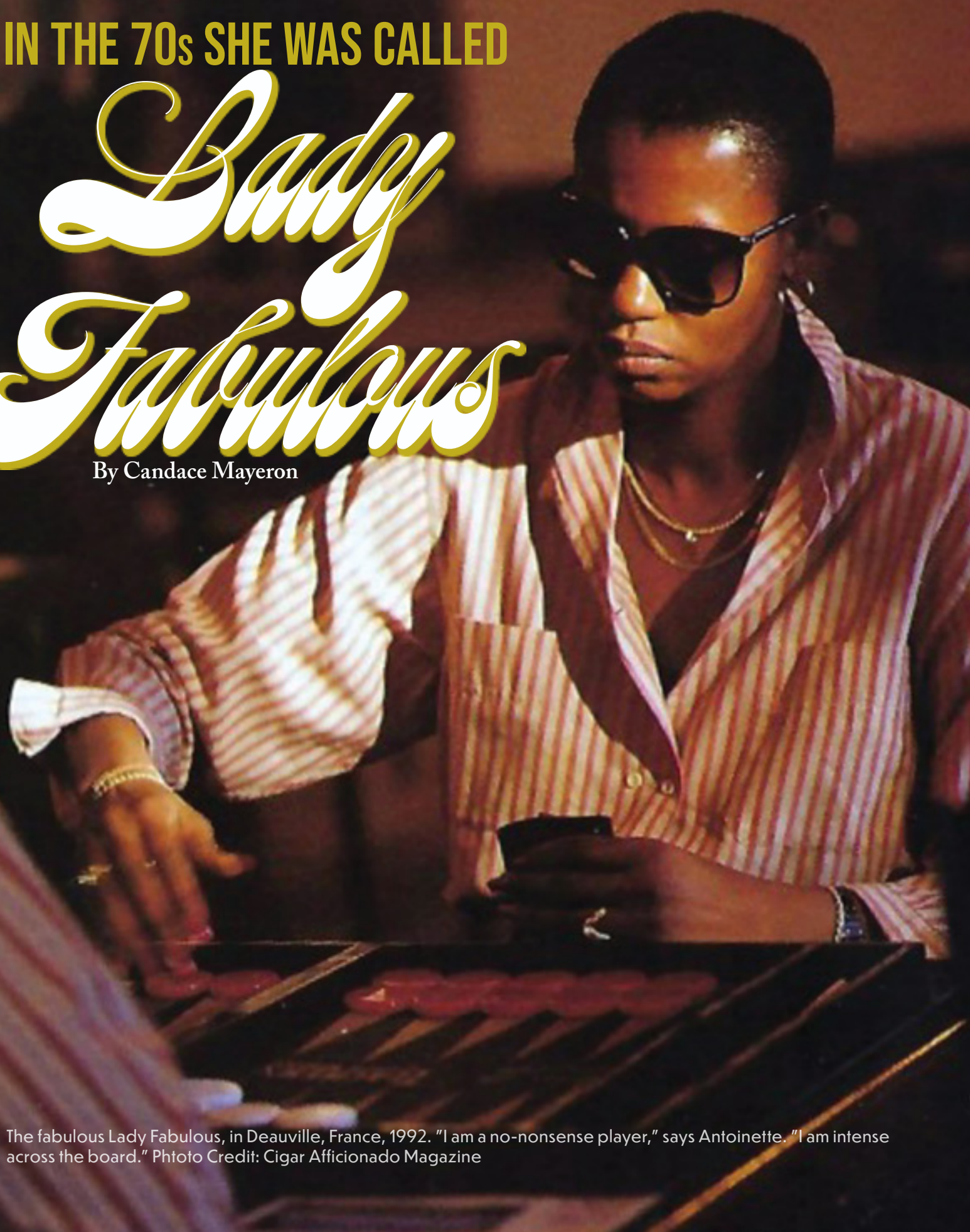


IN THE 70s SHE WAS CALLED

# Lady Fabulous

By Candace Mayeron



The fabulous Lady Fabulous, in Deauville, France, 1992. "I am a no-nonsense player," says Antoinette. "I am intense across the board." Photo Credit: Cigar Afficionado Magazine

**A**ntoinette-Marie Williams is even more fabulous now! She excels at multiple board and card games, travels the world on a motorized scooter, earned a Master's degree at age 52, survived breast cancer; plus she advocates for multiple charitable causes and has told her inspirational story on National Public Radio's prestigious podcast "The Moth." Yet, to hear her tell it, she is just getting started.

