

Bridge

When you hear the word 'bridge', what do you think of: A span of road crossing another highway or river, an idea that joining two thoughts, a replacement for missing teeth, or how about a card game?

To the current generation, it probably means the first definition or maybe even the second. To some of us, elder ones, when we hear the word we don't even consider the first two; we jump immediately to the game, trying to avoid any thoughts of teeth. In fact, to some BRIDGE is a way of life which means playing every week or even up four times a week.

My mother loved the sound of the shuffling cards. During the Depression, she and her friends played several times a week being the only entertainment they could afford. My father hated the game. So what did my mother do? She took the most realistic approach possible. She taught her children how to play. On reaching the age of seven, you were doomed.

I remember much of what she taught us. Like how to count quick tricks and how to bid those quick tricks. This still comes in handy when I am befuddled because of an odd hand. Or the truisms like lead the fourth from the highest in your longest strongest suit, lead to strength of the board, return you partner's lead, second hand plays low while third-hand plays high, or cover an honor with an honor. And to tell the truth, these rules usually work. If they don't work, you can just shrug off the loss.

When I was in high school, I took bridge lessons. The only reason I signed up was my girlfriend, Susie. Not that Susie wanted to learn the game. Never! She wanted to secretly meet with her forbidden boyfriend. She did end up marrying him, but it didn't last. I learned how to count points and keep track of the cards played.

Off to college, I went. There always seemed to be a game of bridge going on in the basement smoker lounge. You might have exams to study for and papers to write, but you always had time for a hand or two, or three. When you absolutely had to get to work, all you had to do was stand up and someone was there to take your place. One night we were playing and the fire alarm went off. We were just starting a new hand and the alarms were always false anyway. We kept playing! We didn't notice the whisper of smoke that came wafting down the stairs. Of course, we were in the smoker lounge taking full advantage of the label. We did take notice when the housemother stood at the top of the stairs yelling at us, "to get the hell out." We finished the hand and joined our dorm mates out in the snow. Finally a couple of hours later they allowed us back in. No big deal

At 3:30 A.M. the fire alarm went off again. The smoker's lounge was full of smoke. It seems that some smoking-bridge players didn't put their cigarettes out properly.

Later when I was married my husband and I tried to play with neighbors, but Bob just didn't take to the game. He's attitude toward bridge reminded me of my father's. "I'm here because I didn't have a choice." He is now my ex.

I quit playing for a while. It seems that most bridge groups expect you to bring your own partner along with the snack. I did try to play with a singles group. The first time I went I sat down across from a gentleman who was a stranger to me. His first words to me were, "I am a Master's Player, what conventions do you play?" I got up and walked out.

Now after many years I am playing again. But they have changed the rules. Instead of quick tricks you have to figure out the "Golden Fit." I thought the golden fit was clothing that made your figure look good.

When I took those bridge lessons, way back in high school the mark of an experienced high-fluting bridge player was the knowledge of the Blackwood Convention. This convention was designed by Mr. Easley Blackwood to help a bidder figure out how many aces and kings his partner has. Now you have to know Jacoby and Jacoby transfer. (I have not figured out if they are the same convention.) Also, when a bridge player says Stayman they are not talking about the stamen of a flower. Overcalls have nothing to do with phone calls. The take out double I think I can almost handle. And this is just the beginning!

Yes, I will keep playing and enjoy the feeling of triumph when I make a bid while I endure the dry spots with non-biddable hands. In my advanced age, I do have enough sense to put down my cards and leave a burning building.

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