

Jason and Pamela's trip to Penticton – June 2026

What it was like for Pamela (with pictures taken by Jason):

Saturday, June 13th was departure day for the Penticton Regional. Lacey-Lex, our dog, was dropped off at her favourite “doggie day care centre,” and by 8:45 am we were officially on the road — another bridge adventure, another long stretch of highway unfurling ahead of us like a promise.

Jason and I still hadn't agreed on the route. He pushed for the Crowsnest Pass through the Kootenays; I wanted the wide, breathtaking sweep of Rogers Pass through the Rockies. In the end, Jason won — maybe because he knew I grew up in the Kootenays and suspected the mountains would tug at me the way old memories do. Either way, we both understood what we were signing up for: a long, winding drive through country that demands your attention.

Lethbridge became our first stop, a final quiet night before entering the Pass. By morning, the mountains rose around us like familiar giants. The drive was beautiful, hushed, and deceptively peaceful — the kind of landscape that makes you forget the clock entirely. But every so often, the road reminded us of its harsher truths. Too much wildlife hadn't made it across, each one a small, jarring interruption in the otherwise serene stretch of highway.

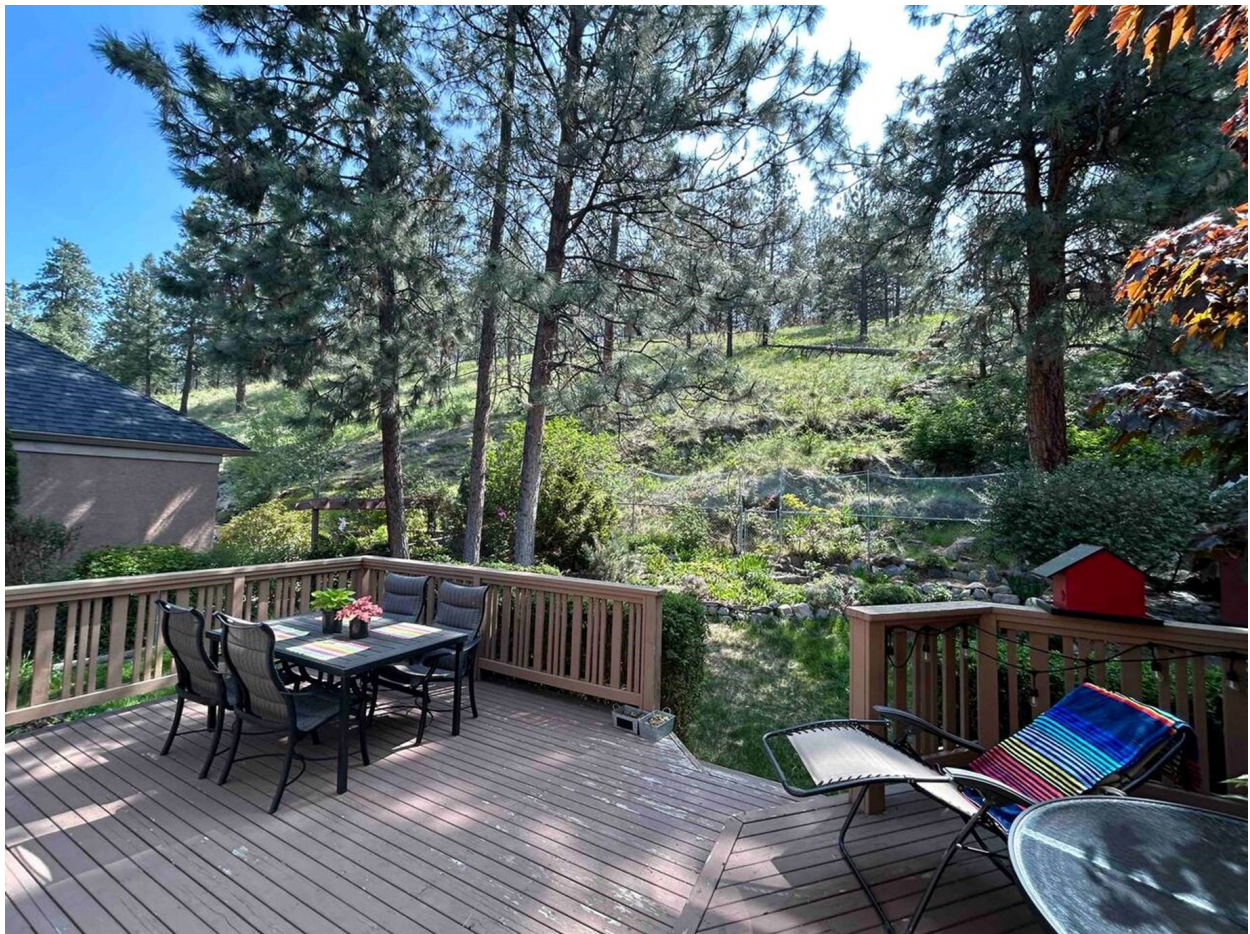


This one shows the foothills outside Lethbridge and it is part of a 50 second panorama [video](#).

On the second day of driving, the air conditioner quit without warning. One moment it was keeping the car comfortable, and the next it was blowing nothing but hot air straight at me. The heat became unbearable. Jason, always quick to improvise, stopped and bought a huge bag of ice. He poured it into a cotton sack and handed it to me like a homemade cooling pack. I pressed it against my chest, grateful for the sudden rush of cold.

Of course, ice has its own ideas. It began to melt, the cotton bag started to leak, and soon I was damp, dripping, and clinging to my improvised cooling system like a traveller in the desert. But it worked. It got me through the long, hot stretch of highway — Christina Lake shimmering in the heat, Osoyoos glowing like a furnace, Oliver rolling past in waves of sun — all the way into Penticton. By the time we reached the city, I was half soaked, half relieved, and fully convinced that sometimes the best travel solutions are the ridiculous ones.

We stayed in an Airbnb high up on one of the Penticton mountains. As the car climbed the final stretch of road, a sign appeared: ***“Beware bears in the area.”*** We took that seriously. Our hideaway sat about fifteen minutes from the Convention Centre where the bridge games were held, tucked away from the noise and the heat. We didn’t mind the drive at all. Each night, after hours of bidding and play, we returned to our quiet mountain retreat — peaceful, still, and completely ours.



