



District Dispatches

October 2026

One D21 member has reached a new milestone and has passed on his comments and journey to Jackie Zayac to share with our readers.



Brad Carson, Unit 502, Life Master

I grew up watching my parents play bridge with their friends. It seemed to be their primary form of socializing. In elementary school, I was allowed to watch hands being played, but I wasn't allowed to ask any questions. I knew about suits and ranks from playing other card games, but I couldn't understand how an Ace could lose to a 2 from a different suit—probably a ruff! After a few hands, I was off to bed.

After my freshman year of high school, in 1969, my mom taught my brother Ron and me the basics of bridge while we were camping on a sandy beach on a lake in Illinois. She created boards out of cardboard and elastic bands. She taught us standard Goren: four-card majors, strong two bids, Blackwood and Gerber for slam bidding. We started with notrump hands before moving on to suit bidding and play. Ron and I played with my parents occasionally during the school year.

The summer after my sophomore year, Ron and I worked for our grandfather clearing alder trees from property he wanted to develop near our family's summer place—a small island in Puget Sound, Washington. The island was very rustic: kerosene lamps, outhouses, wood stoves and no TV. Mornings were spent clearing trees, while afternoons were devoted to chores around the island—chain sawing, chopping wood, digging clams and making general repairs. Evenings were for playing bridge with our grandparents and their friend, "Aunt Letty."

We played bridge almost every evening, usually with Grandma and Letty. Grandpa was generally snoring after dinner, thanks to his two bourbon highballs before dinner. But whenever Grandpa did play, he made the bidding interesting. He would occasionally mix up hearts and spades!

After about two months, my parents drove out from Illinois to the island for their vacation. Ron and I naturally wanted to play a game with them, so we sat down at the table one evening. I remember one hand very clearly. I was declarer in four spades, doubled by my dad. After his opening lead, when I saw dummy, I said to him, "You're going to eat that double," and proceeded to make the contract.

After we finished the hand, my dad gave me the only bridge compliment I can remember him ever giving me: "Boys, you've learned how to play bridge this summer."

I continued to play rubber and social bridge through college—not too much, but enough to keep playing. I taught my wife and children how to play, had dinner-and-bridge nights with friends, and played once a month with a group of dads for about 40 years.

Then, after I retired in 2022, I decided I wanted to play bridge competitively.

Steve Bess was a friend from Oakland who had moved to Reno. He volunteered to take me to my first tournament—the Winter Regional in Reno. When he told me the format was 24 hands per session, I said, "I don't think I can play 48 hands in one day."



We managed to score 2.86 red points over three days. But when I learned that I needed 500 masterpoints to become a Life Master, I thought, “This is going to take a long time.”

I soon learned that the bridge club in Oakland, the East Bay Community Bridge Center, was just five minutes from my house. The owner, director, and teacher, Betty Kael, conducted lessons every Friday for the 499er group. In the fall of 2022, I teamed up with Pete Banwell, a player I had met while playing in a church group, and we started playing regularly on Fridays.

Pete was only available to play on Fridays, so I began searching for a tournament partner.

After playing with a few different partners, I was asked to play in a team game in the summer of 2023. I had never played teams before, but I said yes. After our final session, I was asked if I could give David Gin a ride home, since he lived near me in Oakland. I said sure.

During the ride, we discovered that our approach to bridge was similar and that we were both looking for tournament partners. David and I next played together at the 2023 Santa Clara Regional, where we scored 4.82 gold masterpoints. A tournament partnership was born.

David and I continued to play in most of the Northern California regionals and sectionals through the rest of 2023 and 2024. We also played in the 2024 Las Vegas NABC, where David earned enough points—33 gold and 4 red—to become a Life Master.

Our most productive year so far was 2024, when we earned 153 masterpoints together.

I was hoping to match David’s achievement in 2025 at the San Francisco NABC, but I fell one point short. However, the following month at the Monterey Regional, I got that last point on the very first day we played—before lunchtime!

David and I continue to play in most of the Northern California tournaments. In 2026, David earned his Bronze Life Master in Sacramento, and I’m on pace to earn my Bronze Life Master next year.

The advice I received as a novice player was to play in as many tournaments as possible while your masterpoint total is still low. I followed that advice. The result is that I now have all of the colored points—gold, red and silver—I need to become a Ruby Life Master.

I just need to keep on playing!

For me, bridge is both a competitive and social outlet. I enjoy playing the game, competing and making new friends in our team games. It’s also great to have a foodie partner who can recommend places to eat wherever we play.

I also try to keep up with my exercise program during regionals by working out in the fitness centers at our hotels or bringing my bike along for a ride.

In closing, I want to thank my regular partners, Pete and David, for putting up with my bidding and playing foibles. And thanks to my regular teammates—Steve and Amy, Allan and Margaret, Jan and



D I A M N D I N T H E R U F F

Kathy, Sol and Pearl, Larry and Chris, and John and Betsy. I wouldn't have gotten to Life Master without your help.

In addition, you have all helped me win the Unit 502 Mini-McKenney Award in my changing bracket for four straight years. I'm working on making it five in a row this year!

I look forward to seeing you all at the tables!

Sincerely,

A bridge-playing ski bum