

# Bridge with my Favorite Grandmother

Irad Yavneh

Written & Compiled in 1992  
Revived & Re-edited in 2022

## Prologue

I used to play contract bridge when I was a student. When I graduated and took a post-doc position I stopped playing, but at some point I started following the bridge newsgroup rec.games.bridge. One day in 1992 I constructed a bridge problem and decided to post it. Because the contract in this problem was way too ambitious to make any sense, I made up this story about partnering a fictitious bridge-playing grandmother who had misheard my bid. The reactions were encouraging, so I followed up with more episodes, all centering around my Favorite Grandmother (FG), as she came to be known. FG turned out to be quite a memorable individual and a truly remarkable bridge player. Over time I grew very fond of her, and I like to think that the feeling was mutual. But eventually I felt she was drawing too much of my attention at a critical time. So I stashed the episodes in a folder and I quit the newsgroup and stopped writing. I never returned to bridge.

It's been thirty years. I recently decided it might be worthwhile to revive the FG stories, in the hopes that they raise interest, and perhaps amusement, in some new-generation bridge players. Herein lie ten episodes of Bridge with my Favorite Grandmother, re-edited and rewritten in parts to improve accuracy and accessibility.

Irad Yavneh 2022

## 1 My Favorite Grandmother

My Favorite Grandmother (FG) is in for her annual visit, and she is still going strong. As always, we quickly find ourselves facing each other across the bridge table. It's money-bridge of course, and this is the very first hand.

None Vul., S dealer

**N (FG)**

♠AK54

♥7432

♦Q63

♣AK

**S (IY)**

♠Q3

♥AQ

♦AJ98

♣97532

Playing ancient Acol (Granny sees little merit in anything else), I decide to open an off-shape 12-14 point 1NT. FG calmly raises to 7NT, which is passed out. My left-hand opponent (LHO) leads the ♣Q, and Granny puts down her hand, remarking that with 37 or so points I should hardly have any problem.

In her haste, FG has apparently forgotten to unpack her hearing aide. She must have thought I had bid 2NT. Be that as it may, I must decide how to play 7NT.

Even if the heart finesse is on and four diamonds can somehow be brought in, there are only eleven tricks. A progressive squeeze is clearly necessary. But this means that the same defender must hold five hearts and four spades in addition to guarding clubs. This leaves room for one diamond at best. This had better be the King, as a  $\diamond T$  singleton with West will not do, for lack of sufficient communication. This was the full deal:

None Vul., S dealer

	<b>N (FG)</b>	
	♠AK54	
	♥7432	
	♦Q63	
	♣AK	
<b>W</b>		<b>E</b>
♠J982		♠T76
♥J9865		♥KT
♦K		♦T7542
♣QJT		♣864
	<b>S (IY)</b>	
	♠Q3	
	♥AQ	
	♦AJ98	
	♣97532	

The  $\heartsuit Q$  was finessed, and the  $\diamond A$  dropped the King. Now, a diamond to the Queen and two more diamonds, negotiating the marked finesse against the  $\diamond T$ , squeezed West in three suits in this position:

	<b>N (FG)</b>	
	♠AK54	
	♥743	
	♦—	
	♣K	
<b>W</b>		<b>E</b>
♠J982		♠T76
♥J9		♥K
♦—		♦T7
♣JT		♣86
	<b>S (IY)</b>	
	♠Q3	
	♥A	
	♦J	
	♣9753	

A club or heart discard by West on the  $\diamond J$  would give up two immediate tricks, but a spade discard did little better, as it established a fourth spade winner, which was played in the following position, subjecting West to a criss-cross squeeze.

	<b>N (FG)</b>	
	$\spadesuit 4$	
	$\heartsuit 74$	
	$\diamond -$	
	$\clubsuit K$	
<b>W</b>		<b>E</b>
$\spadesuit -$		$\spadesuit -$
$\heartsuit J9$		$\heartsuit K$
$\diamond -$		$\diamond T$
$\clubsuit JT$		$\clubsuit 86$
	<b>S (IY)</b>	
	$\spadesuit -$	
	$\heartsuit A$	
	$\diamond -$	
	$\clubsuit 975$	

Declarer discards a club on the  $\spadesuit 4$ , leaving West with a choice of evils. If he unguards hearts, then a heart to the Ace, a club to the King, and the last heart will score the remaining tricks, whereas if he chooses to unguard clubs then the  $\clubsuit K$ , followed by a heart to the Ace and the final club will do the same.

## 2 Defending against FG

Despite what she calls “the modest stakes”, Granny’s masterful play, aggressive bidding and light opening style have thus far enabled her to recoup the lion’s share of her round-trip air-fare. Luckily, I partnered her most of the time. Less fortunately, I now find myself sitting on her right in the East position, non-vulnerable against vulnerable opponents.

Sitting South, FG deals and passes. West, my partner, bids a weak 2♥, which North doubles. I pass, and FG leaps to 4♠, which ends the bidding. Partner leads the ♥K.

NS Vul., S dealer

N	
♠T7	
♥A5432	
♦AK5	
♣AK5	
	E (IY)
	♠J8532
	♥76
	♦J43
	♣Q32

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	P
2♥	X	P	4♠
End			

With a barely perceptible frown at dummy's surprising distribution, Granny puts up dummy's ♥A, dropping the ♥8, ruffs a heart with the ♠4 in hand (seemingly unsurprised to discover that West has only five hearts for his weak 2♥ bid), plays the ♣6 to dummy's Ace, West following with the ♣4, and leads another heart. How do I avert an upgrade to business class at my expense?