We did not see any bears in our backyard at any point during the week.

Our plan for the tournament was to play the Knockout Teams with two seasoned, non-Life Masters from Saskatoon who were hoping to earn some more gold as they pushed toward their Life Master titles. From the first board, it was clear the team was solid — steady, focused, and stronger than any of us expected. Shane and Ken played with a kind of quiet determination, the sort that doesn't announce itself, but shows up in every careful bid and every well-timed defense.

By the end of the week, they had earned thirty gold points — enough to clear their entire gold requirement. Watching them reach that milestone felt like witnessing a private triumph, the kind that doesn't need applause. It was the sort of moment that makes a long trip worthwhile, when you realize you've shared in a moment that will stay with them forever.



Ken Kowaliuk, Shane Travis, Jason Larrivee, Pamela Keim at our favourite Penticton restaurant, Dennys.

At some point in the tournament, Jason and I decided to find two pick up partners and play in an Open Swiss Team game that stretched over two morning sessions. We checked the partnership desk, but there was almost no activity — a quiet table, an empty board, nothing promising. Then we noticed a woman off to the side; dialing, and redialing with a kind of determined concentration that made her impossible to ignore. *"Maybe she'd be interested,"* we whispered. Jason approached her, and she agreed to play with us — but she still needed to find herself a partner. More dialing. In the middle of her phone marathon, she paused long enough to mention she was the girlfriend of one of the bridge pros at the tournament. *"Who?"* I asked, trying to sound casual. *"Jacob Morgan,"* she replied. I didn't know who Jacob was, but Jason certainly did. She went back to her phone, determined, and eventually found her partner: Tom Weckworth from Kamloops. Just like that, we had our fourth, and our Open Swiss Team was complete.

The question remained: who exactly was this woman who introduced herself as Jacob Morgan's girlfriend? When I was alone with her, I asked, *"What is your name?"* *"Lorraine,"* she said. Later, when Jason had a moment alone with her, he asked the same question and got the same answer: *"Lorraine."*

A little while later, Jason and I met up with Tom and he told us he understood he'd be playing with a woman who said her name was Lorraine. Everything lined up neatly.

Until game time.

The four of us met at our designated table and filled out the entry slip: Jason Larrivee, Pamela Keim, Tom Weckworth, and **Marie-France Benoit**.

What? Who was Marie-France Benoit — and why did she look exactly like Lorraine? There was no time for questions.

