

Growing up in the fifties and sixties in Nashville, my family all loved to play cards. Daddy, my brothers, and I played Rook, Spades, Hearts, and something called Crazy Bridge, a bastardized primitive variation of bridge. My mother always told me that I would love the real game of bridge “the ultimate card game” which she had played many years ago, but really, I had no one to play with or teach me the game.

Fast forward to the mid-seventies, there was a bridge class taught at the local community center. I was excited that I would finally be able to learn the fundamentals. I asked around at church and found, yes, several little old ladies who played and were glad to take me under their wing. As a schoolteacher, I could play during the day in the summer and we played once a week. We met at each other’s homes where the hostess served lunch and informed us which way the bathtub went, for that was the way the cards would run. These afternoons were fun, but I hungered for a deeper level of play.

Around this time, I saw in the newspaper that a bridge class would be offered at the YWCA taught by Warren Haynie. He introduced our class to duplicate bridge. When I told my church friends that I was learning duplicate, they were flabbergasted! Duplicate was so hard, they said. Warren encouraged our class to come to the Vanderbilt Bridge Club where we could play on Saturdays in the “baby game”. He said we always be welcomed with a partner, and one would be provided if needed. From then on, my Saturday mornings were taken and my passion for the game became a part of my life!

During this period, the late 1970’s and 1980’s, the Vanderbilt Bridge Club, located on Charlotte Ave., was an exciting place! Just walking in the crowded room was thrilling! The evening games were my favorites. We had players from all walks of life, many of whom smoked and the whole room would exude the fumes. There would be glasses on many table with alcoholic drinks. This was before the days of zero tolerance and the games were very intense. At times tempers would flare. One night, a man ran out the door when his wife started yelling at him about his bid. She followed him out into the parking lot where he got in his car and drove off! Bridge was not for sissies!

In those days we had many world class players that played regularly at VBC – Tommy and Carole Sanders, Mike Laurence, Chuck Said, Kathie Wei-Sender to name only a few. None of the games were stratified or handicapped. One Friday night, my partner Paul Lee introduced me to opponent Tommy Sanders. Paul told Tommy that I was a beginner. Scared and intimidated, I was declarer in a four-spade contract. My hands were shaking as I made the contract. Tommy smiled at me and said, “I couldn’t have played it better myself.” I’ll never forget those words. Paul told me afterwards, “In no other game, can a beginner sit down and play against the best players in the world! Only in bridge.” I was hooked!

During those days we had an active ABA club that played in the same facility and Black and White players often played in cross over games. One of my favorite partners was Dr. Gardner Dixon aka Dr. Slam. His famous words were, “Game or slam in every hand.” He taught me much about the game and was always a fun and interesting partner. An adventurous bidder, Dr. Dixon would rather bid five slams and go down than to miss one makeable slam. Brilliant declarer that he was, he would often make games and slams that no one else could. Another treasured friend and partner was Ada Willoughby, a professor at Tennessee State University. We ventured to many tournaments together and she would often

host dinners and bridge games in her lovely home. So many friendships and intriguing folks that I never would have met in my everyday life if not for bridge.

Well, VBC moved from our facility on Charlotte Ave to the campus of Vanderbilt University. We were there for twenty years until our lease ran out. During one game in 2010, two friends said there was someone I needed to meet – Jay Hitt, who they claimed was very nice. Noticing his good looks (ok, admittedly I'm shallow), I asked him if he would like to play sometime. He quickly agreed, said anytime day or night, and wrote down three different phone numbers where he could be reached. Long story short, love blossomed along with our bridge partnership and we were married and have been together for ten years.

After a successful fundraising effort, headed by our president Vicki Buchanan, VBC was able to purchase our own building – 85 White Bridge Road. After Vicki moved to Florida, Jay was elected president of VBC and is still serving in that capacity.

The game of bridge has enriched every aspect of my life, socially, intellectually, and even my love life. Walking into the club, seeing so many friends, smelling the coffee, and anticipating the challenge of the game is something I always look forward to. Jay and I have grown together and never run out of things to talk about. We enjoy traveling to tournaments, discussing interesting hands, and working on our strategy. Of course, we sometimes get a little too intense, but Jay has a saying that keeps our priorities straight – “Life first, bridge second.” Jay said that his goal is to play one perfect game, where every hand is correctly bid, played, and defended. We are still working on that one!

Nowadays, we play online and again I am learning to like this experience of the game. Of course, BBO is not like face-to-face, but it will suffice until we can get back to the club. When I talk to non-bridge-playing friends and family, they invariably ask, “How's bridge?” Everyone who knows me knows how much I love the game and how important and meaningful it is to me.

Many of my bridge friends and partners are no longer here, but I often think of them as I play and silently thank them for their enthusiasm and interest in my development as a player. Hopefully, they are still able to play in that great by and by.

To anyone interested, I can think of no other game that can be played and enjoyed throughout life. Thanks for asking me for my bridge story!