



*Kathleen Vishner*

# SURVIVING DUPLICATE BRIDGE

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# **SURVIVING DUPLICATE BRIDGE**

**The First 23.69 Points**

**By Kathleen Vishner**

*This little book is dedicated to—*

*All the teachers of bridge – that you may better understand the mind of a beginner.*

*All bridge players – that you may take pity on us beginners and forgive us our awkward plays and frequent faux pas.*

*All beginners of duplicate bridge – that you may know – I feel your pain!!*

*And to Sally Payne—*

*Whose quiet strength and unassuming manner gently touch the heart and inspire the mind.*



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# INTRODUCTION

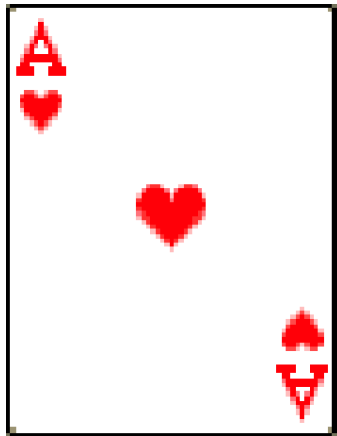
I am a bridge player. Well sort of. I have been playing duplicate on-and-off since June 2007 and as of today, May 31, 2011, I have managed to amass 23.41 points. No wait. That's not right. The American Contract Bridge League hasn't gotten my latest .28, so really I have 23.69 points. Yea! And I tell you, all of these points—every single one of them—were hard-earned by me with just the slightest bit of help from that goddess known to all as “Beginners’ Luck.”

As I'm sure you've probably guessed from this, most folks I am privileged to play with are considerably more skilled in the game of bridge than I am. They have an elegance of play that I sense more than understand, and a practiced ease to their game that I can only hope to one day acquire. But it occurred to me that maybe these players don't remember their first 23.69 points, or their first 100 points, or even their first 4,000 points! Maybe before I go out and set the bridge world on fire, I am in a unique position to take them back in time and share with them the reasoning (so to speak) that goes behind the behavior and play of someone struggling to learn the game. Maybe I can help them to remember the obstacles and frustrations that they too may have faced early on, and in so doing help them to appreciate just how far they've come in their mastery of the game.

And to all of you fellow beginners out there? This book is for you, too. It is my hope that you can relate to the challenges described in these pages, smile, and know that you are not alone.

# PART I

## Pre-Point Play





## PRE-POINT PLAY

### HOW I GOT INTO THIS

I began playing duplicate bridge at the request of my husband, Andy. We had just retired and he thought it might be fun for us to partner together. My first reaction to this suggestion was, *What a terrible idea!* I had played “party” bridge about 35 years ago with my first husband, and he had a tendency to yell when I made a mistake. Since I made many, many mistakes, he yelled a lot. This lasted for all of about two months and I never played again. Shortly thereafter we were divorced. So you can understand my reluctance here. I mean why tempt fate? It was just dumb luck that Andy and I got together in the first place, because we sure didn’t start off on the right foot.

### HOW I MET MY PARTNER

I met Andy at work. I was at the copy machine with a ton of paper, all stapled-up into little packets of various sizes, so I couldn’t just run everything through the sheet feeder and be done with it. Nope. Instead, I had to *unstaple* all the little packets, leaf through them, decide what should be copied, and *then* maybe I could run a few pages through. This was not a happy task. Still, someone, somewhere, had decreed it necessary and I was conscientiously and methodically slogging through, when up to the machine comes Andy—and without so much as a “how do you do”—he rudely asks “Are you going to copy *all* of those papers?” This, as you can imagine, did not go over well. Any number of unkind thoughts tumbled through my mind. I looked at my mountain of papers. I looked across the machine and over to him. He must have read my mind. “I suppose I could come back later,” he said, and off he went.

But even then I noticed that Andy was (and still is) cute. On top of that he had this infectious laugh that would barrel down the halls and burst into the offices commanding your attention and cheering you up, whether you wanted cheering up or not. So, reluctantly, I forgave him his copy-machine gaffe and started asking around about him. No, he wasn’t married. No, he wasn’t gay. No, he wasn’t an ax murderer. In fact, the *only* thing my co-workers thought was wrong with the guy—and this was said to me in a whispered voice—was that he was, *gasp*, an *Atheist*. Well I could live with that.



Shortly thereafter he agreed to go with me to a baseball game (yes ladies, I asked *him* out) and that night it rained harder than it had in 23 years. I naturally took this to be a very bad omen. Obviously, God didn't want me dating an *Atheist*. Andy of course didn't believe in omens, bad or otherwise, and asked me out the next time, and the next, and the next. Unfortunately, it didn't take long for us to realize that we had *nothing* in common.

For instance: I like steak. Andy likes seafood. I like timeshares. Andy likes camping. I like to walk around a lake on a nice, level, paved path. Andy likes to hike over the rocks in the woods. My dreams are filled with color and language. Andy's dreams are filled with, well I don't know what exactly, but they're certainly *not* filled with color and language. He describes them as being filled with pure thought—whatever that means.

