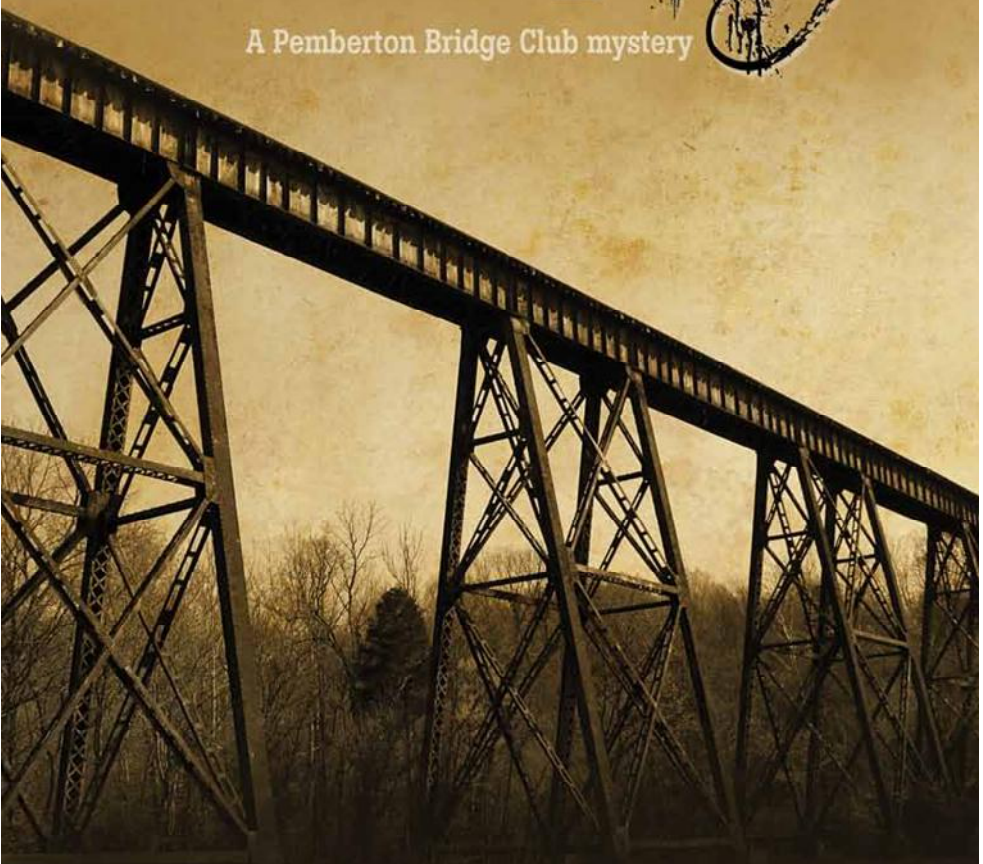


Deadly Endplay

A Pemberton Bridge Club mystery



Ken Allan

Deadly Endplay

A Tembaroc
Ken Allan



MASTER POINT PRESS • TORONTO, CANADA

Text © 2011 Ken Allan

Cover image © 2011 Diane Deaton-Street

All rights reserved. It is illegal to reproduce any portion of this material, except by special arrangement with the publisher. Reproduction of this material without authorization, by any duplication process whatsoever, is a violation of copyright.

Master Point Press

331 Douglas Ave.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5M 1H2

(416)781-0351 Email: info@masterpointpress.com

Websites: www.masterpointpress.com

www.teachbridge.com

www.bridgeblogging.com

www.ebooksbridge.com

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Allan, Ken, 1940-

Deadly endplay [electronic resource] : a Pemberton Bridge Club mystery / Ken Allan.

Electronic document issued in PDF format.

Also issued in print format.

ISBN 978-1-55494-169-8

I. Title.

PS8601.L42778D42 2011b

C813'.6

C2011-901587-0

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP) for our publishing activities.

