

He told her Vegas was the place to be.

She thought about this, letting the possibilities that sparkled like diamonds roll across her mind.

May as well give it a try, she finally decided.

And so on the day she turned 21, Canadian born Evelyn Ng took the advice of close friend Daniel Negreanu and hopped a plane for the gambling capital of the world.

Her decision wasn't merely about a chance to gamble in an environment where she could do it legally to her heart's content, a point she worked hard to make with her apprehensive family members.

Going to Vegas was all about making a living and using her game-playing skills.

A woman like you, you've got to get to Las Vegas, Negreanu had told her. Leaving her home in Toronto and heading for the bright lights where she could put her game-playing instincts to good use seemed like a winning strategy.

Everything continues coming together nicely for this Canadian with the Chinese roots and the unshakable conviction that she could make a living as a gambler.

The Internet site Bodog.com signed her in March and as time permits she can be found hosting a no limit game at her own table on the website.

"I'm a sponsored player and I represent them in tournaments that I play throughout the poker circuit and, of course, I play on their site."

Evelyn has been playing poker for, ooohh, giving this a little thought, about 12 years. "Professionally, it has probably been eight or nine years."

She was born in Toronto and pretty much lived all her life there, at least until

she turned 21 and quickly decided that all things considered, she would just as soon be in Las Vegas.

Evelyn began to learn poker while dealing in the private clubs of Toronto and eventually began to alternate her time — playing and dealing.

"I started playing about a year

after I began dealing."

Gambling was in the blood, huh?

"Oh yes," her tone suggesting, well, yeah, of course. "All my life I've always been drawn to games of skill of one kind or another. As a teen-ager, I played a lot of pool and enjoyed video games, cards, backgammon. Things like that."

Was there a defining turn of events when it became clear these skills could help her pay the bills?

"The first time it hit me that I could do this for a living and not have to fall back on dealing to supplement my skills was when I came to Las Vegas."

She met several professional poker players, an experience that stuck in her mind, "because most of the people playing poker in Toronto seemed to do it rationally."

So she gave the matter a lot of thought. Maybe she could do the same thing, play cards for a living.

The attitude of these pros, interesting people that they were, impressed her. She noticed their discipline.

"I was meeting people who kept accurate wins of their wins and losses and really treated it like a profession."

And then there was Negreanu, managing to say so many of the right things at the right time.

Evelyn Ng and Daniel Negreanu had met as 16-

year-olds, a time when both were intent on sharpening their pool-playing skills. Yes, they did date for a while, but that aspect of their long relationship never went anywhere.

There were several years when they did not see much of each other.

"But," she explains, "we were reunited through poker and dated on and off a couple times."

She reaches carefully for the words to put just the right shading on what happened.

"He was very instrumental in the shaping of me as a poker player. Not so much the strategy, but more a matter of the inner game that it takes to be a professional poker player, the attitude that you have to have. He helped me a lot and he has been like a mentor through my whole poker career."

What's the most difficult thing about playing professionally? Is it the attitude?

"It is," she says. "There are so many different leaks in people's games that can really hurt them."

"It is difficult to be your own boss and to be tough on yourself and make sure you've got to treat it as a profession and look at it that way . . . not just go out there gambling."

There are those days, she suggests, when the inclination is to just say what the hell and to let down. Those are the moments that need to be minimized for anyone expected to survive as a poker pro.

"I've said before that the best thing about playing poker for a living is being your own boss." Pausing for a couple of beats. "But it can also be the worst thing."

She gives this a laugh. "It can be difficult delegating responsibility to myself."

Playing poker for a living requires an ability to see things realistically in more ways than one.

"I think that you have to

keep the accurate records that make it possible to say I've been profitable for this many hours at this level.

You also need for ability to look at your life and say that this is what I need to be comfortable."

Nothing like being honest with yourself, huh?

"Oh yeah. A lot of players who think they're making money, aren't keeping accurate records. It obviously helps if you have another job

to supplement your poker bankroll."

"You can't really lie to your wallet."

Ng focused mostly on cash games for about the first 10 years of her life as a poker professional. Tournaments have gotten more of her time during the last couple years as the possibilities for making serious money have taken off like a rocket. There have been several tournament cashes in the World Series, but nothing significant.

"As a cash game player, I was never in a hurry to move up through the limits. My thinking was that I wanted to feel comfortable, so I was pretty much a red chip player."

Ng's biggest tournament successes, as of a few weeks ago, had been in World Poker Tour Events.

She finished second a couple years back in the WPT's Ladies Night event. She just missed the final table at a recent Borgata Poker Open.

"I really love tournaments. What you can do in a tournament now has really rekindled my love for poker. Tournaments are definitely taking up most of my poker energy."

Most of Ng's family still lives in Canada. She has a sister in Los Angeles, but none of them has demonstrated anything resembling her passion for the world of gambling.

Laughing about this, "I think it is pretty clear that I am the only real gambler in my family."

How did they handle her decision to play poker professionally?

"They were, uh, really against it for several years. They were okay with me being a dealer, but they

were very uncomfortable with the idea of me expecting to make a living as a gambler . . .

"I don't think they understood that it could really be a comfortable way of making a living. It took a while for them to warm up to the idea and see that I wasn't just gambling."

Ng's success now involves ventures that have nothing to do with the number of hours spent at a poker table. The fact that she is an attractive woman in what is still mostly a man's world, hasn't hurt.

She gives that a forced laugh. "It's like a free card that I might as well play as long as people let me have it."

Poker is a changing world, but there are still a number of "good ol' boys" who have doubts about an attractive woman's ability to play a solid, aggressive game.

She thinks it would be interesting to see people assess a good-looking guy and decide he is too pretty to play poker.

Ng has been playing winnings hands in more ways than one as she has found success in more than one venture.

She'll thank her friend Negreanu for that. Ng is one of a handful of friends who have important supporting roles in "STACKED with Daniel Negreanu," a new video game in all the most popular formats that enables players to sit down for some serious hold 'em with the former Player of the Year.

She's fascinated by the game's artificial intelligence that causes it to adjust to changing strategy.

Ng is also part of a World Poker Tour video game. Another of her in-the-works ventures includes a poker project in China that she is not free to say much about for the time being.

"It's under discussion," is all I can really say right now."

Aside from this? "I just been really focused on getting ready for the World Series where I'm expecting to play in most if not all of the hold 'em events."

It's like Negreanu was saying. Vegas has been her kind of town.



PLAYER Profile
BY PHIL HEVENER

EVELYN Ng

Poker Player is pleased to welcome Phil Hevener back to its pages. Hevener was the Managing Editor of Poker Player from July 1983 to December 1985. Phil wanted to produce his own publication, which he did with Larry Hall. They called it, "Las Vegas Style." A popular journalist who writes for many major publications, Phil was replaced in 1985 by Gary Thomson, who is now the spokesman for Harrah's Entertainment.