

A day in the life of . . .

Michelle Brunner

Michelle's first international outing on the ladies team for Great Britain was in 1977, at the Common Market Championships, where she won a gold medal. Since then she has amassed a cupboard-full of medals and trophies including a World Championship and two European gold medals playing with three different partners: Gill Scott-Jones, Rosemary Hudson and Rhona Goldenfield. Her successful bridge career spans thirty-two years to date and she has represented England in the Camrose series twice in the last two years in partnership with John Holland, her better half, leaving everyone in no doubt that her recently-diagnosed illness has not dented either her talent or enthusiasm for the game.

IF, at the tender age of 56, you could get up at any time of the day you fancied, go to bed whenever you felt like it, watch television during the night if you really wanted to, spend the afternoon reading or seeing a film, play duplicate or go to the theatre every evening, go on lots of holidays, meet your friends for lunch every day and be able to eat whatever you desired, you would be forgiven for thinking you were in heaven!

Alas, retirement did come to me early but with a heavy price to pay. In 2007 I was diagnosed with breast cancer metastases after first contracting the disease in 2001. Since then my daily routine has changed dramatically and I was advised to reduce my workload and live every day to the full. That is exactly what I have done and although my days are often governed by my state of health, and the necessity to visit the doctor or hospital for regular tests and scans, I am actually having an amazing time!

As I have already intimated, much of what I do depends on how well I am feeling. Taking daily doses of chemotherapy and morphine means I occasionally struggle to get out and about but, mercifully, those days are few and far between. If I am not doing something I mentioned earlier, I am probably doing my 'wifely' chores like cooking, cleaning and shopping – all, needless to say, aided by my wonderful partner of some thirty-five years, John Holland.



Photo: Ron Tacchi

Deciding which bridge tournaments to enter, discussing system with John and planning our next trip abroad (usually to play bridge!) all have a huge part in my daily schedule. The list of places I have

always longed to visit is another area that is now being broached and I relish the days when, out of the blue, John takes me on a mystery trip to some place in England that I have not had a chance to explore before.

Complementary therapy is essential to my well-being and I will often dedicate a morning or afternoon to being pampered, turning an otherwise dull day into one of luxury; especially so as both Reiki and foot-massage treatments can be performed at home – although neither by John!

As if all that wasn't enough, I have recently become addicted to a hand-held computer game which flatters me daily by telling me my brain age is between 30 and 40. This activity keeps me very quiet (excellent news for John!) although I try not to let it interfere with all my other non-bridge hobbies, which also include pottering about on the piano.

To be honest, if it wasn't for the fact that I can feel awful at times, I would be living a truly charmed life; but, however I am feeling, I don't allow the weather to depress me because, as I see it, the sun shines every day that I wake up. □

To read more about Michelle Brunner, visit www.ebu.co.uk/general/biographies/players.

Michelle's Top Tip

Don't switch off when you are a defender, even though you feel unable to contribute anything to the defence. Always look for a way to steal an extra trick or beat a contract that appears untouchable.

AS a former bridge teacher I frequently heard my pupils moan frustratedly at picking up hands with either no points or relatively few high cards. It was deemed 'boring' and 'impossible to win without them', they complained!

I agree that it's not much fun to sit there while the opponents do all the bidding. However, as the proud owner of two 'Defence of the Year' awards, I can honestly say that finding ways to thwart declarer's plans and trying to create an illusion to beat a seemingly-cold contract will give any bridge player a huge sense of satisfaction when it works.

Allow me to welcome you into a world where you don't always need a fistful of high cards to get a plus score. In a Gold Cup knock-out round you are pitted against top England player Justin Hackett, who with his brother bid, without interference, to 4♠ (1NT [12-14] – 2♣ – 2♠ – 4♠). Partner leads the ♥J which declarer ducks and, taking the ♥K, you find yourself in the hot seat. What would you return?

♠ K 9 5 ♥ J 10 9 4 ♦ 9 5 4 3 ♣ 8 6		♠ J 8 7 4 ♥ A 5 ♦ A J ♣ A Q 10 7 4	♠ 3 2 ♥ K 7 6 2 ♦ Q 10 8 7 ♣ K 9 3
♠ A Q 10 6 ♥ Q 8 3 ♦ K 6 2 ♣ J 5 2			

The bidding marked West with a maximum of 4 HCP. Envisaging a position where partner held a doubleton club and ♠K-x-x, I proceeded to lay a trap and returned the ♣9, hoping to fool declarer into believing that this was a singleton.

In order to prevent an adverse ruff Justin played ace and another trump, spurning the finesse. When the ♣6 was returned, declarer was, unknowingly, at the crossroads. Expecting, at worst, to see this trick ruffed with the outstanding trump, you can imagine his surprise at, instead, seeing the ♠K appearing as he finessed in apparent safety! The ensuing club ruff set the contract – and the rest, as they say, is history!