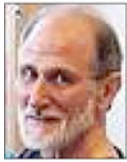


# life



**MALCOLM  
EWASHKIW**

**BRIDGE**

## Part One: Playing bridge in Poland



*Submitted photo - Malcolm Ewashkiw outside a turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century home in his father's village of Łosie*

I have just returned from a visit to the village in which my father was born. He was not actually Polish but his village is located in the south of modern day Poland. His father had emigrated there from Ukraine at the turn of the twentieth century. His mother belonged to a race of people known as Lemkos who had mostly Ukrainian/Russian backgrounds and had immigrated to that region centuries earlier.

Before heading south to visit the village, my family and I spent a week in Krakow, the cultural capital of Poland. Of course, with that much time in the city, and with Poland's reputation as one of the most populous bridge countries in the world, I had to locate a bridge club.

With the help of the Internet, I easily made contact before leaving Canada. I was in touch with Witek Stachnik, president of the Krakow Bridge Association, and he very generously offered to be my partner on the day arranged.

The day I played was the most popular of the week on the Krakow bridge calendar. Twenty four tables were in play and the setup on this day was quite different from the setup in North America. Witek talked of it as a “tournament” and in fact, because of the size of the field, it did seem more like a tournament than a club game.



*Witek Stachnik – photo by Malcolm Ewashkiw*

The scoring was “Barometer” style; this means that all players played the same boards at the same time. Of course, this requires many sets of boards, often a difficulty for local clubs but seemingly no problem for the Krakow club.

Before the game started, one of our first-round opponents was called away because of a fire at his office! When his partner chose to leave and not play with the director, Witek and I were left without opponents on the first round.

This posed quite a problem for the technician who was running the game. He and Witek spent the first round in the back room trying to sort out the movement that they would have to use to accommodate the gap that had been left by the retirement of this pair.

When we returned to our table for the start of round two, this was the first hand I picked up in my sojourn into what already seemed a little bit like a Twilight Zone atmosphere: ♠ J-10-7-5-4 ♥ 5-4-3-2 ♦ J-9-5 ♣ 10.

What a way to greet a guest! The bidding soon sounded as if it had actually been crafted by Rod Serling. My RHO opened one notrump (15-17), I passed, and my LHO bid two clubs. Witek doubled and my RHO passed.

I knew we were on dangerous ground here. I inquired, with Witek's translation, if the pass were conventional. I quickly learned that they had no agreements about how to handle this situation. With that knowledge, pass seemed the best option.

But, it got worse! My LHO redoubled and when Witek and my RHO passed, there I was again. Thanks, Rod. What now?

Since Witek knew what he was getting into when he doubled, I simply passed, hoping for the best. And the best occurred. Witek's clubs were K-Q-9-5-4-3 and he also held the ace of hearts. But I held the key card in whole deal – the jack of diamonds! We nipped the contract one trick for an absolute top. Witam z Polski! (Welcome to Poland!)

After the round, we checked our scores and saw that we were in third place. Scores are posted after the second round and then after each subsequent round when using Barometer scoring. Also, your next seating assignment is posted at the same time.

This makes the game very long. A round of three boards lasts 25-30 minutes compared with 20 minutes in North American clubs using our Mitchell or Howell movements. The game started at 5:15 but didn't finish until well after 9:00.

I'll continue my tale next week.



*The bridge club in Krakow – photo by Malcolm Ewashkiw*

## Part Two: Playing bridge in Poland



*Submitted photo - Malcolm (left) compares family photos with his cousin Zenon Dudra.*

Do you remember that after the first two rounds (only one of which we actually played) Witek and I were in third place? Unfortunately, that was the highest we placed all evening. The slide started when I picked up the following hand: ♠9-7-6-5-2 ♥3-2 ♦5-4-3 ♣J-3-2.

This was a jack worse than the previous hand I showed you! On this one, Witek opened one heart and my RHO jumped to two spades, weak. This was passed around to Witek who doubled.

We hadn't had a chance to discuss how strong he might be to reopen in the balancing position with double. With most of my regular partners, the double is pretty well automatic. If this were the case with Witek, I didn't see how pass could be a winning option when he might hold anywhere from 13 or 14 points to 19 or 20.

Instead of retreating to three hearts, I tried the effect of three clubs, bidding the cheapest suit available. But this only caused a return to Rod-Serling-land: Witek cue-bid three spades.

I toyed with three notrump but that just seemed as insane as passing two spades doubled had seemed the round earlier. I tried to sound very weak and bid four clubs.

This was greeted by a loud double on my left. OK, we were using bidding boxes but the red double card certainly shouted at me. When this rolled around, I pulled to four hearts. LHO doubled once more and my poor partner ended four down, -800 and a tie for bottom.

Ironically, but perhaps not surprisingly, the winning action was to pass two spades doubled. We could have beaten this contract by two tricks with accurate defence. Yes, partner held 20 points, not 13 or 14.

Our slide continued two rounds later when we played against one of the few women in the field. By my count, there were five female players out of a field of 94!



*At a Lemko folk festival – photo by Malcolm Ewashkiw*

This lady, who seemed a little intimidated to play against Witek, was on lead against his three notrump contract. She had opened one club, I had over-called one diamond, and Witek had closed the auction with three notrump. She held ♠A-Q-8-3 ♥K-J ♦J-8-2 ♣9-6-5-3.

She sat and thought for the longest time and finally led a low spade. This caught her partner with K-x-x-x in spades. They cashed the first four tricks. With any other lead, partner would have taken at least 12 tricks.

Two rounds later, partner stopped a bit of the bleeding when he found an effective lead of his own against three notrump. He held ♠9-8-5-2 ♥K-J-8-4 ♦K-9-5 ♣J-4. His LHO had opened one club, his RHO had bid one diamond, his LHO had rebid one heart, and his RHO had jumped to three notrump.

Perhaps remembering that fourth down from your longest and strongest had sunk us on a previous board, Witek led a low heart. I held Q-10-x-x of hearts. So we cashed three hearts and my ace of spades to hold the contract to three notrump for a fine score. On any other lead, declarer will score at least 10 tricks.

We finished the event slightly below average, the opponents not always playing poorly enough for us to score well. Playing bridge in another country, in another environment, however, was well worth the experience. I extend my thanks to Witek for being my partner and for agreeing to play two-over-one rather than his preferred Polish club system.



*Wawel Cathedral in Krakow – photo by Malcolm Ewashkiw*

Here is a final deal for you to savour. You may cover the East- West cards and decide how you would play six spades on a low heart lead. When you have tried the deal single dummy, look at all the cards and try playing the hand double dummy.

I will leave the play of the hand with you. Enjoy.

	♠K732	
	♥AQ8	
	♦3	
	♣QJ982	
♠J109		♠54
♥K10632		♥J75
♦1086		♦K742
♣54		♣K1073
	♠AQ86	
	♥94	
	♦AQJ95	
	♣A6	