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Kingpin

FROM GQ

"I AM NOT A DICK," says the greatest bowler in the history of bowling.

He has had a couple of beers, and he's now on his third Seven & Seven. When he's not bowling, he golfs. When he's done golfing, he drinks. Sometimes things seem clearer after a few drinks. "When I have a little buzz on, my eyesight gets better" is how he puts it.

This is what the great bowler sees now: cool green hills; loose knots of sweating, fleshy men and lean, tanned women; puddled shadows and the midday sun. He watches through a window from the bar at the Bogey Hills Country Club, near his hometown of St. Louis. The people here smile at him, greet him by name. This matters to the bowler. Once, when he was rich and famous and his enormous gifts were no more remarkable to him than breathing or walking, he didn't care what people thought. Now he's just famous. Now there's talk of the enormous waste the bowler has left behind, of the people he has hurt. He wants another chance. Now he wants to be understood.

"I don't want to be remembered as the guy who destroyed his father's name," the great and tortured bowler says. His eyes are filling. He orders a fourth Seven & Seven.

"I am not a dick," he says. "I am not an asshole. That's all I want. I don't want to be remembered as an asshole."

Pete Weber made \$1 million faster than any other bowler in history. He is one of two men who have made more than \$2 million

bowling. (He holds the sole distinction of having spent nearly all his gains.) He is neither the best-liked nor the hardest-working bowler ever to play the game. Yet he employs a huge backswing, and he imparts a subtle spin to his bowling ball that results in a vicious hook. The backswing and the hook delight the most casual bowling fan; the spin fascinates and baffles the lanes' cognoscenti.

He is manic and furious, and this is why all but the most emotionally detached bowling fan either adore or despise him. He bowls with extravagant desperation. He has slammed ball-return devices with his open palm and kicked foul posts and grabbed his genitals, though he can't remember ever doing the latter. He cussed out an old lady during a pro-am tournament. He is one of the most fined, suspended, and disciplined bowlers in the history of the Professional Bowlers Association. But his desperation is fascinating in the way that self-immolating greatness can be. When the PBA wants to draw fans, it knows Weber will bring them. When CBS or ESPN is going to televise a bowling tournament, the producers root for Weber to make it to the finals.

In the spring of 1998, at the Tucson Open, he draws more people than ever. Some want to see redemption; others hunger for rough justice. Some want to see the Pete who bottomed out in 1995, when he earned only \$39,795 bowling, winning exactly zero national tournaments. He divorced for a second time that year. He was broke, in debt, still drinking after three stays in drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers (or four stays, depending on who among Pete's friends and family is telling the story).

Others want to see the Pete Weber of 1996, bowling's comeback kid, who, after a third marriage, rediscovered his magical hook and the delicate spin and started winning again.

Going into the Tucson Open, Pete was the third leading money earner on the tour for 1998 (more impressive considering he was thirty-five, old by professional-bowling standards, and that he was suspended during the first three tournaments of the year for complaining about lane conditions), and he held the third-highest average in the PBA.

Will Pete Weber be remembered as the prodigy who squandered his talents or as the courageous maverick who defeated his demons? Bowlers have wondered about this for a few years now. Going

into the Tucson Open, Pete's family and friends wondered, too. So did Pete.

Pete Weber cocks his bowling ball so far back that it sometimes rises above his head, which looks especially dramatic because Pete is five feet seven and weighs 127 pounds. Like a lot of pro bowlers, Pete sports a mustache. His nose is thin and long, and his hair is swept back in a pompadour he keeps in place with regular applications of hair spray. He has grayish blue eyes that are soft and almost feminine after he has had a few beers but that go narrow and flat when he is angry or frustrated, which is most all the time when he is bowling. They are narrowed and flat now, and he is puffing his cheeks out. He glares at the ground, as if the ground had delivered him some grievous insult. It is late Wednesday morning, the first round of qualifying at the Tucson Open, and Pete Weber has just knocked down nine of ten pins, leaving the nine pin, which sits in the back row, second from the right. In bowling terms, Pete has left a "hard nine." Hard nines make Pete puff his cheeks out and narrow his eyes. They make him hold his arms out and his palms up, or suck air in through his pursed lips, or just scan the bowling crowd with a wide-eyed, wild-eyed look his father once described as "something out of the weird movies." Hard nines can also lead to rosin-bag flinging and genital grabbing.

