


NORTH OF THE

# Master Solvers' Club



THE BRIDGE WRITINGS OF  
**FRANK VINE**

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## FOREWORD

The only thing my father liked better than a good bridge game was a good bridge story. Growing up as children of two avid bridge players, my brother and sister and I were often bewildered at the discussion of major and minor suits, Gerber and Stayman. Most astonishing to us was the way our parents remembered bridge hands in detail years after they had been played. It was a long time before we understood what they were talking about but we still learned a lot from these discussions. We learned geography (and the best places to eat) from their tales of bridge tournaments across the continent; we learned that games can keep the mind sharp; and most importantly, we learned a kind of democracy. Our home was filled with bridge players from every walk of life. Income, profession, race or religion was of no consequence — all that mattered was their shared love of the game of bridge.

My parents spent many happy evenings at the local bridge club. In those bygone days, though, the hours in the late afternoon belonged to men who dropped in to play for a few hours after work. My brother, Ron, recalls that when he was ten years old he was driving with my mother one day when she happened to pass by the bridge club and noticed my father's car parked outside. Perhaps to make a point, she sent my little brother into the club by himself to remind my father that dinner was waiting at home. Ron remembers walking into that strange place for the first time. The room was dim in the early twilight and, as was common in those days, filled with the haze of cigarette smoke. Rows of men sat at tables intently studying their cards. Suddenly the phone rang, and as the director of the club reached for the phone Ron heard five voices say in unison, "If that's my wife — I'm not here!"

Humor is another thing we learned to associate with bridge. Many times my father returned from a tournament with a funny tale or unusual story. Once he was seated against a young couple who were playing their very first hand at their very first bridge tournament. In the middle of the hand the husband piped up, "Convention!" "Yes," my father replied, eager to see what obscure convention the couple had uncovered. "When I go like this," the young man said, tugging his earlobe, "it means I have three aces."

Since the convention had been announced to everyone, my father decided that it was okay with him.

Most of the amusing incidents that happened to my father at the bridge table made their way into his stories. I hope you enjoy them.

*Ira Vine*

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

It is more than twenty years since Frank Vine passed away at the early age of fifty, and he was far too good a bridge writer to be allowed to fade away into obscurity.

Frank made his living as an attorney in Hamilton, Ontario, a steel-industry town overshadowed by its more glamorous neighbor, Toronto. He was one of a number of Hamiltonians who regularly traveled to the big tournaments in Toronto and beyond, and who were regularly successful. The pinnacle of his playing career came in 1969, when he won the National Men's Pairs — undoubtedly the strongest pairs event on the North American bridge calendar at the time, but sadly today no longer held, a victim of political correctness. Frank's partner in that event, Mike Martino (another Hamilton lawyer), was also to die very young. Frank and his wife Lillian were well known on the local tournament trail, and when my wife Linda and I began playing bridge together in the 1970s, we frequently encountered the Vines as opponents.

Frank was a tough competitor, and his acerbic wit tended to make him as many enemies as friends. However, it is Frank Vine the writer that we celebrate in this book, and it was in his writing that his dry sense of humor and ability to skewer the pompous and ridiculous came into their own. Frank contributed articles, letters and editorials to bridge publications far and wide, from the local *Kibitzer* to the *ACBL Bulletin* and the prestigious *Bridge World*. It is perhaps as a *Bridge World* writer that he was best known. For more than fifteen years, he regularly entertained readers with satire, parody, and trenchant comments on the bridge scene. He was twice invited to appear as a guest Editorial writer, an honor that few receive even once.

Frank Vine's writing seems to fall naturally into three categories, so that is the way this book is organized. First, the Cornelius Coldbottom stories, whose central character is reminiscent of David Silver's *alter ego*, Professor Silver. Like Silver, Vine uses his protagonist to poke fun at bridge players' foibles and shortcomings, and even at some serious issues of ethics, propriety and the laws. Coldbottom, the sage of the Wentworth Bridge and Social Club, dispenses advice to lesser mortals, slices of bridge philosophy that seem to work when he applies them, but not when others do. And on one glorious occasion, he even manages to get the better of Wentworth's nemesis, the Blue Team from Stoney Creek.

Comprising the second section, presented with Frank's usual wit and polish, is a group of pieces we have gathered together under the heading of

“Comment”. These are representative of Frank’s views on how the game should be played, and his observations on the people he encountered while doing so. Written more than twenty years ago, they seem as fresh and applicable to the modern game as they were at the time they first appeared.