And even in our similarities, we're different. We both graduated college in Philosophy, but I got a Bachelor's degree with an emphasis in Religion, whereas he completed all but his dissertation for a PhD in Logic. While he finds my studies to be meaningless, I find *his* studies to be non-emotive, dry, irrelevant, formal, boring, and abstract. Later on, I became an accountant who tended to detail, while later still, Andy became an accountant who worked the "big picture."



Andy

Yet, despite these differences, about a year after our first date, when I was 43 years old and Andy was 52, he proposed. A short six weeks later (I'm no dummy) we were married in the atrium of Andy's townhouse. A Baptist-preacher colleague of ours presided over the non-denominational wedding before Andy's orthodox Jewish brother and sister, and my Irish Catholic family. Methodists, Atheists, Catholics, Agnostics, Jews, Presbyterians, blacks and whites were in all attendance. It was a lovely, lovely service.

And you know, as it turned out, we have a wonderful marriage. So maybe instead of thinking that bridge could harm it, I should believe that bridge could become a shared interest—a common bond, as it were. It's possible, I suppose, isn't it? I mean, it *is* just a card game—right?

## MAJOR ISSUES

Well we talked about it and we both agreed that Andy would teach me how to play. Not only had he played duplicate before, but he'd also taught various subjects to various groups of people throughout his college days and accounting career. Also, he's a laid-back kind of guy, and usually very, very, patient. All things considered, Andy seemed a logical choice to be my bridge instructor.

So the first thing Andy decided to teach me were some basic bidding rules. He would deal out a hand and I would try to bid it.

This could have gone better.

### Practice Hand #1

ME  
♠ Q J 10 2  
♥ 4 3  
♦ A J 9 8 3  
♣ 7 5

*And the bidding goes:*

ANDY 1♦  
ME 2♦

I bid 2 Diamonds and that's the "winning" bid. We lay down our hands.

**Andy:** "You want to bid your Spades with this hand, Kathy, your 4-card major."

**Me:** "But you told me before to raise a *minor* suit with 6-to-9 points and 4-to-5 card support."

**Andy:** "And that *is* what you do—except when you have a 4-card major."

### Practice Hand #2

ME  
♠ A Q 6 4  
♥ Q 8 6 2  
♦ 9 7 3  
♣ 8 7

*And the bidding goes:*

ANDY 1♦  
ME 1♠  
ANDY 2♠

I bid a Spade and the “winning” bid is 2 Spades. We lay down our hands.

**Andy:** “There are 4 Hearts in your hand.”

**Me:** “Uh huh.”

**Andy:** “Well with a hand like this, you want to bid your Hearts.”

**Me:** “I don’t like my Hearts.”

**Andy:** “You don’t have to *like* them. When you have *both* four Hearts *and* four Spades, you bid your Hearts first.”

**Me:** “But why can’t I bid my Spades? My Spades are better. What’s wrong with my Spades?”

**Andy:** “There’s nothing wrong with your Spades, but the *rule* is that you bid your Hearts first.”

### Practice Hand #3

ME  
♠ K Q J 4 2  
♥ 10 8 7 6 2  
♦ 9 7 3  
♣ -----

*And the bidding goes:*

ANDY 1♦

ME 1♥

ANDY 4♥

I bid a Heart and the “winning” bid is 4 Hearts. We lay down our hands.

**Andy:** “Now *here* you should have bid your Spades.”

**Me:** “But you *just told me* with four cards in Hearts and Spades to bid Hearts.”

**Andy:** “Yes, but Kathy look. You have *five* cards in Hearts and Spades.”

**Me:** “Yeah. . . So. . .? If I got five I gotta have four.”

**Andy:** “Well sure, but that’s not the point. With *five* cards—not four—with *five* cards you bid your Spades.”

### Final Practice Hand

ME  
♠ J 9 6 4 2  
♥ 3  
♦ Q J 9 6 5 2  
♣ 8

*And the bidding goes:*

ANDY 1♣

ME 1♠

ANDY 2♠

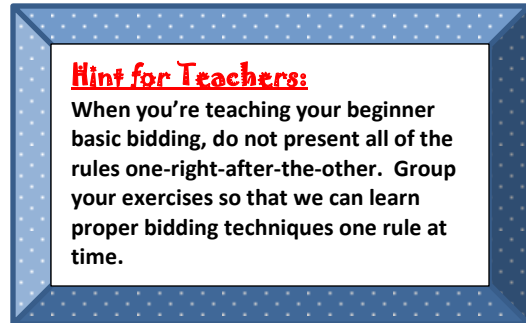
I bid a Spade and the “winning” bid is 2 Spades. We lay down our hands.