Editor

Suzanne Hocking

Interior format

Sally Sparrow

Cover and interior design

Olena S. Sullivan/New Mediatrix

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

This book evolved over a period of about thirty years, until I had a small number of copies printed in 2008. The manuscript was read at various stages by Don Kersey, Paddy Allan, Mark and Shona Donovan. They made numerous suggestions to make the final draft much better. The evolution has continued. This is much the same story, but now it is told somewhat better as a result of feedback from readers, reviewers and, especially, many suggestions to improve the flow of the story from Ray Lee and Suzanne Hocking.

Special thanks to Joy Allan and Bert Weir for the physical appearance of that first version of this book.

A U T H O R ' S P R E F A C E

Ian Fleming, in *Moonraker*, has James Bond deal the following bridge hand to the villain, Hugo Drax:

♠ A K Q J
♥ A K Q J
♦ A K
♣ K J 9

You could play a lifetime without holding a hand this rich in high cards. Drax accepts it as his due, doubles Bond's grand slam in clubs and doesn't suspect he is being swindled until it becomes apparent that he is not going to take a single trick. The hands of Bond and his partner are:

| | |
|-------------|-------------------|
| M | Bond |
| ♠ 10 9 8 7 | ♠ — |
| ♥ 6 5 4 3 | ♥ — |
| ♦ — | ♦ Q 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 |
| ♣ 7 6 5 3 2 | ♣ A Q 10 8 4 |

This is a variant of a famous whist hand (the Duke of Cumberland's hand) and while it helps, in following the action, to know a little about bridge (or whist), you don't have to know much about cards to appreciate that Drax has a pretty good hand and that it would be unusual, not to mention deflating (and, when the high stakes have just been doubled and redoubled, expensive) to lose with such a hand.

It is very unusual to find a bridge hand in a popular novel. Bridge slows down the narrative and there are very few deals where the effect of the bidding and the play on the characters is as easily understood as with Drax and Bond.

Bridge deals and storytelling are an uneasy fit. Some writers of bridge novels avoid bridge deals entirely in the hope that they can reach a larger audience. Some bridge players could follow the bidding and play if they encountered a bridge deal in a novel, but generally choose not to read such novels.

And yet... and yet... bridge hands get under your skin. Some players exhibit a personality when they are playing bridge that is quite different from their personality away from the table. The same hand can provoke quite different responses depending on the personality of the player. This has practical implications in bidding and play. Recognizing and making use of the way different personality types respond to bridge deals is the main subject of the bridge classic *Why You Lose at Bridge* by S.J. Simon. Likewise, in *Bridge in the Menagerie*, the peerless Victor Mollo uses personality traits to bring about unexpected and entertaining twists in the play of bridge deals. Both authors are fun to read. Both write about characters that can be found in every bridge club. Both have characters that can be defined by a single stroke of the pen. Both authors stay pretty much at the bridge table.

Duplicate bridge players seldom leave bridge behind when they leave the table. They always have a story to tell if asked about interesting or challenging hands, and they spend time thinking about triumphs and disasters when they should be doing something else. The rare exceptions are players who play the game purely to relax and who expend very little mental energy on the game. In this novel, Russell and Doc are such characters, but they are unusual in that respect and even they are not impervious.

This novel takes place in a fictional town wedged into an actual landscape located north of Bruce Mines and east of Sault Ste. Marie. The story is a mystery of sorts, but with just one serious suspect, it is not a whodunit. It is more of a whether-anyone-dunit and, if so, howdunit.

S.J. Simon concentrated on four personality types. The average bridge club has many more than that. Appendix A (p. 213) has a short description of the Pemberton Duplicate Bridge Club members who appear most often.

C H A P T E R



THE PEMBERTON CHRONICLE

Friday, November 26, 1982

THE JAY'S NEST

by Jane Seabrook

South dealer

Neither Vul.