As we moved from table to table, several opponents asked who was on our team. When they heard Marie-France's name, they lit up, telling us how much they liked her and what a wonderful person she was. I finally cracked and said, *"I thought her name was Lorraine."* The reply came instantly: *"What? Who's Lorraine?"*

Clearly, it was time to check in with Lorraine-Marie-France herself.

"I thought your name was Lorraine," I said. She looked genuinely puzzled. *"Who's Lorraine? My name is Marie-France."*

"But you told me your name was Lorraine," I insisted. *"I don't know what you're talking about,"* she said, completely sincere.

For a moment, I wondered if I was losing my mind. Maybe I had imagined the name Lorraine. Perhaps the heat, the long drive, and the tournament chaos had scrambled my brain. I re-checked with Jason and Tom. Both confirmed that when Marie-France had been alone with each of them, she had told them her name was Lorraine.

Whatever the truth was, it vanished as quickly as it appeared — leaving us with a mystery that kept its secrets.

Our team turned out to be genuinely strong. Somehow, we managed to lose to the weakest team in the field — a humbling start — and then went on to win match after match, climbing steadily up the leader board. Before long, it was obvious that our final match would be against the powerhouse team in the event: Joan Millens from New York; Ming Sheng from California; Shan Huang and Kevin Dwyer from Florida; and, of course, Jacob Morgan — the boyfriend of Marie-France.

The four of us on Jason's team sat down to strategize, especially to decide who should face Kevin and Jacob, the two most experienced pros on the opposing team. Jason turned to Marie-France, figuring she might have some insight, given her connection to Jacob.

"Who do you think should play against your boyfriend?" he asked.

Marie-France paused, then slowly pulled down the zipper on her top a few inches — a dramatic gesture that froze all three of us in place. She held the moment like a performer waiting for her spotlight.

“Well,” she said, letting the suspense build, “I do have some influence over Jacob...”

She let the words hang in the air, then shrugged.

“...well, on second thought, maybe not so much. He’s seen it all before.”

The timing was perfect. The three of us burst out laughing — tension gone, strategy meeting derailed, and Marie-France once again proving that she was a mystery wrapped in comedy; wrapped in her own unforgettable flair.



Jacob and Marie-France in 2016. ([1](#))

Unsurprisingly, Jason decided that he and I should take on Kevin and Jacob. Marie-France was perfectly fine with this — perhaps relieved not to be the one facing her boyfriend across the table.

It’s worth noting the scale of what we were walking into. Jason’s team had a combined total of 8,548 masterpoints. The pro team — three pros and one client — had either 104,450 or 106,434 masterpoints, depending on which client was playing. The difference wasn’t subtle. It was like facing a team that had mastered the game, while we were still figuring out our convention card.

Jason and I had played against Kevin Dwyer fifteen years earlier — first in Mississippi, then again in Florida. I was actually looking forward to seeing him in Penticton. It gave me a chance to thank him for a lesson he didn’t even know he had given me. What I learned from Kevin was *when* to double at low levels for penalty — a small insight, but one that changed the way I approached competitive auctions. It wasn’t something he taught deliberately; it was something I picked up simply by watching how he handled the cards.

The moment finally arrived. Jason and I sat down across from Jacob and Kevin — the two of them holding a combined total of 67,000 masterpoints between them. I thanked Kevin for the lesson he had given me without even knowing it. He was gracious, genuinely appreciative, and thanked me for telling him. As we talked, something clicked for him. He suddenly remembered playing against us all those years ago, back when he was just starting down the road toward becoming a bridge professional.

What it was like for Jason:

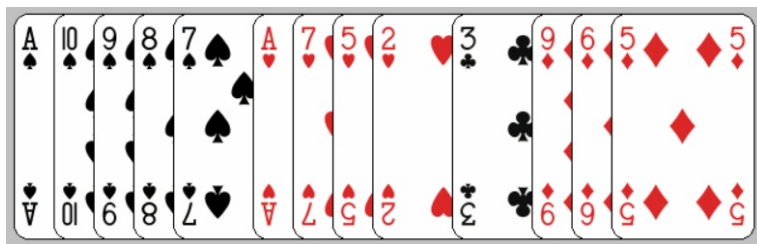
Pam has failed to mention that in the process of putting the team together I had made two promises. First, in order to get Tom Weckworth to even agree to play on our team I had to tell him, *“Don’t worry, we’ve got a good team”* when I did not know if that would be true. By this point, my first promise had been fulfilled as our team has already won 4 out of our 5 matches.

