



BEV SMITH 1940-2015

A tribute from John Knight

With the death towards the end of last year of Bev Smith, the Ashburton Bridge Club has lost its leading member. Not only was she the club's top player, she has been for many years involved in the administration and day-to-day running of the club.

She was first pointed out to me in the late 1960s as “that’s the young person in the learners' class who's showing a lot of promise.” She didn't stay a learner for long. Early in the 1970s, she and Val Brightling won the A Ladder, a feat she was to repeat with Mary Mulligan and Pat Sutherland over the next few years. She was a brilliant natural player who added to her skill by studying bridge, reading widely and analysing hands, which she did for the rest of her life. She and I began our partnership in the late 1970s.

Our first major tournament was in Timaru. We came 35th, a result which pleased some more than it did others. Later that year, we returned to Timaru for the South Island Pairs and came third. Over the years, I can recall at least two 37% sessions and one 80.6%.

She played many times for Canterbury and did well with several different partners. I believe that she could have played for New Zealand had she wished. She had the ability; unlike many, she had the temperament. She could take the rough with the smooth and carry on unruffled. She could and did play with anyone, anywhere, usually with very good results. She was for a long time Ashburton's only Grand Master.

Bev was a member of the club committee for more than forty years. She was treasurer for many of those years and, uniquely, elected president three years in a row. She was up to the time of her death the Thursday night convenor and had taught, until comparatively recently, learners' classes. Many members settle post-mortems with, "But Bev says..." Behind the scenes she did so much more – only she knew just how much. Her retirement from the committee of the club which had elected her a life member many years ago was the committee's loss.

It was always a pleasure to watch Bev play a tight or tricky contract and to see her squeezing every available trick out of the cards. She loved playing the hand (she preferred me in my proper role of dummy). Bridge is a game of mistakes, the fewer the better, and Bev made very very few.

She was always ready to offer advice - but only if asked. Her frequent comment - "Know your system and stick to the rules" - not that she herself always did the latter. But she knew when, why and how to break them.

Our bridge partnership, we joked, lasted longer than many marriages, almost forty years. We felt we'd played at the best time in bridge history. We began in the formal era when what you wore was important and the game was still relatively uncomplicated right through the transformation to today's casual dress style with highly evolved and competitive bidding systems.

Bev was widely known in bridge circles throughout New Zealand where she was admired, respected and loved. I am so glad to have had a role in her journey.