There are five top tricks in dummy, and FG is clearly intent on ruffing hearts in hand. Reasonably enough, she has decided to play me for at least 3-3 in the minors—had she suspected a doubleton, she would have cashed the corresponding high honors at tricks 3 and 4. Evidently, there is no way I can stop her from ruffing all four hearts if she so wishes. For example, if I discard a diamond, she can ruff, cash ♦AK, ruff a heart, ♣K, ruff last heart.

So she has nine tricks. Where will she look for the tenth? If she has Ace fifth in spades, the ♠A will win a trick in the end, and there's nothing I can do, so this assumption cannot be entertained. Does she have five spades without the Ace? In that case I can beat her by throwing a diamond now, and perhaps another later. But is that likely? She should then have ♦Q and ♣J, and still partner would be quite hefty for his bid, and FG thin for hers. More importantly, she would play the hand quite differently. With KQxxx 8 Qxxx Jxx or with a diamond more, she would no doubt have tried to draw trumps instead, because she initially believes that I have only one heart, and also does not know of the bad trump split. With a diamond less, she would have played ♦Q, ♦K, ♦A at tricks 3-5, ruff heart, ♣AK, ruff heart, claim. So Granny must have only four spades. Missing the Ace? That would make her jump to game, with just

eight soft and scattered points and ♠KQxx, far too risky. Furthermore, with the ♦Q she would always have a legitimate play and would not risk my diamond discard.

So she has four spades and no ♦Q. She cannot be missing ♠Q as well in light of the bidding and play, and besides, she would then have no hope regardless. This was the full hand:

	<b>N</b> ♠ T7 ♥ A5432 ♦ AK5 ♣ AK5	
<b>W</b> ♠ 96 ♥ KQJT9 ♦ QT2 ♣ T94		<b>E (IY)</b> ♠ J8532 ♥ 76 ♦ J43 ♣ Q32
	<b>S (FG)</b> ♠ AKQ4 ♥ 8 ♦ 9876 ♣ J876	

So this is it. FG is playing a straightforward, if unusual, dummy reversal. For her tenth trick she will exit ♣J, hoping for ♠J on her left or a trump endplay. The latter will work, unless I am careful enough to retain that third diamond as an exit card, to enable West to play through dummy's trumps. So I must discard three trumps on the hearts, or alternatively two trumps and a club.

### 3 FG defense

When I was young and Granny was, well, younger, we found ourselves partnering each other frequently. In that sense I was a lucky bridge player. In another not: I was always making bad guesses, especially of opening leads. Of course I have since come a long way, and I now take wrong views instead. But then, unlike now, FG was usually there to bail me out, as in the following deal.

NS were vulnerable, EW not. South, a clever fellow, dealt and opened 1♥, playing 5-card majors (for which habit, so goes the urban myth, Granny refused his hand in marriage). Sitting West, I bid 4♠, and North closed proceedings with 6♥.

NS Vul., S dealer

	N	
	♠ 43	
	♥ AT987	
	♦ AQT	
	♣ AQT	
W (IY)		E (FG)
		♠ 2
		♥ 2
		♦ J65432
		♣ 65432
	S (CF)	

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	1♥
4♠	6♥	End	

After lengthy (and futile as it were) consideration I led the ♦7, won by dummy's Ace, South dropping the ♦8. How should FG plan the defense?



NS Vul., S dealer.

	<b>N</b>	
	♠ 43	
	♥ AT987	
	♦ AQT	
	♣ AQT	
<b>W (IY)</b>		<b>E (FG)</b>
♠ AQJT9876		♠ 2
♥ 43		♥ 2
♦ 7		♦ J65432
♣ 87		♣ 65432
	<b>S (CF)</b>	
	♠ K5	
	♥ KQJ65	
	♦ K98	
	♣ KJ9	

My reasoning, which FG kindly described later as less than brilliant, was that North must hold three first-round controls, else he would have Blackwooded. Now, if one of these were a spade void, the ♠A lead could be disastrous. Furthermore, North would hardly bid as he had with two top spade losers, would he, and if he had a singleton spade I might be handing declarer his twelfth trick, or maybe rectifying the count for a minor-suit squeeze against FG, or perhaps FG had no trumps... Anyway, I led my singleton diamond.

Declarer's thoughts were that things looked grim, and he had no choice but to draw trumps, clear the minors and lead a spade. If FG had the singleton ♠A or ♠Q at that point, a ruff and sluff would bring in the twelfth trick, but that was very unlikely. Suddenly, a clever thought occurred to him. Assume that after the trumps are drawn and the minors are cleared the position is as follows:

	N	
	♠43	
	♥AT9	
	♦—	
	♣—	
W (IY)		E (FG)
♠AQxxx		♠x
♥—		♥—
♦—		♦xx
♣—		♣xx
	S (CF)	
	♠K5	
	♥J65	
	♦—	
	♣—	

What if, at this point, the small spade is led from declarer's hand rather than towards the ♠K? Sitting West, I would realize that FG must have a singleton spade. Is it a small card, in which case I should follow with the Queen, or the ♠K, in which case I must hop up with the Ace, executing the so-called crocodile coup, lest FG be endplayed, forced to concede a ruff and sluff in one of the minor suits? Declarer would already be marked with 13 high-card points at this stage, so either play could be right.

FG, however, was thinking too, mainly that if she doesn't teach her grandson some basics in a hurry, he will grow up to become the unluckiest expert in the county and place the entire family fortune at risk. But there was this defense to take care of first. Obviously, declarer had no minor suit losers, and surely no trump loser either, because with ♥KJ in addition to a powerful spade suit I would certainly not have led my singleton diamond, looking for another high card in her hand. The only chance to beat this contract was to win two spades, and FG immediately perceived CF's plan. Now, an experienced player in the West seat would guess correctly. But could a young, eager-to-be-clever player as me resist the crocodile coup? Would I realize that CF were devious enough to lead low from ♠K5? Granny couldn't take the chance. On the second round of trumps she threw the ♠2. CF still went through the motions, but there was no longer any way I could go wrong.