The second promise I made was even more of a stretch. When we found out that we would be playing in the top bracket I told Marie-France, *“Don’t worry about the match against Jacob and Kevin, Pam and I will go over and take care of them for you.”* Then I made my hand into a fist and pretended that I would go over and crush two world class bridge players. Let’s find out how that promise turns out for me as the odds that I will be getting doubled, going down 800 and losing the match are pretty high.

It is now the sixth board of an eight board match and it is not clear who is leading at this point but my guess is that the best we can be doing is tied. It is board 22 and the opponents are vulnerable and we are not. I feel in my gut that this is the moment to take a risk. Take a look at my hand and the auction and make some bid that is not pass.

North	East	South	West
Jason	Jacob	Pam	Kevin
	1C	P	2NT (1)
?			

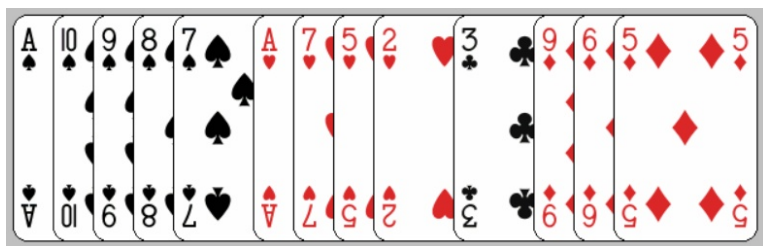
1) Game forcing values, could have as many as 4 spades, could have as many as 4 hearts



This is the North hand I was holding. What are you going to bid with it?

North	East	South	West
Jason	Jacob	Pam	Kevin
	1C	P	2NT (1)
3S (2)	P	P	X
P	3NT (3)	P	P
P	P (4)		

- 1) Game forcing values, could have as many as 4 spades, could have as many as 4 hearts
- 2) I bid 3S expecting to be penalty doubled and hoping to only go down 500.
- 3) pauses for 30 seconds
- 4) Before leading I asked what Kevin's double meant and Jacob said *"I'm not sure, the opponents don't normally come into our game forcing auctions."* True enough!



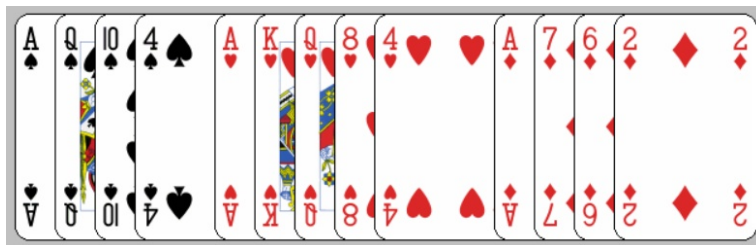
What are you going to lead from my hand to try and set 3NT?

I went with a normal, small spade lead and I felt like I had hit the lottery when I discovered that Pam was holding four spades to the King, Kevin was holding QJ of spades and Jacob was holding two small spades. I took the first 6 tricks off the top and Kevin claimed the rest so it was +200 for us. As it turns out, Kevin was right to double for penalty as 3S was going down 2 or 3 while there was no making game for his side.

The game is now serious at this point as there is a small chance that our team of underdogs is in the lead. We have reached board 24 which is the eighth and final board of the match. Now you get to step into the shoes of Jacob Morgan and see what contract you would like your partner to play in. Your choices are 6S or 7S. Below you can see the interesting auction that has happened to this point:

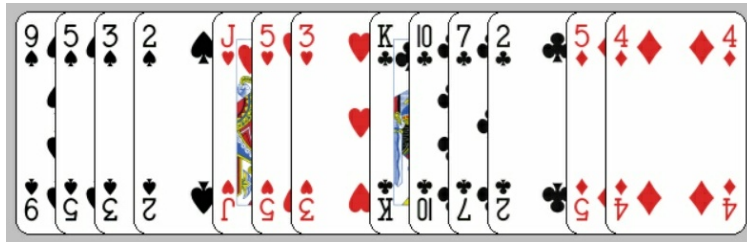
North	East	South	West
Jason	Jacob	Pam	Kevin
			1S
P	2NT (1)	P	3C (2)
P	5C (3)	P	5H (4)
P	?		

