

The Boxer

Grew up in Chicago. Has two twin sons at 21 of age with his former wife and partner, Christal Henner, with whom he has won the Vanderbilt in 2007.

Welland is a former floor trader at the American Stock Exchange and a semi-retired wine producer/importer.

He moved to Europe some years back and currently represents Germany with partner in bridge and crime (though not officially, but he is still hopeful) Sabine Auken. The pair travels almost half the year playing bridge (and a bit without) and in between he spends a lot of time in Copenhagen, a city he describes as the best in the world (when the sun is shining).

Among his many bridge titles are the Reisinger, Spingold and Vanderbilt several times, the last two with Sabine Auken, with whom he also won the European Open Pairs in 2013, the World Mixed Teams in 2014 and the World Open Pairs in Wroclaw in 2016.

He dreams of one day winning the Yeh Bros – and if not, the Bermuda Bowl or the Rosenblum.

By Christina Lund Madsen

*"When I left my home and my family
I was no more than a boy
In the company of strangers
In the quiet of the railway station
Running scared"*

(Simon & Garfunkel, The Boxer, 1970)



Most people regard Roy Welland as a man of the world; he can tell you the grape and origin of a wine with a single sip. He has won so many bridge titles they need their own fact box. Roy enters an argument as if he were in a boxing ring. Sometimes I suspect him of defending a point of view he doesn't share simply because he loves the fight, and he is so knowledgeable regardless of the topic it is hard for his opponents to find counterarguments, and eventually they give up.

Roy never gives up. That is how he survived.

Team picture

The organizers plan to take group pictures of each team. We will do this over a period of three days (2nd-4th July), twice per day, before the first round starts in morning and afternoon.

Here is the sequence of every team. When it is your turn, please go to the backdrop in the playing hall, gathering all your teammates and wearing the team uniform. Thank you for your cooperation!

9:15, 4th July

CHINESE TAIPEI

HKTW

JAPAN

NEW ZEALAND

AUSTRALIA

15:20, 4th July

GERMANY

INDIA

EGYPT

SOUTH AFRICA

Beneath the glamorous surface rests a story of a teenage boy who fled home and became a man in the streets of Chicago and New York.

A life full of Bridge and champagne

Today Roy lives a life many might envy him. He travels the world playing bridge, having dinners and champagne with Sabine Auken, his partner in love and crime, and together they have won more than most of us dare to dream of.

He has an almost childish joy of history and travelling. Driving to an airport in Italy, he has to stop on the way by a small village renowned for its beautiful church. At last year's Yeh Bros Cup in Tokyo he got up at 5 in the morning to make the Fish Market before the flight back home.

He is very smart and smooth. He can be as charming as fierce and a tough opponent at the bridge table in more than one way. He is creative and unpredictable, even to himself. When he is grinding, there is no stopping him. When he is not... well, let's just say that he is less successful. He wants to win even if he is playing a friendly pro/am with a group of nobles in Denmark.

Roy is tall, lean and has an energetic walk. He enjoys exercising and makes an effort to stay fit. Recently he has been biking around in Copenhagen, and every morning he goes for a run – even at bridge tournaments. Most would call him very fit for his age of 55.

If you want to get the check, you have to fight Roy first. Or beat him to the bar, both equally challenging.

Though he has been adopted by Germany and fallen in love with Copenhagen, he is still American at heart. He follows (and in recent years makes fun of) American politics and reads every news page every day.

In a discussion about whether the ten best teams from the European Championships would beat the ten best teams from the US trials, Roy speaks of his countrymen and occasional opponents with admiration and respect. Though it was a discussion he

didn't win. Sabine repeatedly told him they would have to agree to disagree and eventually he folded. He only folds against Sabine.



