

STRANGE AND FUNNY THINGS HAPPENED ON MY WAY TO THE BRIDGE
EXCHANGE BY RODNEY WALKER

Bridge Exchange? Never heard of it? Not surprised, it is very young, barely a figment in the imagination of an old man who recently returned to ACBL after over 40 years absence. The strange and funny I will reserve for another posting. As you read on I have some very serious matters to bring to your attention, regarding the future of the game of Bridge, the ACBL, and 70 million Baby Boomers retiring in the next 5 years. CEO Jay Baum brought that out in his column last Spring. He suggested that the boomers needed constructive mental stimulation. Many retirees would be former ACBL members and we should prepare to welcome them back. I had returned just two or three months before and was having a ball. It occurred to me to offer an account of my activities, if anyone thought they would be helpful in attracting returnees.

I e-mailed the CEO and told him I was happy to have returned in time to help welcome back the retirees. I told him I had a solution to any and all the problems he was facing. I told him I had solutions to all the problems of the boomers and expanding ACBL. Before I reveal my brainstorm, I suggested he check the personal references I furnished: Helen-joe Owens, Betty Grandoff, Eric Rodwell and Betty Johnson. You quite likely recognize the first three, and the fourth is the daughter of an ACBL President in the 60s.

I did not receive a reply. That I took as a challenge, to get his attention I took CEO Baum's article to Guillermo W. Cosma, Geriatric Psychiatrist, and asked him to read the article and write to our CEO. My purpose in doing so was to give ACBL a respected third-party endorsement. It is a tool in advertising and salesmanship for which millions of dollars are paid. I thank my friend Dr. Cosma, who himself is facing retirement. We had discussed the problem the boomers are facing. I suggested Bridge to him and offered to advise and teach him. He had recently begun the study of Italian and said he found it difficult. Isn't that the key? Do difficult mental exercise for mental health. Playing Bridge, especially duplicate, fills the bill beautifully. I do not advocate that it is the only or best way. It is certainly a GOOD one.

Most boomers are aware of the problem. The subject and a myriad of solutions have been written about in Senior oriented publications. My daughter includes puzzles and books in Christmas packages. I have an assortment and they are good, mostly for some other seniors. I feel no need to take time out from my own remedy, Bridge. It is as complex as anything I have encountered. Dr. Cosma NAILED IT. EXERCISE. SOCIALIZE, AND THINK THINK THINK. Bridge activity takes care of socialize and think, and his prescription for a daily walk, suffice for me.

I tried to get Mr. Baum on the telephone, not available. I was routed to Brent Manley, editor of the bulletin. We had a spirited conversation and I was turned away. What I wanted was for a little mention in the bulletin that I had started a little FREE teaching program for seniors. My one and only ally was Donna Rodwell, to be known in my group as "Bridge Angel". I told her about Dr. Cosma's evaluation letter and told her I would teach FREE. She said "I will help you". Over the past five months she has stood ready to

assist when called. I have not called. I keep her in reserve. It is like having an extra bank account just in case.

The BRIDGE EXCHANGE was launched at On Top Of The World Condo East Activity Center November 20, 2008. There are thousands such complexes in the country, housing seniors, like the baby boomers are becoming. Seventy Million in the next 5 years. The need we fill is to have a place for those interested in bridge to become acquainted with others of similar interest. In these large complexes, about 7000 units, it is a difficult task unless there is some interest group capable of handling the activities. I found many diverse activities well organized. Bridge was not one of them. There are many small, closed to non-members, bridge games. That leaves the individual out of the mix. Now, at Bridge Exchange, you can meet others and form new groups, or join in the Duplicate Bridge Club (non-sanctioned) or do as I did and go one mile to Clearwater Duplicate Bridge Club. There you will find almost any kind of bridge activity.

Most bridge courses I am familiar with are one lesson a week. After the first week I added a second teaching period. I found other activities the students participated in interfered: golf matches, doctors' appointments, shuffleboard, lawn bowling, visiting relatives, get the idea? I did the best I could and everyone enjoys our times together. It has been years since I saw so much enthusiasm for bridge. It is fun in the learning stage. If you are not careful it will become grim, as you struggle for master points. You may begin to hate yourself when you fail to "follow the rules". That is what teachers teach; students must learn to apply the rules, discipline.