It's not only hard nines. A bowling ball that hooks too much disgusts Pete Weber, as does a ball that hooks too little. Leaving a seven-ten split makes him ready to quit. Spares in general make him think about pushing the rerack button and giving up on the frame and having a few drinks. (He did that once. It was his fourth "ethical misconduct violation" in a year's time, which led to an automatic six-month suspension from the PBA.) Left-handed bowlers get to Pete, because he thinks they possess an unfair advantage (their side of the lane is less scuffed and smeared), though he likes some personally. Leaving a ten pin (the rightmost one in the back row) standing, or "tapping ten," makes him want to throw in the towel. Let's not even talk about gutter balls. The PBA tournament committee nauseates him. "They look out for just themselves. I've said that to them. In fact, I said, 'You guys are a bunch of self-serving motherfuckers.'" Even some strikes make Pete want to puke. Especially lucky strikes when he "goes Brooklyn," which is to say, the

ball hooks too much and hits the head pin from the left (thus Brooklyn) side.

Pete goes Brooklyn and hits a strike. He spins around, kicks the ground, stares down the offending patch of wood. "Motherfuck," he mutters.

"Pete has got a little bit of an attitude problem," says Don Fortman, a fan who has driven from Willcox, Arizona, to watch Pete bowl in the Tucson Open. "He gets a lucky break, he doesn't smile. Now, a lucky break like that Brooklyn, that puts a smile on most anyone."

But how can Pete smile? How can anyone expect the Greatest and Most Troubled Bowler in the World to bowl for something as simple as fun? Pete hasn't bowled for fun in about twenty years. He says the day he retires from the pro circuit will be his last day in a bowling alley. "He doesn't even like to go in a bowling center now unless he's in a tournament," says his wife, Tracy, who also bowls. "To get him to watch me bowl, I've got to beg." Pete has three rounds in Tucson to make it to the top twenty-four, then three more rounds to "make the show," to bowl with the top four finishers on television Saturday for one shot at the Tucson Open's \$16,000 first prize.

Pete bowls to pay his child support, his mortgage, and his taxes. He bowls to beat other bowlers. He bowls to show the PBA's self-serving motherfuckers that no one tells him what to do. He bowls because "I've never done anything else." He bowls because that's what he is — a pro bowler — and because if he doesn't bowl well, *that's* what he is.

Just one year ago, the greatest bowler in history, the man who had already earned twenty-one PBA bowling championships, won the Tucson Open, at these very lanes. Right after he accepted his trophy, this is what he said about his victory:

"It tells me I'm not a loser."

Many of the bowlers throwing strikes this afternoon are built like Fred Flintstone. This undercuts the PBA's insistence that bowlers are finely tuned athletes. All the bowlers who chain-smoke, like Pete, don't help the PBA party line, either. And not that facial hair has anything to do with athletic performance, but many of the bowlers, like Pete, sport mustaches that call to mind porn stars

from the seventies and dentists through the ages. Dentist/porn-star mustaches simply do not scream "finely tuned athlete."

The PBA wants to attract larger, younger, richer audiences. Which is understandable, because as the desert sun beats down on Tucson's Golden Pin Lanes (right across the street from Courtesy Towing and Tucson Awning & Screen), and as 108 men with a statistically significant number of extra-large guts and dentist/porn-star mustaches throw strikes, sluggish little pockets of hunched white-haired men and women move from lane to lane watching, many of them chain-smoking, some missing teeth, a few with walkers. The air reeks of cigarette smoke and stale beer and disinfectant and sweat.

To counteract this unfortunate impression, the PBA has hired a public-relations company in New York City. Now the PBA is using gold-colored pins and slow-motion cameras on its weekly television show. These efforts to burnish bowling's image make the bowlers happy.