- 1) Shows at least 4 spades and at least 12 HCP
- 2) Shows a singleton in an unknown suit
- 3) Asking for Keycards in spades not counting the Ace of clubs
- 4) Showing one Keycard in spades not counting the Ace of clubs



This is Jacob's East hand. What is the final contract going to be?

Jacob chose to bid 7S and I found myself on lead with the outcome of the whole match likely riding on whether or not we can set this contract. Take a look and see if you make the same lead choice that I did.



These are the cards I had to choose a lead from knowing that the dummy was going to have a void in clubs

I chose to lead the two of spades and got to see Jacob's dummy and knew instantly that although I had found the best lead possible there was no way that Kevin could go down in this contract. Of course, we all know that there are no 100% certainties in bridge and what happened next is proof that even the greatest players can make mistakes. After thinking about the 4-0 trump break for 5 minutes, Kevin proceeded to take a line of play that went down two tricks (I scored the 9 of spades and the 3 of spades).

The match was over and when Marie-France and Tom came back to the table I was pretty sure that our team was going to win but then they started reading the scores back and it turns out that I had made a bad estimate of how the match had been going. After the first 5 scores were read our team was losing by a score of 0 – 18. Then we won 8 IMPs on board 6, lost 1 IMP on board 7 and won 14 IMPs on board 8. When we added it all up it turned out that we had won the match by a final score of 22 – 19 !!!!

I was excited, Pam was excited and Marie-France was ...

Not interested.

Still it was a great experience that earned our team 12 gold points, a second place overall [finish](#) in a tough event and a story that lasts a lifetime.

More of what it is was like for Pamela (with a picture taken by Jason):

On Friday, after the afternoon session of bridge, Jason and I decided to call it a day and head back to our mountain retreat. Jason turned on the car, and everything immediately went haywire. The air conditioner was worse than ever, a red battery warning light flashed on the dash, and a strange noise started grinding from under the hood. When Jason lifted the hood to investigate, an odd smell drifted out — sharp, hot, and unmistakably mechanical. He suspected the alternator was failing.

Our car limped back up the mountain to our hideaway, the two of us hoping the drive might somehow recharge the battery. No such luck. The Jeep felt tired, like it was running on stubbornness alone.

Shortly after 8:00 am on Saturday morning, the Jeep was parked outside Canadian Tire. If I ever hoped for a quick fix, it was this morning. The service department said they would take a look and let us know what was wrong.

"We'll phone you," they said.

No, you can't phone — I'll be playing bridge, I hoped. The last thing I needed was my cell phone ringing during a game where ringing phones are strictly forbidden. Automatic penalty, most likely followed by a bad score.

"Please text me," I said.

Luckily, we were only a fifteen-minute walk from the tournament and we could still make the morning game. We had barely sat down when my phone started buzzing with texts from Canadian Tire. A woman at our table overheard Jason and I discussing the messages and immediately jumped in. With absolute conviction, she told us that under no circumstances should we let Canadian Tire repair our Jeep.

What a conundrum. What other options are even available on a Saturday? And we had to check out of our Airbnb Sunday morning. We decided to ignore the well-meaning warnings and keep playing bridge. By the time we finished two rounds, all the bad news had arrived by text. The Jeep was undriveable. The repairs would cost close to \$2,000. And with any luck — any luck — we might be able to pick it up late Monday afternoon.

What? Now we had to figure out how to get off the mountain with all our luggage, rent a car, and find a place to stay for two nights. All this while we were in the middle of round four of our side game.

Despite the texting, the decisions, the stress, and the looming logistics, we somehow came second overall in the morning side game with 62 percent. With everything going on, how did we manage that? I'll take it.

We walked to the Sandman Inn after the afternoon game to book Sunday and Monday night. It was close to the Convention Centre, and the front desk staff were wonderfully helpful. They checked for car rentals, but every agency in town was closed. Only the airport location would open — at 8:00 am Sunday. Oh, great.

That meant cabbing it back up the mountain to our hideaway, packing everything, then cabbing down again early Sunday morning with all our luggage. And even then, we couldn't check in until 11:00 am. Fortunately, the Sandman was gracious and offered to store our luggage until our room was ready.

Since we were stuck in Penticton until the Jeep was ready, we figured we might as well play bridge on Sunday. Jason visited the partnership desk to see if we could get partners for the Sunday Swiss. Success.

