

Bridge for a Lifetime

Our game gets exposure on a new TV series.

By Linda Granell

Zoe Busiek sits up in bed with a laptop propped against her knees. “Deal me in,” she says, as a bridge hand appears on the screen.

It’s a scene familiar to thousands of us nowadays as ACBL members are able to feed their habit 24 hours a day at a half-dozen and more popular online game sites.

Zoe’s niece walks in and asks in that “bore me” tone we expect from our family teenagers, “What’s so

fun about bridge?” Zoe responds as many of us would: “Oh, lots of things. Strategy and knowing what your partner has in her hand, playing with people from all over the world, learning about other cultures, making friends.”

The difference is that this scene is fiction, included in an episode of the Lifetime cable TV network series “Wild Card.”

The episode *had* to have been written by a bridge player, and a few Google inquiries and

phone calls uncovered “Wild Card” co-executive producer and writer William Schwartz of Los Angeles.

Schwartz, 49, has played socially on and off for 15 years, about the same amount of time he has been involved in the television industry. He also has worked on such shows as “Promised Land” and “Touched by an Angel.”

“I took a class in Studio City with a girlfriend who was interested in bridge,” Schwartz said. “It was a blast.” The relationship didn’t last, “but she left me with bridge, so I can’t complain.”

In 2003, he took a 10-day Celebrity cruise to Acapulco. “One of the people in our group was a woman in her 70s who played bridge. We became fast friends, and I became her bridge partner for the cruise.

“When I got back I noticed on Yahoo! that they had bridge, so I tried it one day, and thought, this is fun. Mostly it’s catch as catch can at night if I have a little time to play.”

Schwartz didn’t know just how fast online bridge is booming.

Tables in ACBL-sanctioned games now total more than 17,500 a month — up by more than 5000 in the past year. About 8000 people are logged on at any one moment at the six most popular playing sites — Bridge Base, e-bridge, MSN Gaming Zone and Swan Games, all of which offer sanctioned games, along with OKbridge and Yahoo!

While bridge in cyberspace is relatively new, the game has had bit parts on the airwaves for decades in series including “The Dick Van Dyke Show” and “Law and Order.” This is the first time it has starred as the basis for a story line.

The episode opens with a smitten Zoe dining with Paul on one of their first face-to-face dates after playing together online.

Zoe is played by Joely Fisher, daughter of actress Connie Stevens and singer Eddie Fisher. She and Chris Potter star as a pair of savvy

