

The Poke Game  
June 2005

Some may be wondering how so young a woman such as Sweet Amy could own an establishment as well established as the 210 Tavern. Here is that story.

A hush had fallen over the 210 Tavern. The cigar smoke was thick. The air was acrid. The two remaining poker participants were about to lay down their cards. The fate of the 210 Tavern hinged on the outcome.

The poker craze that has swept the country has long been established in the north country of Michigan. However, there is one minor difference. This is northern Michigan and no one knows how to play Texas Hold'em. Besides, since this *is northern Michigan* no one would be caught dead playing *Texas* Hold'em. We play Michigan Mittens up here. If you are unfamiliar with Michigan Mittens, it is quite similar to Five Card Draw, except of course, you play it wearing heavy winter mittens. This adds a degree of difficulty to Michigan Mittens that other card games do not have. You have to be very skilled in dealing or picking up your cards wearing mittens because if you drop a card, that card stays face up. If you are the dealer, every card you drop during the deal becomes a face up card in your hand and you must give another card to the recipient. So as you can see, manual dexterity (or "Good Mitts" as we say up here) is a key requirement of Michigan Mittens. Two of the best in the North Country at Michigan Mittens are Sweet Amy and Foster Fenster. Over the years Foster has taught Amy the the game and all it's subtleties. Very Good Mitts both.

This game started out friendly enough. Just a quiet January Saturday night. Not much snow so there were no snowmobilers in town. Foster, Sweets, Digger Dan, Quick Vic and DQ had settled in for a friendly game of "Mitts". As the beer flowed and the night grew on, the game became more competitive. Babe and I watched from the bar as the size of the pots (called "woolies" in Michigan Mittens) grew. As this woolie grew, Quick and Digger folded (signified by removing their mittens and throwing them into the woolie). One could tell that the competitive juices were flowing between business partners Sweets and Foster. As the woolie continued to grow, DQ finally removed his mittens and tossed them into the woolie, saying "The woolie is too hot for me".

Now it was down to the final two. Not a sound was heard as the bidding kept going up. Finally the last two standing were out of cash. Foster smelling blood placed his last Swisher Sweet between his lips and lit it.

He rolled it around his lips a few times as he normally does when he is about to say something profound. "Sweets" says Foster, "We're out of cash. Tell you what I'm going to do. All or nothing." Reaching into his ever present brief case (no easy task when you are wearing mittens), "Here's my part of the deed to the 210 Tavern. I'm throwing it into the woolie. (A silent gasp went up from the spectators). If you've got the cards, then throw in your half. If not toss your mittens NOW!" For emphasis Foster gave the Swisher another roll. This is where our story opened.

Sweets, looking rather fetching in her pink t-shirt and pink ball cap, rather like a teenie-

bopper than a Good Mitts poker player, calmly reached into her purse, showing off the “Mo”(\*see below) tattooed on her arm, pulled out a pen and scribbled an IOU with her half of the 210 Tavern as collateral. She placed the IOU in the woolie and called. Sweet Amy laid down a full house. The only change in Foster's cool business like look was the Swisher in Foster's mouth drooped. Foster left his cards on the table face down and walked away. “Good Mittens”, was all he said. As Foster left, Digger turned over Foster's hand. Aces and eights, the Dead Man's Hand (writers note: no symbolism here, just fact). The Dead Man's Hand, coincidence or Fate, who knows.

I caught up with Foster in the parking lot. I asked what had to be asked, “How could you possibly bet the 210 having only two pair.” Foster's reply, “I thought she was bluffing.” He got into his car and left his beloved 210 Tavern, now fully owned by Sweet Amy. Just like Obewan Kenobe and Anacon Skywalker, the teacher became the taught. Foster had just learned what he should have known all along. Sweet Amy *never* bluffs.

\*\* Amy's tattoo actually says “Mom”, but Sweet's arm is so skinny that the second “m” is on the underside of her arm and is not visible unless she raises her arms over her head. Needless to say, having “Mo” tattooed on the visible part of your arm does come in handy when you are a female bar tender. Nobody messes with a babe whose boyfriend is named Mo. So like everything else in the north country what seems absurd, turns out to be quite useful.