

**District Dispatches**

February 2026

These D21 members have all reached new milestones and have passed on their comments and journeys to Jackie Zayac to share with our readers.



**Alex Martelli, Unit 503,  Sapphire Life Master**

I've been playing bridge, on and off (alas, mostly off!) for more than half the 100 years in which bridge has existed. I started with intensity when I was in high school in my native Italy; dialed it down a bit when studying Engineering in college proved far more interesting and challenging than cruising through high school; then dialed it down a LOT as I got engaged, and soon got my MSEE, married, and focused on career and family. My disconnect from bridge was never total -- I did occasionally get times in which I could play, and far more often times in which I could read about bridge (thanks to a lifetime subscription to the Bridge World magazines my parents gifted me with for my 15th birthday) and sometimes write about theoretical analysis as I became a programming guru (see my articles in the January and February 2000 issues of the Bridge World).

After emigrating to the US for my software developer and manager career, I joined the ACBL in 2007 to play in the NABC that year in San Francisco, and occasionally afterwards (working full time, I found very few games when I could actually play -- evenings, holidays, and weekends only!).

With the 2020 COVID shutdown, as I saved lots of time I had spent commuting, I played more (at first, online only), especially when my American wife Anna (who just made Ruby LM this same month as I made Sapphire!) took up the game -- I didn't need to choose bridge OR family time, I could have both at once!). So in 2020 I made LM, Bronze LM, and Silver LM; in 2021, Ruby LM; in 2023, when I retired, Gold LM. And now, in 2026, Sapphire LM -- thanks in good part to the great NABC in San Francisco in Dec 2025, then the excellent Clambake Regional in Monterey in Jan this year, AND a lot of online play on BBO to push me just above the 3500 MP threshold.

What made the NABC especially great, MPs-wise, was that being above 3000 but below 4000 I could still play "midflight"; alas, in Regionals, I can't, since midflight there tops out at 3000. I find this difference baffling and I wish Regionals had the same MP thresholds as Nationals for midflight vs open!

If D21 could align its Regionals to NABCs' MP thresholds that would be great! It would help my coming long climb towards (I hope, and assuming I'm alive and bright for years to come:-) the Emerald LM goal. I plan to play in every D21 Regional anyway (I love it that I took home at least one celebratory glass or cup from every D21 Regional I've played in over the last few years), as well as two of the three NABCs in 2026 (where playing midflight may help me get more MPs towards my next distant goal), but...

It would be good if my Unit (503) had online tournaments as it used to, as I love playing against friends -- but, alas!, it doesn't anymore, so when I play online it's in all-ACBL tournaments, or other districts (BAND from Texas, etc).



**Anna Ravenscroft, Unit 503,  Ruby Life Master**

In 2017, I retired after finishing (what I thought would be) our last book with my husband, Alex Martelli. I wanted something to keep my brain in gear and decided on Bridge, since my husband had been playing since he was 12 so this was something we could do together. Alex, who just made Sapphire Life Master this month, has all the books (seriously, his Bridge library is HUGE, in multiple languages), including several beginner-level ones, and had introduced me to BBO. After reading a bit and trying out BBO, I looked around and found a Meetup run by Judy Zuckerberg. Judy's meetup was a great group of friends who learned together. We bid hands and discussed them and played them and discussed the play and defense, with no pressure. It was a great place to start. I later met Judy's daughter – world champion Debbie Rosenberg!

Once I'd learned to play a little, I started playing with my husband occasionally, after warning him to “be nice; I have other people I can play with!” and have learned a LOT from him. I also attended classes at our local Unit 503, which has so many great teachers. My first class (on defense) was with Kathy Harper, an ACBL Teacher of the Year. I also started filling in at Unit 503 when someone needed a partner -- playing with a lot of different folks, at various levels. I found this helpful in learning about different bidding and playing styles and figuring out my own preferences. I soon discovered that I really needed to learn 2/1, and happily, Unit 503 has another great teacher, Prue Saunders, who taught a class on 2/1. Later, I took classes with Frank Smoot who teaches amazing intermediate classes which really help us all "level-up" our declaring and defense, and met my favorite partner, Judy H, there. During the early days of COVID, Judy H and I took classes online together from Larry Cohen and Michael Berkowitz.

