

Hooked On Recovery

January 5, 2007

19 Years

“Do I look like I give a damn?” -James Bond (Daniel Craig), when asked whether he wants his martini shaken or stirred in *Casino Royale* (2006)

On December 28th I reached 19 years of sustained, continuous recovery. That’s 19 years without an alcoholic drink or illicit drug. I don’t count the time I inadvertently drank a shot of fermented grape juice during a Communion service. It was supposed to be regular grape juice, except Larry and I found this bottle of Welch’s in the door of the refrigerator and used it to prepare the Communion trays. We didn’t know it had turned. Honestly. The pastor said, “Now we drink the cup.” And as one, the entire congregation winced. It was kinda funny, except for the part of being mortified that I might have to adopt a new sobriety date.

Sandy and I celebrated by going out to dinner and a movie. Since it was my sober anniversary I got to pick the movie although she made a half-hearted pitch to see *Dreamgirls*. She acquiesced to my desire and we saw *Casino Royale*. I was not disappointed. Any chance we have to spend time together alone is special time for us. We try to make a point of having “marriage time” and Sandy honors me by always remembering this anniversary. It’s a time of reflection for me. I’ve spent the last few weeks contemplating some of the lessons I’ve learned since I began my recovery. Here’s a list of my musings in no particular order.

- The further I get into recovery, the less I know.
- Things are usually not black and white as I once thought. In fact, the gray area keeps expanding.
- Fishing is best when you’re not concerned about catching anything.
- Gratitude is the antidote for the poison of resentment.
- A sure sign of getting older is I now have to use moisturizing lotion... on my head.
- There’s no such thing as quality time with your children, there is only quantity.
- The most important human relationship I have is with my wife.
- Life is a series of phases.
- Don’t let a kid with the stomach flu sleep on the top bunk.
- My relationship with God, my recovery, is the glue that holds my life together.
- Everyone knows someone who has been affected by alcoholism and/or addiction. Yet very few talk about it openly.
- Always read the label. For example, it’s not a good idea to use Icy Hot when you meant to apply Preparation H.
- Entertainment reaches no higher pinnacle than watching your kids do something they love.
- Keeping my house in order means that if I were to die unexpectedly my family would find nothing embarrassing and that they would be taken care of.
- Humility means doing something nice for someone and then not telling anyone about it.
- As the hair leaves my head it sprouts on the back of my arms.
- 20 minutes of intense confrontational discomfort is worth months, if not years, of prolonged pain.
- Compassion is not one of my strengths. At times that has served me well.

- I'm too old to fish while standing on slippery rocks.
- If you happen to fall asleep at the dinner table and fall face first into your yogurt, your family may never let you forget it.
- Nothing is really mine. It's all God's; He just lets me borrow it for awhile.
- The stove has many temperatures, not everything has to be cooked on "high".
- Make sure you take enough air out of your tires before driving on beach sand.
- I can get through anything "one day at a time".
- I didn't get sober to be miserable.
- There is incredible wisdom and power in the experience, strength and hope in one person's recovery.
- Running was a lot easier 25 years and 40 pounds ago.
- Let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no.
- Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver and the other is gold.
- I will never maintain a low-carb diet as long as cookies exist.
- People get into recovery and stay in recovery many different ways.
- As your children get older, the house becomes smaller.
- To build a legacy that matters, the driving force must be integrity.
- When in doubt about what to do next, do the next right thing.

I'm sure I've missed several lessons learned, so I'll try to keep better track of them as I step into my 20th year. I'd like to think that I'll learn more in my next 19 years, but I can't be sure of what the future will bring.

So I'll stay in recovery today and deal with tomorrow, tomorrow.

Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, a 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.