Winning the gold medal of open pairs in 2016 World Bridge Games (Wroclaw, Poland)

At the recent European Championships I meet Roy on the way to the venue. We talk briefly about how our teams are doing (his team Germany had just lost significantly to Denmark) and he says with a big, proud smile: "Did you hear what Sabine did to Lars and Dennis (*Blakset and Bilde, ed.*)?" And he tells a story about how she snuck a trick past Lars Blakset and endplayed him afterwards to just make her 3 club-contract.

When Roy tells stories (and he has enough of them to entertain a few months, like the time his infant son hungrily grabbed Hillary Clinton's breast) his very large hands accompanies every word. Form circles and shapes in the air. He always appears cheerful, besides the first 15 minutes after a bad bridge match.

Though he talks a lot, he doesn't tell much about himself. Most people who know Roy well will probably nod their heads at the above description and say "Yes, that's Roy". But people only know Roy as well as Roy allows them too.

Mother where art thou?

Roy's parents divorced while she was pregnant with

him. She moved from Chicago back to Wisconsin with Roy's three older siblings and her unborn baby boy.

"A year after when I was 6 months old she drove back to my father's house and asked if he would mind looking after the kids for a little bit because she had to get some stuff in order. I think she was going nuts. I don't know."

Roy's father was a math professor at the university and had remarried to one of his math students. They decided to sue for custody of the four kids and went to court and gained custody of Roy and his older brother and two older sisters. Roy was less than a year old at the time.

"I didn't know my mother was my stepmother. They decided they would just pretend it was my real mother. I don't think it was ill intended, I'm just not sure it was such a good idea," he says with half a smile.

How come your real mother didn't get to see you?

"She came to the house once but I didn't know who she was. I don't know if she was the most stable person. I don't know her well. I spent two weeks with her when I was 12 and then I ran into her in New York and invited her over when I had kids. But I didn't think her presence was a benefit. So I didn't invite her back."

6 years later Roy's father and stepmother had a daughter of their own. But the child was severely mentally retarded, and that caused the woman Roy thought was his mother a lot of stress.

"It was her first daughter and the year she was born she stayed in her bedroom for almost a full year hoping the baby would recover. But that child never walked, never talked, never fed herself. She stayed in a home for most of her life and died when she was 30."

A year later they had another daughter, this time a healthy one. But the family life suffered from the burden of DeeDee, the firstborn. When Roy was about 9, his parents divorced, and his stepmother took custody of the younger daughter and left the

mentally retarded one with Roy's father and siblings.

When did you discover she wasn't your real mother?

"That night. I said "Where is mom?" "Well, she left and she is not coming back." I said "What?" They said, "Well, don't worry, she wasn't your real mother anyhow." He laughs at the irony.

"I was the only one who didn't know and this was a big secret everybody had been keeping from me? I was only about 9 years old. It's bad enough that my own mother – or the one I thought was my mother – wasn't coming home, I found out that my whole family has been lying to me for years. (he laughs again). It was tough. It was tough."

While you thought she was your mother, did she love you? Treat you well?

"I have a memory of my 4th or 5th birthday. It was a really fun birthday, I got some cars I really wanted and there is a picture of me bearhugging my stepmother and everybody looking so happy. I kinda remember that day like: "Oh, Everything is just perfect." After that it was the end of the perfect."

Leaving home and family

Besides being a severe financial burden for the math professor having a mentally ill daughter in an institution, it was an emotional burden for his children. DeeDee came home every weekend and needed constant attention, so they took turns watching after her. It was not a happy home.

"The environment in the house when I was a kid was so miserable nobody ever wanted to be there. So we stayed away as much as we could."

Roy and his two older sisters and older brother never spent any time together after that. Their goal was to spend as little time at home as possible.

"My father did a very bad job after that divorce. He was upset. Heartbroken. And... He is a selfish guy. Instead of focusing on the well-being of his children, he was bemoaning his misfortune. "Why did she leave me..." He never talked to us about it or said: "Come on, it's a tough time, we can make it through."

Two of Roy's older siblings quickly found excuses to leave home, and Roy soon followed.

