

I'm a former English teacher. ACBL and BBO have been my lifeline during the pandemic. After playing party bridge for more than 40 years I reconnected with some longtime friends and made some new ones at my local club in District 10, Unit 232 in Huntsville Alabama, where I learned duplicate bridge. It quickly became a passion. I took a few classes at the University of Alabama in Huntsville taught by Bob Darnall. I began attending a Monday tutoring class at our bridge center led by Bud Hullings. After a few months I joined ACBL, not at all sure why but the instructors encouraged it and my friends were doing it so I succumbed to the peer pressure. I participated in duplicate bridge sessions aboard Cunard's Queen Elizabeth in the British Isles in 2017 and, though I was outmatched, I returned home ready to elevate my bridge play. A new mentoring program, led by Susan Bridges, launched my quest to advance. Dot Wendt, my phenomenal first mentor, dissected every hand we played and provided copious feedback. Donna Merchant, my second phenomenal mentor, continued my tutelage. (Yes, I won the lottery twice in the mentor program!) A group of friends, initially connected years ago through our young children and reunited after retirement, decided to form a bridge group. After several iterations of a name we became the Crazy Eights because we are both! Exactly one year later we entered the pandemic and everything came to a screeching halt. When the bridge center closed we were all at our wit's end so we began playing online bridge with Trickster. It was less than ideal but it gave us an outlet. After ACBL teamed with BBO my bridge life acquired new meaning. Our Unit 232 Board of Directors quickly formed sessions for all levels of players. I am especially grateful to Phil Bridges who created two sessions per week for players with fewer than 300 masterpoints. As online bridge caught on I was fortunate to have my second mentor, Donna Merchant, continue to mentor me by playing as my partner every Tuesday and follow each session with constructive feedback. A real community formed within our own local club. I played with my regular partner and also with anyone else who needed one. We became an open and inclusive group. I even summoned the courage to put my name in the partnership desk a few times. Every experience has been a positive one. Bridge players must be the nicest people on earth. I could never have imagined after earning my first tiny fraction of a masterpoint back in mid-2018 that I would ever attain the rank of Junior Master or Club Master; yet here I am at Sectional Master, not from having chased it but from a slow and steady race enhanced by the isolation of

a pandemic and the creative efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers led by former Unit 232 President Charles Durrin and current President Susan Bridges. I hope to pay it forward by volunteering at the local club level.