

1) How did you start playing bridge?

I had been playing Solo for many years, but didn't know anyone who played bridge. In the early seventies I was working at International Computers and I ate lunch with three friends. One day, Steve (one of the three) turned up with a pack of cards and a book - Charles Goren's "The Precision System of Bidding". (Journalists Note: He should have been sued under the trade description act, "precision bidding" was anything but)

From then on, every lunch time, we would gradually learn bridge and the precision system. Initially we dealt the cards and then all looked at the book to decide what the bidding should be. Then we progressed to having to make the first round on our own, then we discussed to subsequent bidding. So it went on until we were bidding and playing the hands. It was very gentlemanly, we only bid what Goren said we should. This all stopped when I moved departments.

Several years on, when my children had grown up a bit I decided to start playing bridge again. The first thing I did was to get hold of some books and I learnt Acol and read about the complexities of playing the hands. I then walked into Manchester BC – and that was the start of a passion which hasn't left me.

2) What was your first competitive achievement of which you were proud?

I was playing with Howard Kay in the Manchester BC Wednesday duplicate (we'd just been allowed there after several years playing on a Monday night). There was a record number of tables as eight members of the Polish national team were playing. At the end of the evening the two Polish North/South pairs finished 1st and 2nd. The two Polish East/West pairs finished 2nd and 3rd – and, yes you've guessed it, the rookies, Howard and myself were 1st East/West.

3) What part of being Chairman of MCBA was the best and the worst?

I took over the Chairman's role on the understanding that it was for strictly two years only, until the current Chair felt she had enough experience to be taken seriously. We all knew she would make a great Chairperson, and so it's turned out. So there were no really bad times. I enjoyed continuing to run the Manchester Congress, that Kevin Comrie had started and turned into a major annual event.

4) You were league secretary for many years - how did you enjoy that?

I loved it, it was hard work as there were few people who had computers, so all the communication was by mail and phone. I spent most of my lunch times on league business. I created a spreadsheet with teams down the left hand side and across the top into which I could feed the results and then press a button and it would sort the rows and columns into league positions. I was quite proud of that as I had no training in the use of spreadsheets.

5) Does any of your family play bridge, or have any bridge related stories?

None of my family play bridge. Marilyn, my wife believes that the vast majority of bridge players are crazy. They have a total inability to understand that there are people in the world who don't play bridge, don't want to learn to play bridge and have other skills and pastimes that are equally valid and rewarding.

When I was league secretary, she would sometimes get phone calls from agitated people asking for me. When she told them that I was out (probably playing bridge somewhere) they would start to explain some terrible event that had just occurred in the auction. When she was able to get a word in and explain that she doesn't play bridge, that wouldn't stop them from continuing with "yes but this is an important league match and North has passed and it was actually South to open "

Marilyn, to her credit, never lost her temper ([Journalist Note: She reserves that for Bob](#)) and was usually able to convince the person that the world would not end and that things could be sorted out tomorrow.

6) What bridge do you play now?

I only play once a week plus league matches and very rarely the odd weekend tournament.

7) You've travelled all round the world, have you ever played bridge at any of the places you've been to?

Only once (see q.5), we were in South African, in 2001, staying with friends we'd both grown up with who'd emigrated in 1965. A friend of theirs played bridge and when she heard that I did, asked if I would like to play with her. However, when I arrived at the club, she was very apologetic, for some vague reason she couldn't play with me. She paired me with an 80+ year old lady who played a 16-18 NT and little else. She bid, declared and defended with an equal amount of skill (i.e. none at all) and blamed everyone but herself for bad scores. It was an interesting, if not successful, game.

I realised afterwards that the reason the friend couldn't play with me was that her normal partner had refused to play with the 80 year old.

8) With whom is your longest partnership? And with whom do you play the most now?

My longest partnership is with Howard Kay by a long way (over thirty years) and still going. During our early years he would ring me and we would discuss the previous night's game hand by hand. He has a superb ability to remember every hand and every card played – and he still retains the detailed memory of many hands we played years ago.

Who do I play most with now? ([Journalist note: Whom!!](#))

It's a toss up between Howard (once a month at Altrincham and in the league with DASH) Irene Davies (usually once or twice a month at Cheadle Hulme) and my other regular partner is Eve Lighthill, (Cheadle monthly and occasional league matches.)

9) What is your funniest hand?

This was a board is from an early Wednesday night game at Manchester BC, the hands are irrelevant. I opened, partner responded and I rebid 1NT (15-16). Partner passed without pausing. Bernard Goldenfield lead and Howard put down an 11 count. I looked at the hand with dismay, Howard rarely made mistakes and I could only assume that he's missed a card (as was indeed the case). I decided the only way to salvage anything from this was to assume that all the missing honours lay badly and that the distribution was against us too. I therefore played the cards on that assumption and duly made my 1NT on the nose. We looked at the traveller (as this was in the days before bridge-mates) ([Journalist note: and electricity](#)) and everyone else was in 3NT plus one. Bernard turned to me and said quietly "Your partner really understands your declarer play" - I sat there red faced, saying nothing as I realised that my logic was nonsense. Fortunately I never get

downhearted for too long and soon saw the funny side. (Journalist note: Bob's logic in playing the hand was quite right. If everyone else was in 3NT+1 it makes no difference if you make 1NT, or 1NT+3, both score 0% of the match points. If only the card had been lying badly you'd have scored well indeed!)

10) What was your favourite league result?

Is this a trick question? 30-0 to us of course!

Towards the end of last season we played Proteus who were unbeaten at the top of the league. We (despite my somewhat indifferent form) were in one of the promotion places. On that night Howard and I were on fire and every decision we made was the right one. Our other pair (Eve Lighthill and Ian Kane) were also having a good night. We comfortably won 30-0, it was very satisfying.

It didn't stop Proteus from winning the rest of their matches and pipping us to the Division Two league title, but it felt like we had won a World Championship.

11) What or who have been your biggest bridge influences?

I've read many bridge books, the most influential was definitely "The Golden Principles" by Jeremy Flint and Freddie North. It contains 52 declarer play hands and 52 on defence. Some of them are ones that rarely turn up in real life - the wonderfully named Morton's Fork Coup is one. (Journalist Note: A Morton's Fork Coup is where you give the opponents one of two losing options, typically by leading through their honour. It is named after one of meanest of Henry VII's tax collectors).

It was the inspiration for my long running team's name, Morton's Spoon. However, most of the hands offer sound advice on the play of the cards. Despite the fact that it's falling apart though use, I still flick through it occasionally.

Most of my influences have been people. Jeff Smith, who also worked at ICL and when he found out that I was learning bridge, came to my desk at lunch times and discussed hands and helped me get a better understanding of bridge fundamentals.

The Wednesday night post-mortems at Manchester bridge club were both entertaining and educational. However, the most influential person is, without doubt, Howard Kay. His presence opposite me all these years has made me a far calmer, and therefore better player than I would ever have been. He ensured that I never forgot that bridge is, first and foremost, a game to enjoy.