## 4 FG returns from India

When Granny was young (by her standards) she traveled to India. Ostensibly, she was visiting her nephew, who was stationed at the border-town of Sounali for refusing to play a non-vulnerable weak notrump with a superior officer, or so it was rumored. But she quickly turned to roaming the country, basking in its eternal wisdom and absorbing its ancient culture.

She came back a changed woman. Having survived for many months on little more than air water and dust had affected her strangely. She began to frown upon “our cousins across the ocean” for their wastefulness, “Imagine that—game values for a jump raise. Sheer extravagance!” Her opening bids turned a Polish shade of pale; her preempts were inflicted by acute anemia, as she lowered her standards with an almost religious zeal. Her loved ones began to worry when one night she went as far as shading an Acol two bid.

Curiously, she was doing better than ever, which worried her loved ones even more, since they were frequently her opponents. In one week she bid and made a slam off two cashable aces, brought in a doubled 3NT on a combined 17 point count, and doubled a slam holding Qxx in trumps and out, defeating the contract when declarer assumed she “couldn’t possibly” double with that holding.

This was the deal that finally caused her to be sent away for an extended vacation in Beverly Hills, California, putting an end to her strange crusade.

All Vul., S dealer

N  
 ♠8765  
 ♥K93  
 ♦AKQ97  
 ♣2  
 S (FG)  
 ♠A  
 ♥AQ542  
 ♦642  
 ♣J653

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	1♥
P	3♦ <sup>1</sup>	5♣	6♦
X <sup>2</sup>	6♥ <sup>3</sup>	P	P
X	P	P	XX
End			

1. This was a typical minimum jump shift in those (very) old days.
2. Penalty double of course, these were pre-Lightner days
3. Panic

Opening lead: ♠K.

It must be understood that Granny’s tremendous winning streak was common knowledge by then, and West, a sound player, would not have doubled either slam unless he was virtually sure of a set. Yet Granny redoubled without a moment’s hesitation. And then she proceeded to take twelve tricks.

All Vul., S dealer

	<b>N</b>	
	♠8765	
	♥K93	
	♦AKQ97	
	♣2	
<b>W</b>		<b>E</b>
♠KQJ		♠T9432
♥JT876		♥—
♦JT853		♦—
♣—		♣AKQT9874
	<b>S (FG)</b>	
	♠A	
	♥AQ542	
	♦642	
	♣J653	

Opening lead: ♠K.

West had to have at least nine red cards for his double and for his lack of spade overcall—clearly he had no clubs. The possibility of four diamonds and five hearts could not be entertained, since FG needed five diamond tricks to have any sort of chance. But with five diamonds and four hearts would West make the first double, driving opponents away from the suit in which he had five (not to mention not letting East lead clubs)? This seemed very unlikely. Also, with 4108, and no high cards outside clubs, might not the vulnerable East have settled for a more cautious 4♣? So FG correctly assumed 5-5 in the red suits and proceeded accordingly. She won the spade lead in hand and immediately led a diamond, putting in the ♦7 when West correctly played low. Now, she ruffed a spade in hand, led a second diamond, covered and won in dummy, and ruffed another spade in hand. She then cashed the remaining diamonds, discarding clubs, to reach the following position:

	N	
	♠ 8	
	♥ K93	
	♦ –	
	♣ 2	
W		E
♠ –		♠ T9
♥ JT876		♥ –
♦ –		♦ –
♣ –		♣ AKQ
	S (FG)	
	♠ –	
	♥ AQ5	
	♦ –	
	♣ J6	

Granny now ruffed her last spade in hand with the Ace of trumps, West, perforce, underruffing, and exited with a club. West was forced to ruff again, but was now endplayed in trumps, FG taking the rest.

## 5 FG loses her cool

It was a Friday night when FG bade a final farewell to septuagenarianism, and she agreed to partner me in the prestigious annual Swiss-teams match at our local club. Our team-mates were a youngish couple in their early sixties, both one-time students of Granny's, whose bidding style, FG noted, had developed a number of unfortunate American afflictions over the years, but whose play and defense were relatively unimpaired. Playing in fairly good form, we reached the final round in second place, nine IMPs behind the leaders. As Granny took her time getting into her seat, my RHO (FG's Left-Hand Offender, as she would later refer to him) blurted out some rude comment about little old ladies holding up the game. I noted an unmistakable flash in Granny's eyes, but she pretended not to hear, and I followed suit.

Several uneventful boards went by, and then came this.

NS Vul., W dealer

**N (IY)**  
♠ 932  
♥ AT5  
♦ T543  
♣ AJ2

**W (Offender)**  
♠ QJT765  
♥ Q43  
♦ J97  
♣ 3

**E**  
♠ 84  
♥ 2  
♦ Q62  
♣ QT87654

**S (FG)**  
♠ AK  
♥ KJ9876  
♦ AK8  
♣ K9

West	North	East	South
2♠	P	4♠ <sup>1</sup>	5♥
P	6h♥	End	

1. Believes opponents can make slam, so 7 doubled undertricks still yield a profitable sacrifice. This event took place was in the days of the old scoring for nonvulnerable doubled contracts.

Granny considered 6NT, but decided that 6♥ might offer more options in the play.

West led the ♣3, indicating either a singleton or low from three or four to an honor, and Granny launched into an extended trance. When a minute and a half had gone by, Offender lost what scant patience he had harbored and was about to explode, when FG snapped out of it and preempted him with an “Oh dear me, wasting your time for a silly overtrick”. Offender started to say something about a claim, but FG, with the steady hand of a regional needle-threading champion, rattled off thirteen tricks in rapid succession.