"I was not gonna get stuck there by myself, so I just left and never came back. I moved in with my second oldest sister for a few months and then I just went off on my own from then on."

How old were you then?

"13."

How do you just go off of your own?

"Sometimes I broke into the basement of my own house, I used to leave the window open so I had a place to sleep without having to go to my room."

Did you have any contact to your father after you left home?

"Very little. I didn't speak to him for almost ten years. I didn't want to talk to him. At some point I was in a bad financial situation in New York. I asked him to borrow 600 dollars. He didn't want to lend it to me. I never asked him for anything and he wouldn't even do that."

Yeah.

"Yeah."

We are quiet while Roy's eyes disappear in some lost memory. Roy tells most of his story with a smile and a loud, clear voice. The deeper we get into the story, the more soft his voice becomes.

"How about some more pleasant stuff?" he says back in his usual cheerful mode. I am not letting him off the hook yet."

Did he make an attempt to get you back after you left home?

"No. I don't think he cared that I wasn't there."

How did you survive in those years? Get food?

"I did whatever was necessary."

Did you go to school?

"Up onto a point, yeah. If I had some work I would do that. I stole stuff when I was young, I did a lot of bad

things. That is why I am such a good crook. I have a good eye for that. I can spot all the dishonest people. I recognize it all. That was me for my entire younger life."

He laughs and takes a sip of champagne.



Roy and Sabine at the 2018 European Championships

What kept you going in those years?

"You know, I am blessed with a lot of good fortune."

I wonder how he managed to convince himself of that.

"Even though I didn't have a complete and proper education, I was pretty well-educated. I knew more math when I was 9 than most people ever learn in their life. In America I am white, tall, and not too bad looking. I had a lot of things that most people don't have, including what I always arrogantly considered as superior mental ability. It wasn't that hard for me to get a job. I realized I was lucky, I didn't feel like.... Ok, there were some shitty parts to my life, but I realized that I was lucky."

What is your strongest memory from that period?

Pause. "I don't know." He clears his throat. "I don't know. I don't have the keenest memory of my mental thoughts at the time. I think psychologically I tried to block some of it out, so I don't know... I mean, there

were some times that were fun and many that were not ... Holidays were really depressing. Thanksgiving and Christmas when I was 13 or 14 and I had no money and just riding back and forth on the train. Luckily I never felt suicidal, but it didn't never occur to me in those days. It was really depressing."

His voice is heavy and his eyes blank.

"So now on holidays when I see a homeless person I always give them something very nice."

He shrugs with a tiny smile and his moist eyes turn away while he reaches for his champagne glass.

In your teenage years, did you have like a plan?

"No." He laughs. "Make it till tomorrow, that was always the plan. Well, I was very determined to be rich. A lot of my problems were a result of poor finance. So I had to figure out how to get rich. Along the way I adopted the attitude that I might as well live like I'm rich, cause I am going to be rich some day anyhow, so I always spent whatever amount of money I had. I had a lot of fun like that and spent a lot of time being broke."



Champagne on business class on the way back from a bridge tournament

The Bridge to Wall Street

On December 30th 1980 Roy went to New York for New Year's Eve and never came back. His mathematical skills had made him a good gambler, so he played a lot of poker, chess, backgammon, gin and found a games club in NYC on the east side with a bridge club on the 3rd floor and a poker club on the

4th floor.

For more than a year when the poker game ended at 11 in the morning, Roy would put on a suit and tie and take the subway to Wall Street to try and find a job.

"I knew when I was 8 years old I needed to work on the stock market. My father had told me about it and to me it was just more numbers and I was always very good with numbers."

One morning a girl prepared the room downstairs for the bridge and Roy was hanging out with some of the poker players.

"She asked if I knew how to play bridge, and I said I knew that if you have 16-18 points you bid a NT. Then she asked if I could fill in. So on the first hand she opened 1 diamond and I had 18 points, so I bid a NT."