Saturday after the afternoon session, we finally sat down for supper. We had barely settled into our seats when my cell phone rang. It was Canadian Tire asking for Jason. Oh no, I thought. More bad news. Jason took the call.

“Really?” I heard him say. *“The Jeep is ready? I can come anytime and pick it up?”*

Right after supper, we walked over to Canadian Tire and picked up our Jeep. After spending the entire day buried under the weight of vehicle trouble, we could hardly believe such a wonderful ending. The Jeep ran like a dream.

At some point on Sunday, we crossed paths with the woman who had warned us — in no uncertain terms — not to take the Jeep to Canadian Tire. As we passed, she called out, *“Sure hope you took my advice and didn’t take your car to Canadian Tire.”* Jason and I just smiled and kept walking.

Up until Sunday, we had enjoyed a truly great tournament. We won **44.99 masterpoints**, placing us **55th overall** out of roughly a thousand players in [attendance](#). Not bad for a week that included car trouble, mountain logistics, mystery identities, and a few unexpected adventures — the kind of week that felt more like a travel novel than a bridge event.

Sunday, however, was a completely different ball game. We came dead last. Our new partnership simply didn’t gel, and nothing seemed to go our way. It was one of those days that eventually comes for every bridge player— the kind that reminds you the game has a sense of humour.

By the end of Sunday, we both knew, it was time to go home.



This is what the road out of Penticton looks like but let’s take a little detour before we start that trip.

More of what it was like for Jason:

Yes we came last by a mile on Sunday (Our final score was 32/120 which comes out to 27% while the winning team featuring Kevin Dwyer and Jacob Morgan scored 102/120 which comes out to 85%) but two wonderful things took place in this Swiss that made me forget all of the bad stuff.

We start out by losing our first three matches by scores of 3-23, 6-20 and 2-21. There is one match to go before lunch. No worries I think, there are 37 other teams playing in this event, there must be one team that we can beat. We sit down to start match four and discover that we are playing against the best team in Saskatchewan that features the very strong partnerships of Andy and Curley Anderson playing with Glen and Cindy Cossey. As badly as this Sunday is going, I suddenly find myself in a match that I care about winning. I think to myself, "If we can just win this one match against this one team then I don't care if we lose every match after lunch."

The bridge is exciting and after we compare scores I look down to see something on my scorecard that I don't recall seeing before. Take a look below and see if you can notice what it is.

