



Springfield Fencing Club

By Katherine Sarsfield

Photos by Piero Taico

Oh, sword fights. Who doesn't love a good sword fight?

I discovered this love for myself watching old television specials with my dad growing up. I would sit mesmerized by the dancing swordsmen with the long flowing hair and the oh-so-cool moustaches.

I wanted to be just like D'Artagnan from the Three Musketeers. I would take to copying the swashbuckling antics of my favorite hero on the playground with friends — albeit armed with a stick and ever lacking in both style and grace...and balance...and safety. (Where were our teachers?)

Eventually, my mom agreed to my unending pleas for lessons. "Alright," she said, "I'll sign you up. Please stop asking."

Just as I had gotten all that I had ever wished for, it hit me: self-doubt.



Joanne Liu

You know, no one has ever really described me as coordinated, I thought. I'll probably just embarrass myself.

I never went. Until 20 years later.

Joanne Liu started Springfield Fencing Club in 2011 after years of trying to establish a fixed spot for fellow enthusiasts to practice.

Liu states that she is not looking for a profit, and so she charges no membership fee to join. Instead, she is looking to get more people interested in the sport she loves.



"We just want more people to fence with," she says.

David Chilton, an extremely talented and enthusiastic swordsman, is highly qualified to get the new recruits up to snuff.

For a mere \$60, one can meet with Chilton once a week for 8 weeks in order to soak up his decades upon decades of experience while learning the ins and outs of foil fencing.

Fencing is a sport rooted in 4,000 years of history. According to the Springfield Fencing Club website, ancient Egyptian artwork is the first to represent the traditional ideal of fencing (i.e. masks, scoreboards). However, during the middle ages, the swords grew in size and weight causing the opponents to awkwardly heave themselves at one another while trying to remain in an upright position (i.e. Medieval Times).

According to Chilton, it was the French who eventually developed a shorter sword, allowing for the swift motions, fancy footwork and finesse that we associate with our favorite musketeers.

The course starts with a basic introduction into rules and safety. By the end, one will be familiar with the terms coined by our French friends: En garde! Lunge! Coupe! Parrie!

These basics will prepare the learner to participate in the free club open sessions, where one can duel with club members utilizing the electronically scored system.

Although a basic kit can be purchased relatively economically, the club provides masks, swords and jackets for free.

One does not need a cool moustache and ponytail to join the club. In fact, every fencer I spoke to reiterated that fencing is a sport that can be safely mastered by many regardless of age or gender.

Thirteen-year-old Ellise Swihart became interested in fencing after the club performed a demonstration at her school.

"It's like a human chess match," she says. "It's like videogames, but better."

After participating in lessons and sessions with club members, her tenacity

and talent is regarded with unanimous respect.

Who knows? maybe she will make it to the Olympics one day.

I felt particularly inspired.

This was my moment. I peered through my wire mask, my breath hot against my cheeks as sweat dripped down the nape of my neck. I clenched my fingers tightly around the hilt of my sword. Across from me stood my husband — now opponent.

Timidly, I made my first move. The swords clanked. I started to feel that old self-doubt creeping up on me. Conveniently, I remembered he'd forgotten to put the dishes away again — clank! clank! clank!

I won.

To learn more about Springfield's Fencing Club, please visit its website at <http://www.springfieldfencingclub.com/index.htm>.

Be sure not to wait 20 years!

