

Jo Murray

New ACBL Silver Life Master



Jo grew up in a small town in North Carolina and started playing bridge in junior high. She played frequently through junior high and high school. For a number of reasons, Jo rarely played in college. When she had been out of college for two years and her husband was stationed at an Army post, she noticed both a party bridge and a duplicate bridge game. Jo inquired about both and was told you had to be “really good.” so she forgot about it until a year later when she started playing socially with a friend. The friend persuaded Jo to go to the duplicate club (her first duplicate game) and assured her she was good enough. It turned out to be the annual club championship. Much to Jo’s amazement, they were “really good” and took first place. Jo soon had lots of invitations to play. It is unfortunate that the group initially was so unwelcoming to her and probably to many others as well.

Jo stopped playing bridge for a number of years after her husband was released from the military and didn’t think about it again until they were divorced about 10 years later. The now defunct Harrison Bridge Center in Contra Costa County, California, was truly a welcoming place. Jo started her own business and

there was no time for bridge. She didn’t play again until she was widowed after her second marriage. Bridge filled a void in her life but Jo didn’t meet a lot of people whom she saw outside bridge.

Jo had a full-time job, as do most people under 65, and night games were a commitment of four hours or more when you included travel time. She lived in Oakland, California and tried to establish a partnership with a friend who lived across the Bay in San Francisco. If they wanted to play in San Francisco she had to leave work at 4:30 p.m. because of the traffic. If her friend came to a game in Oakland, she didn’t get home until after midnight. She found another partner and could get home by 11 p.m. – still challenging if one needs to be at work at 8 a.m. the next day.

Jo subsequently moved to Sun Valley, Idaho, and was busy with a myriad of things. A friend urged her to play duplicate, saying “you meet such nice people here.” My reply!! “You’ve got to be kidding. The people were the worst thing about many of the others places I’ve played.” The friend was right, Sun Valley has a lot of nice bridge players, and Jo has been playing here ever since.

It still seemed to Jo that we need even more nice people who play bridge. When the long-time teacher here retired about 10 years ago, she had some friends who wanted to learn. Jo told them she would try her best if they would find four people, buy textbooks for themselves and buy the teacher’s manual for her. Her first lessons were free, since she had no idea if she could teach people to play bridge. Jo

started out with four students and ended up with 16. The Audrey Grant teacher's manual is wonderful. She now has more than 300 students and usually gives two to eight private lessons a week to beginners and lower intermediates. Her secret ingredient? Be nice to your students.

The initial response to her teaching from the bridge community was mixed. Jo was not even a life master at the time, and a few people let it be known that it was presumptuous on her part. It certainly was – but none of them were willing to teach beginners. Her more supportive mentors said she certainly knew enough to teach Bridge Basics 1, and sent a few friends to her class.

.... back to nice people. Their new students were intimidated at the existing club there. With her partner in life and bridge, Chuck Abramo, Jo started a club for people coming out of our beginning classes. Their saying, both in truth and in jest, is that you don't have to play bridge well but you do have to be a nice person. They stress that Sun Valley Bridge is for new players and people who want to be nice to newer players. So far this year they have the second highest table count in Idaho and are in a county with a population of 20,000. Jo is proud to say that in the 2018 Mini-McKenny in her unit, local players took 4 out of the top 10 spots in the 0-5 masterpoint category, all 10 in the 5-20 masterpoint category, and 6 out of 10 in both the 20-50 and 100-200 categories.

In terms of her own progression in bridge, Jo has mixed feeling about going to a higher level. She has been fortunate to go to several tournaments with a friend and mentor who has 5,000+ masterpoints. It has definitely helped her bridge. But the other players are so unpleasant that she has told her she is thinking long and hard about whether she wants to go to another tournament with her. The other players in the higher brackets are not necessarily unpleasant to us, but they are certainly unpleasant to each other. The behavior is rarely egregious enough to call the director in a zero tolerance game, but it is not an atmosphere in which Jo is eager to spend a week. Here are two unpleasant examples from Jo to you.

Me: "Good morning, I'm Jo." "Opponent: "We don't have time for that. Let me see your convention card."

Me, at the conclusion of an auction: "Could you explain your partner's bid, please." Opponent: "It means that my partner is a complete idiot." He then turned to his partner and said, "I don't understand why we have systems if you don't use them."

Jo knows that Eldon Clayman, recently Goodwill Ambassador of the Year, and others have created a much more welcoming atmosphere in Western North Carolina. She plays in sectionals or clubs there a couple of times a year and it is always a pleasant experience. Jo wishes all people would follow Eldon's example.