

WANT TO LIFT YOUR SPIRITS

The following appeared in the US ACBL Bridge Bulletin. While I haven't sought their consent to reproduce it I am sure they would want the message contained in the article spread far and wide.

WHAT BROWN DID FOR ME

Leah Jay

Eddie Brown made me a Life Master. If you don't know what that means, you're not a bridge player. To a bridge player, becoming a Life Master ranks in life experiences with birth, death, marriage and getting your kid into Yale.

The road to Life Master began for me in 1968. I had begun to play at a local duplicate bridge club, I was not very good but I was eager. I soon realized that the only way to get better was to play with a partner who was better than I was.

There were some drawbacks. You had to be willing to put up with the yelling, the embarrassment and the abuse. But how did I find someone who would put up with my mistakes he couldn't get a room at the hotel.

He had to sleep at the YMCA. He couldn't eat in a decent restaurant. When he needed to use a restroom, he had to find one that would accept him." Yes, Eddie was black. As we became better friends, I found out he worked at the main Dodge plant in Dearborn MI. He wore a brown suit, slightly ravelled around the cuffs, every Monday night. He always carried a paperback in his pocket. Nietzsche, Hegel, Karl Marx.

After a series of Monday nights, I realized I was improving. I had joined the American Contract Bridge League and was accumulating masterpoints each time I played - a quarter of a point one night, a third of a point another.

Then I got a notice in the mail. The Southern Michigan Bridge Association was staging its fall tournament at the National Guard Armory in Pontiac. A two-session event. I asked Eddie if he would play with me and he said yes. I was really excited. A couple of days later I was playing with another partner when I noticed one of the Southern Michigan players at another table.

"Hey, Fred," I said, "I'm coming to play in your tournament next Saturday."

"Great, Leah. We're expecting a big turnout. Also serving dinner between sessions. Who are you playing with?"

"Eddie Brown," I replied. Fred looked at me thoughtfully.

"Oh, you can't do that."

"Why not?"

"We don't allow blacks to play in our tournaments."

To say that I was stunned would be an understatement.

"How can you prevent it?"

"We just won't sell him an entry. He wouldn't even want to try. He might be subjected to some unpleasantness before he even got in the door. You understand."

"Yes, I understand," I said, and made my way back to my table.

All that day and the next I thought about what I had been told. What to do? Then it came to me, and I called the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. I talked to a very nice lady there. She knew nothing about the structure of bridge tournaments, but she pointed out two factors.

"You say the tournament is at the Armory. That's federal property. Furthermore, is this tournament sanctioned by a national organization?"

"Yes," I replied, "The American Contract Bridge League."

"Then you call them. Ask to speak to the legal counsel. Explain your situation. See if they will take action. Then get back to me with the reply." And so I did. I called New York. Asked for the legal

counsel. A man named Al Landy came on the line. To all you bridge players, the name Landy should be familiar. We all play Landy over 1NT. It was that Landy. I explained my problem.

He replied, "Leah, this is the first order of business of the ACBL. All our tournaments will be fully integrated or they will not be sanctioned. Give me the number of the Pontiac director. You'll be hearing from either him or me." Two days went by. The Civil Rights lady called and seemed satisfied with my progress. "Keep me informed," she said.

That night I got the call. A man from the Pontiac unit said, "Just to let you know, our tournaments are now fully integrated. Everyone is welcome, including your partner." So far so good. Now I had to tell Eddie. I called and asked him to play that night.

After the game I asked him to come out to the car. There was something I had to tell him. I outlined the events leading up to this conversation. He was silent. "Eddie," I said, "we can't all be Jackie Robinson. It might be very unpleasant. What do you think?"

"We will go," he said. And we did.

After that, everything came to a swift climax. There were no problems at the door. No problems as we played. At dinner, the ladies served Eddie as though he was, if not an honoured guest, more like just one of the gang.

After that, Eddie and I went around Detroit, integrating all the bridge clubs that had formerly been restricted. One of my girlfriends, who assured me I was going to get a brick through my front window, later said she had been a fool and asked if Eddie would play with her.

Meantime, I was accumulating masterpoints in increasing numbers. Then came the great day Eddie and I played in a regional in Port Huron MI and won the Mixed Pairs. We earned nearly 30 red points, enough to put me over the top. I had a dream, and the dream came true.

Shortly after that, Eddie invited me to his daughter's wedding. I was the only white face in the church. Then I moved to New York and never saw Eddie again. During last year's political campaign, Eddie was on my mind a lot. I wish I could talk to him about the president of the Harvard Law Review who is now America's chief executive.

I wish I could hash over a few hands with him. I hope he is well and happy and still spreading words of wisdom about negative doubles and inverted minors. Where are you, Eddie? I'd like to shake your hand and rejoice together.

We've got a brother in the White House.

The author, a Silver Life Master, was a bridge writer for the Detroit News and wrote other articles for the News and the Detroit Free Press. She also worked as public relations director for the Dallas Aces and hosted a match between the Aces and the Italian all-stars at her home in Huntington Woods MI as part of the Omar Sharif Bridge Circus Tour: She now lives in New York City.

HOW TO BE A GOOD PARTNER, AND OPPONENT

Barry Rigal

Anyone who knows me, be they a friend or enemy, will smile inwardly when they see an article from me on this subject.

As someone who is not known to greet adversity with a smiling face, it is ironic that I have been asked to contribute a thought or two on what one should or should not do at the table. Nonetheless, if you bear in mind the preacher's advice to "Do what I say not do what I do" you may not only have a more enjoyable tournament, but you may also help your partner and opponents to do the same.

BEFORE THE EVENT STARTS

If you are an inexperienced player, please do not get overly concerned about the idea of playing against the big boys. They play bridge a little better than you, but you may be pleasantly surprised at the fact that they rate to be at least as well behaved as your regular opponents. The one difference is that they may know the rules better than the players in your regular game. But the likelihood that you will encounter a problem is truly very small.