On Wednesday afternoon, the PBA's greatest hope and most fearsome nightmare is throwing strikes on lane twenty-four of Tucson's Golden Pin Lanes. Another hard nine. "Motherfuck," Pete Weber hisses.

Imagine the Greatest and Most Troubled Bowler in the World as a surly thirteen-year-old. He is scrawny and longhaired, and he pulls his sixteen-pound ball (the heaviest made, just like the pros use) back, back, above his head, flings it down the lane and watches it teeter and hang on the right gutter then hook with murderous intent. Everything about the kid's delivery — the backswing too high, the release too snapped, the hook too hard — is wrong, almost intentionally different from bowling's classic five-and-a-half-step, shoulder-high delivery.

Which is much more than merely weird, because in 1975, when the kid is flinging strikes, the most famous practitioner of classic bowling, and not incidentally the most famous bowler in the world, is Pete's father, Dick, or the Legendary Dick Weber, as he was and is unfailingly referred to by bowling fans and bowling writers. The Legendary Dick Weber is as renowned for his easy charm, quick smile, and supreme self-control as he is for his bowling prowess. He is sometimes referred to in bowling circles as "bowling's greatest ambassador" and "the Babe Ruth of bowling," a spokesman for and

embodiment of the politeness, grace, commitment to hard work, and all-around cheerfulness that the chain-smoking thirteen-year-old with the goofy backswing doesn't seem to lose a lot of sleep over and that the Professional Bowlers Association so desperately wishes people would associate with the sport. (Actually, PBA officials would be delighted if more people would *think* of bowling as a sport.)

It's not that Pete doesn't get along with his dad. No, Pete loves Dick. He especially loves Dick's life. What thirteen-year-old wouldn't? Pete's been on the road with his dad, seen him buy drinks for his bowling buddies, witnessed the fun they have, the parties that never seem to stop.

The thirteen-year-old wants that life for his own. That's why he's flinging that big hook at Dick Weber Lanes. He works on his release, on different angles, on different ways to play different lanes. He throws strikes from each arrow on the lane, six hours a day, seven days a week. Is he good enough to think about hitting the road and buying drinks for the house and hosting the parties that never end? Does he worry about measuring up to his father? He doesn't want to worry about that. He knows what that worry can do. He has watched Richard, his oldest brother, take his sixteen-pound ball and his monogrammed bowling shirt, which unfortunately says **DICK WEBER, JR.**, and follow the Legendary Dick Weber on the tour, a dutiful son with an understated, classic bowling style, just like Dad's. "He'll never be as good as his old man," the bowling fans say, until Rich starts worrying, starts wondering, and quits. Pete watches John, the next Weber, as he packs the bowling ball and the **WEBER** bowling shirt and follows his pop into the family business. John uses the same classic, understated bowling style as his dad, and people talk, and John worries and wonders, and then he quits, too.

Pete was different. "It just made him mad," says Pete's mother, Juanita, whom everyone calls Nete. "It just aggravated him." Pete made a promise to his mother. He told her he'd make people forget about Dick. Told her that one day, when people saw Dick walking down the street, they'd say, "There goes Pete Weber's dad."

A chain-smoking little old lady wants an autograph, so when the second round of qualifying is over on Wednesday afternoon, she makes her move. But it's not Pete she makes her move on.

"Walter Ray," she calls out. "Oh, Walter Ray," she calls out again, and then a third time, until a big, shuffling blond man with a beard looks her way. Only one bowler in history has earned more money bowling than Pete Weber, and it is this man, Walter Ray "Deadeye" Williams, Jr.

Williams has a physics degree and a savings account and vague plans to teach high school mathematics someday and six world championships in horseshoes. He throws the ball with graceless efficiency, and he has a little hitch in his delivery that makes bowling aesthetes wince. ("Have you seen him bowl?" one of them asks rhetorically. "It's ugly. It's just brutal.") Williams wins, though, and he possesses a placid demeanor on the lanes that bowling's older female fans particularly adore. But when he signs his name for this fan, he neither smiles nor talks. In fact, Williams, the PBA's adored Abel to Pete's very public Cain, scowls slightly, then turns and gives this little old lady his back, which makes her gasp, then pucker her lips, almost as if one of her grandchildren had thrown some freshly baked tollhouse cookies in her face.