**Andy:** “Ah, you should have bid your Diamonds.”

**Kathy:** No response.

**Andy:** “You get it? Kathy? You get why you should have bid your Diamonds?”

**Kathy:** “This isn’t working.”



### LEARNING HOW TO PLAY

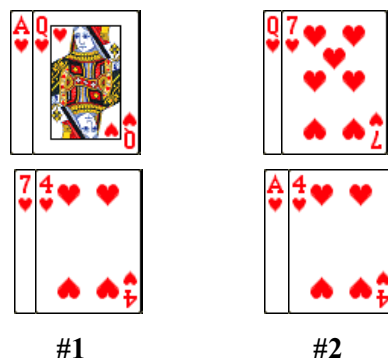
So I learned how to play bridge online. In case you don’t know, the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) lets you download free bridge software— “Learn to Play Bridge” and “Learn to Play Bridge 2” from its website at [www.acbl.org](http://www.acbl.org). (You can download it even if you’re not an ACBL member.) This, to me, seemed a perfect way to study—I could learn at my own pace and in my own way, and best of all, if I got mad at the computer I could just shut it off.

Now I found this software to be—comprehensive. It approaches bridge by breaking it down into two components: bidding and play-of-the-hand (which the program calls play-of-the-cards, but no matter).

The bidding chapters, and especially the exercises, are fabulous. They are straight-forward, clear, and very, very, helpful. It is the play-of-the-hand chapters that get a little dicey.

The program introduces play-of-the-hand by using card combinations. I *hate* card combinations.

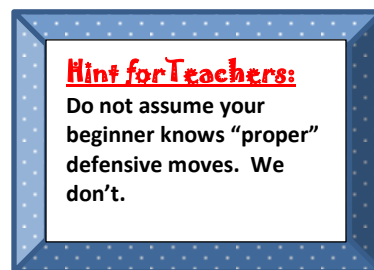
Take, for instance, these two:



Card combination #1 is easily learned—lead small to the Queen. Got it. But the second one—the second one is not straight-forward at all.

Teachers out there, let me tell you right now, with the second card combination my choice of lead is most definitely NOT the Ace. I mean, why *not* lead low to the Queen? It's what I did in card combination #1. Or why not lead the Queen itself? What's wrong with that?

No, what the play of the Ace assumes, and assumes incorrectly, is that I know the *defender's* proper play of the King!! Well how am I going to know that? Defense isn't covered until "Learn to Play Bridge 2!"



And just so you know, if it was *me* defending *you* and you played low to the Queen, I'd play low right after you. Even before learning "second hand low," this is the play that makes the most sense to me, right now, at this stage of my bridge education.

What would seem to work better with card combinations, and what may be the quicker and easier way to learn them, is not to go too much into "why," but rather to employ the mantra:

MEMORIZE FIRST. LEARN LATER.

If you try to tell me *why* to lead such and such, I'm going to do just what I did earlier—I'm going to say "Well why not do *this* instead?" And your explanation is going to be over my head.

On the other hand, if you tell me to just memorize a card combination, I'm going to say, "Okay."

Finally, the ACBL program spends a couple of chapters discussing and illustrating a number of strategies for playing trump and no-trump contracts. While it's helpful to read them through once or twice, going in four chapters from learning there are 13 cards in a suit to learning the "Hold Up Play" is a bit like going from zero to sixty in three seconds flat—it's a tad dizzying and far too fast for me.

\* \* \*

## THE FIRST 23.69 POINTS

Bridge partnerships can be fun. We all know that. Of course, they can also be difficult, maddening, disappointing, and frustrating. We all know that, too. But when the players of these partnerships are also spouses—well that’s when things can get downright tricky—and only some of us know that.

In this book, Kathleen Vishner shares with you the highs and lows of learning duplicate bridge while partnering with her ever-patient husband, Andy. Follow his attempts to teach her the game himself (not a good idea) and share the emotion that somehow escaped his notice when Kathy played her very first game.

Come on along and experience again for yourself the initial shock of a penalty double or the bewilderment at the sheer number of rules that can be unwittingly broken. Peek behind the scenes to see the workings of some fabulous bridge clubs, and get the inside scoop on what directors really think of “slow play.”

And for you teachers out there—helpful “Hints” throughout the book will remind you of the beginner’s mindset and suggest techniques to help students learn and become more comfortable with the game. Many illustrative bridge hands pinpoint typical areas of confusion and explain the reasoning behind the many misunderstandings of a less experienced player.

This book tells a delightful story, always punctuated with humor, and one that can be appreciated by bridge players of all experience levels. So take off your shoes, put up your feet, and enjoy the read.



**KATHLEEN VISHNER** (Arizona) received her degree in Philosophy and was fortunate to be hired at the local Whataburger. Finding advancement opportunities limited (and rent monies short), she reluctantly changed career paths and became—of all things—a Certified Public Accountant. Thousands of business reports and countless financial statements later, Kathy gleefully retired and now spends time in more whimsical pursuits—like learning bridge. She lives in Green Valley, Arizona with her husband, Andy, and their two perfect cats, Bob and Annabelle.

