

The caddies at the tournaments, callow and cute, I watch them, too. They are so eager yet uncomprehending, gladly pulling down a rather decent half-day's wage for their ages, simply ferrying the cards back and forth among the tables, feeding the addicts. I listen to them laugh and whisper among themselves, "Hey, 'sup with this? Just sittin' there hour after hour pullin' out cards and layin' 'em on a table? Huh???"

Addiction, yes, but such a beneficial addiction! Not only for us old fogies, spicing our adrenaline and sharpening our mentation, but for kids in school, too, elementary school kids who have been lucky enough to have bridge included in their curriculum and consequently scoring significantly higher on standardized tests. Not only do these students' scores in Math go up, but also their scores in Science, Reading, Language and Social Studies.

Why bridge? Ask the teachers. Ask Bill Gates and Warren Buffett who have donated millions of dollars funding youth bridge programs. Ask Omar Sharif who treasures his bridge trophies beyond any of his other trophies. Ask anyone who plays the game avidly Why the passion? Why the pride?

And why, one might ask, the prejudice? Why do so many of my friends merely shake their heads no in reply to my inviting them again and again through our lifelong friendships to add bridge to the many other games of chance and skill that we enjoy together. "Nope." Why not bridge? What is their reluctance to learn this game? Fear they won't be any good at it?

I was a third grader when I learned to play! I didn't care if I was good or not. I just wanted the fun. In college I looked forward to what I thought would be heaven,

playing bridge day in and night out in that wickedly enticing "cack"—as we called our Campus Activity Center. I had been warned by my mother that many college students actually flunked out of school because they couldn't stop playing bridge, and oh, yes! How eagerly I sat at those tables, waiting for a chair to become vacant.

Some of those glorious young bridge players were sexy beyond my callow ken and I watched with hot envy those intimate smolderings in those eyes, meeting those other eyes across the table, the cards lowered like a shield being let down ever so slightly, those lips parted, the breath almost visible as steam, silent assignments being made before my very eyes. And yet they would never leave their doggone tables!

There have been murders across the bridge table. I had heard the story—which I had thought wholly apocryphal until I read *The Devil's Tickets*—of the Midwest wife who shot and killed her husband over a hand of bridge. The rumor was that when the jury found her guilty—not having the least understanding how such a wanton murder could be possible—the judge let her off with a suspended sentence because the husband so deserved it, having trumped his wife's ace.

Why bridge? Why not bridge? I keep asking. I guess I simply love, love, love this game. And in writing these words, I just wish to share it with everyone. It's free. It's fun. And I say without the least hesitation that bridge is indeed the greatest game yet invented.

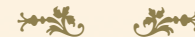
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WHY BRIDGE?



*The Hullabaloo, Hush, Passion
And Fun !!!
of the World's Greatest Game*

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by
Robert Locke



I was in third grade when I learned to play bridge, and I'm still hooked, still learning the game.

Third grade? How hard can this game be? *The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge* is in its 6th edition and now over 1000 pages. How easy can this game be?

And therein lies the attraction and addiction of bridge.

I remember vividly my mom and dad coming home from work, Mom saying to us, "Sit down, I'm going to teach you a new game." The biggest challenge to me at first was holding the thirteen cards all at once in my two hands.

I devised a plan, however. I would put some of the cards face down on the table and pick them up when I needed any of them, my first efforts at memorization. Oh, no, not by suit. My mom and dad were no dummies; they would catch on. It was my secret scheme. We enjoyed another nearly 50 years of bridge, Mom and Dad and I together, inventing our own three-handed version of the game since none of the rest of the family would join us, their loss. Even when Dad fell victim to dementia, he could still play bridge, though he would need to ask every second or third card, "What's trump?" Still, he retained all his basically sound bridge practices.

After caring for them until their deaths, I opened up my bridge life and now travel thousands of miles, also just down the street to the home of a new friend, a whopping fun ex-nun, to play bridge at every opportunity. I gladly accept practically every partner, good bad or indifferent, so I can continue to learn and play the game and feed my addiction to it.

I wish I were a Toulouse Lautrec so that I could paint a blazing picture of the crowds I find at these various events. Some are so flamboyant they beggar description, like preening exotic birds in all colors and ornamentation, bedazzling the eye with innumerable rings and bracelets and necklaces encircling every digit and appendage, sparkling studs in every orifice, and jewels and bangles dangling from both ears sometimes a foot and a half. Others are so withdrawn that they too beggar description. Some are so rich that they spend countless thousands year after year to attend national bridge tournaments in every capital of the world, flying in for a 10-12 day stay during which they do nothing but play bridge, never even setting foot outside their



hotels. Some eke by with such modest incomes that they do not even qualify to pay income taxes. Take that ex-nun down the street, dedicated to a life of non-profit: she throws no fewer than three, four, five bridge parties a week, often more than one a day, attracting a growing gathering of addicts, as many as three tables at a time.

Church is where the ex-nun picks up many of her addicts. "She plays bridge!" one man overheard her whisper during mass to a woman in the pew behind, both skewed awkwardly sideways to appraise a third woman sitting a few pews away. The man whispered to them over the back of his pew, "Do you want a fourth?"

But only party bridge for the ex-nun. "No, no, no, I won't play Duplicate! I won't play that awful Stayman thing or those what-do-you-call-them transfer things, I just play plain bridge, my way, and I like to change partners after every rubber." That smile? Could an ex-nun make or even catch onto such a double entendre?

And the crowds! I sometimes just sit and watch the people as they arrive at the big games, greeting each other, waving ecstatically and calling out across the room to old friends and new, meanwhile working the room, eyeing the contacts,

wending their way through and among each other, grabbing hands, kissing each other on cheeks and foreheads and lips, hugging, whispering, flirting, even sometimes filching other familiarities, oh what fun! I've seen it, I been-there-done-that; good clean fun—young and old, but mostly old, pushing their walkers or wheeling their wheelchairs through the hullabaloo to arrive finally at that hush. Oh, how would, how *could* a Toulouse Lautrec paint that sudden hush as thousands of heads bend at once over their own personal thirteen cards, the concentration, the calculation, the noiseless thrill of reaching into the little box to pull out that first bid.

That hush can be more hair-raising than the roar of the crowd at the touchdown or dunk: those are merely spectators; these are participants, North and South vs. East and West, so totally absorbed into their game, so vital, their hearts pounding, their blood cells chasing each other with a rush and flush, their brains so full of complex maneuverings that perhaps their hush can be understood and appreciated only by such another participant. Oh, Toulouse.

"It's only 52 cards, right?" the unaddicted will ask with a wry grin. "It can't be, like, you know, fun."