North (Corey)

♠ K 10 9
♥ K 5 4
♦ K Q 10 3
♣ 6 5 2

West (Kit)

♠ Q 5 4 2
♥ Q 2
♦ A J 9 5
♣ 9 8 4



East (Jake)

♠ 7 3
♥ 10 8 7 6 3
♦ 7 4 2
♣ K J 3

South (Jay)

♠ A J 8 6
♥ A J 9
♦ 8 6
♣ A Q 10 7

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|----------|-------|
| pass | 3NT | all pass | 1NT |

Opening lead: ♦ 5

This was the second hand out of the box. On the first board our opponents, Kit and Jake, got a top because I made a mistake on defense and let them make a game contract that nobody else was in.

"I was pushy," said Kit to Jake, "but I knew you'd play it well."

What he meant was that Corey and I could be counted on to defend poorly. Honestly, these experts assume that anyone who is inferior to them at bridge is too dumb to understand when they talk in code.

The second hand cheered me up a little. I could see right away there were finesses all over the place and I just love finesses. The experts say a finesse should be taken only as a last resort but I'll leave them to their strips and squeezes — just show me a finesse and I'll take it. I won the diamond lead with the king in dummy and led a club, finessing the ten, which held, and I got that warm feeling you get when you just know everything is where you want it to

be. I led a spade to the ten, which won. Bliss. Then I noticed there was a two-way finesse in spades — if the spade queen had been on my right, I should have finessed toward my hand rather than toward the dummy.

It was a good thing I didn't see it sooner or I would have gotten it wrong. As much as I love finesses, I hate two-way finesses. With the simple finesse, you just take it and if it wins you get an extra trick and if it loses... well you were never going to win that trick anyway so it doesn't matter. With two-way finesses, there is a right way and a wrong way. With an unerring sense of misdirection, you can go wrong every time.

Fran says if there is no other indication, two-way finesses should be taken toward the longer hand. I'm sure she gave a reason but I forgot it long ago. The catch in this is the 'no other indication.' I'm not sure I would recognize an 'indication' even if there was one. Finessing toward the dummy was backward, sort of, but it was right this time so who cares — besides Kit, of course. He sat there squirming and I could tell he was not enjoying this hand, which cheered me up no end. Maybe the 'indication' was that I wanted to get back over to dummy to finesse in clubs again so I might as well take the two-way finesse in the direction that was most convenient for my plan.

Still, if I had noticed the two-way spade finesse I would have gotten

it wrong. It was a narrow escape, but I didn't let it slow me down. A club to the queen and a spade to the nine got me two more extra tricks. With every successful finesse, I was enjoying myself more and more. I cashed dummy's spade king and played to my club ace, leaving me in my hand with these cards left.

| | | |
|----------|--|------------|
| ♠ — | | ♠ — |
| ♥ K 5 4 | | ♥ 10 8 7 6 |
| ♦ Q 10 3 | | ♦ 7 4 |
| ♣ — | | ♣ — |
| ♠ Q | | |
| ♥ Q 2 | | |
| ♦ A J 9 | | |
| ♣ — | | |
| ♠ A | | |
| ♥ A J 9 | | |
| ♦ 8 | | |
| ♣ 7 | | |

Next I played a diamond toward the diamond queen in dummy and when Kit went up with the ace, I was almost ready to forgive him. Kit returned a spade to my ace. I was about to lead small to the heart king when I had an inspiration — maybe I should take the heart finesse backward too. So I played the heart jack and as soon as Kit covered with the queen I realized that I had acted too quickly. The finesse had worked, but I didn't have an extra trick. When a finesse works, it's supposed to give you an extra trick. That's one of the rules of bridge!

Then I saw there was another finesse available in hearts — with the king, queen and jack gone, and

the ace-nine in my hand, I now had a finesse against the ten. This is what I love about bridge. Just when the deal seems to be over, another finesse appears out of thin air. I was pretty sure my club seven was good, but there was no need to take a chance. I just pitched it on the queen of diamonds and took the heart finesse.

There were only two other players to make three overtricks on this deal, so Corey and I had a tie for top.

