

unison. I predict almost every one of the aces! When Frances thinks the deck is deteriorating, because it's apparent we have a negative-14 count and no more high cards will be coming our way, we exit. But we leave a full \$2,200 richer in just under 20 minutes. Jill looks over at us as she gets to her feet and mouths, "Wahoo!"

Giddy, we take the money up to our room and carefully lay it across the bed. It isn't a casino takedown. But at a low-stakes table, \$2,200 in 20 minutes means something. It's the culmination of work and talent and way too many Diet Snapples. It's about early mornings and late nights and guts and perseverance and the hard-earned sense that you can take charge of your life.

"Can I just do this one thing?" Jill asks. My friend gathers the money in her arms and throws it into the air. The bills rain down on the mattress, the floor, the three of us. "Wheeee!" she cries, diving onto the bedspread and rolling around. We are laughing like lunatics.

Finally, Jill comes up for air. "I said from the beginning, 'All I want is that night when we walk into our hotel room and toss the money in the air!' Well, and a chance to replace what I lost in the stock market. And a working air conditioner."

"And college tuition!" Frances chimes in. "And summer camp," I add happily.

You see, none of us are looking for world domination, but we would like to build up the kind of financial reserves that allow a person to retire prior to her 92nd birthday. In a few days, Duke will set about sharpening our skills, and we will commit to getting ourselves to a casino periodically—work crises, family dramas, and life permitting.

But for the moment, we laugh some more and doze a little bit until the sun rises and it's time to pack our bags and head for home. *GH*