

ACBL Life Master! What an intimidating moniker that is to those newcomers to duplicate bridge! The only thing wrong with the above statement is that Life Masters can and will be the novices' best mentors and friends. If a little Mississippi Delta girl can attain this status, anyone can.

I was born, raised, and lived as an adult in the same small Delta town. We were fortunate to have a real live Goren Master Teacher as a resident there. I took my first lessons from her as an eighteen-year-old. In college I played a little and after marrying, I played social party bridge while my children were young. During this time I took more and advanced lessons from our teacher. When the activities—school and sports— of three boys became all-consuming, I took about a twenty year hiatus. I started back with a vengeance later, but still played Goren 4-card majors, strong 2 openers, strong jump shifts as did all the members of my several bridge clubs.

In 2012, I remarried and moved to the Jackson, Mississippi, area. I knew very few people there and really missed my friends and my bridge playing days back home. After three and a half years, I Googled the Jackson Bridge Association. With much trepidation, I ventured to JBA, not knowing what to expect or even the location. I chose a Thursday because the website listed it as an Open game, thinking that it was open to outsiders to visit, kibitz, and maybe to play.

When I entered, the director did, in fact, ask me if I would like to watch. I sat and watched him and his partner for about two hours. I had never seen a board, a bidding box, a bridge pad, or people moving from table to table. I had no idea of the scoring, even though I had heard someone mention a “top board.” What in the world did that mean?

While watching, the director, James Tullos (the owner of that game and the club manager of JBA) asked me a few questions. Did I know what a direct bid of the opponent's suit meant? I responded that it was a cue bid. He then asked if I knew what that meant. Of course, it was the equivalent of an opening two bid and showed first round control of the opponent's suit. Nope—not these days. And an opening two bid was now weak! I noticed that 1 No Trump was now 15-17, when it had always been 16-18. Only 25 high card points for a No Trump game, not 26. Jump shifts by responder were weak! Transfers. What were those? Open a hand with 12 points, don't count shortness. Negative double, support doubles, Drury, Michaels, unusual two No Trump, 1430. I was terrified—I knew nothing of this new-fangled bridge.

James asked me to come back that same night for a limited game, partner guaranteed. I did and even returned the next day for another limited game and was lucky to be partnered with another director, Jean Denson. Jean met with me privately to make suggestions on learning. Jean and James took me under their wings, encouraged me to keep playing, taught me brief lessons, and suggested books to buy and read to teach myself. I have no idea how many bridge books I have bought, but I read six before feeling the least bit comfortable.

It was very hard for me to “unlearn” all the bidding rules I had used for over forty years and to “re-learn” all the “new-to-me” rules. I made so many mistakes early—and still make quite a few, in bidding and in playing the cards, as does everyone.

When people would mention Life Master, I would always respond that I had no aspirations of ever being one. The number of masterpoints—total and especially gold—seemed unattainable in my lifetime. All those points came lots quicker than expected.

It took four and a half years for me to become a Life Master. I have been so fortunate to have had both Jean and James as partners, many other partners, and teammates who have all helped me on my journey. My regular partner in my quest for Life Master, Susan McNamara, actually helped me over the 500 mark by playing virtual club bridge in April on BBO. She named me “The Corona Queen.”

Duplicate bridge is a wonderful game with opportunities to learn every time you play. I have learned so much and made so many friends in these four and a half years. Becoming a Life Master is a goal accomplished, but it isn't nearly as important as the Friends for Life I have made during this experience at JBA, the Jackson Bridge Association.