Relatives of Bridge Players Anonymous: a confession

By Janice Arenofsky

Hello. My name is Janice, and I'm the relativeof a Bridge Addict. This is my story.
I was fine until my sister got engaged to a bridge player. In no time at all, it seemed, she went from playing war and concentration to making bids and contracts. From then on, she was playing with her fiance-partner at least once, sometimes twice, a week. If you called, she'd talk to you, but you felt her impatience and the stirrings of desire for a good bridge game with accomplished players. Meanwhile I'd sit at home wondering if I, too, would one day give up my sissy card games and grow up to become a bridge player like my older sister. Once married, my sibling couldn't say no to any bridge-playing opportunity. She'd play any day of the week, with her husband or without. It didn't matter where the game was or what the snackswere, she'd putt-putt there in her old Buick with the vinyl top and broken odometer.

Within a few years she and her husband becameLife Masters, and I was married and worrying what to do with my free time. Every chance she had, shewould try to recruit my husband and me. "Take a course at the high school," she would say whilediapering her firstborn.
"And read a few books." Meanwhile she was playing bridge so often and with so many better players that she began to improve by leaps and bounds.
Pretty soon she was motoring or flying to local, regional and national bridge conventions all over the country. One time it was Florida, the next time it would be Las Vegas or Washington DC.
I didn't know it at the time, but that was when she started abandoning her family for the quick fix of bridge. She said it was a hobby, stress relief, a way to be competitive without becoming a real estate broker, but I knew better. She was hooked on it. Since she was the first person in our family to become a fully functioning bridge player, no one understood her constant need for the thrills and chills of the sport. I figured she was using it as a way to avoid facing her real problems, whatever they were since I couldn't actually fathom why a middle-class high-school teacher with a lawyer for a husband and three adorable children (two ofwhom were unfortunately turned on to bridge at an early age) could be unhappy.
I had now relocated to Phoenix, where oddly enough, my sister never seemed to have a bridge convention. I checked on the ACBL web site and found out that, sure enough, there had been a recent bridge conference in the Valley of the Sun. When I called my sister on this, she stammered and stuttered and finally came up with the excuse that, "It was just too hot in Arizona in the summer."
But I knew better. After all, not only was it a dry heat, I had a pool. There was another, uglier, reason. If my sister and her husband came to Phoenix, they would feel obliged to spend some quality time with us. And that would take away from my sister's nonstop bridge schedule. That would never do. By then, she really couldn't go more than 24 hours without a bridge fix. Otherwise she'd act edgy and nervous.

Sadly, the situation never got any better. Every time I returned home to visit, she'd be going to play bridge. It didn't matter that she hadn't seen me for months and sometimes years, she still couldn't tear herself away from games in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. I did what I could to help her – I invited her to dinners at trendy nightclubs and even tried to distract her with tickets to a few Broadway shows – but nothing helped. Even her two married children tried to entice her away with opportunities to babysit her grandchildren and paint the kitchen. It was hopeless. The last straw was when I called her from Scottsdale and realized while I was blabbing away, she was at her computer playing online with a fellow addict in South America. What gave it away were all those dings ringing from her PC. She didn't even care enough to muffle the sounds. So that's my story. Luckily, I did not inherit the "obsessive" gene. I never became enthralled by the coolness, sophistication and intellectual pleasure of

bridge. My sister now plays bridge online every night and on weekends, she attends marathon sessions in the tri-state area. I hope I've helped. Perhaps you'll have more luck rehabilitating your relative-addict. Thank you for listening.

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