Antoinette was born in New York to a stay-at-home mother and a nurse's aide father. They divorced when Antoinette was ten, but by that time her father had taught her card games like Cutthroat Pinochle, and her future was charted. "What I really learned from my father," she says, "was not to wallow in loss. Move on. Don't bitch and moan."



Antoinette graduating high school

She moved out of her mother's home at age 18 and has been on her own ever since. At first she worked for the Civil Rights movement as a secretary. "It was a good job, but I wanted more for myself." At 27 she quit her job and enrolled in the Borough of Manhattan Community College. To earn extra money she played card games: Whist, Coon Can and Tonk.

It was the 70s and Antoinette was a party girl. She would go nightly to discos and set up a chess board. "I was pretty good, and guys would line up to play me. I happily dashed their egos. If Latin music came on, I'd stop the game to dance. I do a very good Mambo!"

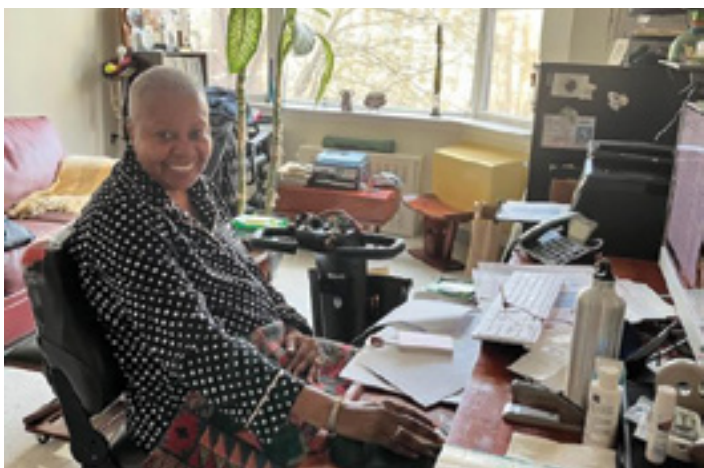
In 1973, a girlfriend suggested she learn backgammon but Antoinette shut her down. "I sure didn't need another damn game!" The friend persisted and eventually Antoinette-Marie Williams discovered backgammon, which led her to the hallowed Mayfair club in New York, the East Coast center of serious backgammon in the 70s. All the backgammon gods played there: Paul Magriel, Jason Lester, Roger Low, Lee Genud, Kent Goulding, Michael Senkiewicz, et al. Antoinette was in the center. Literally. "No way I could afford their \$25 chouette," she says, "so I kept score for them. I listened to their conversation and analysis. I wish I had listened harder. I would be in the Top Ten by now."

And then it happened. At age 40, she was running for a bus and suddenly her legs gave out. The diagnosis was devastating: Multiple Sclerosis, a degenerative disease of the central nervous system. At first she could still walk, albeit with a limp, then she needed a cane. Finally, six years later, she needed a motorized scooter. In the last 30 years she's had multiple scooters, all called "my Ferrari."

Candace Mayeron and Antoinette Wilson at NY Metro







Antoinette at home on the Upper West Side of Manhattan

She remembers the days before her crippling illness. "At the time I had a rich boyfriend," she says. He promised to take her to Monte Carlo for the European Championship as it was called back then, but broke up with her one week prior. "I wasn't going to let that stop me," she says. "I went by myself that year." She loved it and went the next year as well, and the next and the next. Eventually the event owner, Société des Bains de Mer, hired her to coordinate hotel rooms. When Ron and Patti Rubin purchased the now-renamed World Championship, they kept her as Hospitality Liaison. Although she no longer holds that position (new owner Marc Brockmann Olsen has his own staff), she attended last year purely as a player, making it 37 consecutive years that Antoinette has attended the Monte Carlo event.

"I've traveled the world on my scooter," she says. "Nothing is going to keep me down. What do you want me to do? Sit at home and cry? Not likely. I'm going to enjoy my life. I'll make lemonade out of lemons." In 2016, she survived breast cancer. "And I still went to Monte Carlo," she crows.