Finally we return to fiction with a third section that we have entitled “Parody”. Here you will find bridge versions of literary masterpieces (my favorite is *Rashomon*, where the same deal is described four times, from the point of view of each player) alongside brilliant send-ups of favorite *Bridge World* features such as “Master Solvers’ Club” and “You be the Judge”.

*The Bridge World* published the proverbial slim volume of Frank Vine’s material a few years ago, but it has been unavailable now for some time. This Master Point Press anthology has been published with the permission of Frank’s family and of the Editor of *The Bridge World*, Jeff Rubens. John Carruthers, the current Editor of the *Kibitzer*, was also immensely helpful in gathering material for us, as was Tom Dawson, whose comprehensive collection of bridge magazines was, as always, an invaluable resource. This book would not have been possible without their help and support.

If you are old enough to remember Frank’s work, we hope you will be pleased to have this more comprehensive collection to allow you to rediscover your old favorites. If you are young enough not to have encountered Frank Vine before, you have a treat in store.

*Ray Lee*  
*Editor*  
*October 2008*





THE  
Coldbottom Chronicles

## CORNELIUS COLDBOTTOM ON DECEPTION

*Modern players may well miss the passing reference to a Consolation event, which in context is very funny. Back in the day, an Open Pairs event always consisted of two sessions, the first of which was labeled “Qualifying”. After this, the top half of the field continued into the Final, with some carryover, while the rest started over from scratch in the one-session Consolation — often referred to as “The Swamp”. Those who went on to play the evening session in the Swamp often did so after drowning their sorrows over dinner — with the result that scores in the Swamp could be more or less random. I remember playing in the Swamp at a Sectional many years ago, and not bothering to stay for the scores, estimating our game at 40% or thereabouts. Indeed, my partner and I retired to the bar and entertained our friends with tales of the ludicrous things we had done to produce such a bad game. It wasn’t until the next day we discovered we had won the event.*

“When you come right down to it, there are only two kinds of bridge players. The majority are what I call card pushers. Many of them, having studied long and diligently, are quite competent. They are familiar with all the latest squeezes and smother plays. In addition, they know that if such and so are divided such and so, the play of the queen will win 2.34% more often than laying down the ace. The only thing they lack is inspiration. Then, of course, there are those who hear voices.”

The speaker was Professor Cornelius Coldbottom, leading bridge authority of the Wentworth County Bridge and Social Club. The place was North Caledonia on the final day of Bridge Week, between sessions of the Open Pairs. His audience: the contingent that had traveled down from Hamilton in an effort to win for our club the most prized bridge laurel of Southern Ontario, the famous Chicken Roost Trophy.

“Those who hear voices,” he continued, “are few in number, and are rarely found among the winners at tournament time. That is because they disdain the game of average plus, and the less than one-and-one-half mistakes per session approach. They seek glory instead in the triumph of guile, the swing created out of thin air.

“Theirs, of course, is not a science, but an art. Nevertheless, there are certain sound principles, which can be learned and applied. Let me illustrate by examining some of the hands from this afternoon’s session.”

The first board Professor Coldbottom discussed was #7. I was surprised. Although my score had been below average, I could see no way in which it might have been improved.

*Dealer South*  
*Both vulnerable*

<p>♠ J 10 9 ♥ A K 3 2 ♦ 6 3 2 ♣ A 6 5</p>	<p>♠ K Q 2 ♥ 10 ♦ A Q J 5 4 ♣ J 9 8 7</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; text-align: center; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ 8 7 6 5 ♥ 6 5 4 ♦ 9 8 7 ♣ K 4 3</p>
	N											
W		E										
	S											
	<p>♠ A 4 3 ♥ Q J 9 8 7 ♦ K 10 ♣ Q 10 2</p>											

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	2♦	pass	1♥
pass	3NT	all pass	2NT

West led the jack of spades. I had a sure nine tricks. If I could establish the hearts before the opponents cashed their ace-king of clubs, I would make eleven tricks. Deceptively, I won the king of spades in dummy and led the ten of hearts. West won his king and led another spade. I took this in my hand with the ace and led the queen of hearts. West captured this with his ace, and I pitched a club from dummy. I could see his lips moving as he counted my blessings. Finally he laid down the ace of clubs and it was all over. Three notrump on the nose.

“The principle at work here is that of diminishing greed,” said Professor Coldbottom. “Declarer was greedy for eleven tricks but West was greedy for nine. He was able to look into declarer’s heart and guess what he was doing. Since it was exactly what he would have done had he been in declarer’s place, it fell, as we say in the trade, well within his experience.”