



“Sam Was with Me in Toronto” by Paul Amer

David Kessler, renowned grief expert, highly recommends writing as a way to grieve. I have not written much since research grant proposals and technical papers at UD, and that ended over 8 years ago. So I will give David’s recommendation a try.

The title says it all.

I just returned from the ACBL Summer Nationals in Toronto, where my winning D4 GNT-A team -- consisting of longtime Bridge Studio friends Mark Henderson, Bern Rehberg, Jeff Ruben, and me -- got clobbered in the opening day’s round robin. Twenty-three teams competed, with the top 16 advancing into a 4-day knockout. Suffice to say we did not just miss out on making the top 16.

So Jeff and I moved on to play in the 0-6000 Bruce LM Pairs. It was a 3-day event, with 96 pairs starting, the top 52 qualifying for the 2nd day, and then the top 28 of those 52 qualifying for the 3rd day.

Jeff and I easily made it to the 2nd day in 29th place. Then we proceeded to play some of the worst bridge we’ve played in years, either together or with others. Some examples: revoking while (not) following to declarer running his 6 card diamond suit; missing a rescue redouble for a minus 1600 absolute bottom; and overbidding to 2 slams which failed by multiple tricks. And those were just my mistakes! I will leave it to Jeff to confess his bridge sins. ☺

At the end of Day 2’s play, Jeff and I began discussing which event to play on our final day in Toronto. Then we learned that, miraculously, our two 49% sessions managed to qualify us 27th out of the 28 pairs, allowing us to play on Day 3. Our carry-over was 0.77 MPs, while the leaders carried over 18.29 MPs, just under 1½ boards.

We thought we did well in the morning session of Day 3, and reality hurt when our game was just a little over average. That was good enough, however, to move us from 27th to 15th.

Before I present a few hands, I will share advice that Sam regularly gave his old man. I hear his voice in my head every time I play: "Dad, don't play scared bridge."

In the first hand of the final session with both sides vulnerable, I picked up:

♠QJ6 ♥Q9843 ♦K65 ♣T2

Partner opened 1♣. RHO overcalled 1♥, and I bid 1NT. That ended the auction and LHO led the ♠9. Dummy came down and I was looking at:

♠AK
♥652
♦QT7
♣KJ753

♠ 9 led

♠QJ6

♥Q9843
♦K65
♣T2

Given the overcall and lack of a heart lead, it was clear East held ♥AKJT7. Perhaps we had a bit of good fortune to have been kept out of our 8 card heart fit. Can I make 1NT? Looks like 3 spades, 1 or 2 diamonds depending on the location of the ♦J, maybe 1 heart and some number of clubs. A lot of work to be done before the opponents establish their spade tricks. Making 1NT should be a good score, but making 1NT was far from obvious.

How would you play the hand?

I won the ♠A (perfect play so far!) and led the ♣3 from dummy, RHO played low, I played the ♣T and it won. A good start. I returned the ♣2 and LHO played low. Surely LHO did not duck the ♣Q allowing my ♣T to win. I put up the ♣K and RHO dropped the ♣Q. Nice! Two club tricks won with the suit splitting 4=2 ... too bad they weren't 3=3. It was time to change suits. Do I attack diamonds or hearts? It seemed like I could afford to play hearts. Even if I lost 3 heart tricks and the 2 minor suit aces, I'd still make my contract and a possible overtrick.

So I played a low heart, and RHO went up with the ♥A. To my surprise, LHO dropped the ♥T. RHO had overcalled on ♥AKJ7. Suddenly my heart suit was looking quite promising. RHO returned a spade which I won perforce in dummy (another nice play ☺). I led a small heart and RHO played the ♥7. I won with the ♥8. LHO showed out. (At least RHO did not overcall on ♥AKJ.)

I led a low diamond to dummy's ♦Q and it won. It appeared LHO held 2 aces and a long spade suit headed by the 9. Another small heart from dummy saw RHO put up the ♥A and return a diamond. The lack of a spade return confirmed RHO's shape to be 2=4=5=2, so I played low, and fortunately LHO did not hold the ♦J. LHO won the ♦A, cashed his ♣A, and I claimed holding top ♠Q, ♥Q, ♦K.

