



The Illinois Billiard Club

"The Country Club of Pool and Carom Billiards"

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Lessons - Leagues - Tournaments - Memberships - Private Functions

1975 - 29th Anniversary - 2004

"Thirty Years and Millions of Precious Memories"

by Jim Parker

Visions of personal achievement and attaining success are born within all of us, as are the skills necessary for their fulfillment. What often lacks however, is inspiring encouragement and proven direction from others having already found such ideals and are eager to share their methods and magic. The Illinois Billiard Club will soon be celebrating its 30th anniversary. And be well advised that the following story and pictorial documentation have not been written and displayed as an act of self-praise. On the contrary, it's been prepared as a guide to help others find their success within an all too often one dimensional and socially limited public side of American billiards.

The following story has been written with the intent of acting as a time proven road map offered to guide anyone that would like to take a trip to exiting new places where billiards in America has seldom, if ever, been before. The story charts one couple's 32-year journey that began with a bright new idea that most humbly included the use of a 70-year old carom billiard table in the basement of their home. All of which today, through love and determination has evolved into a multi-million dollar private billiard club and public banquet facility. The story also contains facts and figures so unique they've carried the game of billiards to new found heights and, bought the Illinois Billiard Club a permanent place in America's history books within the pages of "Images of America."

Recently, a letter lambasting a billiards trade organization known as the Billiard Congress of America (BCA) for allegedly reneging on a past business agreement

with various tavern pool league operators came raging across cyberspace. A letter using deeply expressed words like "lawsuits" and "extortion," and expounding phrases like "violation of trust," and "The BCA is a pathetic shadow of its former self, etc."

A few weeks ago notice was given that a carom billiard organization known as the United States Billiard Association (USBA) for whatever reason hadn't the funds to send their national champion abroad to compete in the upcoming world three-cushion championships. A problem hopefully soon to be solved when a few of the organizations membership responded by passing the hat.

When we receive reports like these concerning the arguably two oldest billiard organizations in America tells everyone there are obvious organizational problems that have to be dealt with by each of their respective associations. More importantly however, reports of this nature bring to mind American billiards long and repeated history of social, economic and leadership struggles dating back to the 19th century. And if honesty prevails, the same three problematic struggles we've all at one time or another battled with at some point during the course of our own lives. A billiard organization is not unlike any other organization throughout our society. Simply because they're all comprised of committees made up of people with the same basic interest in achieving similar goals, yet often through various means.

Setting out to damage the reputation of any individual or organization by implying acts of extortion, crookery or any negative characteristics has historically been proven pointless and anything but helpful to all concerned. Therefore, discussing one's problems of disagreement or shortcomings with anyone other than their affiliates is a matter of privacy, as

were the original arrangements made by the concerned parties initially. And as time-proven fact, far more good is always accomplished when concerned parties of indifference respect one another through both their thoughts and actions.

While always remaining a questionable act, publicly faulting others for what they have or haven't done is nonetheless a matter of personal choice. But if it's a positive solution one's after and not simply an act of counter productive criticism there are far better means of becoming helpful and reaching progressive goals. More precisely, to initially forgo involvement with others in the first place and map out one's own course of self-enterprise. In short, invest one's own time, finances and energy, and set sail on the same oceans of financial risk and ever changing social climates that one might fault others for failing and/or violating. After all, everything initially begins with one thought and thousands of options. Therefore, what more is required to begin almost anything other than one individual or one couple so deeply in love with one another and sensitive to the others well being that through nature, come to think and act as one.

By the time we all reach adulthood most everyone comes to realize there has seldom, if ever, been any association or business organization that has proven itself any greater or wiser than the very "individual people" themselves that make up their various committees. Yet when it comes to the often bureaucratic, unimportance of a committee on a whole, it's in everyone's best interest to remember, that God sent his only begotten Son to save the World not a committee!

This story I'm about to tell you first began over 32 years ago in the early 1970's and during a time in America when billiards was considered little more

than a back-alley gutter-game, and continually lived up to its reputation. The Beverly Bowl, a Chicago South Ashland Avenue bowling alley, billiard room and restaurant where I enjoyed playing billiards as a young man had fallen into hard times do to its declining neighborhood. It became obvious that it was either give up the game of three-cushion billiards or bring the game and a billiard table into our home. A brick four-flat apartment building with unenclosed rear-entrances leading to two-adjointing basements. For better or worse it was then that my ever-understanding wife, Bonnie Marie Parker consented to my installing a carom billiard table within our east basement (Fig 1). Of course in our Jim and Bonnie style this meant a bit of remodeling and a few small changes throughout our building. Small changes that led to a full-blown construction project. Like relocating one-concrete enclosed steel-supporting column, installing a huge exhaust and make-up air system, framing and pouring a new 25-ft. concrete (one ton) platform to support some sixteen steel commercial spectator chairs. The same chairs I rescued some 15 years earlier from the Gage Park Bowl. - Another bowling alley where I first began playing billiards in my teens.