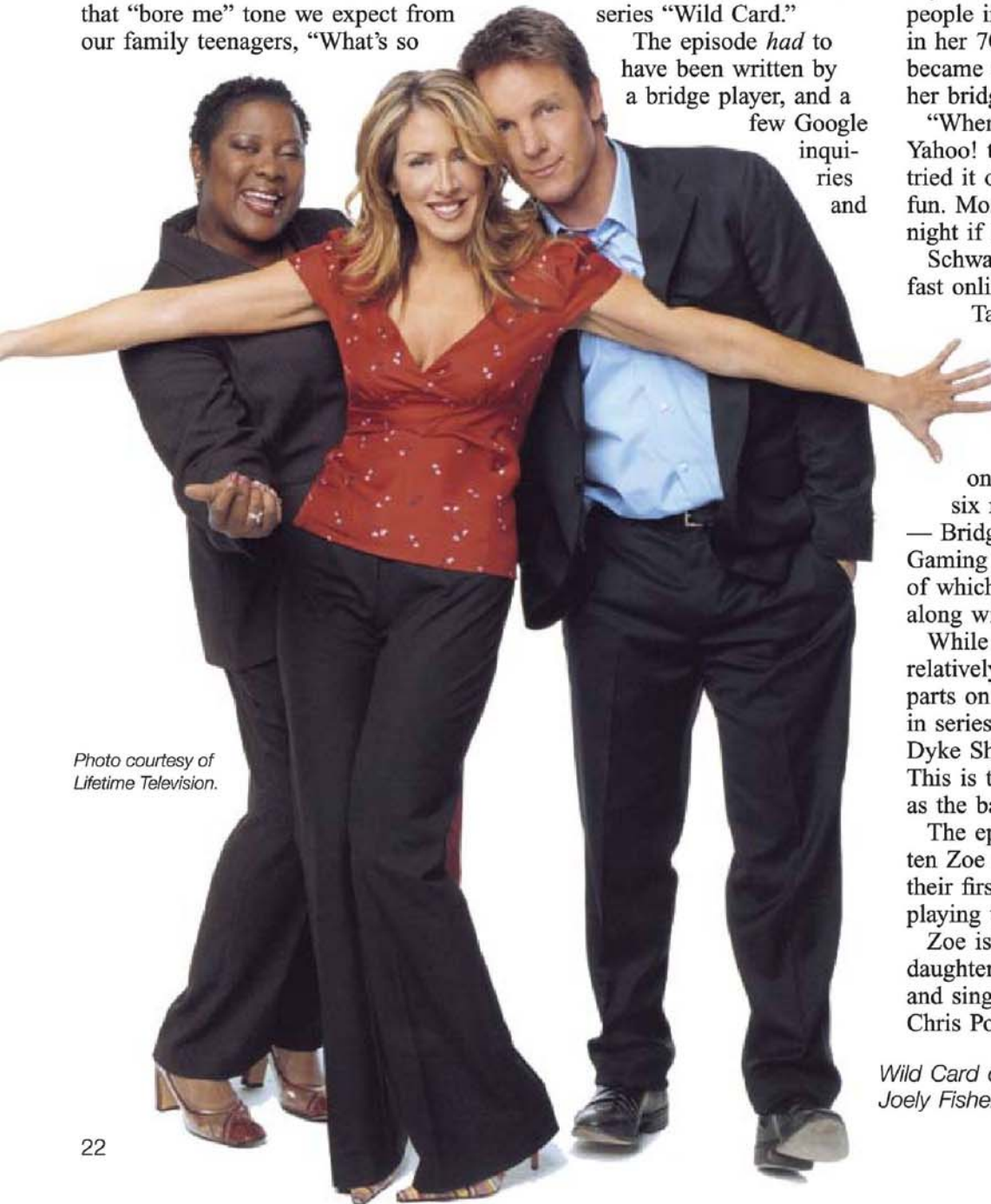


Photo courtesy of Lifetime Television.

Wild Card cast members Loretta Devine, Joely Fisher and Chris Potter.

insurance investigators.

Unfortunately, Paul, the cad, is married, thus putting an end to the budding mixed pair. You can guess the rest. It's the same old story: "Boy meets girl, boy is murdered, girl is accused, girl is vindicated."

"I thought it was an interesting thing for people who don't like going to chat rooms or dating groups," said Schwartz. "What if you can meet someone online in a romantic entanglement because of a common interest?"

Couldn't Bob have been a fellow crime fighter rather than a philanthropic husband?

"Well, that probably wasn't the best thing for me to do to your game,"

"Our character is smart," he said. "She should play something more intelligent."

Schwartz laughed. "The Internet is a place you can lie personally, but," he added with the insight of a tournament veteran, "if you're a bad or rude bridge player, you can't cover it up, and that should be a signal to future partners."

Schwartz had to finesse his colleagues to make bridge the card game for "Wild Card." His co-producer wanted Zoe to play poker.

"He said, 'Bridge is so highbrow. Everyone understands poker.'" Schwartz persisted.

"Our character is smart," he said. "She should play something more intelligent."

"Wild Card" is back on the air for its second season, and bridge may be back as well.

"Maybe we'll develop a four-some," Schwartz said. □



William Schwartz, center, with wife Pam and son Zachary on their *Celebrity Cruise*.

Movie Star

Bridge has been a big player in film, books and even an opera.

Bridge fans love to see references to their favorite game when watching a movie or reading a book. So the folks in the ACBL marketing department thought it would be fun to try cataloging references to bridge in these media. To help with this task, a request went out to members on the ACBL web site. As usual, our members came through.

Thanks to the following who submitted references: Ryan Daniels, Vernon Hills IL; Steven Gaynor, Arden Hills MN; Delores Johnson, Alamo TX; Mary Leonard, Rhinelander WI; Joe Livezey, Paoli PA; Lee Madison, Ukiah CA; Michael Schneider, Denver CO; Stan Subeck, Olympia Fields IL; Rick Weinstein, Manchester NH; Gary Zeiger, Phoenix AZ.

Film

The Single Standard (1929)

Greta Garbo is a restless bridge player who seeks adventure in a succession of romantic interests.

Animal Crackers (1930)

The Marx Brothers. Harpo and Chico engage Mrs. Rittenhouse and another lady in a "friendly" game of bridge with no rules. Harpo leads an ace, then another ace, then another and another, taking the first six or seven tricks, all with aces! Chico says, "He's pretty good, eh?" at which point the ladies leave in disgust. During the game, Chico admonishes Harpo with, "No spades, partner?"

