolfini said. "I won the first two games, but I didn't deserve to. In other words, he was clearly outplaying me, and I won through cheap tricks and gross blunders on his part. He was getting angrier and angrier. In the third game, he was outplaying me again, and once more he let his advantage slip. I began to feel terrible. Then I lost on time. He looked at me and said, 'Justice triumphs.' And I thought, Justice triumphs? He wasn't just making a statement. He really meant it—that he was the Just and I was the Unjust. I started to question whether I thought the same. Was I there just to beat him? Is that what it's all about? After that, I gave up tournament chess."

Pandolfini went back to New York, and, after a series of odd jobs, ended up working at the Strand bookstore. "The Strand was great because I love books," Pandolfini said. "But I certainly missed competitive chess, the thrill of coming up with a strong, unexpected move." One day after work in 1972, Pandolfini ran into Shelby Lyman, an old friend and fellow-master from the Marshall. "Guess what?" Lyman said. "We're going to cover the Fischer-Spassky match on PBS—live coverage five hours

"Enough storyboarding. Let's shoot something."