

## Emma Kolesnik and Finn Kolesnik

In the spring of 2017, the Beynon/Kolesnik household was busy like most others. The parents, Sharon Beynon and Alex Kolesnik, taught full-time at the community college while the children, Emma, then 18, and Finn, then 12, went to school in their coastal community of Ventura. Emma was busy applying to college and finishing her senior year, playing for her high school tennis team, competing in debate, and writing for her high school newspaper. Finn played tennis, bowled with his father in a Thursday night bowling league, and played cello in his middle school youth orchestra. Their two cats and one dog could expect them to be home most weekends.

Every few evenings, the family would sit around and play 42, Mexican train, Apples to Apples, or maybe a few hands of gin. Sharon, who'd taught bridge since her days in Austin, Texas in the early 1990s, would occasionally encourage the kids to play a little bridge. Emma knew the game and had played in youth events at nationals in Washington D.C. and Chicago, but Finn flatly refused to learn.

Something shifted, however, as the family made plans to go to the summer NABC in Toronto. District 22 again gave Emma a scholarship to participate in the youth championships. She planned to play a little and work as caddy the rest of the time to earn money for college. When Finn saw that his sister was getting money to play cards, he wanted to know if he could get a scholarship too. On the condition that he begin to learn earnestly, he applied for a scholarship.

For the Toronto National, the family arrived early to their Airbnb within walking distance of the playing site. They saw the New Zealand String Quartet at Harbourfront and rented city bicycles to see the town.

On the first night of the tournament, the four of them entered the midnight KO game: Finn played with Alex and Sharon played with Emma. They were shocked to win 3 matches until they were beat in the finals by a group of college kids. Before that point, Finn had no masterpoints, and Emma had fewer than 10. To place second in that KO, they beat several strong teams along the way. There were many other young players, including a team with some of Emma's future college teammates from the Claremont colleges.

The kids were hooked. Alex was playing in the national 3-day pair game with Brian Glubok (they finished the event in 63<sup>rd</sup>), but he wanted to make time to play with Finn and Emma as often as possible. Sharon also played with Finn, winning him his first gold points, but mostly she was holed up at the Airbnb writing her dissertation for her doctorate at UCLA. Finn went to the

partnership table looking for games, while Emma worked as a caddy. By the end of the tournament, he had won over 13 masterpoints, and Emma almost 8 (despite the fact that she worked 5 days as a caddy). In the youth NABC, they played as partners and did well, including winning the consolation of the youth teams.

One of the things that attracted them the most was the huge presence of other young players. They met lots of players their own age, and made bridge friends. They enjoy playing with and against players of all ages, but it is very fun to play with young players. Both kids joined the junior training program (organized by Michael Rosenberg) and Emma joined a team that entered the youth team trials. Both kids play a lot of bridge online (on Bridge Base), and really enjoy it.

As fall began, the kids were hooked on bridge. Emma joined the Harvey Mudd bridge team, where she would be studying math and computer science. Both kids played occasional club games and local tournaments occasionally (time permitting from their busy school work). Alex is on a sabbatical from Ventura College this year, so plays with the kids as often as he can. Alex is also coaching Emma's college bridge team. The kids started having great bridge success. In September, Finn played his first sectional Sunday Swiss, and won. Both kids played at the Ventura regional in October (Finn evenings and both kids on the weekend), where Finn won a pair game and Emma won a KO. In November, the kids played both weekends at the fall NABC in San Diego, and they won several events.

Towards the end of the year, the largest wildfires in California history struck Ventura. The Thomas fire burned over 1000 homes. The family had to evacuate their house, and spend the fall living in their apartment in Hollywood. Their house is fine, but it did suffer some damage from smoke and ash.

Finn's school closed down until the end of the year, which did not make him sad at all, as he got to play 5 weeks of bridge! Finn finished the year with 150 masterpoints, and won the national rookie of the year race for ACBL. Emma could not play nearly as much, but still managed to win almost 70 masterpoints. Both young people won red ribbon and blue ribbon qualifications, and all of the gold points they need to be life masters.

As 2018 begins, both kids are still playing quite a bit of bridge. Emma was selected to join the youth Rona team (young women) to represent the US in the world youth championships this coming summer, which means a 10-day trip to

China with her teammates. And both Emma and Finn are doing junior training online, and Alex has agreed to serve as mentor for other kids online through the program. The family drives to regionals and sectionals in southern California. Both kids have been very successful, with high finishes and wins at those tournaments. Emma has won over 30 points this year, and Finn almost 70.

They have been lucky that many top local and national players have served as mentors, and play with the kids. From District 22, Bruce Ferguson, Aaron Jones, Steven Love, Mark Perlmutter, Rick Roeder, Wafik Abdou, Marcus Evans, Walt Schafer, Kitty Cooper, Jim Weeks, Neil Stern, Raeann Koerner, and Buki Burke have all served as mentors and/or played on teams with the kids. Margie Michelin and Ellis Feigenbaum have been extremely supportive and have helped the kids find partners and teammates. From District 23, John Ramos, Mitch Dunitz, Ifti Baqai, Om Chokriwala, Roberto Scaramuzzi, Bruce Horiguchi, and Rob Perlsweig have also played with and/or mentored the kids.

The kids are looking forward to lots of bridge this year, including the upcoming nationals in Philadelphia where Emma and Finn will be representing District 22 in the flight C of the North American Pairs.