Grand Slam (1933)

Based on novel by D. Russell Herts, this film is thought to be the story of Ely Culbertson starring Loretta Young and Paul Lukas. Peter Stanislavsky (Lukas) invents a bidding system for couples: "If there are no rules, there is nothing to fight about. We believe that bridge is a family institution, that it should

keep husbands and wives together not break them apart."

Night Intruder (1938)

Four women who meet regularly for bridge are disrupted by an intruder breaking in through their window.

No Census, No Feeling (1940)

The Three Stooges play bridge while taking the census at a fancy mansion.



Shadow of a Doubt (1943)

In one of his famous cameos, Alfred Hitchcock plays bridge on a train.

North by Northwest (1959)

Another Hitchcock film. Cary Grant's mother complains she will be late for her bridge game, to which he responds, "Good, then you'll lose less than usual."

Metropolitan (1990)

Upper-class New Yorkers meet nightly to play bridge and talk about socialism, ambition, life and philosophy.

Bad Company (1995)

Ellen Barkin and David Ogden ▶

Stiers star in this tale of murder, deceit and a bridge-playing judge.

Literature

My Lady Love, My Dove by Roald Dahl (1952)

Arthur and Pamela decide to bug the room of their guests. The guests retire after a resounding victory at the table, and Arthur and Pamela turn on the speaker. Arthur realizes they have used a betting code and is unsure what to do. Pamela's response shocks him. "Why, Arthur, this is a *mar-vellous* idea ... Go fetch a deck of cards; we'll start right away."

Moonraker by Ian Fleming (1955; film 1979)

James Bond and "M" play against Hugo Drax and his partner in an effort to discover how Drax is cheating a club's patrons. One hand is a takeoff of the Duke of Cumberland deal where a grand slam is made on 6 high-card points.

The English Patient by Michael Ondaatje (1992; film 1996)

Bomb disposal expert Kirpal Singh recalls the words of his mentor: "Bridge depends on character. Your character and the character of your opponents. You must consider the character of your enemy. This is true of bomb disposal."

Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil by John Berendt (1994; film 1996)

The rules of the Married Women's Card Club for Savannah's elite have saved marriages.

The Cabinet of Curiosities by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child (2002)

Special agent Pendergast meditates: "In the darkness of his mind's eye, he created four players, seated around a card table. Pendergast had always found bridge a nobler and subtler game than chess, but he rarely played it with others because, outside of his late family, he had found few worthy partners. Now the

game began, each player ignorant of all but his own thirteen cards, each player with his own strategies and intellectual capabilities. The game began, with ruffs and slams and deep finesses. Pendergast toyed with the players, shifting Blackwood, Gerber and Stayman conventions, posting a forgetful declarer, misunderstood signals between East and West. By the time the first rubber was completed, all distractions were gone ... "

The Broker by John Grisham (2005)

CIA Director Teddy Maynard hears a report on the whereabouts of the President's estranged wife: "She's already back in Delaware playing bridge."

Music

A Hand of Bridge by Samuel Barber and Gian Carlo Menotti (1959)

Four characters in this one-act opera express their true thoughts while playing bridge. □

Bridge Literature

Author Somerset Maugham was a fan of the game.

"There are people who have no head for cards. It is impossible not to be sorry for them, for what, one asks oneself, can the future have to offer them when the glow of youth has departed and advancing years force them, as they force all of us, to be spectators rather than actors in the comedy of life? Love is for the young and affection is but a frigid solace to a pining heart. Sport demands physical vigor and affairs a strenuous activity. To have learnt to play a good game of bridge is the safest insurance against the tedium of old age. Throughout life one may find in cards endless entertainment and an occupation for idle hours that rests the mind from care and pleasantly exercises the intelligence. For the people who say that only the stupid can play cards err; they do not know what decision, what quickness of apprehension, what judgment, what knowledge of character, are required to play a difficult hand perfectly. The good card player trusts his intuition as implicitly as Monsieur Bergson, but he calls it a hunch; the brilliant card player has a gift as specific

as the poet's; he too is born not made. The student of human nature can find endless matter for observation in the behavior of his fellow card players. Meanness and generosity, prudence and audacity, courage and timidity, weakness and strength; all these men show at the card table according to their nature, and because they are intent upon the game drop the mask they wear in the ordinary affairs of life. Few are so deep that you do not know the essential facts about them after a few rubbers of bridge. The card table is a very good school for the study of mankind ... "

From W. Somerset Maugham's introduction to his Traveller's Library.