“How on earth did you know to finesse against my ♥Q?”, exclaimed Offender despite himself.

“Don’t you know”, croaked FG, “eight never, nine ever... or whatever... no wait, five frequently, six sometimes... or is it... ”

Later, when we were waiting for the other table to finish I asked FG: “I suppose the heart finesse was some sort of avoidance play, wasn’t it?”

“Not at all”, she responded, “we just got lucky. Very lucky, I suspect, for I see that it is Mildred who is sitting West at the other table.”

This enigmatic prophecy soon came true. East did not raise at the other table, but NS still ended up in 6♥. Mildred (West) led ♠Q, and later, when declarer understandably misguessed hearts, she found the killing defense.

The vulnerable slam swing was easily sufficient to clinch the match. But as we were waiting for the final scores, FG could still be heard mumbling, "... how about... finesse on Fridays, bash on birthdays..."

How did FG play and why? How did Mildred defend? Seeing that FG was not in the most pedagogical of moods I decided to work it out myself. Proceeding in orderly fashion, we can make the following observations:

1. FG has eleven sure tricks. If she does not lose a trump trick, then there is no problem, but if she does then she must make an additional side-suit trick somehow. The remaining observations assume that this is the case.
2. If West has more than one club, then he must also have the ♣T or ♣Q. In this case, if FG plays low from dummy on the opening lead, she will either be assured of the twelfth trick immediately (if West has the ♣T), or later in the hand, by finessing against the ♣Q. Thus, FG's working assumption needs to be that the ♣3 is a singleton. In this case, she needs to execute some sort of squeeze to make her contract. Under this assumption, plus the fact that West is marked with six spades for his weak 2♠ opening bid, West has exactly six red cards.
3. The ♣A needs to remain intact for any squeeze to operate.
4. If only West guards diamonds, having four or more, he can be squeezed in spades and diamonds.
5. If only East guards diamonds, having four or more, and has ♣Q as assumed, he can be squeezed in clubs and diamonds.
6. The diamond menace must be in the South hand for any squeeze. Hence, the ♦8 is the menace, not the ♦T.
7. A double squeeze (West in spades and diamonds, East in clubs and diamonds) requires keeping ♦AK intact, because the spade and club menaces are both in dummy, without a high spade.

FG's play: Low from dummy, ♣T from East, won by FG's ♣K. Now FG reasoned that, given Obs. 2, the only challenging case was if the lead was a singleton, as was very likely anyway. So assume that West has six red cards. If he has all the trumps then Obs. 5 holds. If he has two or less then Obs. 4 holds. The only problematic case is if he has exactly three trumps. Then a double squeeze may be needed, and if a trump is lost, this may be broken by a diamond return (by Obs. 7). So FG made the following *safety play*. First she cashed ♥K, so as not to lose the trump finesse to the single ♥Q. Then she finessed in trumps, knowing that if it lost she will still have twelve tricks by Obs. 4. When the finesse won and East showed out, she could pretty much

spread her hand. She drew the last trump, entered her hand in spades and ran spade and trumps, reaching the following position:

		<b>N (IY)</b>		
		♠9		
		♥—		
		♦T5		
		♣AJ		
<b>W</b>				<b>E</b>
♠QJ				♠—
♥—				♥—
♦J97				♦Q62
♣—				♣QT
		<b>S (FG)</b>		
		♠—		
		♥8		
		♦AK8		
		♣9		

On the last trump West discarded ♠J, dummy a diamond, and East was squeezed, forced to discard a diamond. Now FG led a club, ready to finesse if West could follow (Obs. 2). But West was squeezed instead, throwing a diamond, and FG's hand was known to be high.

In the other room, West led ♠Q. Declarer entered dummy with a heart and led a second round, ducking to West when East discarded the ♣4. Now West found the brilliant return of the ♦J to break up the double squeeze, while retaining the ♦Q in partner's hand and the ♦9 as guard in her own (Obs. 6).

## 6 FG on facts and issues

“Bridge would be a much simpler game if the issues were not so often obscured by the facts”, FG philosophized. Somehow, I couldn't shake the feeling that this had something to do with my going down in a vulnerable slam earlier that afternoon.



NS Vul., E dealer

				<b>N (FG)</b>					
				♠A5432					
				♥63					
				♦KJ4					
				♣A52					
				<b>W</b>	<b>E</b>				
				♠KQJT9	♠76				
				♥75	♥942				
				♦T82	♦Q953				
				♣QJ9	♣T874				
				<b>S (IY)</b>					
				♠8					
				♥AKQJT8					
				♦A76					
				♣K63					
West	North	East	South						
—	—	P	1♥						
1♠	2NT	P	4♣						
P	4♠	P	6♥						
End									

The bidding was straightforward enough, with 4♣ asking for aces and 4♠ showing two. West led the ♠K, won in dummy. There were two minor-suit losers. If West held the ♦Q, then the diamond finesse would bring in the contract. If East had it, I might be able to execute a double squeeze—no, a club switch, when I lost a trick to improve the count, would break it up. But if East also held five or more clubs, then I could squeeze him in the minors, throwing him in at the end for a lead up to dummy's diamond tenace. Even if *both* defenders had the ♦Q I might still be able to set up spades, if West happened to have overcalled with only four. A black-suit squeeze against West was out of the question, since the opponents were playing the Michaels convention, so with 5-5 he surely would have overcalled 2♥, indicating a two-suiter with at least five cards in spades and in one of the minor suits.

To maximize my chances—or so I thought—I ruffed a spade in hand, drew trumps, entered dummy in clubs and ruffed another spade, disclosing the 5-2 distribution. Now I ran trumps, but West kept his clubs and spades, and there was nothing I could do. Bad luck, I thought.