I am really wrapped up in teaching elderly beginners. I teach only as far as to get them ready to play contract bridge. They learn to take tricks; they learn to count points, to bid within the value of your hand and your partner. I want them to understand that every hand is interesting, even without picture cards, and the opponents playing the contract. THINK THINK THINK, sound familiar? An essential, says Dr. Cosma, for seniors' health.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE: the first dirty words in this writing. That is the condition brought when the mind ceases to be challenged daily when we retire from daily intricate problem solving. Alzheimer's is a tragedy. It is costly in treatment, and devastating to families everywhere. I am adding a voice to the admonitions of the medical communities who say to do whatever it takes to prevent that from happening to you and yours. I am 87 and do not want it to happen to me when I get old. So I play bridge for prevention. I called ACBL asking for a little help and was told that the bulletin was not a proper forum because I would be "Preaching to the Choir", GIVE ME A BREAK PLEASE. It is the choir I want to get the message to, and in turn to the whole congregation. I complained that I had not seen or heard of any activity other than my own. I was disappointed Dr. Cosma's letter was not printed in the bulletin. It could encourage others to take the initiative and THINK of ways to attract the 70 million targeted group. They are surely coming and I think we need to find ways of attracting them. I disagreed when editor Manly told me he thought they were doing a good job of that. I ask WHO, HOW,

WHEN? His reply was Bridge Teachers. ACBL is proud of its growth, and I was told satisfied, no need for my concern.

I have left out more arguments supporting the idea of taking in and teaching all seniors FREE. Battle Alzheimer's, save families. Help our new President Obama's Health Initiative to provide health care for all. HOW? I asked an Administration Official for the mathematical formulas for making projections on deficit reduction, tax revenues, medical costs, and everything having to do with money. I constructed a model to determine the number of the 70 million who would develop the disease, the cost per case and other data. The results of the calculations were astounding. If Alzheimer's cases were reduced by 5.3% each year, by the end of Obama's second term savings to the health system would be over \$1 trillion. A comforting thought but not the real story. I keep thinking of the human toll. Wouldn't it be nice? Applied to this proposition,

YES. Gives me a warm feeling. I hope you will take notice of the little crusade I propose. THINK THINK THINK. You can come up with better ideas. When one hits you, don't just sit there, do something. I like the motto of a college I believe Martin Luther King Jr. attended, "When you wake up, get up; when you get up, do something."

Every endeavor can yield profits. If this catches on, who profits? Thanks to the new vernacular it is a "stimulus" venture, a few dollars added to the economy providing much needed jobs for unemployed bridge teachers and directors, Baron Barclay Bridge Supply will be hiring, so will their suppliers, it's a chain reaction folks. ACBL employees get increased work load, and appropriate raises. The Bulletin will add many pages each month to cover the news of interest to low master point boomers. All clubs will have a Duplicate Bridge Lite section, for a few hundred thousand new players who enjoy soft ball instead of the hard ball game played in a lot of clubs. Understand? Use your imagination THINK THINK THINK.

ACBL is a fine organization, we can all be proud. I am told it is satisfied, almost to the point of being smug. A Mission Accomplished Banner can fly over headquarters. I think CEO Baum's call to prepare to welcome the 70 Million constitutes the birth of a new mission taking all of us to a higher level. Let's get on with it.



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Mr. Jay Baum, CEO

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Dear Mr. Baum

Allow me to introduce myself: I am Dr. G. W. Cosma, a geriatric psychiatrist working in Clearwater, Florida.

A former patient of mine credits his ability to maintain his intellectual and cognitive abilities to his playing bridge. He has shared with me your article in the Bridge Bulletin in which you discussed what will happen when the baby boomers retire. He was very enthusiastic and asked me to share my opinions with you.

For years we geriatric psychiatrists have stressed the fact that in order to maintain the youth of our brains, it is important to do several things in a routine manner — among them, exercise, socialize, and think, think, think. That means using your brain, because the more you use it the better it will work.

