

Jason and Pamela's trip to St. Louis – March 2026

What is was like for Pamela:

We entered the online North America Pairs game almost on a whim, and to our delight we came first in the B section. The NAP is the only bridge event that actually pays out money, and between that prize and the generous gift from our Unit, the trip suddenly felt possible. Driving would cost less, and more importantly, it would open the door to a little adventure. So, we decided to go.

We left on February 28 at 9 a.m., just after settling the dog at her favourite doggie-day centre. The highway was quiet, the three-hour drive to the U.S. border sitting in the back of our minds like a small knot of anticipation, we wondered what sort of confrontation might await us.

To our surprise, the border was nearly deserted — just our car and a single truck. We rolled slowly up to the window, bracing for the usual scrutiny, but were greeted instead by a pleasant officer who asked the standard questions with no urgency at all. He didn't look in the car. No photos were taken. After years of tense crossings, this one was the easiest ever. We exchanged a look of disbelief as we pulled away, the road opening in front of us like a quiet invitation.

It took us 53 hours to reach St. Louis — twenty hours of actual driving, the rest a patchwork of meals, rest stops, and weather. Twice the season reminded us who was really in charge: once with a sleet storm that coated the car in a stubborn crust of white and road dirt, and once with a torrential downpour outside Kansas City. Daylight was fading fast as we crawled through that rain, trucks thundering past at full speed, wipers barely keeping up, the road dissolving into spray and headlights. Blink at the wrong moment and you could lose the lane. At some point we looked at each other — no words needed — and steered off at the next exit, choosing safety over bravado. The adventure could wait for clearer skies.

The tournament was held in St. Louis, Missouri, but we stayed across the Mississippi at the DraftKings Casino Queen in East St. Louis, Illinois. Every door — hotel and casino alike — was plastered with **NO GUNS ALLOWED** signs, a detail that made us pause more than once. Late, on our second night, we heard loud voices that seemed to come from the room next door, though we were fairly sure no one was actually staying there - we are left with this mystery.

Each evening after playing bridge, we walked the mile back across the Mississippi to our hotel. The bridge lights were all burnt out, leaving us to cross in near-darkness, guided only by the faint glow of the city behind us. Oddly enough, that part felt safe. The real challenge was getting to the bridge in the first place.

The main street leading to it had several intersections, each equipped with lights, walk signals, and all the usual assurances of order. But in St. Louis, the signals meant nothing. When the light said **WALK**, cars barreled through the intersection at full speed, often swinging around the corner directly through the crosswalk. Drivers didn't look for pedestrians. They didn't slow down. They didn't even seem aware that anyone might be trying to cross.

We learned quickly that the only way across was to ignore the signs entirely and rely on instinct — watching the flow of traffic, judging the gaps, and moving when it felt right. It was a strange kind of dance, part caution, part courage, part resignation.

And yet, through all of it — the storms, the long hours, the dark bridge, the chaotic intersections — we were together. Two people on the road, heading toward something we loved, collecting stories we hadn't expected to find.

Jason's birthday fell on March 10, and we spent it on the road home. To celebrate in our own bridge-player way, we stopped in St. Cloud, Minnesota for a morning game. That's where we met Roger Melaas.

Roger was one of those people you meet once and never forget — lively, talkative, full of stories from a youth spent travelling with a competitive bridge team. As he talked, names from his past floated into the conversation, and suddenly one of them landed close to home: Winston Gokavi from Saskatoon. Winston is the older brother to Christina Gokavi, one of our regular Regina players. A small world indeed. Roger's stories were the kind that make you smile long after you've left the table.

We spent our last night in the U.S. at a motel in Jamestown, North Dakota — the Norway Inn, a very old roadside place close to the highway, easy in and easy out. The price was excellent, but the room came with... character. There was no door separating the bathroom from the sleeping area, no sink in the bathroom at all, and the cement walls were painted green with exposed wires running along them like exposed veins. A list of rules was taped to the wall: no loud talking or music between 9 p.m. and 9 a.m., and a strict limit of two beers. Breaking the rules could result in immediate removal from the premises.

The parking lot told its own story. A bright **NO VACANCY** sign glowed above a collection of licence plates from Florida, New York, Texas, California, and more. We were in North Dakota — why were all these people driving instead of flying? They were all a long way from home. It was one of those small mysteries of travel that you never quite solve.