She turns to Pete. The older women who frequent bowling alleys are fierce creatures, but she is speaking more softly now. Maybe she has seen Pete react explosively to a few too many hard nines. Whatever the reason, she is positively timid when she approaches Pete.

"Would you mind?" she murmurs, holding out a piece of paper.

"Hey, how ya doin'?" Pete says. "Where are you from?"

She tells him, but warily. Little old ladies — even those who frequent bowling alleys — tend to speak cautiously around men they have watched kick the air while screaming "Motherfuck!"

Pete asks how she's enjoying the tournament. He admits that he's having some problems with the lanes. But, yep, he sure hopes he'll improve as the week goes on.

Emboldened, or maybe shell-shocked, she says, "You know, I used to watch your father all the time."

"Oh yeah," Pete says, "he was the greatest. He is the greatest. Greatest bowler of all time."

They talk for five minutes.

As she leaves, she reaches for Pete's forearm. It is a gentle, tentative gesture, as if she is trying to convince herself that what just

transpired involved flesh and bone and was not some miraculous apparition made up of cigarette smoke and fluorescent lights and beer fumes.

"Thank you," the little old lady says to Pete.

"No," he says. "Thank *you*."

He turned pro at seventeen, a tenth-grade dropout married to a girl he had met playing Frisbee in the parking lot of his dad's bowling alley.

The other bowlers on the tour invited the kid to the bar. They knew he liked to drink, so they patted him on the back and bought him drinks.

They bought him drinks because bowlers drink. Even the Legendary Dick Weber had knocked back a few. Actually, more than a few. "Dick got drunk from one coast to the other," Nete says, "and no one ever wrote anything bad about *him*."

They bought him drinks because pro bowlers are generous. "Back in the day of Dick," says a high-ranking PBA official, "no one made money, because whoever won the tournament hosted the party in the bar that lasted until they packed up and drove to the next tournament."

And they bought him drinks because pro bowlers might be a lot of things, but one thing they are not is stupid. This scrawny little longhair might have good bloodlines, but how many of those vicious hooks could the foul-mouthed little punk roll after he was pumped full of those sweet-smelling, girlie-sounding drinks he liked?

Trouble was, he could roll a lot of 'em. A whole lot. Trouble was, as the pro bowlers found out, not only was Pete an exceedingly nasty drunk (unlike his father, who was a gentle, fun-loving drunk when he drank), he was also without question the greatest drunk bowler in the history of bowling.

So Pete would suck back two or four or, on a couple of occasions, eight or ten Long Island iced teas, which was one of his favorite drinks in those days, then he would cock that arm back above his head and let fly, all the while taunting opponents and cussing hard nines and grabbing his nuts and screaming at the world and in general making PBA officials and other pro bowlers regret that Richard Jr. and John had been too sensitive and mild-mannered

to follow in the big, deep classic five-and-a-half-step-delivery paw prints of the Legendary Dick Weber.

His first year, Pete was named PBA Rookie of the Year.

Pete cocks, flings, hooks. He taps ten. "Fuck," he mutters in a tone of voice that is almost pleasant, considering his range of intonations. Then he picks up the spare.

A fan named Jack Iaci nods grimly. "The game is cruel to you," he says with the existential weariness that seems to infect a certain type of bowling fan. "It will rob you. Pete, though, he's the ultimate bowler. He's an artist."

It is Thursday morning, the final round of qualifying. Pete is in twelfth place, and if he bowls well this morning, he'll make it to match play tonight. Some of the other bowlers at the Golden Pin Lanes are flinging the ball as hard as Pete, but they are bigger, stronger, heavier, and younger. They pump iron, jog, take care of themselves. Pete's limbs are skinny, his chest sunken. Some of the other bowlers call him Bird Legs.

Yet Pete throws the ball so hard, hooks it so dramatically, and imparts such intense forward rotation to it (he's got a "big hand," in bowling parlance) that in the past year he had to switch from a sixteen-pound ball to a fifteen-pound one, because the heavier one was driving too powerfully through the pins, not deflecting enough from pin to pin and leaving far too many hard nines. A right-handed bowler with a big hand will inevitably leave hard nines. (Left-handers with big hands leave hard eights.) Pete leaves more hard nines than almost anyone.