“The location of the  $\diamond Q$ , you see, was not the issue. Unfortunately, this was obscured by the fact that dummy happened to have the  $\diamond J$ . Consider how you would play the hand if dummy’s  $\diamond J$  were exchanged with West’s deuce:

<b>N (FG)</b>		
$\spadesuit$ A5432		
$\heartsuit$ 63		
$\diamond$ K42		
$\clubsuit$ A52		
<b>W</b>		<b>E</b>
$\spadesuit$ KQJT9		$\spadesuit$ 76
$\heartsuit$ 75		$\heartsuit$ 942
$\diamond$ JT8		$\diamond$ Q953
$\clubsuit$ QJ9		$\clubsuit$ T874
<b>S (IY)</b>		
$\spadesuit$ 8		
$\heartsuit$ AKQJT8		
$\diamond$ A76		
$\clubsuit$ K63		

“Now things are much clearer. There are eleven top tricks, and you need one more. Not letting yourself be misled by the irrelevant fact that you do not happen to have any spade losers, you duck the opening lead to improve the count while preserving the  $\spadesuit A$  for the end game. West does his best by switching to the  $\clubsuit Q$ , but you win in dummy and ruff a spade in hand. Then you run all your trumps, arriving at the following position:

<b>N (FG)</b>		
$\spadesuit$ A5		
$\heartsuit$ –		
$\diamond$ K4		
$\clubsuit$ 5		
<b>W</b>		<b>E</b>
$\spadesuit$ QJ		$\spadesuit$ –
$\heartsuit$ –		$\heartsuit$ –
$\diamond$ JT8		$\diamond$ Q95
$\clubsuit$ J9		$\clubsuit$ T8
<b>S (IY)</b>		
$\spadesuit$ –		
$\heartsuit$ –		
$\diamond$ A76		
$\clubsuit$ K6		

with West still having to discard *twice*. Clearly, he must hold on to both spades. If he retains the diamond guard, discarding two clubs, you cash the  $\clubsuit K$ , forcing

him to unguard diamonds as well, and then a diamond to the King and the ♠A squeezes East in the minors. Conversely, if West retains the club guard, discarding two diamonds, you play ♠A and a diamond to the King, forcing West to unguard clubs too, and again the ♠A squeezes East in the minors. Reading the end position should give you no trouble at all, due to the fact that East needs all his cards to guard the minors, and that you would have to misguess the distribution by *two* cards (playing West for an “impossible” five-card minor) to go wrong”.

## 7 FG on finessing

“The secret to successful finessing”, declared FG wisely, “lies in avoiding the losing ones”. I was not quite sure I understood, so she drew up the following diagram of a deal from her afternoon game:

NS Vul., West dealer

N
♠T43
♥AQ543
♦AJT
♣62
S (FG)
♠AKQ98765
♥T
♦Q4
♣K7

“We were vulnerable, EW not. Our opponents were a pair of nice young American gentlemen, who played some sort of silly modern system they called ‘Precision’. Sweet. West dealt and opened 1♥ (5+ hearts, 11-15 HCP), which was passed around to me. I bid 4♠ and West passed”.

“Now”, continued Granny, “partner raises to 7♠, which ends the bidding. West leads the ♠2, East following with the ♠J. Plan the play”.

—“Obviously this never happened. North would be crazy to bid this way, and West would lead the ♣A he is marked with. Anyhow, I have ten top tricks, and there appears to be relatively little choice in the play”.

“Quite right on all counts”, agreed FG, “I was just trying to make a point. North was daring, not daft. She bid 6♠, which was passed out. Same lead, East following. Plan the play”.

—“Hmm... this is less obvious. I’ll have to think about it”.

—“Please do, but I have to admit that this was not quite what happened at the table. Partner, who seemed to harbor little appreciation for the implied solidity of my vulnerable jump to game, meekly passed. Now East, evidently uncomfortable with the idea of losing a seven-minute rubber, reopened with

4NT (pick a minor). I passed, West bid 5♣, and partner 5♠, which ended the bidding. Same lead again, East following. Please play”.

In 7♠ the diamond finesse needs to be working, and also either the heart finesse or singleton ♥K offside. Finesse diamonds, run everything. Dummy’s last two cards are ♥AQ, and FG’s are ♥T and ♣K. Now play a heart to the ♥A, unless of course West has obliged you by discarding the ♣A he is known to hold.

In 6♠ a successful diamond finesse brings in the contract. However, there is just enough room in East’s hand for a King, and it is far more likely to be the ♦K than the ♥K. But the hand can always be made when the ♥K is onside, provided one reads the distribution, by means of a squeeze without the count. Simply cash ♦A and run the trumps to reach the following position:

N	♠ –
	♥ AQ5
	♦ –
	♣ 62
W	♠ –
	♥ KJx
	♦ –
	♣ Ax
S (FG)	♠ 5
	♥ T
	♦ Q
	♣ K7

On the last trump West must bare his ♣A to avoid giving you the third heart trick. You throw the ♥5 from dummy and lead the ♣7. West wins and exits with a heart, but you finesse, cash ♥A, and the ♣K is your twelfth trick. Of course, West might have both red Kings. When in doubt, it is probably best to assume at the time of decision that West has unguarded hearts, unless, of course, he discarded only two. This never loses unless West has six or seven hearts and is missing the ♦K.

In 5♠, however, you have a perfect safety play. This was the full hand.