Next came the designing and building of a washroom so our billiard-playing guests wouldn't have to use the one in our home. And before the money and our energy ran out we even purchased a new freezer, refrigerator, coffee pot, electric toaster oven, huge candy jar (which is still in use today some 32 years later) and finally, rebuilt an existing gas stove. After all, as I recall mentioning to Bonnie at the time, "Our guests will surely have to take nourishment during their upcoming four and five-hour, seven and eight handed games of three-cushion."

And so it came to pass, some two

decades before actor Kevin Costner stared in his motion picture "Field of Dreams," Bonnie and I had already built it (and not in a cornfield, but rather in Chicago IL on South 64th and Artesian - I suspect the cornfield was Costner's idea?) But nonetheless, they all came. And have never stopped coming for more than the past 32 wonderful years. Within a month after the first click of an ivory billiard ball (yes, ivory billiard balls were still in fashion), one-by-one some 20-billiard players began frequenting our little basement billiard room on a weekly basis. Operating our contracting business and not having nearly the time they did, Bonnie and I simply had keys made for everyone that they might use and maintain the table and room until 11 p.m. whenever their schedule permitted. Fortunately, to provide parking for everyone our building was located across the alley from our banks' parking lot. And with some certainty had it not been available I wouldn't be writing this story today.

About a year and another eight or nine three-cushion players later it became obvious that five to eight handed, 10 point games of billiards would soon be on their way out. When a man finally did get his turn at the table and left nothing but a piece of chalk and a place to rest his hand, I decided it was time to expand operations and add more tables. With thoughts of purchasing all of the Beverly Bowl's billiard equipment one of our colleagues, Eddie Broaches, a then Hall of Fame bowler and great three-cushion player introduced me to the new owners of the then fast sinking bowling alley. I soon struck a deal with the Thomas brothers and it wasn't long after Bonnie and I found ourselves owning eight Brunswick Anniversary billiard tables (three carom and five pocket) along with scads of other miscellaneous billiard equipment. All of which after carting to our four-car garage on south Artesian looked so worn-out and abused we both felt as though we bought a pile of dried-out salvage rescued from the Titanic (Fig. 2).

Neither our car nor truck ever saw the inside of our garage again for almost a year because the garage was suddenly transformed into a billiard equipment workshop. Every inch of every piece of equipment had to be completely disassembled, repaired or replaced where necessary, re-glued, re-laminated, sanded,

stained, sealed until ready for three coats of varnish (wet sanded between coats) and finally reassembled. All of which wasn't the only self-enterprising project going on at the time but rather a project to be accomplished during off-hours from the operations of our newly founded electrical contracting business and, paying attention to the more important business of raising a family.

Next came the task of finding the perfect location, which we did in short order. Or so we thought? Just seven blocks to the south of our home and even on the same street, a retired hardware merchant, Tony Drier and his wife were selling their some 9,000-sq. ft. building that included a luxurious apartment that would have all proven ideal. Not wanting to sell off our 64th Street rental property Bonnie and I submitted an offer to purchase the Drier's property by renting with the option to buy once our private billiards club was more financially responsible and proven itself through the test of time. Wanting to liquidate all of his inventory and real estate holdings in order to finance the construction of their new retirement home our offer was refused. I recall mentioning to Tony shortly after, that Bonnie and I were determined to make a success of our little club and after doing so if he hadn't sold his building within the next few years we'd be back to purchase it outright.

While disappointed in losing what could have been a perfect arrangement we soon found a smaller rental property located at 10329 S. Pulaski Avenue (Fig. 3). It was located within a bit more upscale area but some six miles from our home. A traveling arrangement we never cared for since we've always enjoyed the comfort and convenience of living within the same building as our businesses. The community was clean and stable but the building lacked square footage and any living quarters whatsoever, yet adequate enough to provide an ideal proving ground for our extremely ambitious concept. After installing new paneling and carpeting throughout, and all the while guided by Bonnie's ever-talented decorating ideas we transformed a typical stark storefront building into a rather charming and quaint little billiard facility, complete with a small lunch counter (Fig. 4).

To be continued...



Fig 1



Fig. 2



Fig.3



Fig. 4