**Tennis (Mis)Adventures**

10SNE1 – (California Car License Plate)

When I went to college, there were many opportunities to play ping-pong and badminton in the courtyard of Page House. The tennis courts were far away near the gym across the street. They were populated with dedicated serious players with high school experience. Graduate school offered little opportunity as I had no tennis playing friends and the courts were always busy. Besides, it looked like an activity that would be hard on my sensitive feet, due to the hard, black, hot court and running.

When I went to Florida on a vacation, I stayed at a 20th floor condo at North Palm Beach. The three story beach parking lot had three tennis courts on top. Marilyn said “Why don’t we play some tennis?” Sure, why not. We went out to the court and she warned me about hitting balls over the 20 foot fence surrounding the court onto the sand and people nearby. I tried to be careful. She hit the ball to me gently and I hit it back. The problem was that I looked at one side of the court and always hit it to the other side of the court. She wanted to rally but I kept looking one way and hitting the ball the other way where she was not She accused me of being unfair, since that not what the tennis pro did and marched off the court. I was crushed because she did not want to play with me.

A few years later, I was at the Bloomington, Illinois, Country Club. The tennis courts were in the middle of a marshy area, while the golf course got the drier hills nearby. Gary brought two cans of balls (6 balls) and said lets play. He served quite hard and with spin. After completely missing the first few serves, I decided to swing faster at the ball. Very shortly, the six brand new balls (they bounce more than old balls) flew over the surrounding fence into the unretrieveable marsh area. There were no more balls to play with; he said I was littering the area and marched off the court.

A few years later, I was invited to play some tennis with Joann. She was learning; she just wanted to hit some balls around. Great, I thought, non-competitive and fun. We went to the local public park. She hit the balls to me and I was able to lob the balls back somewhere in her vicinity. She said that she was tired of running around to get the balls and that I should hit them back with more pace (that is tennis-ish for speed, not the salsa) directly at her. So I did; the first ball went right by her, the second hit her on the legs, the third (towards her face) caused her to duck out of the way. She got disgusted and marched off the court. Oh no, what did I do this time? She said that I did not play polite tennis.

A few years later, the Ski Club at work decided to sponsor a tennis evening at the local tennis center. There were several courts and about 16 people. We would all play one set of doubles tennis to 6 games, and then switch partners for the next set with Swiss style pairings (winners play winners, losers play losers, etc.). All of the players were better than me, and I really had to try hard to hit the ball. However, the doubles court is wider, so there is more room to get it in play. My partner played close to the net, and I hit him in the back twice in a row. He marched off the court, and said that I should not be playing in this contest. Somehow, I managed to also hit my next partner on the head.

A few years later, I was working at TRW with Kelly and Tak. They were talking about their doubles tennis match. I said I could beat them at tennis. They laughed and said that not even Wimbledon Williams could help me that much. After some discussion, the tennis match was duly arranged. The entire department staff came out to see the match. Kelly and Tak strategized that Wimbledon was used to first rate tennis, so they would hit everything as a soft lob to the back of the court. I played near the net and tried to hit everything, but all the balls were just too high for me to touch. Wimbledon was not used to the slow balls and this body wandering in the court in front of him. Many of the balls that he hit were off the court or into the net for an unforced error. None came near me. I followed instructions and never hit him with my racquet. We lost big, and went out with the spectators to a local restaurant to recover. Wimbledon challenged Kelly and Tak to a revenge match just against him. He had no trouble beating them as a single versus their doubles. Since I was useless, I quit playing tennis.