The next morning, we stepped outside early, ready to begin the final stretch home. The parking lot that had been full the night before was now completely empty. Every car — Florida, New York, Texas, California — gone without a trace. It felt like waking up after a dream, the kind where the characters vanish the moment you open your eyes.

Pamela Keim

What is was like for Jason:

Pam has given you a great sense of what it was like driving to St. Louis, travelling back and forth to the bridge tournament and getting home again. What she has not mentioned is that we were playing bridge twice a day, every day and there were lots of exciting bridge hands. Below are a couple that I found interesting.

The first took place on our fourth day at the tournament when I decided to take the morning off from playing bridge in order to kibbitz some of the best bridge players in the world while they played in the Vanderbilt Knockout. I had my choice to watch any of eight teams for 15 boards and I picked a truly international table that featured Michael Whibley, New Zealand; Nabil Edgtton, Australia; Rob Helle, Mauritius; Ed Hoogenkamp, Spain

This is the second hand I saw. It took E/W literally 20 minutes to bid and play this one. Take a look at the auction and see if you can figure out what the 6C bid means. I heard afterwards that the expert commentator on vugraph had no idea what it meant.

South	West	North	East
Hoogenkamp	Edgtton	Helle	Whibley
			1NT (1)
P	2H (2)	P	2S
P	3C (3)	P	3D (4)
P	4D (5)	P	4S (6)
P	6C (7)	P	? (8)

- 1) 13 - 16 Balanced
- 2) transfer to spades
- 3) asking bid
- 4) shows 2 card spade support
- 5) shows 5 spades and 5 diamonds and slam interest
- 6) no slam interest
- 7) This 6C bid takes West 6 minutes to make. What do you think it means?
- 8) East thought for 6 minutes before bidding. What would you do here?

Below you can see the hand that East was holding.



I think West was bidding 6C naturally just in case East was holding 5 clubs.
 East bid 6D and got a small club lead from South. How do you play the hand as East?

West Hand	East Hand
♠ KJ653	♠ A4
♥ —	♥ AK983
♦ AQ983	♦ 742
♣ A85	♣ Q62

South leads the 3 of clubs

The play quickly went AC, AS, AH, KH.

East then thought for 6 minutes before playing a diamond to the Queen, KS, rough a spade, and a diamond before claiming making 6.

I watched 15 hands and claims were made on every hand at some point between trick 2 and trick 10.

As you can see below, 6D is the only making slam on this hand. East/west won 10 IMPS on this hand when the other table played in 3NT. The score at the end of 15 boards was 40 - 40. It was a perfectly exciting set for me to kibbitz.

E Deals	♠ Q97		
N-S Vul	♥ J106542		2
	♦ J		
	♣ KJ9		
♠ KJ653		♠ A4	
♥ —		♥ AK983	
♦ AQ983		♦ 742	
♣ A85		♣ Q62	
	♠ 1082		
8	♥ Q7		
14 13	♦ K1065		
5	♣ 10743		
EW 6♦; EW 5N; W 5♠;			
E 4♠; EW 3♥; EW 3♣;			
Par -920			

The second hand takes place on Saturday during the first session of the North America Pairs. For those of you that don't know, this is my fourth time playing in the North America Pairs. It is a four session pairs game and everyone gets to play two sessions on the first day but only the top half of the players do well enough to qualify and play two sessions on the final day. The first two times I played, my partner and I averaged more than 50% on the first day but that was not quite good enough to qualify for the second day. The third time I played, I was recovering from a severe case of food poisoning and did not play my best. Today is my fourth attempt and below you can see the most exciting hand from that day. I was sitting North, they are vulnerable, we are not and I am holding the very shapely 1 HCP hand you can see below. The key decision is about to fall in my lap.

North Hand

Vul: E-W

♠ 8
 ♥ 10 9 7 4
 ♦ 8 7
 ♣ J 10 9 8 7 2

We were playing against the most consistent pair in the room (they ended up finishing 1st overall after the first day and 3rd overall after the second). Below is the auction that took place at our table. The opponents are vulnerable and we are not vulnerable. Take a look at my bids and tell me if there are any bids that you would not make. What are you going to lead?

South (Pam)	West (Opponent 1)	North (Jason)	East (Opponent 2)
1C (1)	2S (2)	P (3)	4S
P	P	5C	5H
6C	X	P	6D
P	6S	P	P
X	P	P	XX
P	P	P	

- 1) 14+ HCP, artificial and forcing
- 2) I asked and was told pre-emptive
- 3) 0-4 HCP

I chose to lead the 10 of hearts and West had no problem making 13 tricks. In order to hold this to 12 tricks I had to find the club lead.

