

# OnBoard

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SCRABBLE IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF J.W. SPEAR & SONS LTD, MAIDENHEAD



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Well known on the London Scrabble scene in particular, Rachel chats about her early life, her aptitude for maths ... and how her love of Bridge led to her finding a husband

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## PERSONALITY



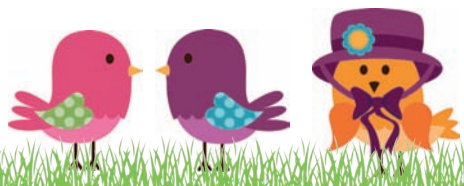
**A**s a stay-at-home mum since child number three was born, I've found the internet a godsend, but little did I know that online Scrabble – a relatively recent addition to my games-playing repertoire – would take over my life!

From the age of seven, I grew up in the East End of London, where my father was the Rector of Poplar and my mother was a nurse in the Special Care Baby Unit at the London Hospital.

The Rectory was a nine-bedroomed mansion with a snooker table in the basement, but it was still rather crowded, what with four siblings, several lodgers, a dog, a cat, numerous guinea pigs and rabbits, two geese, five peacocks and a drake.

As children, we loved playing board games – Monopoly, (strip) Trivial Pursuit, and many late nights of Risk – but Scrabble didn't really interest us, it being rather a tedious game we might play with elderly aunties at Christmas.

My parents loved card games, and held Bridge evenings until one American lodger taught us all to play Pinochle.





### A JILL OF ALL TRADES

At the age of 11, I was packed off to boarding school – which I hated, though am still in touch with many of my fellow-inmates. I divided my time among programming in the computer room, bellringing with the local campanologists, and sneaking off to the pub for beer and fags. I ran away the day I finished my A-Levels.

At 18, I went to study maths at University College, London, though I sandwiched my degree by working as a database administrator in the fast-growing London Docklands for a youth-training organisation.

It was before Canary Wharf was built, and the new the Docklands Light Railway was thought of as dinky rather than a major part of London's transport infrastructure!

After university, I joined an investment bank and traded eurobonds for four years. Early starts, long lunches, late evenings entertaining clients, and 2am phone calls from the Toyko office took their toll, and I quit my job when my final bonus allowed me to pay off my mortgage.

### OFF TO SEE THE WORLD

Over the next few years, I took a fairly relaxed attitude to work. I started with a four-month overland trip around South America, where I held a coati, little suspecting it would ultimately feature in my favourite-words list.

On my return, I temped on and off as a medical secretary. However, the work did not occupy me fully, and after reading James Gleick's excellent book *Chaos*, I killed time by writing a program to display the Mandelbrot set.

Thinking I needed to do something a little more intellectually stimulating, I applied and was accepted on a Master's course in IT at Queen Mary & Westfield. They even gave me a grant!

Back at university, I graduated top of the class, and stayed on to start a PhD in artificial intelligence. Three years later, they took me on as a lecturer.

### PAIRED OFF – FOR LIFE

Meanwhile, apart from the studying, I was playing an enormous amount of duplicate bridge. I had some very good partners, and twice won events at national level. As with Scrabble, men dominate the top echelons, but it does mean that decent female players are in demand for mixed-pairs events. And so I met my husband, Matthew.





Though I had known him for years, there came a time when both of us were single and in need of a mixed-pairs partner, and so the inevitable happened. I thought that I had found my partner for life – bridge partner, you understand.

Little did I know that my love for bridge would diminish, only to be replaced by another game ...

### AND THEN THERE WERE FIVE

Oh, I forgot to mention the children! Of course, they were the main saboteurs of our bridge partnership. It's not easy going to tournaments when you have two or three small children in tow. We did manage to win our heat of the Portland Pairs when I was 40 weeks' pregnant. People kept asking when the baby was due, and I had to reply, "yesterday"!

In 2002, Max arrived, and less than two years later, so did Eddie. I certainly had my hands full for a while, but embraced the nappy-changing, breastfeeding, playgroups, and (so many!) trips to the park. I wouldn't have got through it without wine boxes, I can tell you!

Though still working part time, I was mainly stuck at home and in need of something to occupy my evenings. Matthew would stay up late watching the World Poker Tour, and I made the mistake of joining him.



"I could do that," I thought. He brought home a free copy of *Poker for Dummies*. I asked if I could upload \$50 from our joint account to an online poker site. "No," he said, firmly.

So I uploaded it from my secret stash and never looked back. I specialised in Seven Card Stud, and for the next eight years made a healthy profit, peaking in 2008, the year after Joanna was born. But the US government made it harder for Americans to participate and eventually the 'fish' dried up and the 'sharks' took over. No longer able to make any real money at it, my interest waned. As the old saying goes 'Poker is a hard way to make an easy living'.

### BRIDGE, POKER ... NOW SCRABBLE

Spending a huge amount of time online, inevitably I ended up on Facebook and was introduced to Scrabulous. This was around the time that Adam Kretschmer started running an online Scrabble league. I joined, and have been playing ever since. The league has gone through several incarnations, both in management and playing platform, but many of the players I met back in 2009 still play in what is now called the Facebook Scrabble League (FSL).

Being used to playing tournament bridge, I searched out Scrabble events and attended my first tournament in 2009, which was the Winter Matchplay in Milton Keynes.



It took me a further two years to join the London Scrabble League (LSL) and start playing live regularly. My first fixture was a baptism of fire at David Holmes' place, the other players being Victoria Kingham and Vince Boyle. I managed only about 250 in my first two games and felt hopelessly outclassed. When David started with a bonus in the third match, things weren't looking too pretty. However, he left his bonus next to a TWS, it took an S, and before he knew it I'd won with a score of 500. I was (belatedly) hooked!

### MYSCRABBLEAPP IS BORN

Being a nerd, obviously I kept track of all my online results, and recently felt the need to consolidate them in one place. Last year, I developed a website – *myscrabbleapp.com* – built on a database of my FSL results.

I thought it would be nice to have all my live results, too, including LSL fixtures. The LSL fixture scoring is rather esoteric, so it was quite common that results sheets contained calculation errors. I developed an online form by which one could enter the fixture scores and it would calculate the results.

With the aid of Moira Conway, the form was developed, and now members can not only input fixture results, but also see their past results and where and when where they are playing next.

Now, several online leagues run on *myscrabbleapp.com*. The crossover from online to real-life Scrabble has been hugely positive for me. I have made many friends both real and virtual, and would highly recommend all Scrabble players try both! ■

The screenshot shows the 'Members Dashboard' for the London Scrabble League. At the top, there's a header with the league name in a stylized font. Below that, the 'My Recent Results' section lists four matches with dates and 'View results' links. The 'My League Table Snapshot' section contains a table with columns for Position, Average Points, Average Score, Played, and Name. The 'My Upcoming Fixtures' section lists several fixtures with dates and 'View' links. Finally, the 'Enter Fixture Result' section has a form with a 'Host' dropdown, a 'Date' input field, and a 'Create fixture' button. A note at the bottom explains the form's purpose.

Posn	AveragePoints	AverageScore	Played	Name
21	14.1875	414.8958	16	<a href="#">Philip Cohen</a>
22	14.1875	408.5000	16	<a href="#">Jake Berliner</a>
23	13.9333	401.8889	15	<a href="#">Kim Phipps</a>
24	13.8846	420.1026	13	<a href="#">Moira Conway</a>
25	13.5263	404.2456	19	<a href="#">Rachel Bingham</a>
26	13.3182	403.7941	11	<a href="#">Phyllis Fernandez</a>
27	13.0455	402.8485	22	<a href="#">George Gruner</a>