	N	
	♠ T43	
	♥ AQ543	
	♦ AJT	
	♣ 62	
W		E
♠ 2		♠ J
♥ J9876		♥ K2
♦ K52		♦ 98763
♣ AQJ4		♣ T9853
	S (FG)	
	♠ AKQ98765	
	♥ T	
	♦ Q4	
	♣ K7	

“At trick 2”, said FG, “You play ♥T to the Ace and ruff a heart in hand. When East’s ♥K falls, you claim thirteen tricks on the marked diamond finesse. But note that if the King does not fall, you play a diamond to dummy’s ♦A and a small heart, discarding the ♦Q. West wins, but any return presents you with your eleventh trick, using the ♠T as an entry if necessary.

So you see, in seven you must avoid an unnecessary losing finesse to a singleton ♥K. In six you must recognize that you have a choice, and avoid the finesse that is far more likely to lose. And in five you make sure of avoiding the losing finesse by not taking any”.

—“Yes, very nice. Interesting hand, too. You would be down in the excellent 6♠ by taking the wrong right finesse, when the wrong finesse happens to be right. Yet you made two overtricks in 5♠ by planning to take no finesse at all, but...”

“Well... I would have”, interrupted Granny, looking mildly embarrassed, “but I must confess that this was not exactly how it happened. You see, I wasn’t actually the declarer in this hand. When West chose 5♣ over East’s 4NT, my partner decided to take the sure plus by doubling. This ended the bidding. Now, with her powerful red-suit holding and the expected eleven spades in our combined hands, you’d think partner would lead trumps (resulting in only three undertricks, as it turns out), wouldn’t you? But no—she led a spade. I won and, realizing that there was neither a way for West to get rid of any diamond losers nor any cause for a switch to trumps, played back my singleton heart. Partner won the ♥A and returned a heart, which I ruffed. Next, we took three rounds of diamonds, and a heart overruff with the ♥K meant five down. I, well, judged that particular moment to be somewhat inappropriate for lecturing partner on her judgment”.

## 8 FG on deception

“The best defense against deception”, lectured FG, “is not to be fooled”.

My face must have disclosed a hint of doubt as to how one might go about implementing this strategy, for she added: “Failing that, one should attempt to fall back on the second-best strategy, which is of course...” Just then the phone rang, and Granny had to play the leading role in a trans-Atlantic you-be-the-judge affair. By the time it was over our guests had arrived and it was time to sit down and play.

Curiously, FG found the opportunity to display both strategies in the very first hand. EW were a pair of bright young local experts, playing a complicated multi-gadget system which FG diagnosed to be marginally more tiresome than futile. East dealt and opened 2♣, showing any three-suited hand (4441 or 5431) with 12-16 HCP.

FG, sitting South, overcalled 2NT which, according to our general approach to such situations, showed about a Queen and a half more than a 1NT overcall, or roughly 18-20 HCP. This was passed out, and West led the ♠2, playing third/fifth best.

None Vul., E dealer

**N (IY)**

♠T73

♥Q54

♦Q853

♣T73

**S (FG)**

♠Q64

♥AK2

♦AKT2

♣Q64

West	North	East	South
—	—	2♣	2NT
End			

FG played low from dummy, and East went up with the Ace and shot back the ♠5. Granny cleared the first hurdle by putting up the ♠Q, which held. Later she explained that East seemed a dash too eager. She did concede, however, that East could never have dared put her to the test had EW been playing good old fourth-best leads, since West might then have had ♠Jxxx, leaving her with ♠Qx. Now FG cashed ♦A, West playing the ♦4 and East the ♦9. How should she continue?

This was the full hand.

	<b>N (IY)</b>	
	♠T73	
	♥Q54	
	♦Q853	
	♣T73	
<b>W</b>		<b>E</b>
♠J82		♠AK95
♥T63		♥J987
♦4		♦J976
♣AJ9852		♣K
	<b>S (FG)</b>	
	♠Q64	
	♥AK2	
	♦AKT2	
	♣Q64	

Granny paused momentarily, and then played ♥AK. When both followed she laid down the ♦K...

“You should have played by the principle of restricted choice”, I later told her. “East was an expert, and therefore the play of the ♦9 was mandatory from ♦J9xx in this position, in order to give you a chance to go wrong. Now, since the a priori probability of a smaller-than-9 singleton is three times as great as that of a singleton 9, the percentage play is clearly to finesse against East in the case of 1-4 distribution”.

Granny, who likes to feign total ignorance in such matters, replied wearily: “I’m afraid that I am totally ignorant in such matters. I do, however, strictly adhere to the principle of making one’s contract. If East’s ♦9 were truly a singleton, my play would have brought in eight tricks on the proven diamond finesse, whereas if I had misguessed, playing East for four diamonds, I might have amounted to no more than seven, even if I had not cashed the high hearts yet (say if East had been dealt AKxx Jxxx 9 Axxx). But when West showed out, you will recall, I simply cashed my third heart to reach this position:

	<b>N (IY)</b>	
	♠T	
	♥—	
	♦Q8	
	♣T73	
<b>W</b>		<b>E</b>
♠J		♠K9
♥—		♥J
♦—		♦J7
♣AJ985		♣K
	<b>S (FG)</b>	
	♠6	
	♥—	
	♦T2	
	♣Q64	

Now I could exit with a small black card of my choice, and defenders were helpless, so long as I took care to unblock the ♦T, which I did”.

—“Yes, I see. East was marked with at least one high club honor. And you tested hearts first, so that if East showed up with a singleton, you would know to play him for four diamonds. Perfectly safe!”

“That, indeed, is the second-best defense against deception”, concluded Granny. “Allow yourself to be fooled only when you can afford it”.

—“Well, you’ve got to give East credit for his clever defense. Also West, for diagnosing the misfit and neither bidding nor leading clubs”.

