

Lagniappe: How Helen Sobel Smith Discovered For Herself the Bridge 'Elimination Endplay'

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Lagniappe

"**Lagniappe**" is a word known to every New Orleanian. "Lagniappe" means "a little something extra." Every restaurant patron has received lagniappe while dining in New Orleans. And there is even a Louisiana magazine about restaurants that is named Lagniappe. "Lagniappe" was even a word promoted by Mark Twain in his 1883 memoir, Life on the Mississippi, about his life as a steamboat pilot before the Civil War.

"We picked up one excellent word--a word worth traveling to New Orleans to get; a nice limber, expressive, handy word--'lagniappe.' They pronounce it lanny-yap. It is Spanish--so they said. We discovered it at the head of a column of odds and ends in the Picayune, the first day; heard twenty people use it the second; inquired what it meant the third; adopted it and got facility in swinging it the fourth. It has a restricted meaning, but I think the people spread it out a little when they choose. It is the equivalent of the thirteenth roll in a 'baker's dozen.' It is something thrown in, gratis, for

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, the purported ACBL Double Triple Emerald Gold Platinum LifeMaster with 20+ million ACBL MasterPoints, in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So, this article was really, really written by Bruce Thompson.

good measure. The custom originated in the Spanish quarter of the city. ... If the waiter in the restaurant stumbles and spills a gill of coffee down the back of your neck, he says 'For lagniappe, sah,' and gets you another cup without extra charge."



Helen Sobel Smith

Helen Sobel Smith² née Helen Sobel (1909 - 1969) according to The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge (6th ed.) may have been the "greatest woman bridge player of all time." An article published in The Bridge World (Vol. 41, No. 1) in the year of her death noted that "she may well have been the most brilliant card player of all time."

Sobel Smith did not learn bridge until she moved to New York City and became a chorus girl. She learned bridge from a fellow dancer. World class duplicate bridge player Eddie Kantar claims that

"Helen Sobel seldom, if ever, misguessed a queen in a slam contract when she was playing against two men. Her trick was to lift her skirt a little above her knees. It never failed that the one with the queen of spades was too nervous to look around, but the one without the queen always looked."³

Sobel won her first national championship, the Women's Pairs, in 1934. In 1937, Sobel played on the United States team that played in the World Bridge Championships held in Budapest. She was

² See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Sobel_Smith

³ See: https://www.bridgebum.com/helen_sobel.php

the first woman player to represent the U.S. in a world championship.

Sobel won a total of **35** national championships, **3** more than her longtime Partner, Charles Goren. When asked about speculation that she and Goren were romantically involved and would marry, she responded, "We would marry in a moment—if anybody would have us."³

Sobel Smith Discusses Her Personal Discovery of the "Elimination Endplay"

Sobel Smith in her 1950 book, Winning Bridge, discussed her personal discovery of the "**Elimination Endplay**":

"I think that bridge really got into my blood a certain day in the thirties when a world-shattering incident occurred:

I was declarer in a 6♠ contract, doubled by my right hand opponent. He had actually turned up with the QJT of trumps - I had cashed the ace and king - and I was disconsolately sure that he would turn up with the king of hearts, over dummy's ace-queen.

Simply to delay the awful end as long as possible, I gathered in my tricks in diamonds; then (hoping my partner would not be too disagreeable about my slam bid), I was just about to take the necessary heart finesse when the Vision Appeared!

I led a trump. East was 'in', and his forced heart return, to dummy's tenace, made me tingle with delight and self-appreciation.

That, so far I was concerned was the Birth of the End Play (perhaps it's needless to say I hadn't been playing bridge very long)."⁴

Note. Esther recently posted a "**Map**" of all the "**Esther Bridge 'Pop' Quizzes**" that (1) use **BBO Bridge Master** lessons and (2) cover either the bridge (a) "**Elimination Endplay**" or (b) "**Squeeze Play**": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/MAP.pdf>

⁴ See: <https://www.bridgebum.com/endplay.php>