Kit Know-It-All McCrea was fit to be tied, muttering about practice finesses, but I figured a bottom served him right after what he had said. I told him "You buttered your bread, Kit, now lie in it."

He just stared at me with a blank look on his face. Honestly, I don't think he understood a word I said. It's just amazing how some people can be so good at bridge and so bad at life.

CHAPTER

On a cool Tuesday evening in late April, 1983, a blue cloud of smoke hung over fifteen tables of bridge players in the Elks Hall. In ten years, the club, like other duplicate bridge clubs across North America, would become non-smoking. Until then, a smoker could light up at will, inhale deeply while studying the cards, and then, ready to proceed, place the cigarette in an ashtray, the smoke wafting lovingly toward the player at the table who was most offended by secondhand smoke.

When the Methodists of Pemberton sold their church to the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks in 1925, they had no idea that it would become a home for instruments of the devil. The game of Contract Bridge had just been invented, so they couldn't know that, in twenty years, Contract Bridge would be the favorite indoor pastime of the citizens of Pemberton. Not on Sundays, of course, though in another twenty years their grandchildren, feeling a little wicked, would play bridge even on Sundays.

This evening, sixty bridge players sat at fifteen tables arranged in two rows down the length of the hall. The players were a cross-section of Pemberton. Women outnumbered men by two to one and over-fifties outnumbered under-fifties by the same margin. Beyond those two broad distinctions, there was no discernible type, with all ages and occupations represented.

The youngest members were Kevin Crockford and Barry Penrose, who looked like teenagers but were actually in their early twenties. Both worked at the Brickworks for several years after graduating from high school and were now commuting to Algoma College in the Soo.


The oldest were Jenny Bird and Carrie Hamel, both over ninety, who lived at the Red Castle retirement home (red brick donated by the Brickworks). They were picked up and delivered back after the game by Jenny's nephew, Jim Campbell, better known as the Professor.

Although most of the field was experienced and fairly good at the game, even ordinary looking deals could produce a variety of results.

Take Board 15:

South dealer

N-S Vul.

| | | | |
|--------------|---|-------------|--|
| | North | | |
| | ♠ K 9 8 | | |
| | ♥ J | | |
| | ♦ K Q 7 3 | | |
| | ♣ Q J 7 6 5 | | |
| West |  | East | |
| ♠ 6 4 | | ♠ Q 3 2 | |
| ♥ A 9 3 | | ♥ 8 7 6 5 4 | |
| ♦ J 10 9 5 4 | | ♦ A 6 | |
| ♣ 8 4 2 | | ♣ A 9 3 | |
| | South | | |
| | ♠ A J 10 7 5 | | |
| | ♥ K Q 10 2 | | |
| | ♦ 8 2 | | |
| | ♣ K 10 | | |

The cards in this board were shuffled and dealt at Table 8 at the beginning of the evening. On the face of it, there was nothing very unusual about the deal. Looking at all four hands, it is surely routine to bid the four-spade game, taking ten tricks (losing just three aces — a simple spade finesse avoids losing a trump trick to the queen of spades). Despite this, in actual play, not everyone would get to the same contract or take the same number of tricks. In fact, this straightforward deal got varied treatment both in the bidding and in the play. Not only that, it

was, for several players, the deal of the night. Indeed, for a few others, this deal started small ripples that would never completely fade away.

When Board 15 arrived at Table 4, Katie Burton and Corey Loucks bid confidently to four spades. Katie was a buxom woman in her mid-forties who wore her red hair up in a bun from which a strand or two was always making an escape. She had been a regular duplicate player for six years, starting soon after David's heart attack made her a widow (David was the Burton of Burton & Johnson Realty). A rubber bridge player for all of her adult life, Katie found, when she took up duplicate, that her bridge skills were inferior to those of the other players in the club. She took the Professor's advanced class in card play several times and absorbed a little bit more each time. She was gradually becoming a competent player, much better than her rubber bridge friends, but barely average in the duplicate club.