—“Definitely a most promising pair. If only they weren’t so bogged down by their awkward bidding habits”, said Granny. Then she added dreamily: “Singleton ♦9 is about 5 to 1 on. You forget that there are only five diamonds out but seven clubs, of which E is marked with at least one top honor, and that East is known to have a singleton in one of the minors...”

## 9 FG on Luck

Shortly before her 90th birthday Granny agreed to an interview for the regional bridge bulletin, provided that no questions will be asked on private matters such as her longevity or her incredible winning streaks. True to his word, the interviewer focused on an impressive sample of FG’s famous bridge hands, giving her ample time to modestly elaborate on her lucid thought processes. At one point, however, he unexpectedly prompted FG to share her secret recipe for 75 years of consistent winning at bridge. FG responded that there were probably as many different recipes as there were consistent winners at bridge, but that she believed there were three common ingredients, namely, skill, patience, and luck. With this, the interview ended.



Later in the afternoon, I carefully approached the question of luck in bridge. “Statistically”, I said, “luck must surely even out, I mean, the cards don’t play favorites, do they”? “Quite the contrary,” she responded, “the cards favor those who befriend them”.

I decided to work out what she meant, looking for recent lucky wins. One that immediately came to mind was a fiercely fought teams match from the previous week. Towards the end of the last round, Granny correctly estimated that our team was a few IMPs behind, and so we needed a significant swing to have a chance to win. The penultimate board provided us with such an opportunity.

Both Vul., E dealer

**N (IY)**

♠7653

♥KQ2

♦AK8

♣432

**S (FG)**

♠AQ2

♥AT8743

♦J4

♣AQ

West	North	East	South
—	—	1♠	X
P	2♠	P	3♥
P	4♥	P	4NT
P	5♠	P	5NT
P	6♦	P	7♥
End			

FG decided that her hand was too strong for a simple overcall, so she doubled. I showed opening-bid values with my 2♠ cue-bid, and Granny bid her heart suit. When I showed support, she checked for key-cards, and then Kings. My 5♠ showed the ♦A and the King and Queen of hearts, and my 6♦ showed an additional King. At this point, FG could count 12 tricks, including both black Queens, as East was surely expected to hold all the missing honors, and she assumed—correctly as it turned out—that our opponents in the other room would land in 6♥. In order to give us a chance to win the match, she boldly bid 7♥, hoping that a spade ruff in dummy or some squeeze play would bring in the contract. West led ♦T. This was the full deal:

	<b>N (IY)</b> ♠ 7653 ♥ KQ2 ♦ AK8 ♣ 832	
<b>W</b> ♠ – ♥ 965 ♦ T9765 ♣ 97654		<b>E</b> ♠ KJT984 ♥ J ♦ Q32 ♣ KJT
	<b>S (FG)</b> ♠ AQ2 ♥ AT8743 ♦ J4 ♣ AQ	

If FG was disappointed by my flat distribution, she showed no sign of it. She eyed the ♦T thoughtfully and seemed to be patiently going through the entire play of the hand in her mind's eye. Only then did she lay down the ♦K and drop the ♦J from her hand, a far-sighted play. She next finessed the ♣Q, drew trumps in three rounds ending in dummy, and finessed the ♠Q. Then, keeping close track of her opponents' discards, she ran her hearts, arriving at the following position:

	<b>N (IY)</b> ♠ 76 ♥ – ♦ A8 ♣ 83	
<b>W</b> ♠ – ♥ – ♦ 976 ♣ 976		<b>E</b> ♠ KJ ♥ – ♦ Q3 ♣ KJ
	<b>S (FG)</b> ♠ A2 ♥ 87 ♦ 4 ♣ A	

On the ♥8 West painlessly discarded the ♣6 and dummy the ♠6, but East was forced to unguard one of the three side-suits. A spade discard would give up an immediate trick, and a club would allow declarer to execute a double squeeze, so East decided to bare his ♦Q. But now the play of ♥7 left him

with no recourse. If he discarded the  $\diamond Q$  then, thanks to Granny's foresight in unblocking the  $\diamond J$  at trick 1, the thirteenth trick would be brought in by finessing the  $\diamond 8$ . So East discarded a club, but FG cashed the  $\clubsuit A$ , and her  $\spadesuit A$  squeezed West in diamonds and clubs, the humble  $\clubsuit 8$  taking the final trick. The lead of the  $\diamond T$  was indeed lucky (for us), but only because of Granny's patient planning before playing to the first trick, as well as her technical skills and card-reading abilities, which, together with her thoughtful bidding, enabled us to win the match by a narrow margin.

## 10 FG and the Pigeonhole Principle

"I wonder if it is possible to classify squeeze plays using the pigeonhole principle", I ruminated during one of my afternoon visits with FG. It turned out that she was not familiar with the term, perhaps it was coined after she graduated, so I explained that it simply meant that if one has more pigeons than pigeonholes, and tries to house all the pigeons in pigeonholes, then at least one pigeonhole will contain more than one pigeon. Granny found this awfully unfair to the poor birds who will not get their own place. I clarified that no actual pigeons were involved, it was just a name given to a mathematical technique that can be used for proving surprising assertions, for example, that there are at least five people in London who have the same number of hairs on their heads. At this, Granny observed that the number of hairs is the sole concern of the individual upon whose neck the head in question is mounted. I decided to steer the conversation back to bridge.

"Consider a simple squeeze. At the time the squeeze is executed, one defender must guard two suits (two pigeons), but only has enough cards left to guard one (one pigeonhole). In a double squeeze, in contrast, each defender is left with a single pigeonhole, and each has a suit she must guard (a pigeon), but there is an additional pigeon for which neither defender has room. And in the case of a progressive squeeze, one defender has three pigeons but comes down to two pigeonholes, and then just one."

