

**THE**  
**LONE**  
**WOLFF**

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF  
A BRIDGE MAVERICK

**BOBBY**  
**WOLFF**

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# Author's Tribute...

SINCE MY INTRODUCTION TO THE GAME on that train ride in 1944, my life has been positively touched by thousands of incredible people whose memories I will always hold dear. Obviously, time and space does not allow me to detail all those associations, but I would be remiss if I did not recognize the following individuals who so generously impacted my life and in some measure played a major role in *The Lone Wolff*:

*Johnny Gerber, Ozzie Jacoby and Tobias Stone* who recognized the talents of a young enthusiast and helped further my career;

*Joe Musumeci* who was my first mentor and with whom I started a bridge club in San Antonio in 1960. He later joined the Aces as Coach and whipped us into shape so that its founder, Ira G. Corn, could realize the dream of his life — creating the first successful professional bridge team in the world whose players devoted their lives to nothing but learning and enhancing their playing of the game at the highest level possible;

*Jimmy Ortiz-Patino (The World), Denis Howard (Australia), Jose Damiani (France) and Ernesto d'Orsi (Brazil)* who helped me recognize and appreciate the important composition of foreign bridge cultures and most importantly, different types of work ethic, creativity, individuality, and making good things happen.

*Nick Nickell*, the actively ethical *crème de la crème* of the bridge and financial world, who, when everything is considered, formed perhaps the most successful bridge team of all time (for whom I played from 1991 to 1998);

My late wife, *Debby*, to whom I was married for 17 years, for demanding and bringing out the best in me and encouraging me to pursue my ideals to uphold the high standards of the game, making the bridge world a better place for posterity.

And finally to *Judy Kay-Wolff*, whom I wed late in 2003. Her enthusiasm and vitality compelled me to resume writing the book I had temporarily abandoned — having begun it in 1995. Unrelentingly, Judy stayed on my case till its conclusion — allying me with a delightful publisher, *Ray Lee* of Master Point Press in Toronto, to whom I will always be grateful.

# Foreword

An intriguing behind-the-scenes revelation of what's going on in our game and a clarion call to players and administrators alike to right the wrongs and clean up the very best of games. Who better to blow the whistle than Bobby Wolff, eleven-time World Bridge Champion, United Media Syndicated Bridge Columnist, who served as WBF and ACBL President, member of the ACBL Board of Directors, Chairman Emeritus of the WBF Appeals Committee and co-founder and co-organizer of the first professional bridge team, the Dallas Aces?

I hope that this book leads to beneficial changes in our game and that Bobby's warnings are not *vox clamantis in deserto!*

— Eric R. Murray

# CHAPTER

# FIRING IRA

WHEN I AROSE FROM THE TABLE, I knew it was time. We still had to compare with our teammates, but when that was done, I would be steeling myself for the job ahead — one I had been delaying for months. “Ira,” I said, “let’s take a walk.”

It was a Tuesday in Minneapolis in the summer of 1968. We, the Aces, had been there for five days — five troubled days. As Ira and I weaved our way through the hotel, the chatter of other players comparing scores was audible. I rehearsed the speech in my head, trying hard not to envision the worst-case scenario. Would he blow up? Fire us all? Make a scene? I had no clue. This dreaded task had fallen to me, and I had to get on with it — like it or not! Though the sun was shining, I sensed a dark cloud looming overhead. I was about to ‘fire’ Ira Corn as a playing member of the Aces.

No one was more enthusiastic about bridge than Ira G. Corn, Jr., millionaire-businessman and founder of the first full-time professional bridge team in history. Ira’s odyssey began in 1964, when, as an aspiring bridge enthusiast, he traveled from Dallas to New York to scrutinize the high-level game during the World Bridge Olympiad. After discovering bridge through a friend, Ira had thrown himself into the game with the same energy that had built Michigan General, his thriving business.

Always supremely confident, Ira figured he could master the game through sheer force of will. He was an enormous success in the business world, so why couldn’t he apply the same drive and intelligence

toward becoming a top bridge player? All he needed to do was study the game, observe some successful players and emulate what he saw. Simple!

Ira was electrified by what he witnessed at the Olympiad in New York. The revered Italian Blue Team won comfortably against a good American team in the gold-medal round, and Ira returned to Dallas with a vision. He approached Dorothy Moore, the friend who had introduced him to bridge, and set his plan in motion.

“What would it take for us to put together a team in Dallas?” Corn wanted to know. “What do we need?” Money was no object at that point, but Ira had no idea how to go about fielding the right players. Eventually, Dorothy put Ira onto me. She knew me because we had both played professionally in Texas. I was living in San Antonio at the time, and she respected my bridge ability and my evaluation of the talent in the bridge world.

When we finally got around to recruiting players in 1967, we started with Jim Jacoby, who was right there in Dallas. Two down, four to go. Ira, however, was thinking in terms of three more. He was planning on being a member of the team — and I was going to be his partner.

Ira did a lot of things right after we got the Aces together. Our lineup (besides myself) was Jacoby, Billy Eisenberg, Bobby Goldman, Mike Lawrence and, of course Ira. In the early days, we were involved in a lot of practice matches against competent players in the Dallas area. Eventually, for these sessions, we imported even stronger opposition from out of town. Ira was absorbed with his business, which had just gone public. He had neither the time nor the inclination to work at bridge but he still wanted to play, and his indomitable personality could be a problem. Ira was about the level of an average club player — at best. He never read a bridge book but he was thrilled by good results and he was eternally optimistic. He loved to play. It was like cake and candy to him.

One incident will always loom large in my memory. I was playing with Ira in a practice match and my right-hand opponent, the dealer, opened 1♣. I held:

♠ A Q J   ♥ K J 7 2   ♦ K 10 7 5   ♣ A 3

I doubled for takeout. My left-hand opponent passed (though many would have bid 1♠ on his cards) and Ira bid 2♣. This was followed by 5♣ by the opening bidder. Given Ira’s cuebid, 5♣ sounded like an advance save. I had a good hand but it was more defense-oriented than offensive, so I doubled for penalty and everyone passed.

West