

## New Silver Life Master

### Shawn Darby



Shawn grew up on bridge. Her parents played bridge regularly with friends and her mother played bridge with Newcomers' and Welcome Wagon groups. Growing up in the cold winters of Wyoming, as a family, they played every card and board game possible. But learning bridge was a "come watch us while we play" situation instead. Shawn did learn enough from watching and picked up the basics such that she could adequately play during college. She had a cook in the sorority house who knew the game well and helped with the learning process. After graduation, she played lunch time bridge during her first career as an aerospace engineer in Los Angeles. Shawn also played bridge with Welcome Wagon groups and formed a spinoff social group of three tables that met once a month. After a significant career change, she returned to Utah (her college education was at the University of Utah). Shawn played a little bridge with a Welcome Wagon group and again a spinoff of three tables was formed that met once a month. During her second career that was at the University of Utah, she formed a foursome with graduate students to play bridge at lunch. One of the IT employees heard about it and asked if she'd like to play duplicate at the local club. She agreed....Whoops! Up until now, Shawn thought she was playing a pretty good game of bridge but found out that there was a whole different world at the duplicate club. Weak twos, Stayman, conventions like Bergen – what was this? Needless to say, she was overwhelmed. Her partner – a man much younger than her – had played duplicate with some of these conventions while he was in college, from which he had recently graduated. Shawn struggled but was fortunate to have a very patient partner. They played together for 20 years at the Bridge Center in Salt Lake City. During that time, they made two very good decisions...they always "played up" – they didn't play at the novice games; they played with the advanced players. And they took it slow with her learning curve. When Shawn was comfortable, they would add another convention to their card. Even then, it was a fairly simple card since she was literally learning bridge all over again. She played once a week with her partner, Steve Ackerman, (since they were both working) and tried to play at the local sectional tournaments. They had only been playing together a couple of years and they went to a sectional tournament in Ogden. They felt like they were doing okay but their next opponents

were a pair of international students who played Precision. (At the time, neither of them knew what that was!) One club on her right (Alert), pass, one diamond on her left (Alert), pass, one spade on her right (Alert), pass, one No Trump on her left (Alert). Steve couldn't stand it any longer and bid two hearts. Double on her right, pass, pass, pass. Down four! They had three hands in a row like that and during the break, they almost quit bridge!

It took 11 years to get her Life Master mostly because the black points took so long. Shawn earned her gold/red points in knockout games at Las Vegas Regional tournaments. Their favorite team members for all her Swiss team and Knockout games were Bonnie and Pete Edwards from Salt Lake City. But they were also fortunate enough to pair with her father and his partner (from Albuquerque) for a knockout game in Las Vegas where they took first (some 16 red/gold master points) and Voila! – I earned my Life Master in 2004. Shawn's father and mother continued to play party bridge until her mother died in 1997. After that, she encouraged her father to try his hand at duplicate bridge – especially since Albuquerque has a HUGE bridge center – Duke City. He decided to try it and has already surpassed Shawn's Silver Life Master! He'll be 97 in the Fall and plays duplicate bridge twice a week (and poker once a week). Shawn credits bridge with some of his longevity and certainly with his enjoyment of life. And he's met some really nice girl friends at the bridge table!

It took another seven years (2011) to get her Bronze Life Master with Steve as they continued to hone their game but actually continued to play a fairly simple convention card. While in Salt Lake Shawn also served on the Unit 386 board. Then in 2013 she retired from her third career and decided to move to St. George, Utah to a developing over-55 community called Sun River. The main impetus for the move was that the community had tons and tons of activities and clubs and a community center with everything that a senior would need to be happy. Bridge in Saint George is fairly new. There are four open duplicate bridge clubs and two invitational-only clubs – one of which is at Sun River. And even though there are some advanced players, the bulk of the “bridgers” are somewhat new to the game but all of who are slowly but surely becoming more excited about playing. Thanks to a lady named Vicki Shelley and also to various others (Herb Fox, Ron Smith, Rich Glass, Marsha Glass, etc) lessons have been offered to help those who are interested. They have games five days a week – mostly during the day and regularly can have eight to 13 tables which is a good size for a town where bridge is new. They also had their first St. George Sectional three years ago (thanks to Sheila Berry) and it's now a regular tournament. Last year they had 30 and 40 tables at the sessions! They also host three days of bridge during the Huntsman Senior Games.

So where is Shawn now with bridge after 60+ years of playing some form of the game? She's playing bridge three and four times a week with some regular (and terrific!) bridge partners. Compared to her simple card with Steve, her convention card is now filled with all the new things Shawn has learned (and continues to learn) – Bergen, Inverted Minors, NAMYATS, Karousel, Montreal Relay, etc. She is Vice President of the Sun River Duplicate Bridge Club. Shawn writes a monthly bridge article for their community newsletter and maintains the web site for both the Duplicate and Beginning Bridge groups. At Sun River, they are trying their darnedest to get new players. As such, Shawn is mentoring new players twice a week and generally has three to five tables. Eight of these “newbies” are already playing with the duplicate group and she has two more couples ready. She is also mentoring newer players in her home. She don't pretend to be a certified teacher but wants to provide an environment where they talk through the hands. As a result, she thinks her bridge game has gotten better because she keeps getting reminded of the basics. Shawn is close to becoming a Director but may bypass that in order to continue work with the “newbies” as there just may not be enough time for both. But she does what she can to support the Sun River Duplicate director by determining the movements and setting up the weekly table assignments. Shawn also determines the calendar for the club that includes discussing with the Director (Rich Glass) as to what games will be special – STaC, etc. Annually, they host a table, at the Sun River Activity Expo highlighting duplicate and beginning bridge. They also have two bridge games a year with the other invitational-only club in St. George. Shawn also maintains the directory of all St. George bridge players and sends out appropriate announcements as needed.

So is bridge now consuming my life – probably so. Does she love it? Yes and is trying to encourage others to enjoy it as much as she does.