

Bridge: The Journey is the Goal

(Continued...)

We took the beginner classes from Nila and I only understood half and forgot 50% of what I previously learned again. Nila did a great job, but learning bridge jargon when you don't know the English phrases like ruff, void, discard or even clubs which I knew all my life as "Kreuz" (German), makes it twice as difficult to learn.

What I found helpful was forming a "kitchen table" group with Jane, Kathleen, Jean and myself. We brought our own cards, bidding boxes and met once a week to discuss rules and hands, played with open cards and had tons of fun. However, learning to play bridge is - like Jane said - drinking out of the fire hose -- too much information!

Nila Hobbs offered a mentoring group every other Monday, with a 30-minute lesson, afterwards playing hands, which helped us a lot as well.

We started to go to some bridge games which were offered, as Nila convinced us to do so. Players, most of them welcoming and happy to see new faces, but not all of them were very friendly. "Have you thought about playing party bridge?" was one of the not so nice comments at the beginning. Jean and I decided to call ourselves the "feel good team" as everyone made good boards with us, but we didn't give up.

In October of 2017, our Northern Colorado Bridge Unit 363, offered an introduction to duplicate bridge, a special mentor duplicate bridge game. There, we needed to have a completed convention card. Another step which I didn't know of beforehand. At the beginning you are shy to play with the BIG players; Julie Wertz was my partner. I remember one bidding, which was similar to: 1 S opening from me, and she just jumped to 4S, and even 6S? I almost flipped out of my chair, my heart felt like it was beating to the wall and back. How could she do that? And I have to play it! She just smiled, and said: "You can do this! I believe in you!" I made it!

So, I played once per week, with Jane in a club for beginners (499er). I could not afford more time, as I still belong to the work force (if anyone is interesting in light aviation, let me know, that field is my profession).

When our kitchen table group decided to get deeper into the bridge material we signed up for a "convention" and "more convention" classes with Dick Webster.

Here I learned a lot, mainly that there is more behind this game than what I ever imagined. Finishing the class, with all the information I felt again like I was "drinking out of the fire hose".

Jane, my partner, decided to go big and for points and played three times a week, dropping me, as I couldn't follow all her desire to play. I found a new partner in Katie and we decided to play KISS (keep is simple, stupid).

I went for a visit back to Germany, and there came the first bridge test, playing with my mom. We went into one of her clubs and played. Along that afternoon, some weird things happened, i.e. ,she opened 2D -- a weak hand and long diamonds. I thought I better pass as I don't have anything to say. I didn't know, that 2 D was the strongest opening, meaning I have 22+ points (similar to our 2C openings. By the way, 2C is 19-20 points back in Germany, 1NT 15-18 points. What can I say, we took last that day. But now we knew our different systems and talked about it. We decided that I would try to remember her bidding, as we were in her country. The next day, we were back at the table, different club and that day we discovered was the annual club tournament. We came in second, almost took the club trophy home with me to Fort Collins.

Back in the US I continued playing and learning with and from Katie till she decided to move to Florida. Quickly my friend Jean came up with the idea to play together. It was risky for both of us, as we have a good solid friendship away from the bridge table. We saw a couple of friendships destroyed, just by playing bridge together. Jean is a professional, she wants to do it 100% right, always happy to learn and hungry for more information and knowledge and there was me with a kind of relaxed bridge attitude... could that work?

In the summer of 2018 my mom came to visit for two weeks. I did it - I played with my Mom here in US!! Mission accomplished!! Checked!

In August 2018, I played my first tournament with Kathleen in Loveland, at the Gold Rush NLM Regional. It was the first time that I played two sessions in one day and it was the first time someone called the director on me. We ended up with 46% and 48%, not bad for beginners with five points.

In May 2019, Kathleen, Jean and I decided to participate in a Pro/Am tournament in Denver during the Rocky Mountain Regional. I was partnered with a lovely lady from California, Dianne Bouquet. She understood my bidding and at the end we even got some red points. I didn't know that they existed.

In May 2020, I played the same Pro/Am tournament with Bob Lupton. Even though the whole tournament got canceled because of COVID-19, Shelby Bastiaans, Jennifer O'Neil, Sheryl Siegel and Elly Larson put a lot of effort into the Pro/Am pairing, so we played it online. I contacted Bob before the game and he took his time to go over my convention card. After the game we had a ZOOM conference where Curt, a bridge teacher and reviewed hands. He recommended listening to the auction and to think about your second bid before you bid at all.

Drinking from the fire hose...

Bob and I came in fourth overall out of 120 pairs! A ZOOM conference with all the winners was held the next day for a photo shoot.

Regularly, I am playing bridge with Jean now and I love it. Our collection of mistakes grows every single time. Yes, we get mad about our mistakes, but with every mistake you learn, and still you do it again and again.

Playing online gives us the advantage to see how our partner plays as we now see the cards when we are dummies. My husband hears me screaming into the monitor, "Jean, get the trumps out!"

Still I am looking forward to playing in our beautiful new bridge club building in Fort Collins, which Robyn rented and decorated so nicely at the beginning of the year. Thanks to her, we were all safe at the beginning when COVID-19 hit our community.

Lessons learned ...

Bridge is not only about points; it's about the people, friends, new and old ones, about the cards, combinations, strategies and partnerships. Bridge connects people from all over the world, people of different heritages, races, genders, ethnicities, beliefs, religions, ages and borders are no limitation. The bridge language is its own language which needs to be mastered.

So many more milestones are still to be conquered in my bridge career – the journey is the goal. Thank you so much to a great bridge community, which is only possible because of the efforts of so many outstanding people.

See you at the bridge table, in person or online.

