

Hooked On Recovery

January 19, 2007

Still Waters

Our 10-year old daughter Samantha shares a room with her little sister, 2-year old Mary. This is a 10' x 12' room, tiny for two people. Sami is not one to express herself outwardly. She is the quiet one. Always has been. The phrase "still waters run deep" applies to her. She has deep waters. Sandy and I respect her stillness while trying to get her to open up, to talk more, to find out what's going on with her. Verbal expression has never been her strong suit. However, back in August, Sami sent us a very clear, powerful message but not through the spoken word. Today, I thank God we heard it. Sandy sent me the following email.

"I just spent 2 hours in Sami's room – still need another ½ hour. What I found frightened me. She had multiples of so many things, tucked into bags and boxes. Including a whole tray of clothing tags. Journals with some of the pages filled with angry messages, not really directed at us. I'm beginning to think she may need therapy. I have a sense she doesn't feel loved and needs to surround herself with all this stuff. I took out 6 garbage bags filled with this kind of stuff. She may blow the house down when she sees. Ugh. Off to get Matty soon and then I have a hair appt. I love you!" – Sandy

When Sami came home, she was not upset. To our surprise, she was delighted! Looking back, she was relieved that we heard her message. Later that evening, after a long emotional discussion, Sandy and I knew what we must do. The first step was the cleaning of the room, relieving some of the "pressure". We knew we had to give her more attention. I responded by asking Sami's soccer coach if he needed an assistant. He's an old friend of mine, so he said "sure". I've been helping out with her team for the last few months. This has carved some time for her and me to be together. Sandy has also worked to make more time with her, taking her shopping, helping her with a big Girl Scout cookie drive and helping with the girls' room.

We also had to address her room. With a crib, a bed and two dressers, there was not a lot of storage room. Clothes piled up on the floor. We took down the crib at Christmas and tried to move Mary into a toddler bed. Mary adjusted. Instead of going to bed at 8:00 and falling right asleep, she now felt that since she was in a "big girl bed", she had a new bedtime – anywhere between 8:00 pm and 11:00 pm. Plus, she now had the run of the house and would show up anywhere in the house at any time. That girl is a handful.

However, we knew that the only way this room was going to stay clean and uncluttered was to put bunk beds in. Sami loved the idea and she asked that since we were going to rearrange, could she design and paint her room. She had a definite color scheme in mind, so now she has a coral pink ceiling, with the top half of her room painted in the same pink. The bottom is a lighter shade of pink with a multi-colored border separating the pinks. She has a purple door and used all the colors to paint her closet door. Sami really impressed us by diving in and doing most of the work, Sandy and I just helped her. We put in a new beige carpet and set out to IKEA for the bunks.

It was my first trip to IKEA. I had not prepared myself emotionally. After 10 minutes I was overwhelmed. The place is far too big. Too much to see. Too many choices. Just get me to the darn bunk beds. We followed the arrows on the "street" to the bunk beds. I shook a few and

found the most solid. Sami liked it. Good! Let's get outta here. Of course, Sandy wanted to make this a family outing. She was in gathering mode and I was in hunting mode. "Oh, look at that chair. Isn't that cute?" "No, it's not." "Oh, wouldn't this look good at the bottom of the stairs?" "No." I had already found my prey, stalked it, shot it, now I wanted to pick it up and take it home. Reluctantly, she acquiesced to my being an impatient ass and several minutes later, we had two 80 pound boxes wedged between four kids in the Dodge Caravan. I wrestled the boxes into the living room and there they sat for a few days. On Thursday, I came home early and the entire family began assembly.

This is where IKEA gets you back. I cracked open the boxes, found the instructions and they were drawings only. No words – not a one. Ha ha, very funny. Fortunately, Sandy has an incredible knack for stuff like that and she deciphered the instructions easily. She directed and we all assembled, except for Mary who was determined to deposit all the smaller pieces into the deep recesses of the couch. Each box had roughly 700 pieces, and by 8:30 Sami had enough. She crawled into her sleeping bag in the boys' room and passed out. By 10:00, five and a half hours later, the bunk beds were assembled. The next day, Sami set up her nest in the top bunk and has loved it ever since.

Over these last few weeks, Sandy and I have noticed a dramatic change in Sami's demeanor, her attitude and her confidence. She even talks more. So far, she has taken great pride in keeping her room clean. She loves her room design. It's actually quite good, the girl has talent. I wonder if Sandy and I would have been in tune with her cry for help, her cry for attention, if we were still using. I doubt it. Being clean, being sober has given us the wits to deal with child-rearing issues as they arise. We are far from perfect, very far, but we're somewhat aware. What I appreciate and cherish most is that we worked together to resolve this and we involved the whole family.

Of course, we weren't done. Last weekend, Sandy drove down to IKEA and bought a matching wardrobe. Monday, we put that together. Sandy is getting a little cocky; she thinks that if things get rough for us we could always start an IKEA furniture assembly business. Hmm. Now the girls have enough storage. Last night, I quietly pushed open the door to their very clean and vibrant room. Sami was snuggled up top wrapped in her colorful comforter. Mary was sprawled out on the bottom bunk sound asleep. As I covered her, she stirred. I whispered "Good night little Mary, good night my dear Samantha". I stood and savored the moment.

As I backed out and closed the door quietly, I tear slid down my cheek.

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.