Below you can see the whole hand. I asked a couple of people in the room about their auctions and there were a number of very different choices made with the South, East and West hands. Passing 4S and leading a club would have gotten me an 80% board. Bidding 7C and going down 1100 would have gotten me a 62% board. I was pretty sure that 7C was right here but Pam's hesitations and body language were suggesting 7C so I did not think it would have been ethical to make that bid as passing 6SXX is a logical alternative for me.

Mar 07, 2026 - Saturday 10:00 am

Board detail for **GOLDER NORTH AMERICAN PAIRS FLIGHT B**

Session **1**

SECTION 55, BOARD # 19 RESULT

Sections: --Select-- Boards: 19

Dir: S **19**
 Vul: E-W

♠ 8
 ♥ 10 9 7 4
 ♦ 8 7
 ♣ J 10 9 8 7 2

1
 12 10
 17

♠ A K J 9 3 ♠ Q 10 7 6 5 4 2
 ♥ 2 ♥ A K J 8 6
 ♦ A 10 9 6 5 4 ♦ —
 ♣ 3 ♣ 6

—
 ♠ Q 5 3
 ♥ K Q J 3 2
 ♦ A K Q 5 4

[Double Dummy Makes](#)
 NS: 2♣♦ 4♥ 2/1♠ 0NT3
 EW: 1♦ 4♥ 6♣ 1NT 3♠

[Par Score](#)
 -1100 7♣* N ♠-5

N-S

	Contract	By	Score	Matchpoints	%	Pairs
Play	6♣x	S	-300	38.5	94	7-Zenon Wachowicz-Elizabeth Wachowicz vs. 4-James Alstad-James Heltsley
Play	6♣x	S	-300	38.5	94	3-Steven Powers-Janet Yeager vs. 16-Mark Rosen-Daniel Baker
Play	7♣x	N	-500	36	88	10-Rick Jasper-John Wachsman vs. 10-Jackson Wahl-Andrew Caranicas
Play	7♣x	S	-500	36	88	6-David Jaspere-Robert Trenary vs. 2-Mark Marty-Kathryn LeGro
Play	5♠	W	-680	33	80	5-Jeffrey Weiss-James Pivarski Jr vs. 20-Alan Wood-Marc Franklin
Play	5♠	W	-710	30	73	8-David Neiman-Mark Lasoff vs. 6-Michel Vigeant-Pierre Lemire
Play	7♣x	N	-1100	25.5	62	11-Abraham Pallas-Ernest Levinson vs. 19-Noah Bell-Edythe Krauss
Play	7♣x	S	-1100	25.5	62	20-Martha Meyer-Mark Meyer vs. 17-Gillian Andrews-Mike Andrews
Play	7♣x	S	-1100	25.5	62	13-Michael Schwartz-Janie Woo vs. 3-Nancy Rader-M Schuster
Play	6♠	W	-1430	19.5	48	16-Janet Baumgartner-Dwight Stafford vs. 9-Marion Brum De Barros-Denise Klein
Play	6♠	W	-1430	19.5	48	1-Thomas Fagan-Katie Fagan vs. 12-Xiao-Qian Wang-Chen Zhou
Play	6♠	W	-1430	19.5	48	9-Sheryl Hobbs-Kate Burton vs. 8-Paul Ritters-Ellen Eastman
Play	6♠	W	-1430	19.5	48	4-Leyi Chen-Nick Tipton vs. 18-Trish Leblang-Tyra Galyean
Play	6♠	W	-1460	11.5	28	19-Claire Barnett-Alan Barnett vs. 15-Mark Mackenzie-Jennifer Samuels
Play	6♠	W	-1460	11.5	28	18-Hugh Hendrickson-Christine Chai vs. 13-Betsy Wellington-John Scheuermann
Play	6♠x	E	-1660	5.5	13	15-Michael Weir-John Albanese vs. 7-Larry Denneau Jr-Alan Kosansky
Play	6♠x	W	-1660	5.5	13	12-John Williams-Larry Newman vs. 1-Medhat Fawzy-Harry Eaglesham
Play	6♠x	E	-1860	4	10	17-Oyvind Tafjord-Shawn Abernethy vs. 11-Darlene Fraser-David Fraser
Play	7♣	W	-2210	2	5	14-Gregory Harding-Douglas Babcock vs. 5-Jeffrey Walker-Rolf Hubmayr
Play	6♠xx	W	-2470	0	0	2-Jason Larrivee-Pamela Keim vs. 14-Robert Corry-Giacomo Beretta

Thanks to this 0% board, our score in session 1 was 46.25% and our score in session 2 was not much better at 49.67%. Normally this combination would not be good enough to be in the top half of the players but thanks to a lower than expected turnout in the event there was a small chance we would qualify. You can see below if we made it.