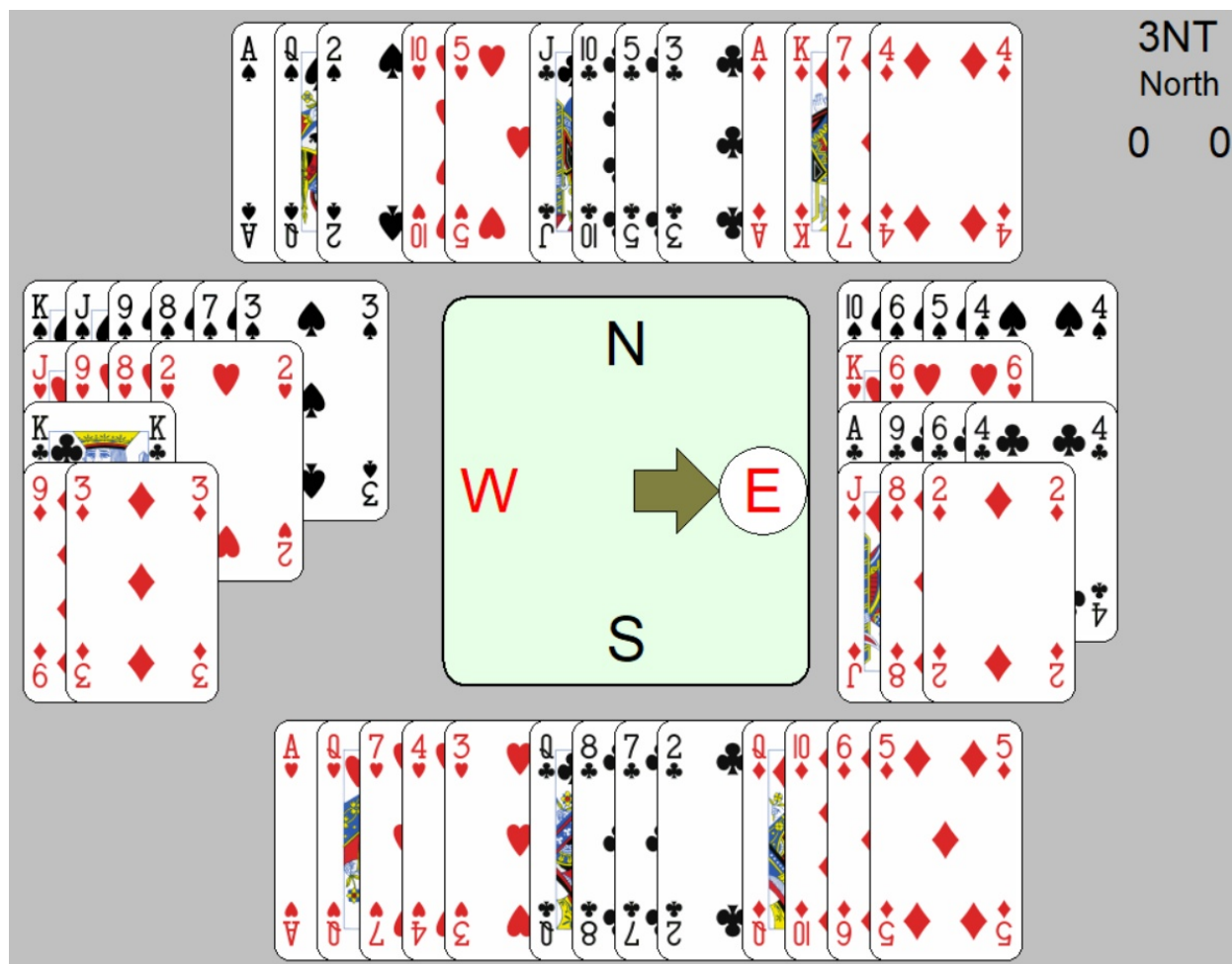
#	Contract	+ Score -		+ IMPs -	
29	4HE	700		3	
30	4SE	50		3	
31	INTs	120		1	
32	2HE		50	2	
33	2HW	140		5	
34	3NT	100		2	
35	INTW	300		4	
Match #	(4)	vs	63	100	
VPs Curr		VPs Runng			

We won IMPS on every board and my wish came true. We have beaten the best team in Saskatchewan in spectacular fashion!

The other half of my wish came true as well. We came back from lunch and lost our last three matches by scores of 11-38, 9-35 and 9-26. What could there possibly be to write home about on an afternoon like this? Well, for me all it takes is one beautiful bridge hand to make the whole afternoon memorable in a good way. Here is a two sentence summary of the hand that you are going to see below.

Q: If the opponents have a 10 card spade fit, is it ever right to double them for penalty at the 2 level?

A: Yes it is on this board unless you happen to be good enough to make 3NT with the N/S cards.



At our table West opened 2S, I passed in the North, East passed and Pam balanced with a double in the South. I decided to leave the double in and we set 2S by 1 for an easy +200.

3NT (for +400) is my other choice and it makes based on the cards shown here. I am not good enough to figure out how to do that even when looking at all the cards. Perhaps you are smarter than I am. Assume that East helps you out by leading the four of spades.

I love this hand because I was able to recognize (thanks to insights from Pamela Keim and Kevin Dwyer) that it was right to double 2S for penalty in a set of circumstances where it is **almost** never right to double for penalty. This left me feeling like a genius because it won our team 6 IMPS when the other table was in 3NT going down 1. Then, when I studied the hand after the match was over, I realized that I wasn't a genius after all as a real genius would have bid 3NT, made it and won his team 10 IMPS. This genius/idiot dynamic is part of the long term appeal that bridge has for me.

How to make 3NT:

- 1) Win the spade lead with your Queen while throwing a club from the dummy and then cash your four diamond tricks. Watch what West discards very carefully.
- 2) If West discards 2 spades then you can set up a club for your ninth trick.
- 3) If West discards 1 spade and 1 heart then you can set up two hearts for your ninth and tenth tricks.
- 4) If West discards the King of clubs then you can set up two clubs for your ninth and tenth tricks.

More of what it is was like for Pamela (with more pictures taken by Jason):

"Let's go home through the Rockies." says Pam. With great excitement Jason replies: *"Oh no, Let's go home through Trail, the place you grew up in"*. (Actually, I lived in Tadanac a community 3.12 km north of Trail). *"There is a bridge game every Monday in Trail. Who knows who you might meet up with."* Off to Trail we went.



