

Character in ACTION

Iris Zimmerman: Totally Disciplined

When 15-year-old Iris Zimmerman was in kindergarten, she tackled a boy around the neck and planted a kiss on his cheek. She also talked nonstop in class and spent a lot of time in the corner. As she grew older, she took her older sister Felicia's clothes without asking and messed them up.

Iris's dad enrolled Felicia in a fencing class. Iris ran around the Rochester Fencing Center for four years wishing she could fence, too. When Iris was six, she was accepted as a student, and she loved it. But while fencing helped Felicia learn assertiveness, it helped Iris learn self-discipline.

Iris began competing when she was nine years old. To develop her talent, she began going straight from school to lessons at the fencing center. She also learned to play the flute and the piano. Eventually she was accepted at the School of the Arts.

To maintain her mostly "A" average, Iris uses every hour of the day. She has made a strict schedule for herself, and she sticks to it. She studies in study hall at school and at home on weekends. She doesn't have much time to study in the evenings, because after fencing, she lifts weights to improve her strength and endurance. She falls in bed at night, feeling like a limp dishrag. But she thrives on the competition and self-discipline.

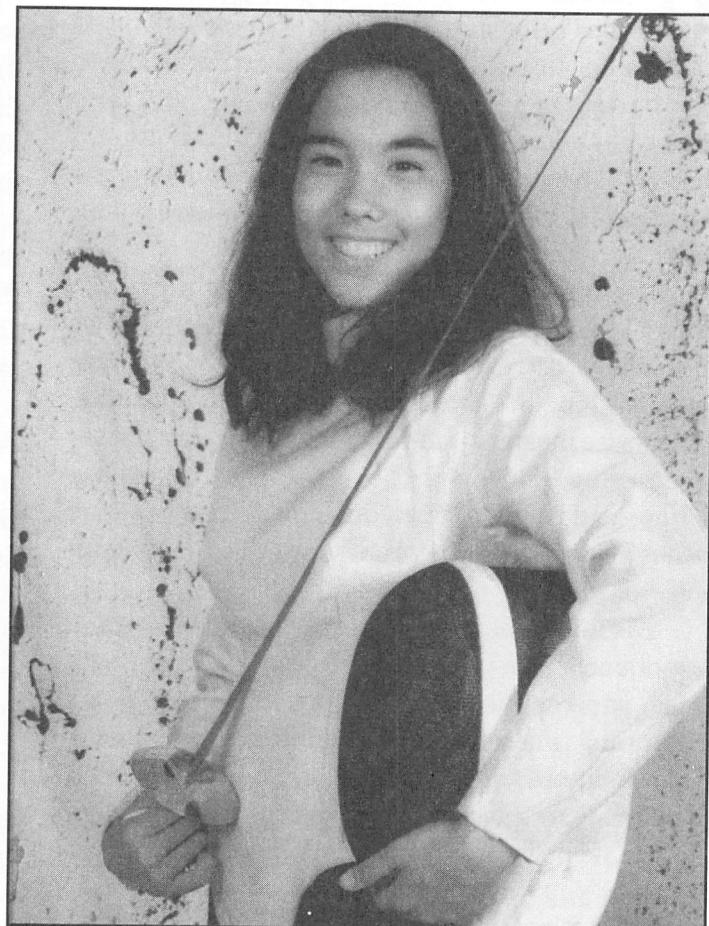
"I don't have time to do some of the normal girl things," Iris explains. "A lot of my friends go home from school and watch TV or just hang out. But I have to tell myself 'If I go with them, I'm not going to be ready to compete.' When I relax, I usually hang out with my sister and my fencing friends. This is what I want to do."

Her self-discipline and practice have already paid off. In 1995, Iris traveled to France and won the World Fencing Championship in the Under

17 category. In 1996, she went to Belgium and came in third place in the World Championship for the Under 20 category.

"I've learned that you have to be totally disciplined," Iris explains. "The greatest fear I have to overcome is the fear of losing. When you're on your way up, you have nothing to lose, but when you're at the top, you have a lot to lose."

"I've learned that I don't have any limitations. You can do anything you want to do . . . if you have the self-discipline."



Iris Zimmerman