The girl was Debbie Zuckerberg, today Debbie Rosenberg.

Roy told Debbie that he wanted to get a job on Wall Street and she explained how there were world class bridge players who hired a lot of bridge players to trade options on the stock exchange. When Roy heard that, he thought: "Ok, I need to learn how to play bridge so I can get the job I want."

Roy began to watch a rubber bridge game every day for 4 months and then started in a duplicate game and played every day hoping to get a job on Wall Street.

"I can blame my father for neglecting to do a lot of things, but there was one thing he did well. He was able to convey the essence of mathematics to me. My fundamentals were as good as anybody's. I always felt I understood mathematics. It was in my nature."

When Roy went grocery shopping for a family of 6 when he was 4 years old, his father told him he had to add up the prices of everything they bought, and I had to do it before the cashier finished ringing them up.

"So my mathematical education was supreme because of my father. It helped me on Wall Street, it

helped me at bridge.”

In 1987 some of the Wall Street traders heard there was a talented bridge player, so Roy was offered the opportunity to train to become a trader at the Stock Exchange. For months Roy was trailing Michael Rosenberg.

In October 1987 the stock market crashed and the person who had agreed to hire Roy went out of business.

“That was heartbreaking for me because that was all I ever wanted to do. I had spent years trying to get into that position and I finally got there, and then they yanked the carpet out from under me.”

Several months later another bridge player decided to take a chance on Roy.

“It didn’t go exactly as I hoped. It was a difficult market. I left 2-3 years later and started working in technology, then came back in 1997.”

In the mean time Roy had met and married Christal Henner through bridge, and they had just had twin sons.

“After my two boys were born in 1997 I came back to trading options with more focus than I had before and two kids I had to make sure were cared for.”

There were a lot more opportunities in the markets in 1997 and Roy finally made serious money.

That meant he did not play much bridge from 1990-2000 and never unleashed his potential. He went a few days to some nationals but didn’t play on a regular basis. The arrival of the twins didn’t make it easier.

In 2000 Roy worked with a young Brad Moss on Wall Street, and he suggested Roy that they found some good teammates and tried to make a competitive team. Roy played with Marc Jacobus and Brad played with Fred Gitelman and then they found Peter Fredin and Magnus Lindqvist and entered the Spingold in 2000 and swept away one opponent after another.

“Our team played every famous player I had heard of until we finally lost in the finals. I was again hooked

on the game and have been playing ever since. The 2001 Reisinger was my first big victory.”

In the first decade of this millennium, Roy hired and achieved great success with teams, often on a team with Christal, among some other titles, won the Vanderbilt in 2007.

“To me it made sense to hire a bridge team in 2000. I was making lots of money and didn’t play very much bridge. So my choices were to put together an amateur team and hope for the best or to hire a team of top class players. You really need some serious bridge players to be competitive.”

Roy was warned that once he started to hire teams, he would always be considered a sponsor. But growing up on trains in the suburb of Chicago, Roy did not mind being considered the sucker, after all, that’s the guys who’s getting exactly what he wants.

After the financial crisis in the years 2008-09, Roy stopped hiring teams.

“During the financial crisis I lost a lot of money. I also lost my livelihood. I really wanted to play in the Bermuda Bowl and it was very difficult to field an all-American team, because there were always others wanting the same and willing to pay more. When I was first sponsoring teams, it was cheap. Now if you want to go hire a team you have to pay a gazillion dollars.”

Today Roy lives the life he always wanted. He is not a victim of his past; on the contrary he sees it as the reason he is where he is now.

“I feel like I had a pretty unique life. Why would I trade that? Sabine and I travel together, play bridge together, have dinner together, drink champagne together. I have surprisingly few regrets about the way my life went. What doesn’t kill you only makes you stronger.”

Do you believe that?

“Of course I believe that - if you are never faced with trouble, how will you know what to do when you encounter it?”