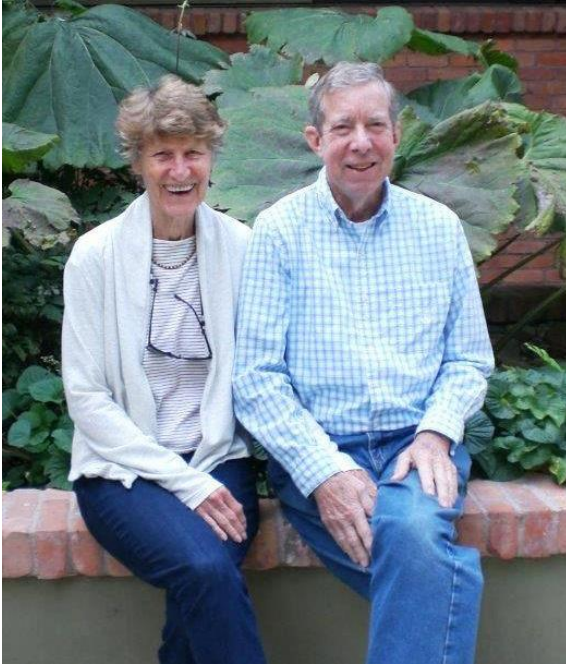


New ACBL Regional Master

Still Dancing after all these years.....

By Gayle Hanset



Claire Jones, representative from District 18 on the ACBL National Board, sent me an email congratulating me on reaching my Regional Master status. He wrote, "I would love to hear your story on how you achieved this milestone and would like your permission to share your story as an inspiration to others." How can I be an inspiration to others? I live in the small town of Sandpoint, Idaho, I have only been playing bridge for 3 years, I add my HCP's on my fingers under the table (math was never my strong suit), I get diarrhea before playing in a

tournament and half the time I forget the conventions I've learned. Who would be interested in my story?

In 1977 my dear silver life master husband, Don Hanset, was diagnosed with Polycystic Kidney Disease (PKD) an inherited condition in which the kidneys shut down when the cysts become enlarged. His GFR (Glomerular filtration rate) was at 9mL by 2009. A normal adult kidney should be around 90mL. I was tested as a possible donor and was accepted as a match. It is rare that a husband and wife have the same markers. In May of 2011, our transplant team at Sacred Heart Hospital in Spokane, harvested one of my kidneys and inserted it in Don's abdomen area. We were not allowed to be in the same recovery room but I did get a note written on a napkin:

Dear Gayle, Thanks so much for the early Father's Day present...much better than a pair of slippers. I hope your recovery goes well. Dancing next week? Love, Don.

Don made an amazing come back. He was his old self again which, of course, included getting back to his beloved bridge. He got his directorship so he could run our local bridge club and began playing in tournaments in the area. A living donor kidney functions, on average, 12 to 20 years. This time I was able to do the math! Time with this precious husband of mine was short. In 2011 he was 69 and I was 67. Don and his partner, Bill Drayton were going to exotic places, usually an armory, staying in flea bag motels, and eating at burger joints, while I was still working as an instructional coach for our school district. My challenge: how could I make the best of our 12-20 years together before Don would be in dialysis 3 hours a day for 3 days a week? I am a competitive skier, runner, hiker, cyclist, volleyball and pickleball player with no interest or experience playing cards. I can't even sit for longer than 10 minutes.

I left my job, and answered an ad for bridge lessons through the Sandpoint Department of Parks and Rec. I showed up every Tuesday night with instructor, Mary Faux, aka the hat lady. Turns out she can teach anyone to play bridge, even me. I went after it with the same gusto I tackled my various sports interests. I read Larry Cohen, Barbara Seagram, etc. I played online and went on an Audrey Grant cruise. I played 3 days a week at local bridge games. My first tournament was in Penticton BC in June, 2016. We stayed in a nice Air B&B which we shared with friends and ate wonderful food. What's not to like?

I would like to end this with kudos to the bridge players who have inspired me: my husband, Don for playing with me at least once a week, his encouragement, patience, and unending support. My partner, Deb Johnson who reminds me that bridge is just a game and we are playing for fun; my mentor, Ginny Redford who works tirelessly for the benefit of all the members in our club; directors Mark Hatten and Marlene Manion who welcome me every Friday to the Bonner's Ferry bridge club, and finally, acknowledging my own tenacity by showing up each week knowing some days will be better than others.

Don and I don't dance as much as we used to but we dance to a different drummer now, the bridge tango and loving every minute of it, well, mostly.