



# Five Minutes With...

## *Karen Spark*



Introducing Karen Spark - intrepid and inspiring - and her story of interesting life choices, passion for bridge, travel adventures, and a strong commitment to supporting SABA as a member and volunteer playing at both Walkerville and Unley.

### ***What was your life before Bridge?***

I started playing music in Grade 3, but also excelled in maths and science, so my life could have followed either course. The choice was between exploring my creativity by going to the Conservatorium or bowing to persuasion to focus on science as a potential pathway to a more conventional and secure career. While most of my friends pursued creative music opportunities world-wide, I studied mechanical engineering. After university, I combined my scientific expertise with further legal studies to become a patent and trademarks attorney. But I didn't give up on my love of music and continued to play, including in orchestras, ensembles and even a German 'oompah' band. I also fostered my love of learning by completing a Graduate Certificate in World Historical Studies.

When I retired, keeping my mind busy was a priority, so I helped my daughter with her work for NDIS, and took on a range of volunteer work, mostly in schools, before discovering bridge.

I also undertook further study covering areas of interest (e.g. a Master of Arts in History and some units of human biology) and



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qualifications relating to my volunteer work (e.g. a Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies to understand how we all learn).

## ***How did Bridge come into your life?***

Like many Bridge players, card games were a strong focal point during my childhood in leisure time and on holidays with family members.

After retirement and my decision to stop volunteering, I was looking for something that would challenge my mind, increase my social network and that would be sustainable into my later life, even if I became physically frail.

Bridge seemed appealing, but, although I am generally confident and assertive, I initially rejected Bridge as an option because I didn't have a partner to learn with. Then I saw an advertisement for a Beginners Class at SABA, and took the courage to ring up to see if the club would accept me as a learner without a partner. I was assured that the club would find someone with whom I could play.

## ***You learned bridge towards the end of 2022, and have become a solid intermediate player in a short period of time. To what do you attribute your success?***

I have a mathematical brain so understand rules and probabilities, and I find it easy to remember structure, so now the nuances of shape and things like that are easier for me to work out. I think Bridge suits my sort of brain.

I also keep my playing simple, steady and reliable, with only a select number of conventions that are solutions to repeated problems that I have identified with partners - not learning conventions for the sake of it. I have seen people get into trouble because they have too many conventions. Learning a new convention is a slow, considered process and only for regular problems - for example, how do we challenge someone who opens



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1 NT. We tried Landy, but are now using Cappelletti. We got to that point because we wanted to learn how to interfere.

I am not yet at the level of being able to 'read' the hands around the table but am in awe of people who can. That will take a lot more practice.

## ***And what have been your greatest challenges?***

Disgust at my own play when I think I have been 'stupid'. I don't let mistakes get to me during play, but I do go home and give myself a hard time, feeling embarrassed when I should have known better. Everything I have ever done in my life I have tried to do really well so bridge is inherently frustrating for me. Also, Bridge is a team sport and I don't like to let my partner down through stupid play.

But the biggest challenge, as I have already mentioned, was turning up to Bridge alone.

## ***Given that there are likely to be many people wanting to play bridge but don't have your level of confidence to take that first step to come alone, is there any feedback you would like to give to SABA?***

If I hadn't had a partner by the end of the Beginners Course I don't think I would have come back, so the support of the tutors to always make sure I had someone to play with was critical.

The encouragement and reassurance I received as a beginner, including finding a suitable partner for me, were significant factors in my positive introduction to Bridge and my motivation to continue.

I would encourage SABA to make this level of support more explicit when advertising classes i.e. 'you don't need to have a partner to come and learn, we welcome everyone, and we will help you find a partner who is a good match for you'.



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***Since becoming a member of SABA have you noticed any changes?***

I think a positive change has been the development of more events for less experienced players. I think it is important to do that and ensure that more competitions are available for members of all levels, not just A grade players.

***You have a very active life outside of Bridge. What are some other interests that define you?***

I keep fit, walking 8 - 10 kms every day and going to the gym. This keeps me in good shape to pursue my passion for travelling and hiking.

I like to challenge myself. Most years since retiring I have been overseas for 3 or 4 months visiting places that I have always wanted to see. For example, in Grade 2 we learned about ancient Egypt, and it took me until I was 58 before I got to Egypt.

I travel by myself. I sometimes join tours but also spend time on my own. I try to do some hiking on most holidays, combining walking with history, so last year I followed the full Camino Frances all the way to Finisterre (about 1000 kms), and then walked Hadrian's Wall. Still on my bucket list is a walking trail in Japan, the Kumano Kodo, which is the only other trail beside the Camino Frances that is recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Cultural Landscape. If I complete both trails I qualify for a Dual Pilgrim Certificate!

I love to see different landscapes and engage with other cultures. My experiences meeting other people on my travels reminds me that most people are good and kind. I would still like to go to Antarctica, even though I have some environmental concerns.



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## ***Fun fact?***

I play the recorder, cornet and trumpet. I also love art and 'tinker' with water colour.

## ***A final word.***

I like to volunteer at SABA, as an acknowledgement that the club is OUR club, and it isn't just paid staff who have the responsibility to make the club successful. The club is what we make it.