

Hooked On Recovery

January 8, 2010

Dumb Little Dog

“We have found much of heaven and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed.” ~Alcoholics Anonymous, pg. 25

Stella was a good dog. We didn't train her very well though. For example, she went through several groomers. Hard to imagine that an 18 pound (if she weighed that much) cockapoo could turn into a snarling, snapping terror when confronted with shears and clippers. Plus, I don't think she was ever fully house-broken. But Stella was a good dog, a very good dog. She loved us well. Samantha named her after the character in *The Italian Job*.

She used to sit on the back of the couch and watch the world go by. And like all good dogs she greeted everyone with ridiculous enthusiasm when they walked through the front door. When her energy reached a level that could no longer be contained, she would fly around the house using pieces of furniture as lurching pads. She loved ice cubes. As soon as the freezer door opened, there she was. Stella was a frequent and welcome visitor at work where people new in recovery often found her to be a great sense of comfort. When I was going through the trial last year, sometime I came home and just sat on the kitchen floor where she would crawl up on my lap and let me hold her tight. It was like she absorbed some of the pain, the anguish, the fear. Whenever someone was hurting, the dog was right there. She healed us. She had a spiritual gift. Not to say, she didn't have attitude. At night, she had free run of the house and when I went upstairs to check on the kids, she would always be on one of the kids' beds. She'd raise her head, open her eye and look at me and seemed to say, "What now? What do you have to say about it?" Then she'd sigh, put her head back down and grumble, "I didn't think so..."

Stella was with us for less than two years. In October, she died. I was in Minnesota when Sandy called sobbing, incoherent. Stella was on her run in the back yard when she was attacked by a swarm of paper wasps. She hung on for about 36 hours, but her little body couldn't handle all that venom. I got home the next day, and we got the call at 2:00 in the morning. Nothing good happens at that time. A very tearful veterinarian told us that our Stella had passed after a courageous fight. I sat in shock. I told Sandy. Sandy sobbed. We waited to tell our kids the next morning. The house became enveloped in sadness and heartbreak. We all went through the motions kind of numb. I didn't realize how much I loved that dumb little dog. Until she was gone.

We discovered a huge underground nest of paper wasps right by the steps to our outside deck, a place where we all walk. The exterminator said it was a very aggressive strain. No kidding. But as Sandy was talking with him, God whispered to her that "Stella took the hit, it might have been Mary." As I write this I choke up, it rings true to me. Mary is our littlest one, four years old at the time. Now it could be we hung on to that notion to make some sense out of a seemingly senseless tragedy...

Until just a week or so later, Mary and I are out running some errands, and we stop at a local farm shop to get some pumpkins for Halloween. As I'm paying, I see a big old Labrador who looks sad. I say something to Mary about it. A woman sitting behind the register says that he is sad. They just had to put down his lifelong buddy, another lab, whose aging heart couldn't last

any longer. So I told her about Stella and the bees. She said, “Really? My brother spent four months in the hospital from wasp stings. He was leaning against the barn and they got him. He almost died. Gee, that has to about 55 years ago now. I hadn’t thought about it in a long time.” I asked, “How old was he when it happened?” The answer, “Four or five.”

Thank you Stella. Dumb little dog.

Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, father of five and just another surf fisherman. These thoughts, views and opinions reflect on his personal recovery and are not meant in any way to speak for the entire recovery community. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at phillip@ccar.us. Visit the website at www.ccar.us to read the entire series.