"No one throws a ball like Pete," says Brian Berg, a former pro bowler who now works for Storm Bowling Products, Pete's sponsor, and who serves as Pete's friend, equipment manager, and apologist. "Never has. Never will."

"Pete has unlimited talent," says fellow bowler Mike Aulby, the third-winningest bowler of all time, behind Deadeye Williams and Pete. "There's nothing that can stop Pete but himself. And he's done a pretty good job of that."

By the end of the session, Pete is in eighteenth place. He's made it to match play. Two more days to make it to the show.

In the spring of 1984 — a year in which Pete earned \$115,735, turned twenty-two and used cocaine — Pete checked into a drug

and alcohol rehabilitation center in Lonedell, Missouri, after a drunken argument with his then wife, DeeDee. He stayed twenty-eight days. Dick told people his son had a sore wrist.

By 1989 Pete had earned \$1 million faster than any other bowler in history. He was twenty-six, divorced, seeing a woman he had met in a bowling alley (and whom he would later marry), in debt, drinking again, paying child support, and fined and punished more times than he or the PBA officials wanted to think about. (The PBA had never named him its Player of the Year, and Pete was convinced it was partly because the self-serving motherfuckers flat-out didn't like him.)

Even his fans considered Pete a crazed natural, a strike-flinging phenom pissing away his greatness. People commented on his tantrums. Bowling writers called him the John McEnroe of bowling. Pete is a lot like McEnroe, but in ways the writers probably didn't intend. Like McEnroe, with his command of spin and pace and angles, Pete is a master of his sport's subtleties, and he "reads" pin falls and lane conditions as well as anyone on the tour. (Also like McEnroe, Pete hates to practice and seldom does.)

The phenom was approaching thirty, and the genital-grabbing tirades notwithstanding, he was beginning to worry about his reputation. He wanted to be remembered. But he didn't want to be hated.

In 1991 he wrote an article titled "Uncontrolled Emotions Don't Mix with Victory" for *Bowling Digest*. He told the magazine, "I finally got it into my head that liquor and Pete Weber don't mix."

In 1996, after a second divorce and a third marriage, to Tracy Goettel, and a few more attempts at sobriety and a lot more disciplinary actions against him, Pete was bowling a pro-am tournament in Tacoma, Washington, while he drank Seven & Sevens.

The bartender, an older woman, told him he'd had enough.

And that's when the author of "Uncontrolled Emotions Don't Mix with Victory" said, "You can take your fucking bowling center and your fucking tournament and you can shove 'em up your ass."

Turns out she was the mother-in-law of the bowling alley's owner. The PBA put Pete on five years of probation, which he is still serving.

Pete wishes he had a beer, but the hamburger and fries will have to do, because, as Tracy says, "We don't cut loose till the weekend."

That's just the way it is." Last night they ate peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches in their \$99-a-night hotel suite, which is more than they usually like to spend. But now it's Thursday afternoon, and Pete has made it to the top twenty-four, and someone else is buying, so for lunch they splurge. Tony Roma's. Tracy goes for the ribs.

They're both slightly preoccupied. Tracy knows it costs them between \$1,100 and \$1,400 a week to bowl on the road, including the \$400 tournament entry fee, and that if Pete doesn't bowl well in the next three sessions in Tucson, they'll lose money this trip. Pete's first wife is suing for more child support, even though, Tracy says, "I went through the checks he wrote last year, and I found another \$11,000 that he spent on the kids, including paying for their braces." She knows Pete's a soft touch, always lending money to his friends and even to some people Tracy doesn't think are his friends. She knows how Pete is about paying bills and that he loves to gamble and that he once won \$25,000 in a single night and that he can lose just as big. She knows that he spends most of his afternoons back at the Bogey Hills Country Club, which she doesn't like, but what can she do, other than make him promise to call her to pick him up so at least he won't be driving drunk. She knows golfers bet \$1,600 in one afternoon at Bogey Hills. She knows that not too many years ago the PBA had to send Pete's tournament checks straight to his mother. "We bailed him out two different times," Nete says. "Had to do that. He owed the IRS \$43,000 one year, and we helped him. We also had to pay his American Express bills."

