

Nigel Guthrie (1940-2022)

Very sad to report that Nigel Guthrie has passed away, peacefully in a care home in Glasgow.

My relationship with Nigel has revolved purely around bridge since we met in the mid-1980s at Reading Bridge Club. I've never met his wife or family and we rarely discussed work, although I know he worked for DEC on their office software products. He has met my wife, but then she plays bridge.

He learned bridge in the 1960s at a time of great Scottish players. He was a contemporary of Victor Silverstone although it was Nigel who taught Liz McGowan how to play, allegedly (I expect Liz will be writing a proper obituary in the near future).

At that time, he played in the traditional conservative Scottish style: get through the bidding as quickly as possible, it was the play that mattered. This served him well as he became a much stronger pairs player.

However he did change and became fascinated with system development as he got older and had more time on his hands. He was always fiddling, tweaking, and seeking victims who would play his latest ideas.

In terms of bridge achievements, he won the British Mixed Pairs three times, each time with a different woman: Carolyn Peplow in 1970, Liz McGowan in 1973 and Hedy Brown in 1997 (when Hedy was in her eighties); and the EBU Grand Master Pairs with long-time friend David Barnes in 2008. He represented Scotland in the Seniors Camrose in 2018, playing with Jim Forsyth. He is the current holder of the Scotsman Trophy for the SBU National Pairs, again with Jim.

His primary partner at Reading was Stuart Maurice and I played in their team for a few years. Stuart always complained that Nigel took far more time at the table than anyone else; a problem that he never overcame although falling asleep at the table didn't help!

Nigel loved playing bridge and, if he could not play, then discussing bridge. He was well-known on various forums for his strong, and often eclectic, views (BridgeWinners was really too late for the full force of his views as his health declined).

His desire for a simpler law book was insatiable, but struggled to articulate how it could be done. He was forever disappointed that the WBF did not enforce a uniform set of rules and regulations on all the NBOs: he did not support different system and alert policies around the world, seeing them as allowing local politicians too much sway. I'm unclear if he had a similar view on Scottish devolution :)

His ability to comment on the world of bridge confused me, given that he'd hardly ever played outside the UK. Why did he care that countries had different rules? He never played in America, despite his strong views of how the ACBL should run things. But he was an avid online player, initially on OKBridge and then BBO, and we played on many online teams together. This got him some international experience in an environment of little regulation and common understandings, reinforcing his views.

In the days long before double dummy solvers, if you ever played with Nigel, either as a partner or teammate, you'd always receive comments about interesting hands afterwards. There was never blame, but it was always about the beauty of a hand or position.

Like Paddington Bear, Nigel could rarely be separated from his duffel coat and was often seen at the EBU Summer Congress wearing it when most were wearing very little. It was not particularly scruffy and he wore a suit jacket under it.

The unstoppable force met an immovable object during one of our matches in the county league. This was an era where head to head matches were played in people's homes and, to many, the tea was more important than the bridge. We were playing in a lovely house and, while the rest of us were dealing the hands, our host was trying to remove the coat in her warm, centrally-heated home.

We were well down at half-time and a lavish buffet was laid out: sandwiches, sausage rolls, canapes and lots of different cakes. It was here that Nigel won us the match.

Having been playing for some time, he was keen to remain standing and loaded up his plate. He then wandered around the living room talking to both us and the opponents about the interesting hands in the first half and how badly he'd done.

This was all done with cake precariously balanced in his right hand as he conducted his post mortem. He was followed around the room by our host with a small dustpan and brush, clearing up all the crumbs after him. I believe it was the mental exhaustion caused by this that allowed us to turn the match around. I should add that Nigel always denied this happening when I told this story, but he was giggling away since he really had no idea what happened save he could probably recall a hand from the match.

I mentioned that Nigel was not a fast player, but the most frustrating part of this was that, more often than not, he was not thinking about the hand he was playing. It would be a previous hand, not necessarily the last one, and he'd spotted some line, defence or position that would have allowed him to do better on the hand. Nigel was the only person I knew who could take five minutes to respond to Stayman; eventually his partner would get fed up and tell him to concentrate on the hand in play.

As others have said, Nigel was a friendly, kind and generous man. One who would greet you warmly and then give you a bridge hand before asking about the family.

Nigel (29 October 1940-29 August 2022) will be missed.

Originally posted by Paul Gipson on Bridgewinners