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2021 Teacher Of the Year: *Josée Hammill*

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2021 TEACHER OF THE YEAR: JOSÉE HAMMILL

Richard Braunstein

Josée Hammill was named the winner of the 2021 ABTA/Master Point Press Teacher of the Year award at the ABTA's mini-convention in August.

As is the case with all nominees for the Teacher of the Year award, her students are enthusiastic supporters of their teacher. Here are some of the comments made by Josée's students.

- She is well prepared, enthusiastic and thorough.
- She makes lessons fun.
- She is always available to answer every question and help in any way she can.
- Her newsletters are inspirational, packed with information, tips and challenges.
- She remembers everyone's name and makes you feel like a friend.
- It's a joy to be in her class.
- Many of her students used the word "joy" to describe Josée and her classes.

Josée grew up in Quebec City and moved to Ontario as a young adult. Years later, in 2000, a friend sent her an email suggesting that they learn to play bridge. So they started taking lessons with John Rayner. Although she was fluent in English, her second language, Josée felt that she was at a disadvantage because she was unfamiliar with much of the terminology. Words like trump, spades, and clubs were new to her. Through hard work and perseverance she learned to play bridge, and she was "hooked and mesmerized by the intricacies of the game."

In the late 2000's, she took Audrey Grant's one day teacher's certification course at the Toronto Regional. She went on to offer a beginners' course at her local community center. Following that she asked Barbara Seagram if there was a place for her in Barbara's school. She says "Barbara agreed to give me a try and

for this I will be eternally grateful. She has been the most supportive and giving person during all these years."

When asked about her teaching philosophy, Josée said the following:

"This is so difficult to answer! I think at the very foundation of my teaching approach is that Bridge is a difficult game. That my students need to be kind to themselves, forgiving of themselves and their partners and that ultimately this has to be fun. Our lives are way too short to give ourselves a hard time over a bridge problem or how quickly we learn the game. It is nice in a way that I came into bridge relatively late in life, as I get this. I remember how it feels to learn this game. Headaches and all. To borrow from Zia who spoke to us during the 2017 Bridge Teachers Convention , approach bridge with these in mind:

1. Fun (play at a level where you are having fun – if not having fun, then you are playing too high a level).
2. Focus with the hand in front of you. Stay in the present moment .
3. Forget – the past is the past. Nothing you can change about this now. Don't let it take away from your focus and fun."

When Covid shut down face-to-face bridge in March of 2020, Josée was quick to adapt to the new reality. She experimented with a few approaches, got some help from Henry Meguid, and was off and running with classes on Zoom. Her goal was to make the online classes as close as possible to face-to-face learning. Judging by the comments of her students, she has done so quite well.