Tracy knows all that, and that's why she shops for peanut butter and jelly and Wonder bread. That's why she buys Pete's hair spray for \$2.48 a bottle at Walgreens. That's why she keeps the books and keeps him out of bars and off the golf course during tournaments. "I worry about him drinking when he's golfing, and besides, these guys might say they're his friends, but they're bowling against him, too, and I wouldn't trust one of them. I mean, who would you like to knock off the tour?"

Pete grabs a french fry, describes his typical day on the road. "I bowl, then I eat lunch, then I go back to my room and don't think about bowling. Then I bowl again."

"Yeah, babe, you're bowlin' great," Tracy says. Pete works over his burger. Tracy dispatches a baby-back.

Tracy knows all about Wayne Webb, the PBA's twelfth all-time earnings leader, who is better known to bowlers and bowling fans as "the King of Karaoke." That's because Webb, a forty-one-year-old with a diamond stud in his left ear and a blond dentist/porn-star mustache, has for three years been lugging his karaoke equipment from tournament to tournament, setting it up in bowling-center bars, where he serves as master of ceremonies three nights a week. He gets \$250 a night.

Pete finishing his career manning a microphone in a bowling-alley bar? Tracy doesn't think so. Not if Tracy's around. And she plans to be around. Tracy knows how much she loves Pete. But what she doesn't know is what will happen if Pete doesn't keep winning, if Pete doesn't start saving.

"That's a scary thought," she says. "No, I don't know."

"The King of Karaoke!" the PBA guy shouts into a microphone, and Wayne Webb trots onto lane thirty-two and squints into the spotlight. It's Friday night, the final eight games of match play, and the PBA is doing its best to ratchet up the tension. The fluorescent lights are turned off, rock-and-roll music is pumped up, and the PBA guy is shouting player introductions with all the manic energy he can muster. A new group of bowling fans has shown up for the final night of match play. They are younger, mostly men, and they wear sleeveless shirts and baseball caps. Some have tattoos.

When a bowler is introduced, the young men yell. "One of only three players ever to convert the seven-ten split on national TV!" the PBA guy screams, and Jess Stayrook waves, and the young men yell "Yarghhh!" "The comedian of the tour!" the PBA guy hollers, and Randy Pedersen waves, and the young men yell "Yarghhh!"

Most of the players sit in groups, with friends, and they laugh and cheer and make fun of whoever happens to be the bowler in the spotlight. Pete sits alone, smoking. He knows what's at stake. So do the bowling-ball companies, which pay incentives to those fortunate four who make the show.

Pete is in ninth place, 109 pins from the show. He yawns. "Because I'm not bowling," he says.

Friday night, with four games left, Pete still has a chance for the show.

He strikes.

"Atta babe," Tracy says softly, because she is his wife and she loves him. Also, she wants a new outfit. "That's the deal. If he makes the show, I get a new outfit to wear on it."

He strikes again.

"Yeah, Pete," Brian Berg says, because Pete is his friend and his favorite bowler and because if Pete makes the show, Brian gets an incentive check from Storm.

He strikes yet again.

"Yarghhh!" yell the young guys in the sleeveless shirts, because they know that when Pete's on TV, if he's hitting strikes, he'll sometimes imitate Diamond Dallas Page, his favorite professional wrestler, and he'll make the Diamond Dallas Page hand sign (it's a diamond) for the crowd, and he'll also do the Schwarzenegger pump-you-up flex thing every once in a while, too. And though the young bowling fans haven't yet learned to articulate their existential weariness, they yell "Yarghhh" because Pete embodies the disaffected, free-floating rage they admire, and they don't like the self-serving PBA motherfuckers any more than their hero does.

Pete strikes again, pumps his fist.

"Atta babe," Tracy says.

"Yeah, Pete," Brian says.

"Yarghhh!" the guys in sleeveless shirts yell.

