

A Bridge Life

By Lemuel (Bill) Copeland

I have played card games from my earliest memory, beginning with playing whist with my parents and older brothers during my childhood. Throughout high school, college, three years in the U.S. Army and years of social and professional interaction I played an assortment of other competitive card games: Tonk, Poker, Pinochle, Texas Hold'em and Blackjack.



The original Bayridge Bridge Boys: William Larson, Lem Copeland, Ralph Parmegiani, Murray Goldstein, Steve Weiss, Larry Silk and Leonard Pomerantz.

In 1965 I was invited by a co-worker, Leonard Pomerantz, to join a lunch-hour bridge group at a newly opened New York City Welfare Department Office in Bayridge, Brooklyn. When I told Lenny that I did not play bridge, he responded, "As a Black guy I am sure that you play bid whist. Well, bridge is White folks bid whist." Lenny and I and our families became best friends, and he was my most compatible and trusted bridge partner for nearly fifty years. Lenny was an exceptionally skilled bridge player and had an amazing card memory. He and I finished in first place in a bridge tournament on the maiden voyage of the revamped Queen Elizabeth 2 (QE2) cruise ship.

Lenny was also a masterful blackjack player and was a high roller at casinos in Atlantic City and Las Vegas. He taught me basic blackjack strategy and how to count cards. Lenny arranged for my wife and my first comped casino rooms which was at, of all places, the now defunct Trump Plaza Casino in Atlantic City. Lenny and I and, later, Paul Shulkes frequently motored together to Atlantic City where Lenny had a comped room, show tickets and unlimited access to complimentary High Roller dining clubs. Sometimes the casinos would provide limousine or air transportation for us. On one occasion, I accompanied Lenny on an all-expense paid junket to the Tropicana Casino in Las Vegas.



Paul Shulkes, Paul Dean, Lem Copeland and Leonard Pomerantz.

The lunch-time bridge group expanded into a weekly game night. When our careers and job promotions took us to other assignments in the Welfare Department, four of the original members -- Paul Dean, Paul Shulkes, Lenny and I -- continued the bridge game on Friday nights, rotating partnerships and homes. After retiring, we continued our weekly bridge games on weekday afternoons until Paul Dean, afflicted with dementia, passed away in 2012.

Lenny passed away in 2013, also suffering from dementia. It was one of the most painful and heart-breaking experiences of my life to see such a vibrant active man reduced back to an infantile state. I count my blessings every day!!!!!!



Rest in peace, dear friend and partner

In 2013, I was invited to join the Jetsetters Duplicate Bridge Club of the Metropolitan Bridge Unit of New York, which hosted the Tuesday game at the Community Bridge Home in Queens. Paul Shulkes was my partner. Even though we both had some difficulty adjusting to the duplicate bridge rules, conventions, regulations, and the monastery like atmosphere of the games in the Bridge Home, Paul and I were very competitive, earning points and financial rewards at nearly every session. Unfortunately, Paul began showing symptoms of dementia, lost confidence in his bridge skills and his ability to travel independently and was relocated by his family to be near them in New Jersey.

In 2015, Patricia Jackson of the Cosmopolitan Duplicate Bridge Club became my Tuesday game partner. Pat and I are a very competitive partnership. However, I still find it difficult adjusting to the discipline and decorum required by the duplicate bridge environment. Pat and I had an 82.14% score in this past June 14th club game, said to be the highest percentage in the records of the MBU. Pat and I teamed up with Jetsetters club members Beverly Sessions-Kelly and Tracy Stukes to finish in first place in the Team Game at the Eastern Sectional in Atlantic City.



Jetsetters Duplicate Bridge Club



PERCENT	PAIR NAME
82.14%	Patricia Jackson - Lemuel Copeland
59.52%	Marilyn Legall - Ronald Prester
57.14%	Beverly Session-Kelly - Patricia
51.59%	Steven Bond - Donna Woo
49.21%	Raye Liverpool - Marion Mercer
48.81%	Lois Wright - Ruth Shuler
48.41%	Paula Joseph - Marcia Demos

Patricia Jackson and Lemuel Copeland (82.14%)

Several years ago, I began Thursday game partnership with Paul Watford of Twilight Bridge Club. Paul and I, both now eighty-nine years old, have developed a very deep friendship and are a very compatible and competitive partnership. We finished in 2nd place in the recent June 6th Nationwide games.



Lemuel Copeland and Paul Watford

I also teamed up with Marcia Demos, Philippe Gerdes and Ronald Preister to win the team game at the Eastern Sectional at Dover Downs, Delaware. Ron and I also finished in first place in the partnership.

One of my biggest bridge playing regrets is that I never played duplicate bridge with Lenny Pomerantz as my partner or with Paul Shulkes when he was at the top of his game. A team composed of my Welfare Department co-workers. Lenny Pomerantz, Paul Shulkes, Paul Dean and I would have been an awesome team.



Team winners: Philippe Gerdes, Ron Prester, Lemuel Copeland, Marcia Demos



Bill and Ron Prester: #1 at Dover Downs



Beverly Sessions-Kelly, Tracy Stukes (RIP), Lemuel Copeland, Patricia Jackson