West led the jack of diamonds and Corey laid down her cards, making Katie responsible for winning ten or more tricks from their combined hands.

Dummy (Corey)

♠ K 9 8

♥ J

♦ K Q 7 3

♣ Q J 7 6 5



South (Katie)

♠ A J 10 7 5

♥ K Q 10 2

♦ 8 2

♣ K 10

Katie won the second round of diamonds in dummy and paused to consider how she should play the trump suit. With just two top honors, she would have to hope the missing spade queen was on her right. Should she play the king first before leading low toward her hand for

the finesse? Or should she hold the king in reserve to get back to dummy to finesse a second time in case Rose, on her right, started with four spades? No need for that — with the nine in dummy she could play the king first, in case the queen dropped, and then run the nine.

Eying the spade nine, Katie suddenly realized she could also finesse toward the dummy. This was what the Professor called a two-way finesse — if the queen was on her right, she should finesse toward her hand as she had been planning; however, if the queen was on her left, she should finesse toward dummy. Katie hated two-way finesses.

Katie's attention drifted to the other suits. The clubs would be solid once she forced out the ace. The hearts too. Suddenly the jack of hearts in the dummy leapt into sharp focus. It almost grinned at her as she made a connection between the hand in front of her and an advanced play she knew only in theory. Top players make such connections regularly, but Katie had difficulty transferring theory to the table unless it was a situation that occurred frequently. For Katie, this moment, when abstract theory shone its light on an actual hand, was an epiphany. Unless she was missing something, she had all the ingredients for Clayton Carmichael's pseudo endplay!

It had been two months since Clayton explained how it worked. Then for several weeks she had been on the lookout. Now, at last, she could solve a nasty two-way finesse by making an expert play. The key was the singleton jack of hearts in dummy. She said, "Heart, please." Jake Harden, on her left, won with the ace, and Katie held her breath.

Jake, in his late forties, had weathered skin from years of exposure to sun and wind on his mixed farm north of Pemberton. He should have looked older than his age. In fact, he had a boyishness that made him look younger. He spread his cards with labor-thickened fingers and tried to figure out why Katie Burton was so tense. It looked as though she wanted to trump a couple of hearts in dummy, so the marked play was to lead a trump and hope that his partner held the ace — a spade return would cut her down to one ruff. Perhaps she was hoping he wouldn't lead a trump. Or maybe it was just that leaving the kiddies on the street made her nervous.

After deliberating for an interminable length of time, Jake lead a spade to the nine, queen and Katie's ace. "Won't Clayton be pleased," she said, beaming at the confounded Jake Harden.

“What’s he got to do with it?” asked Jake.

His irritation was lost on Katie. “I just can’t wait to tell him how I did his pseudo endplay,” she said as she drew trumps, knocked out the club ace and claimed the rest of the tricks.

The full deal, once again:

South dealer

N-S Vul.

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| | Dummy (Corey) ♠ K 9 8 ♥ J ♦ K Q 7 3 ♣ Q J 7 6 5 | | |
| | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> | | |
| West (Jake) ♠ 6 4 ♥ A 9 3 ♦ J 10 9 5 4 ♣ 8 4 2 | | | East (Rose) ♠ Q 3 2 ♥ 8 7 6 5 4 ♦ A 6 ♣ A 9 3 |
| | South (Katie) ♠ A J 10 7 5 ♥ K Q 10 2 ♦ 8 2 ♣ K 10 | | |

| West | North | East | South |
|----------|-------|------|-------|
| pass | 3♠ | pass | 1♠ |
| all pass | | | 4♠ |

Opening lead: ♦J

Jake looked around the room of duplicate bridge players and saw Clayton sitting South, eight tables away. He checked his card: five rounds had been played. “Don’t tell him until after the game,” he said, “He’ll be playing this hand on the last round.”

