

# Ally Carlson

## New ACBL Bronze Life Master



Ally is happy to see the opportunity to earn silver and gold points at the club level. For those who don't enjoy the luxury of traveling to tournaments, it is great.

Ally knew for a long time that she wanted to play bridge. Her appetite for the game had been whet by good friends who had become avid bridge players when they moved east. They did their best to teach Ally and her husband Dave enough of the game each time the four of them vacationed together, that they could all stumble through a game of bridge. She loved it. When she retired in 2001, she set out to find a place where she could learn the game properly.

Ally found that place. The Lethbridge Duplicate Bridge Club was offering EasyBridge lessons. "Easy" sounded good to her and although she didn't know much about duplicate bridge, she knew she was going to those lessons, and she did. At first she attended sporadically because she understood about suits, face cards and that you had to bid your hand etc., but she was soon back as lessons progressed and she devoured the book provided with the lessons. Ally couldn't wait to learn more about the game.

Through those lessons she learned a lot, met other people interested in bridge and formed congenial partnerships with Edith Deane and with Faye Ward who took some years off before recently returning to duplicate bridge.

The instructor at that time, Bruce Storey, was well prepared and knowledgeable creating an atmosphere that was welcoming for newer players. Tuesday nights were great! There was lots of laughter, lots of learning and lots of help from the many experienced members who volunteered their time.

Eventually, Ally took her first big step and played in a regular session and can remember her excitement at winning a fraction of a point. Communicating that excitement to people who didn't play duplicate bridge was challenging though. "Your prize is part of a point?" they'd ask. "Yes..." and she'd explain.

Ally was hooked though and soon had a new partner, Ruby Misak, who convinced her to join ACBL in 2006. She was equally excited by the game and soon had her playing more. In fact, as Ally headed off to bridge one day, her granddaughter, Sage, aged four at the time, looked at her quite quizzically and asked "Grandma, is that your work?"

Ally and Ruby had fun; they laughed that they would be ancient if they ever attained Life Master status, and set out to learn from books (many books), from the ACBL bulletin and from the generous players who mentored her. Sometimes the help came in the memorable form of down four, doubled and vulnerable. Now, those lessons stick!

But there were also excellent players like Gwen West, who took the time to set up lessons which reinforced Ally's understanding of conventions or play, or others, like her mentor, Clarice Santa, who stoically endured her missteps and snail-like pace. And, there were also directors who were patient in their explanations and respectful of both the experienced and the inexperienced player. All of these things made a difference.

Before long, Ally and Ruby took courage in hand and went to the Lethbridge Sectional tournament and from there ventured out to tournaments in Shelby, Helena, Whitefish, Calgary, Edmonton and even Penticton. They were in search of silver and gold. But along the way they found more.

Ally found friendships and made acquaintances with people from all over. She was also being educated by playing against so many players who knew much more than she did. And, occasionally, she would experience some success and Ally savored that; she began to realize that the goal of becoming a Life Master might be something that was, in fact, obtainable. At home, she found that she could play in Stacs and Matchpoint Games and earn more silver and gold. She did that, and gradually her little treasure trove grew. But, oh, that elusive gold...

In 2012, a Lethbridge Regional tournament was held and it was there where Ally finally jumped the hurdle and fulfilled the requirement for gold. She was ecstatic! Ally soon realized, however, that she wasn't done. Really, it was the trip; it was not just the destination. She carried on and looked forward to that next designation, Bronze Life Master, which she has now reached.

Again, Ally realizes the journey's not over. And, as she looks around, she sees that there are so many others like her, who came to bridge later in life and are now achieving those same goals as Ally had set out for herself.

Personally, though, Ally likes silver.