But bowling is a cruel sport, and it will rob you.

Four games to prove he's not a loser and Pete goes Brooklyn, leaves four pins. Then he hooks too early with his spare ball, leaving a pin. An open frame. For a pro bowler, a disaster worse than a gutter ball.

Brian Berg stares at Pete, then at the remaining pin. "His attitude stinks right now," Berg says. "That spare he chopped? He didn't even try."

Pete won't make the show, and he knows it. The last game Pete bowls in Tucson is a meaningless 222. After one strike, for the first time on the lanes all week, he smiles.

He's had four beers and two Seven & Sevens, and his eyesight is good. Friday night in the Golden Pin Lanes bar, less than an hour after match play concludes, and this is what Pete sees: Tracy, sitting across from him, working on her second screwdriver; the King of Karaoke twirling dials and gesticulating; bowlers at the bar, drink-

ing and waiting for their checks; and in the front of the room eight young women in halter tops and shorts, singing a giggling, wiggling version of "Harper Valley P.T.A." "Here's some girls looking to meet a bowler tonight," Tracy says, with a hard smile at the singers.

The PBA tour director enters the bar waving a wad of checks for the twenty finishers who didn't make the show. Tracy snatches Pete's \$2,100 check for his tenth-place finish. "We got gambling money for next week in Reno," he shouts.

When the teenyboppers sit down, Brian Berg takes the mike and eases into "Mack the Knife." A pro bowler turned bowling-ball-company representative who can wring beauty from a song is a rare thing, and with each phrasing and pause, another patron of the bar seems to realize his precious luck, until the room is quiet and attentive as Brian nails the big ending of the song. And then bowlers holler, and bowling groupies scream, and Pete and Tracy drink up, and Mackie's back in town, and here at the Golden Pin Lanes bar no one is suing anyone else for an increase in child support, and no one's mother-in-law is cutting anyone off, and seldom is seen a hard nine. The King of Karaoke invites another singer to the mike, and Pete and Tracy order another round. Just one more. Well, maybe two, and then, Pete says, "We'll probably go to the hotel bar. We'll probably close the bar, actually."

The greatest bowler who ever lived has another ten years to earn some money, put some away, leave whatever bowling legacy he's going to leave and get on with the rest of his life. Even though Pete will be inducted into the PBA Hall of Fame this month, even though he was a huge hand, even though Pete is the greatest drunk bowler in history, he is still going to be looking at more seven-ten splits and open frames in the next decade. "And ten years is pushing it," Dick Weber says. "Being forty-five, trying to keep up with these twenty-year-olds, especially now — that's tough."

Sometimes Dick blames himself. He remembers times he let little Petey watch him drink with his pals and wonders if it all looked like too much fun. So he and Nete try not to drink in front of their youngest son. It saddens Dick when people think unkindly of Pete, "that he's a violent person, because he's not. I would say, yes, they're right, when he drinks. But when he's Pete, he's the most kind, the most generous person going. I mean, we didn't believe in

the tough love. I guess we're just not that kind of people. So I don't regret not doing the tough-love thing. I still couldn't do it."

Nete wishes Pete would quit drinking. "But what Pete does he does and will admit it. And what he says, you can bank on it being the truth. And he doesn't sneak around and do things. And I happen to know a lot of the bowlers out there who do the same things Pete does and nobody notices it. In fact, I wrote a letter to the PBA once telling them what some of their 'nice guys' did."

("Have a player tell Juanita to get fucked," says a PBA official, who wisely requested anonymity, "and then see what happens.")

"What do I want people to know about Pete?" Dick Weber says. "That he's loved by his family. He's just so loved by his family. We just love him to death."

Pete Weber is sitting in the bar of the Bogey Hills Country Club. He has had two beers and four Seven & Sevens. He has expressed a wish that people not judge him too harshly. He has said he would like to be remembered as a "nice guy." He has fought back tears. In an hour or so, he will call Tracy, who will have to drive out to pick him up. But now he is studying the glass of merlot in front of him, telling the story of his life, remembering how it began, wondering what might have been.

"If it wasn't for bowling," he says, "I would have ended up dead."