On the way to Trail we drove by Skaha Lake where Pam's father owned a cabin with a view like this. (2)

I had forgotten how small Trail is. There are only two main streets in downtown Trail. Standing on either of them you can more or less see from one end of the city to the other. Trail seemed back in the past; today was “old-fashioned” Monday where many of the businesses were closed. The bridge game was held in a church across the street from the church where my two older sisters were married in the same year, six months apart.



Pre-teen Pammy climbed up and down these 350 stairs twice a day when she lived in Tadanac.

It was a small [game](#), three and one-half tables. The kind of game where everyone knows everyone, and apparently everyone knows the rules too. One of the players explained it to me with complete confidence: *“We all know the rules, so if there’s a need to call the director, someone at the table will state the rule.”*

And sure enough, when an infraction occurred at our table, he simply announced the ruling like a town crier. No director needed. No hesitation. Just Trail-style governance.

On the game roster, I was listed as **Pamela Kiem**, and Jason was listed as **Joan Arrivee**.

Standing there, looking at our new identities, I couldn’t help thinking: *Can we really trust that everyone knows the rules?*

During the last round, one of the players looked over at me and said, *“So, you grew up in Trail — well, Tadanac, actually. Is that right?”*

“Yes,” I said.

“Did you attend Tadanac Elementary School?”

“Yes, I did.”

Then he asked, *“Were you from the family that had all those sisters?”*

I laughed. *“Yes, I am.”*

He nodded, thinking back. Then he told me he was from one of the outlying districts and had also gone to Tadanac Elementary. *“I was from Duncan Dairy,”* he said.

Wow. That was exciting for me. I told him, *“I used to go to Duncan Dairy and take your horse for a ride — as did my sisters.”*

He had absolutely no interest in hearing this. Not even a flicker. I thought he might like to know where his horse had disappeared to back in the day, but he wasn’t listening at all. He was lost in his own thoughts.

Then he spoke again.

“Was one of your sisters named Alexis?”

“Yes,” I said.

And suddenly everything made sense. Years later — decades later — this man still carried such warm memories of my sister, whom he had met when they were about six or seven. He couldn’t think about anything else. The moment swallowed him whole.

It was touching, unexpected, and strangely moving — a tiny Trail connection that had survived a lifetime.

Alexis was my youngest sister and my best friend for all of my life. She died a few years ago. Losing her broke my heart. Sitting there in that old church, listening to a stranger talk about his memories of her — memories from when they were only six or seven — was a wonderful, unexpected gift.

He wasn’t interested in hearing about his horse, Duncan Dairy, or any of the things I remembered. He was somewhere else entirely, lost in a childhood moment that had stayed with him for decades. And that moment was Alexis.

For me, it felt like she was suddenly there again — not in the room, but in the air, in the conversation, in the way his face softened when he said her name. I got to live in her beautiful presence one more time.



On the drive out of Trail we stopped to visit Pam and Alexis's old friend the Columbia River (see [video](#)).

Medicine Hat — one more stop, one more game, one more story.



This is what the Medicine Hat bridge club looked like after the bridge game.

The Medicine Hat bridge club turned out to be in a wonderful location: Spacious, bright, with big windows looking out over the landscape. It had that welcoming, lived-in feeling that only long-standing clubs seem to have.

The entry fee was \$1.00 each — and even that was waived, because we were visitors from out of town. After the week we'd had, it felt like a small blessing. A gentle, friendly gesture at the end of a long journey.

The club had a procedure at every table that I had never seen before. Religiously, North ran the bridge mate. East ensured that the right boards were at the table, in the correct order, with the proper cards facing North. South delivered the boards to the next table at the end of each round. And West checked and approved the bridge mate. It was like watching a tiny, well-oiled machine — everyone knew their role, and everyone performed it with quiet precision.

We won the [game](#). Then we climbed back into the Jeep for the final lap home — another five hours on the road. It made for a long day: five hours to Medicine Hat, three hours of bridge, and five more hours to Regina.

Finally, the Jeep rolled up our driveway, the mountains now behind us, the long highways quiet, and the stories we'd gathered along the way feeling like small treasures tucked into the corners of our minds. Penticton had challenged us, Trail had touched my heart, Medicine Hat had welcomed us, and the road had carried us through it all. Coming home felt like closing a well-loved book — full of chapters we'll remember for a long time.