Playing bridge is considered by many of us as being a very important activity to help us maintain our cognitive abilities at a high level. I might add that bridge also offers the opportunity to socialize, as spending time with other people gives the brain a boost. So it seems to me that if we are able to encourage the "baby boomers" to play bridge we are doing two of the three things that we need to do every day: exercise, think, and socialize. With bridge, we socialize and utilize our brain in a unique and special way.

I think that it is important that we stress this fact and that we promote playing bridge and other activities as a way of maintaining and improving our cognitive abilities. It would be wonderful if every mobile home park and every retirement center offered the opportunity to join a bridge group. This certainly would be of great help in maintaining the cognitive abilities of this unique generation.

I hope that my comments will be helpful to you and your organization in promoting bridge as a way of improving the lot of thousands of "boomers" who will need activities that promote thinking and cognitive abilities.

Sincerely,

Guillermo W. Cosma,

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From : "r.walker3@juno.com" <r.walker3@juno.com>
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Date : Fri, Mar 20, 2009 02:48 PM

Dear Muriel, My miserable computer has made life more difficult. My teaching schedule contributes to the complications, and I am trying to follow a regular routine by doing some playing. I continually THINK about how to get the word out to others who might find the concept of offering free bridge to seniors appealing enough to become activists.

What we have here is a press agents dream. All necessary elements are in place. The idea is new and easy to understand.

The writing I snail mailed is in your hands I hope. It is an account of efforts so far. The enclosure of "Card Sense ?" is copied from The Ideal Student Textbook by Charles Michaels and Ruth Cohen. I always use it to keep students from getting discouraged early on. Dr. Cosma's letter speaks volumes. The point count summary and scoring pages I took from a scorepad endorsed by Goren & Sharif. Enough information about bridge for newcomers to use, if they apply the same diligence they did to the work they did to obtain the condo lifestyle. It is working and I am *a miserable success*. The social aspect shows through. We are bonding. I want to challenge others to join in this effort to fight Alzheimers Disease. Making beginning bridge FREE to any and all of the 70 million boomers retiring. All that need be taught is Contract or rubber (from whom most all duplicate master point seekers came). I take them just so far, then recommend them to Bridge Teachers. Roy Sandstrom is teaching the Audry Grant beginners course at our Clearwater Duplicate, and I recommend it to some almost intermediate players. Perhaps I have forgotten to mention that my classes are at On Top Of The World. The kind of community millions of the 70 million will retire to. Catch them early before reduced mental activity brings on Alzheimers symptoms.

(I break here and send while my computer is in a calm mood. It failed my first attempt to send the document I sent snail mail. We are the only persons who know the content of the proposal. When Donna returns I will bring her up to date.)

CARD SENSE ?

I am often solemnly assured by mutual friends that, "Mr. - - - will never learn bridge. He hasn't card sense." Many husbands and wives say the same about each other.

The irony of this is that eventually this opinion drifts back to Mr. - - - , and is erroneously accepted at face value. He never learns to play cards and misses out on one of the most fascinating means of relaxation and recreation for the rest of his life.

After forty-five years of intensive card playing experience with thousands of players of all kinds, beginners to top experts, I have yet to meet anyone with the mysterious gift of card sense. Frankly, if pressed I could not even give a clear-cut definition of it.

Yes - - I do know that it is presumed to mean a good card player one who seems to have an INSTINCTIVE knowledge of cards. If .so, where did the instinctive gift come from? Was the player descended from a long line of Mississippi River gamblers, born with a deck of cards instead of a silver spoon in his mouth?

I've never heard of a child prodigy bridge player who, at the tender age of five, could execute end plays, strip plays, throw-in plays, etc., or maybe play six games simultaneously, blindfolded. There are no baby Mozarts in bridge, and I am afraid that there will never be any.

If card sense isn't inherited, then it must be acquired

— but why can't we all acquire it?

BECAUSE WE WON'T TAKE THE TROUBLE TO LEARN HOW!

Contract bridge cannot be learned over night like canasta. It is a difficult game. Nevertheless, my experience with all types of students has definitely developed the fact that any normal individual with a fair I.Q., determined to learn and with the will power and perseverance to study and practice, will eventually learn to play a sound game, better than the 80% of the bridge players who "picked it up" and think they are "Gorens", merely because they have played at bridge for years.

"We'd Like to Teach the World ..."



"...to Think"

"...to Play Bridge"