Here's the full deal

	♠AK	
	♥652	
	♦QT7	
	♣KJ753	
♠987532		♠T4
♥T		♥AKJ7
♦A4		♦J9832
♣A964		♣Q8
	♠QJ6	
	♥Q9843	
	♦K65	
	♣T2	

Plus 150 was an absolute top. Two other NS pairs played 1NT by N and were down 2, a 4 trick difference from our result. Four NS pairs played in hearts making 7, 8, or 9 tricks, presumably when East did not overcall his 4 card heart suit. Six EW pairs played and made 2♠.

The next hands went well; either we were in the right contract making the right number of tricks, or the opponents were not.

Then with both sides vulnerable, I picked up ♠AQJ97 ♥874 ♦Q ♣QT62 Partner passed and RHO opened 1♣. I overcalled 1♠. LHO passed and partner cue bid 2♣ showing a limit raise in support of my spades. RHO bid 3♣. I should have doubled 3♣, but if I did, there would be no story to tell. I bid 3♠ and that was passed out. West led the ♣5, and I was looking at:

	♠852	
	♥AKJ62	
	♦8542	
	♣8	
♣ 5 led		
	♠AQJ97	
	♥874	
	♦Q	
	♣QT62	

RHO won with the ♣K and returned the ♦7. I expected a spade return to cut down on dummy's club ruffs. RHO appeared worried about dummy's hearts. LHO won my stiff ♦Q with the ♦A and returned a low diamond on which RHO played the ♦K. I ruffed and led a heart to dummy's ♥K on which RHO played the ♥9. Then I led ♠2 from dummy and RHO quickly played the ♠K, which appeared to be a singleton.

I won and led the ♣6, LHO discarded a diamond, and I ruffed with the ♠5. I now believed RHO had 1 spade, 7 clubs, 3 or 4 diamonds (at the time I thought with ♦K7, RHO would not have led the ♦7, but that was not necessarily correct) and therefore 1 or 2 hearts. Looked like the heart finesse was odds on with LHO holding 3 or 4.

But wait ... LHO has the ♦A and maybe the ♦J. If he had the ♥Qxxx, he certainly would have made a negative double over my 1♠ bid. Even with 3 hearts, he'd have 5 diamonds, ♠Txxx, and with the ♥Qxx, he might have bid 1nt or made a negative double. I decided RHO had the ♥Q. So I cashed the ♥K. RHO dropped the ♥Q with an air of disgust. Another queen magically fell offside under my king. I cashed the ♥J to reach this ending:

	♠8	
	♥62	
	♦85	
	♣	
♠T64		♠
♥		♥
♦JT		♦9
♣		♣KJ97
	♠QJ9	
	♥..	
	♦	
	♣QT	

I now led the good ♥2 from dummy, but I ruffed with the ♠Q as LHO discarded a diamond. I led the ♣T. Best defense is for LHO to ruff higher than dummy's ♠8 and lead a spade, leaving me with the losing ♣Q in my hand. But that didn't happen. Defense is hard. LHO discarded his last diamond, I ruffed with the ♠8, and led dummy's good ♥6 pitching my ♣Q.

LHO was forced to ruff and lead from his ♠T6 into my ♠J9 spades. 3♠+1. Plus 170 beat out the other pairs playing in spades or hearts, but it wasn't a top because 2 EW pairs played 3♣X and 4♣X, respectively down 1 and 2. I did say I should have doubled 3♣, didn't I? It did turn out that 2 EW pairs made 3♣ and 4♣.

Here's the full hand:

	♠852	
	♥AKJ62	
	♦8542	
	♣8	
♠T643		♠K
♥T53		♥Q9
♦AJT63		♦K97
♣5		♣AKJ9743
	♠AQJ97	
	♥874	
	♦Q	
	♣QT62	

For the entire session, it seemed every hand was going our way; no mistakes. I had visions of 70+%. Even had the fantasy of winning or coming in 2nd and getting our photo in the Bulletin. It was not to be, but our session score of 63.12% was good enough to move us up to 4th place. Not bad, going from 27th to 4th out of an original field of 96 pairs. The 34.62 MP award was enough to reach Sapphire Life Master.

Kudos and major thanks to my partner Jeff for his support over the past year+, and I am not talking about his holdings in my trump suit.

Sam and I played in this same event (Bruce LM 0-6000 pairs) in Providence 2 years ago. We came in 3rd, our pinnacle bridge moment together. That was the last time I did, or will ever play bridge with Sam, my son and 20-year bridge partner.

Thank you, Sam, for forever being with me at the bridge table in Toronto.



By the way, Sam's mom and 2 sisters (Jill, Sarah, Libby) told me there was no way Sam was going to let Jeff and me do better than Sam and I did in Providence. ☺