When life is busy or a lot of illnesses are going around, I tend to stay home and play online. But I appreciate seeing all my friends at Unit 503 which is full of kind and welcoming people. Of course, every group has “that guy,” and everyone has off days, but the friendliness of folks at my local club is one of the reasons I've stuck with Bridge. I also love playing at tournaments. One of our friends convinced his partner and Alex and I to “play up” at the recent NABC in San Francisco, so we entered the Keohane teams and lost all but one of our matches but ended up making .5 Platinum points! There are always new adventures to be had in Bridge. Alex and I already have plans to play NABCs in Minneapolis this July and San Diego in November. And of course, we can't miss the Firecracker Sectional at our own Unit 503, which got moved to the last week of June to avoid conflict with the summer NABC. See you at the Firecracker!



**Henry Hung Fong, Unit 506,  Bronze Life Master**

I made Life Master when I played a lot of tournament bridge in the Los Angeles-Orange County area, 1968-1973. Competition was top-notch, and I remember playing against world/national champions and pros like Barry Crane, Eddie Kantar, Mike Lawrence, Paul Soloway, Dick Walsh and John Swanson, Rhoda Walsh, Lew Mathe, Hermine Baron, Mary Jane Farrell, Kerry Sanborn, Jill Meyers (she was just starting out), Jon and Pam Wittes, et al. All were polite, nice, and superb bridge players. The #1 highlight of my early career: winning the “1972 Culver City Open Pairs,” against many of these top LA players, playing with my “once-a-





year" partner, Frank Jerome (a chemistry instructor at Santa Monica City College). We had a "monster" game--82% ("lots of gifts").

Needless to say, for a variety of personal/career reasons, I dropped out of bridge until 2016, when I frequented the Daly City and San Francisco senior centers again. Finally in early December, I made my Bronze Life Master "thanks to my latest partner, Dr Bill Chung" -- at the 2025 Fall Nationals in S.F. Took me only 52 years, that's all.

Next goal: make Silver LM, gotta do it before another "52 years." The best thrill: meeting many nice, fun people at the table, some of whom have become my good friends, in the past ten years. Retired, I supplement my huge retirement income by writing jokes in a fortune cookie factory in a S.F. Chinatown basement that used to be an opium den -- for two bucks an hour.



**Earl Jones, Unit 510, NABC Master**

Not much of a story: Persistence. I don't even remember when it was that I passed 200 total points. I play regularly with my father (now 96), and some years ago we took a bridge cruise trying to get the gold points he still needed for Life Master (he's still 6 short, alas). That left me needing a relative handful of silver, but since we haven't been going to tournaments, I've been nibbling away in STAC games and other promotions at our local club. Finally made it over the top in one particularly good week.

If someone is serious about advancement, I'm not a great model. It would be nice to make Life Master eventually, but I'm not going to get the color points I need without getting serious about tournaments. That's a daunting prospect for someone as socially inhibited as I am.



**Samuel Kuang, Unit 506, Junior Master**

To me, bridge isn't just a game. It connects people like a real bridge. My friend Anson was my bridge, he introduced me into a whole new world that I would cling to. My journey into bridge has never been easy, from my sister (who is my partner) to the struggles of learning. Even with this, I persevered thanks to the help of wonderful coaches like Dan, Chris, and awesome cookie maker Deborah, and last but not least--My Wonderful Mom. I've played at home, clubs and even at nationals. At the beginning it wasn't easy, I talked a lot and didn't focus. Even so I tried my best to learn, and have come so far. So back to what I said at the

beginning, bridge isn't just a partnership game, it's a crossroad filled with people like you.



**Kaitlyn Kuang, Unit 506, Junior Master**

Every Saturday for three hours me and my brother would go to our bridge club. In the beginning me and my brother only played for fun. Then soon we started to go to tournaments. Now me and my brother try to go to as many games as possible. I get better each day by playing bridge online. Now I'm looking forward to go to Minneapolis for the youth NABC. I appreciate all the help from my coaches, parents and everyone who helped. If you know how to play bridge I think you should teach your family and friends so it'll be more fun.