Jim Campbell was Pemberton’s bridge teacher. One of his first students, back in the 1960s, had referred to him as The Professor. The name stuck and was now used even by citizens of Pemberton who were

unaware that he taught bridge. He was actually a stationary engineer. In the course of a shift at the Brickworks, where he was in charge of the steam plant and kilns, he might become covered with grease, dust and cobwebs, but he was always immaculate when he strolled out of the Brickworks at 4:45 p.m., wearing a tweed jacket with leather on the elbows and smoking a pipe.

He was a good teacher. In fact, he was somewhat better as a teacher than as a player. He had rules for every situation and they were good rules. But rules have exceptions and bridge rules seem to have more than their share. The Professor knew this, but was not good at spotting the exceptions, especially at the table. On the hand that had given Katie Burton such extraordinary pleasure, he opened the bidding with one spade. Rita responded two clubs, the Professor bid two hearts and Rita jumped to game in spades. The opening lead was the diamond jack.

Dummy (Rita)

♠ K 9 8

♥ J

♦ K Q 7 3

♣ Q J 7 6 5



South (Professor)

♠ A J 10 7 5

♥ K Q 10 2

♦ 8 2

♣ K 10

It was obvious that he was going to cover the diamond jack with dummy's queen, but the Professor stopped to analyze the lead and make a plan. Making a plan was the rule most widely disregarded by his students. Most of them liked the action of play so much that they refused to do any thinking until they encountered a problem. The Professor could see that with three aces to lose, the only problem was to decide how to take the two-way finesse in spades. His rule for two-way decisions was to make them the same way every time — then you could

be sure of being right half the time. For two-way finesses one could adopt a completely arbitrary rule like always playing toward dummy, or geographical north, or the biggest person at the table. His personal solution in this case was to adopt the rubber bridge rule that the queen lay over the jack.

In rubber bridge, the queen would often cover the jack (but seldom the other way around) in the play to a trick. The queen would go into the deck just under the jack and during an imperfect shuffle the two cards would stay together. During the deal, the queen would be dealt immediately after the jack. None of this applied at duplicate, where players keep their cards in front of them in order to be able to put the hand, as they received it, back into the pocket of the board. It was, he thought, as good as any other arbitrary rule (and it meant that when he played rubber bridge, he didn't have to change his rule). If the queen was over the jack, then it would be in the hand on his left.

Having made a plan, he called for the diamond queen from dummy. This was won by the ace on his right and a diamond was returned to dummy's king. In order to follow his plan for the trump-suit finesse, he had to play from his hand. The Professor crossed to his spade ace. This was an inferior play, something the Professor was quite capable of figuring out. But when he had a rule to follow, he didn't always think things through. He led his jack, losing to the queen on his right. Down one.

When they examined the traveling score slip, it appeared that of the seven times Board 15 had been played so far, there was one other pair in four spades down one trick, one pair in two spades making four, one pair in three notrump (declared from the north side, don't ask about the bidding) making three, and three pairs (including Katie and Corey) in four spades making four. A tie for bottom, so far, for the Professor. "The problem with a weak field," he muttered, "is that most of them don't even notice there's a two-way finesse, so they play toward the long hand, which, this time, just happens to be right."

Russell Hicks was a bear of a man, a tame bear who looked slightly out of place at the bridge table. He enjoyed bridge, but for him it was a much simpler game than for the majority of duplicate players. He liked the rituals of duplicate bridge — the orderly movement of players and boards around the room, fanning a new hand every five to ten minutes,

sorting the cards into suits, bidding the hand, playing all thirteen cards one at a time. He gave each hand a minimum of thought and when the last card was played, the hand disappeared from his mind. This was a pleasant, relaxing way to spend an evening as long as he didn't do it too often. Once a week was just right.

Russell was a welder and his lack of application at the bridge table surprised those like Jake Harden who dealt with Russell on a professional basis. Russell was very good at what he did and would typically recognize a piece of equipment he had welded years before. When it came to bridge, however, he could talk about when he played and who he played with but not the cards he held. In comparison with the rest of the people in the room this evening, Russell was not a good player. He had signed up for the Professor's lessons a couple of times, absorbing just enough to get by.

