

The Declarer

5 Minutes with Jill le Vieux

Born in London in 1932, Jill has travelled extensively and has lived in three continents.

Jill has played bridge for 50 years and has enjoyed our club for over 20 years. She recalls her parents playing at a London club. They were a card loving family.

Jill was raised in Norwood, South London, along with an older brother and sister. She remembers her brother carrying her up a tree and leaving her there! Mischief and adventure have been features of Jill's life.

She was sent to boarding school in Yorkshire at a young age. Playful and roguish, Jill's antics were not always appreciated.

"I organised a bed jumping competition; we broke seven beds and I got expelled."

She then went to another boarding school. Her next move was to Finishing School in Switzerland where she learned to dance and she became proficient in French.

With acting ambitions, Jill attended The School of Speech and Drama in London at the Royal Albert Hall. Yes she did get her moment in the sun, taking the part of Tatania in a Mid-Summer Night's Dream on stage at the Albert Hall.

Unfortunately, Jill contracted pneumonia and whooping cough, leading to isolation and recuperation for three years in the seaside town of Broadstairs. These were the days before antivirals were available to fight such debilitating diseases.

Despite this setback, Jill started a new adventure when she recovered. She joined British Airways first as ground staff and then as a hostess.

'I wanted to be an air hostess and see the world.

Jill's regular crewing was to the Channel Isles on what was called the honeymoon route. Subsequently she was employed by Rhodesia Airways crewing on 21-seater Vikings. Today in modern aircraft this journey takes 13 hours. For Jill and the passengers the journey took three nights and four days! There were three stop-overs including at the city of Wadi Halfa, Sudan. Camel skin shoes were popular souvenirs.

Tea, coffee and sandwiches were provided on board the Vikings, but no hot meals. The planes flew relatively low as the cabins were not pressurised back then.

Jill had a flat in Zimbabwe Rhodesia. She became friendly with Felix, a Frenchman, who lived in the same complex. Romance blossomed. Jill and Felix made their home in rural Rhodesia. The couple acquired a sugar cane farm and they raised three children.

They needed strength for this journey, particularly as their two sons joined the army during the civil war. Sadly, one son did not return home.

When Felix died, Jill migrated to Australia some 25 years ago. Soon she joined SABA to pursue her passion for bridge. Jill's family were card players and she recalls her parents playing bridge. In Zimbabwe – Rhodesia, Jill learned to play and developed many friendships. Often bridge was played in homes: 'a common pursuit of farmers' wives.

' I took to bridge like a duck to water and I love playing.'

Here at SABA Jill played twice per week and she still enjoys her weekly visit. Jill and her current bridge partner, Anne Casaretto, spend time discussing bridge and consider how they can strengthen their strategies. Jill sees this as crucial to good partnerships. Highlights for Jill include making the occasional slam and she really enjoys it when the finesse works!

' when a finesse works, it's great.

Jill enjoys bridge and sees it as a way to keep the grey matter ticking over.

' Bridge keeps the brain active.

' It's generally enjoyable playing. It's great to have a nice partner and it's enjoyable when you win' she said.

What about our club?

' I like the atmosphere at our club. I've found everyone reasonable and pleasant.

Jill looks forward to continuing to play bridge once per week into the future.

Jill continues to enjoy travel. In the last months she and her niece enjoyed a trip on the Ghan to Alice Springs and Darwin. Recently she journeyed up to Queensland to visit her daughter and grandchildren. At 92, Jill's adventures continue.