—"I see, but what about the case where each defender has a pigeonhole, and there is only one pigeon, but nevertheless a safe haven cannot be found for it."

I could not readily envisage such a situation, so FG drew up the following diagram from a recent teams match:

None Vul., S dealer

N  
♠ J6  
♥ K32  
♦ T54  
♣ AKT73  
  
S (FG)  
♠ AQ873  
♥ AQ8  
♦ 976  
♣ 62

With no one vulnerable FG dealt and opened 1♠. West bid 2♦ and North 3♣, which was passed by East, leaving FG with a choice of evils. 3NT might talk West out of a diamond lead, but was far too dangerous, especially as the lead would probably have to be lost at least once. 3♠ would overstate the spade suit, and 3♦ was out of the question because Granny was notoriously allergic to meaningless cue-bids in the opponent's suit. So FG bid 3♥. This was where half her strength was located, it allowed partner to bid 3NT or give delayed support in spades, and if partner held four hearts and raised, the Moysean fit might well prove playable. West passed, and now North faced a problem. Partner might be 5-4 in the majors, but also 5-5, or may be even 4-4 (with 15+ HCP). Game might well be on ice, since partner could be quite strong, but it was hardly assured. Finally, after much deliberation, North opted for 4♥ in favor of the false preference. East doubled, and this ended the auction. West led the ♥5, to the ♥2, ♥J, and ♥Q. This was the full hand:

None Vul., S dealer

		<b>N</b>	
		♠ J6	
		♥ K32	
		♦ T54	
		♣ AKT73	
	<b>W</b>		<b>E</b>
	♠ 54		♠ KT92
	♥ 54		♥ JT976
	♦ AQJ832		♦ K
	♣ QJ8		♣ 954
		<b>S (FG)</b>	
		♠ AQ873	
		♥ AQ8	
		♦ 976	
		♣ 62	

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	1♠
2♦	3♣	P	3♥
P	4♥	X	End

It was clear to West that East must have good spades, else he would not have doubled the heart contract. Moreover, North was marked with shorter spades than hearts. A trump lead certainly seemed to be indicated.

It was equally obvious to FG that the only chance would be to make the trumps separately. Even then, five side-suit tricks would be needed. This meant ♠K had to be onside, and also ♣QJx. Furthermore, East was very likely to hold ♦K on the (non-diamond) lead, leaving West with an aggressive, but not unreasonable nonvulnerable overcall.

The mission now was to get the timing right. FG played low from dummy, taking East's ♥J with the Queen. Then she played a club, finessing the ♣T when West played low (best). Now a spade to the ♠Q was followed by two more clubs, discarding a diamond, and a spade to the ♠A, reaching the following position:

	<b>N</b> ♠— ♥K3 ♦T54 ♣73	
<b>W</b>		<b>E</b>
♠— ♥4 ♦AQJ832 ♣—		♠KT ♥T976 ♦K ♣—
	<b>S (FG)</b>	
	♠873 ♥A8 ♦97 ♣—	

FG led a spade, and West found himself squeezed in the ♥4. If he kept it, dummy would ruff with the ♥3, a club would be overruffed in the South hand (presumably with the ♥A, after East ruffed high), another spade would be ruffed with the ♥K, and a club lead would score the ♥8 by the coup *en passant*. So West ruffed the spade, thereby relinquishing his guard against dummy's clubs (the pigeon, so to speak). Now, however, FG overruffed with the ♥K and led a club, squeezing East in the ♠K. If he kept it, ruffing high, FG would overruff, ruff a spade in dummy as East followed helplessly, and again lead a club to elope with the ♥8. So East discarded the ♠K instead, but FG threw a diamond and led the last club from dummy. East ruffed high, but FG cleverly discarded again, and scored two more tricks with the ♥A and ♥8, making 4♥ doubled.

“Well-played indeed! And, yes, I think I should probably reconsider my Bridge Ornithology idea. Aren't you concerned, though, that your aversion to cue-bids put you in a precarious heart contract, instead of a much more sensible spade part-score?”

—“It might interest you to know that this was indeed our opponents' choice of action in the other room.”

It turned out that the first round of bidding was the same in the other room, but South bid 3♦ over partner's 3♣, just as I had suggested, asking North to bid notrumps if she could stop diamonds. North could not, and therefore she very reasonably signed off in 3♠.

The opening lead posed no great problem for West. South was very unlikely to have the ♦K, since he would not then have bid 3♦, risking the chance of North playing the hand with a diamond lead through dummy. A trump lead could not be right, but dummy's clubs might provide discards. So West led ♦A, continuing diamonds when partner's ♦K dropped, as East discarded the ♣4 and then the ♣5. Then, in the following position, West paused for thought.

	N	
	♠ J6	
	♥ K32	
	♦ –	
	♣ AKT73	
W		E
♠ 54		♠ KT92
♥ 54		♥ JT976
♦ 832		♦ –
♣ QJ8		♣ 9
	S	
	♠ AQ873	
	♥ AQ8	
	♦ –	
	♣ 62	

The defense needed two more tricks. East would have signaled a doubleton club, so he had to have at least one left. Could he have a heart trick? That would leave no room for a spade honor in view of South's opening bid. So two trump tricks were the only chance, and in that case a ruff and sluff could not help declarer but might hurt him. And so it did. South, who on any continuation but another diamond might have guessed to take two trump finesses, was left with an impossible task. If he ruffed in dummy, as East discarded his last club, he could take one trump finesse, but would still have to lose two trump tricks. And if he ruffed in hand, East again discarding a club, he would lack the entries for two trump finesses. Nor was there a trump coup or endplay.

The doubled game swing, as it turned out, clinched the match and left me with a mental note not to try to talk FG into changing her winning ways.