Nevertheless, he sometimes scored better than one would expect from a player who put so little effort into the game. The one bridge play that never failed to get Russell's full attention was the ruff. He always made maximum use of the trump suit and if the success of a contract depended on a cross ruff, there was no one likely to do better.

On Board 15, after dummy's diamond king won the second trick, Russell's first thought was to ruff a diamond. When Russell had a first thought, he seldom wasted time on a second. After the diamond ruff, Russell was in his hand and paused briefly to consider a course of action.

Dummy (Jenny)

♠ K 9 8

♥ J

♦ 7

♣ Q J 7 6 5



South (Russell)

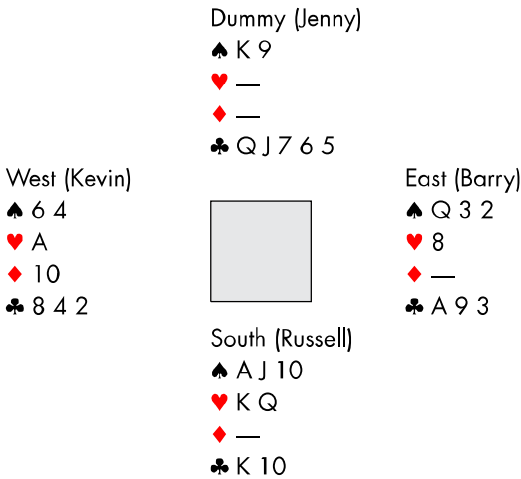
♠ A J 10 7

♥ K Q 10 2

♦ —

♣ K 10

Russell saw that if he lost a heart he could do some more ruffing before he drew trumps. The Professor had tried, in vain, to convince Russell there was no gain in ruffing in the long hand, as Russell had just done when he ruffed the diamond. This deal was going to make the Professor's task even more difficult because Russell was about to take more tricks than the Professor. Of course, once the heart jack forced out the heart ace, there would be no need to ruff hearts. But Russell played a heart before this occurred to him. Kevin, on his left, carelessly played low so the heart jack won the trick! Although this was an unexpected turn of events, Russell knew what to do next. He ruffed another diamond and then ruffed a heart. This brought about the following end position with dummy on lead:



Russell called for a small club and craftily dropped his king under Barry's ace. Barry was on lead and considered his options. He correctly guessed that if he played a club, Russell would win and coast home on the crossruff. Barry played a trump, but to no avail, as this was won by Russell's jack. Russell ruffed another heart with the spade king,

played dummy's queen and jack of clubs, throwing his last heart (Barry kicking himself for not having discarded clubs on the third and fourth diamond leads), and won the last two tricks with the ten and ace of trumps.

In the bidding, they had stopped short of game (Russell passed Jenny's conservative limit raise — being conservative usually worked best for them), so they didn't have a good board. Russell and Jenny took turns apologizing for not going on. Nevertheless, Russell was pleased with the result. He took one trick more than anybody else and two more than the Professor (the results of everybody who had played the hand were there on the traveling score slip for all to see).

"I don't see how he could go down," said Russell. "Sometimes he gets too fancy."

The Stinson twins (Fran had actually been a Porter for seventeen years now, but whenever she played with her brother she became a Stinson again) were the strongest pair in the club. Outside the bridge club, Phil was quiet and self-effacing. As one of the best players in Pemberton, he was treated with more respect when he played bridge than in any other part of his life. At the bridge table, his bidding and play of the cards spoke for him. Fran was reserved, like her twin brother, but more assertive in social situations and more likely to take control when something needed to be done. As a bridge player, she was more conservative than Phil, more knowledgeable about bridge theory and technically better at playing the hand.

On Board 15, they had the same bidding sequence as the Professor and Rita, making Fran the declarer.