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Esther Discusses "Why, I, Play, Duplicate, Bridge"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

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Bruce: Esther, you and I have known each other for *many* years. Probably almost as long as I have been alive. But there is one question I have wanted to ask you for MANY years. Esther, **why do you play duplicate bridge?**



Esther: Well, Bruce. That is quite an interesting question. Not many people have thought to ask me that question. But I am delighted to have this opportunity to talk about **why I love**

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by Bruce Thompson.

duplicate bridge! My reasons for loving duplicate bridge involve the experiences I have had playing bridge, primarily in my "formative" years within the Savannah Bridge Club.

You may be surprised to learn that my affection for bridge does not arise from the *numerous* intellectual challenges involving bridge probabilities, or *unusual* bridge distributions! My interest arises from *other origins*.

Bruce: Esther, could you give us a *hint* about *why* you love duplicate bridge?

Explanation #1

Esther: I was sitting at Table 3 EAST on the "B" side in a "limited" game. My RHO sitting NORTH was Pat Sewell, a player for whom I had developed immense affection and respect. She and her husband, John, had provided care for one of their sons who had terminal brain cancer. Pat and her John were elderly and not very strong physically. There were major challenges with caring for their son who at the end of his life sometimes fell.

I also knew that Pat had a very usual genetic anomaly. Pat has *only one* carotid artery. This means that blood flow to her brain is somewhat compromised. Her condition is quite rare.

At the beginning of the auction on this day Pat announced to the Table, "I am about to faint." I found this **quite unusual**. Normally when people are in distress, and realize that they are about to become *helpless*, will say, "Please, please, please take care of me once I faint and I am totally helpless."

That was *NOT* what Pat said!!! Pat said, "Please don't distress yourselves about me fainting. I will be OK." I found this quite touching.

Pat did indeed faint. Her frequent Partner, Mike Sueirro, happened to be sitting nearby at Table 2, SOUTH. Mike said, "Oh, don't worry. She does this all the time." I like Mike, but I also found this a bit unusual.

Patricia Sewell



Pat Sewell ('61) (right) and her husband **John** ('60) at the June 27, 2019 Georgia Southern University Armstrong campus' Armstrong State University 1937-1965 classes reunion.

Explanation #2

Esther: I was playing in a "Sharks and Minnows" competition in which Shark players were paired with Minnows with less experience, for mentorship purposes. My Shark Partner was Terrence. Before the competition Terrence told me about a convention that he wanted us to play: "**Texas Transfers After a 1NT Opening**". The Opener bids 1NT. The Responder bids 4H to transfer to 4S, or 4D to transfer to 4H, saying, "Partner, we will make Game in a Major, but will not make more. Please bid Game, and 'shut up'."

On Board #1 within a 3-Board Round I opened 1NT. Partner, Terrence, bid 4D. I PASSEd. It did *NOT* go well. Never PASS a Partner's "artificial" bid! Terrence did not punch me in the nose, or say anything derogatory, or tell me I was an idiot (which I was). Instead, he merely reminded me of the parameters of this convention.

On Board #3 within a 3-Board Round I opened 1NT. Partner, Terrence, bid 4H. I PASSEd. It did NOT go well. Never PASS a Partner's "artificial" bid! Terrence did not punch me in the nose, or say anything derogatory, he merely reminded me of the parameters of this convention. The other Minnow at the Table, Sandy, sitting NORTH, turned to me and said, "Bruce, thank you so much for teaching me this lesson!!! Thanks to you, I will *NEVER* forget how to bid the '**Texas Transfers Convention**' !!!"

There is an ethic within bridge, or at least within some ACBL bridge clubs, about service. This ethic is about *mentoring* newer players, even at GREAT and PAINFUL sacrifice to oneself!



Terry Kessler

Terrence "Terry" Kessler, according to Esther, is "the kindest human person I have ever known." Terry, a lawyer, retired in December, 2016 as the CEO of the Sisters of Charity in Cleveland Ohio. For nearly 50 years Terry maintained a Partnership with Roger Neds despite living in different regions of the country.

Explanation #3

Esther: I was playing on a Wednesday in a once-a-week duplicate competition that the Savannah Bridge Club held at one of the Savannah Landings Association Clubhouses. It was late morning. It was A Swiss Teams competition. The Director was Veronica. She was the *original owner* of the ACBL Sanction for the Savannah Bridge Club.

I was in front of the Director's table. The Director's table was backlite by sunlight. One of the Savannah Directors, Roger, approached me and inquired whether I might be interested in becoming an ACBL Director and directing Novice games, and teaching a lesson before each Novice game.

Veronica's eyes got wide in *utter surprise*. She was utterly *shocked!* But she was "fast"! And she quickly "processed" the situation. And she quickly surmised that this was a "*genius*" move by Roger.

Thus, Esther became an ACBL Director. And Esther directed Novice game before Savannah Clubhouse burned down, and the

pandemic. And during the pandemic Esther directed BBO "limited" games and emailed out written lessons since in-person lessons were not possible.

And then Esther began posting all these lessons on her bridge website. And thus was born Esther!

Esther says...

Esther: Bridge provides *NUMEROUS* intellectual challenges. Dealing with "split" probabilities. "Drop" probabilities. *Numerous* conventions. Signaling. Bridge is *endlessly* intellectually stimulating!

But for me duplicate bridge is about people, and "social" connections! That's what bridge is really about! Not probabilities! Not conventions! People!!!

Explanation #4

Esther: I was afforded the opportunity to take bridge lessons with Marla Chaikin, a Savannah Bridge Club player who in 2019 became an ACBL bridge Emerald Life Master (7,500+ MPs). Marla on occasion teaches 4 students at a time in very special lessons. She prepares Boards in advance of the lessons. Each lesson is about 2 hours in length.

Marla kibitzes and comments during both the bidding and the play of the Hand. The intriguing thing is that Marla has 3 or 4 small dogs who also monitor her students' bridge bidding and play during her lessons.

The dogs would become quite agitated if you made stupid bidding or play decisions and would "nip" at your ankles if you made any really dumb decisions.

I *never* succeeded in determining whether (1) Marla has taught the dogs how to play bridge or (2) was secretly "signaling" the dogs to bite our ankles when she detected our mistakes.

But I learned *more* in these 11 lessons than I have ever learned in any other instructional session. And for this I am eternally grateful.

Some Savannah Bridge Club members call Marla "Yoda" in respect for her prowess. And Bruce adopted the BBO User Name "YodaJunior" in honor of Yoda.



Marla “Yoda” Chiakin

You may also be interested in Esther’s discussion of *how ACBL Clubs are “owned”*, and how these *ownership structures* may create incentives that either prioritize the incomes of Club/“sanction” owners or the interests of the bridge players:

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/BridgeDead.pdf>