

# A Bridge Between Friends

by Laura Colihan

Games, we all love games! They bring together friends and family in a way no other activity can. Whether it's a cozy game of Go Fish with the kids on a snowy day, a sleepy game of Euchre with your grandparents after a big turkey dinner, a quick game of Cribbage as you wait at the airport for the plane that never seems to come, or endless summer nights at the cottage playing Monopoly and Balderdash as you laugh as you never laughed before; Games have a way of bringing us together—the way nothing else can; a way that stays with you forever.

This is a story about how the game of Bridge brought together four people from opposite sides of the world in an unbreakable friendship that grows with every convention learned, each misplayed contract, and all those missed slams.

On an extended honeymoon cruising from India to Brazil, my husband, **Scott**, and I decided that we needed to find something to bring our new marriage even closer together; something that we could do forever as a team. So somewhere between Namibia and the tiny island of St. Helena, we decided to go down to the Bridge Room and see what all the fuss was about!

We had a long Atlantic crossing ahead, and there is only so much shuffleboard that you can play! So during this grand voyage we learned the basics of bridge from amazing teacher Don Mamula and his wife Linda Mamula from Washington. We left that 57-day journey with a new love not only for each other but for the game...a game that would become an obsession, a passion, a “bridge” into the future!

When we arrived home, we were so high with the excitement for this new pastime that we immediately booked another cruise that left a week later, not caring where it went, but only looking to maximize our bridge play! A 26-day cruise around South America to Antarctica—what's there to see around there anyway? A cruise that would surely satisfy these cravings, we thought!

At the meet and greet on the first night we meet Sandy Lovering, and her husband, Bill, amazing teachers from Toronto that

would help solidify a friendship and love! A love of the bridge and a lifelong friendship with **Ralph and Lynda Lipe**! After a few minutes of talking with Sandy and explaining our new passion for the game she said “I have a couple you have to meet!”

She went on to explain that this young couple had been on the prior segment of the cruise and just started learning. We were likely to all be at the same level. When introduced, an instant connection was made!



Lynda and Ralph Lipe;  
Laura Colihan and Scott Dunlop

This affair started innocently with a quick game by the pool bar as we soaked up the warmth of the sun and gobbled up rules and permutations of this fascinating game. We started staying late after the morning lessons and played till lunch. As the ship cruised farther south and the weather cooled, we stayed inside and began to play bridge all day long. It started at 9 a.m. with a class, continued with us borrowing a few decks of cards and playing till lunch—where we'd talk only about bridge of course—and then right back to the Bridge Room until dinner. We'd have dinner together and then play late into the night with cocktails and laughs.

Sandy always seemed to be there to answer questions and explain how to describe a hand to partner with the sophomoric rules we had. We'd sit in the corner during the duplicate...too afraid and green to play with the ‘big boys.’ Instead we played our ‘kitchen bridge.’

We all silently became aware that we had become obsessed! We began dreaming of bridge at night...cards, suits, bidding boxes...flashing nightmares

of unmakeable contracts...waking up in pools of perspiration screaming “7NT”!

We were captivated with bridge and the friendship that had grown up around it! I think the day we all realized the true impact was when we sailed into Paradise Harbor in Antarctica, a place that is rarely seen due to terrible weather and impassable waters. The ship sailed in on this amazingly calm day as the glaciers calved next to the ship, penguins sunned themselves on icebergs, and whales surfaced in the distance. We played bridge all day!

The duplicate game was canceled so people could enjoy the highlight of this amazing cruise. But we sat, overwhelmed and mesmerized by card combinations, ignoring the views of Antarctica that were surrounding us!

Suddenly, Sandy walked into the room! She looked at our flushed faces and piles of scrap paper that held the scores, and in her most stern yet kind voice said: “Put down those cards and go outside!” She explained that bridge would always be there, but we may never have the chance to see Antarctica in this most perfect setting.

I think that was the moment that truly united Ralph and Lynda with Scott and me! We all knew bridge would be the thing to keep us together and friends forever, no matter what was going on around us! We reluctantly finished playing and headed outside to see the breathtaking sights. We stayed for about five minutes, made sure Sandy was out of sight, then sneaked back in to continue our marathon!

Almost two years after the fact, we still play together every chance we can. Currently we are looking forward to our first Nationals together in a few weeks and we just finished our first Audrey Grant cruise together through the Maritimes. We find any chance we can to break away from reality and our busy lives to play. We take vacations together—just to play bridge—and schedule time to play together online. We teach each other new conventions and tricks, and tell stories of unbelievable contracts made.

This game has been the “bridge” between us, and we plan to continue building bridges among friends, families, and generations to come.



P. S.: Ralph and Lynda have taught their kids to play, and are now teaching several of their friends!