Antoinette plays more overseas than in the United States. "I like going to different countries, plus there is added prize money when a casino is the host site." She took first place in the Intermediates in 1979 in the Bahamas, and in 1991 won the Intermediates at the World Championship in Monte Carlo. She has been an Open player ever since. She has won Ladies' events in Monte Carlo, Cyprus, Venice and Las Vegas. As an Open player she has placed or cashed in over 20 singles and a half-dozen team or doubles events. In 2017 she was 3rd in the ABT "Player of the Year" race, becoming only the second woman -- and the first American woman -- ever to place in the Top

Three (Akiko Yazawa did so in 2015). Contributing to that status was her biggest Open win yet, the powerhouse Texas Backgammon Championship in San Antonio. She plays regularly on GridGammon and frequently in online chouettes. Her PR average is seven. She uses neither books nor bots to improve her game. She does it the old-fashioned way — she plays every day.

In addition to being a top player, Antoinette is a tireless backgammon ambassador. She currently gives free backgammon (and chess) lessons to multiple volunteer organizations focused on seniors and the disabled. She was the USBGF's first streaming coordinator and currently does the same for the Women of Backgammon. In 2022, she was elected to the USBGF Board of Directors where she hopes to work predominantly on grass-roots backgammon. When she is not playing backgammon or chess, she is an advocate for people with disabilities, working with numerous non-profits that service the elderly. She has received numerous citations and awards for her volunteerism. "I love inspiring people to improve their lives."

Antoinette earned her Master's degree in creative writing at age 52. Why? "I want to write my memoirs," she says, so I can show people with disabilities there is nothing they cannot do. I call it Laughing at Illness. I've already written three parts." Last year she turned 76. Did she finally take up knitting? Have you met her? She went skydiving! "It was a bucket list item," she says. "I just want to live life my best life."

You are Antoinette, trust us, you are. 



Antoinette with her Masters degree in creative writing

*Backgammon Around The World*

# For My Love of the Game

By Antoinette-Marie Williams

In 2021 I was elected to the U.S. Backgammon Federation (USBGF) Board with a strong personal agenda: to introduce backgammon to children. Fortunately, I found a supportive and enthusiastically in John Pirner, the USBGF Executive Director.

Teaching children is not only my passion but also my focus and my calling. I have been successful teaching backgammon to anyone interested and have had the privilege of collaborating with several schools and community organizations.

In 2019, I became a Founding Member of the Friends of Bloomingdale Inclusive Parks and Playground Task Force. The term "inclusive" refers to creating products and environments that are user-friendly for people of all abilities, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. This includes individuals of all ages with autism, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and other mental or physical disabilities. I am grateful to Karen Davis, who loaned me a large demonstration board to show examples of setting up the board.

On Sunday, November 21, 2021, the opening celebration of "It's My Park Day" took place. I volunteered to provide free backgammon lessons during the event. We set up two cafeteria tables and five backgammon boards, which I brought from my nearby apartment, along with rules. From 1 pm to 3 pm, the day went well: a 3-year-old learned to count, a 6-year-old played with his dad, took a break for ice cream, and returned to play another game at his son's request. Additionally, a 14-year-old quickly learned the game and enjoyed playing against adults. I did it all over again at another inclusive event in June 2023.

As a part of another Open Streets program, in response to a request from the program director, I give lessons on Saturdays when I am not participating in a tournament.



News has spread within the community. Since May 2023 I have taught an after-school program. Six eager 7th graders attend regularly and have even taught others who joined later. Although school is over for the summer, I was invited to continue lessons in the fall. Thanks to John Pirner, the school purchased three boards for their program.

Again, I was invited to teach 7th graders in a four-week program. They were especially excited to hear the story of my winning a Geoffrey Parker board I brought to teach on. I encourage them to ask their parents to buy a board and play. Additionally, a private club has requested lessons for their members and their children. I eagerly look forward to embarking on this new adventure.

In addition to Parks to Playground, I have dedicated my time for the past two months and donated three backgammon sets from USBGF for Parks to Parks, another street program. Another outdoor program offers chess lessons and expressed interest in me teaching backgammon outdoors as well. John generously donated free Crisloid boards for any group that shows interest.

I am incredibly excited about spreading the joy of backgammon throughout the Big Apple. My vision is for backgammon to thrive again across New York City schools and beyond. 