Section TT - EW

Pair	Player 1	Player 2	Flt	Qual	Overall		Section		Session Score	%	Carry Over	Overall Score	mps	Color	Personal Scores
					A	B	A	B							
10	Rick Jasper	John Wachsman	A	Q	-	-	1	-	662.50	62.15	547.00	1209.50	10.34	Gold	Scores
12	John Williams	Larry Newman	A	Q	-	-	2	-	657.50	61.68	554.00	1211.50	7.24	Gold	Scores
15	Michael Weir	John Albanese	A	Q	-	-	6	-	627.50	58.86	596.50	1224.00	4.37	Gold	Scores
18	Hugh Hendrickson	Christine Chai	A	Q	-	-	8	-	622.00	58.35	577.50	1199.50	3.27	Gold	Scores
7	Larry Denneau Jr	Alan Kosansky	A	Q	-	-	9	-	599.00	56.19	462.00	1061.00	1.72	Gold	Scores
9	Sheryl Hobbs	Kate Burton	A	Q	-	-	10	-	590.00	55.35	583.50	1173.50	3.06	Gold	Scores
22	Josette Levesque	Johanne Sevigny	A		-	-	13	-	567.00	53.19	419.00	986.00	1.30	Gold	Scores
8	David Neiman	Mark Lasoff	A	Q	-	-	-	-	539.50	50.61	492.00	1031.50			Scores
17	Oyvind Tafjord	Shawn Abernethy	A	Q	-	-	-	-	530.00	49.72	555.50	1085.50			Scores
2	Jason Larrivee	Pamela Keim	A	Q	-	-	-	-	529.50	49.67	493.00	1022.50			Scores
4	Leyi Chen	Nick Tipton	A		-	-	-	-	526.00	49.34	470.00	996.00			Scores
13	Betsy Wellington	John Scheuermann	A	Q	-	-	-	-	525.00	49.25	620.50	1145.50	2.75	Gold	Scores
14	Gregory Harding	Douglas Babcock	A		-	-	-	-	511.00	47.94	428.50	939.50			Scores

Our average of 47.96% was just good enough to qualify us 51st out of 52. Seeing that Q (for Qualification) beside our names made the whole trip a bridge success in my mind. Thanks Pam for getting me across the finish line.

Jason Larrivee

QUALIFIERS IN THE GOLDER NORTH AMERICAN PAIRS FLIGHT B

26.0 Tables / Based on 42 Tables

1	Robert Corry, Palos Verde Estates CA; Giacomo Beretta, Redondo Beach CA	100.00
2	Zenon Wachowicz – Elizabeth Wachowicz, Clearwater FL	98.01
3	Mark Throop – Eleanor Throop, Framingham MA	69.17
4	Michael Haddox-Schatz, Yorktown VA; William Vandyke, Poquoson VA	68.25
5	Frank Grzegorzewski, Erie PA; Samuel Root, Youngstown OH	63.50
6	Yanlai Yang – Zhiyu Cheng, Jersey City NJ	63.34
7	Corey Powell – Cagliyan Kurdak, Ann Arbor MI	62.12
8	Michael Weir, Madison AL; John Albanese, Hazel Green AL	61.96
9	John Williams – Larry Newman, Cincinnati OH	58.13
10	Rick Jasper – John Wachsman, San Jose CA	57.52
46	Jared Egerer, Mount Arlington NJ; Tiger Lili Williams, Fair Lawn NJ	6.29
47	Karie Willyerd, Windsor CO; Fiona Freeseaman, Fort Collins CO	3.37
48	David Neiman – Mark Lasoff, Minneapolis MN	2.91
49	James Alstad, Rancho Palo Verdes CA; James Heltsley, Redondo Beach CA	2.61
50	Peter Griff, Randolph MA; R. Edward Kelley, Quincy MA	1.84
51	Jason Larrivee – Pamela Keim, Regina SK	0.15
52	Bruce Peterson, Aloha OR; Kevin Marnell, Milwaukie OR	0.00