

Hooked On Recovery

February 2, 2007

David

“I’m 100% man and I cry. If a man doesn’t cry, he doesn’t have a heart”. – Duane “Dog” Chapman, The Bounty Hunter

*“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a **man**, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*

– 1 Corinthians 13:11-13 (NIV)

Sometimes I have to take one for the home team. The federal government issued me an invitation to attend a conference on Recovery Support Services. When they ask specifically, it is usually a good idea to go. For political reasons. This time they sent me to Fort Lauderdale in January. Darn. The conference was held in a hotel right on the water, the Lauderdale strip. I’d been to Lauderdale back in ’79 and ’80 for Spring Break. At least, I think those were the years, it’s pretty blurry now. I’ll have to check with my sister, she remembers everything! As the taxi rolled down the strip, I recognized some of the bars, but the names had changed. Yep, that’s where The Elbow Room was, that’s where The Button was, that building had the disco bar – Celebrate and I Will Survive were big at the time, that’s where Burger King used to be. But that was about all I could recall. I had no idea where we actually stayed.

I do remember getting arrested and spending a night and day in jail. Four of us had just left The Elbow Room after downing a few pitchers of Smashers – a revolting concoction of beer and pineapple wine. Yes, you read that right. We felt the need to kick start our evening with a little cocaine. I settled into someone’s car, but when the cop rapped on the window, I hadn’t done any cocaine. But I did get hauled out, handcuffed and thrown into the back of a paddy wagon. The driver had mad skills. Who knew a paddy wagon could handle corners at such high speed? Who knew they had that much horsepower and were so quick off the line? Who knew that the brakes were so solid? The driver must have taken our shouts of pain and our colorful language as encouragement. He maneuvered us into many formations of preppy college kid piles. Bruised and battered, I settled in at the Broward County police station where I was repeatedly asked “Who owns the camera case?” My answer, “What camera case?” “Yeah, right.” I hardly knew these guys. Seems there were all kinds of drugs in that camera case, enough to charge us all with several counts of felony possession. I’d just as soon forget that night and day in jail. Once the Smashers wore off, it got real nasty. I hated coming home to face my parents. What a nauseating time of my life. My parents reached deep into their pockets, paid an attorney, and got me out of that mess. My God was I fortunate.

The messy time continued through college, where I essentially dropped out to work in a restaurant. From there I started playing a lot of golf and that led to me becoming an assistant golf professional, that led to me becoming a head golf professional. They hired me because the previous pro had a drinking problem. Ha! At the golf course, The Knob, is where I met David. Sparky, David’s dad, was a regular at the Knob, often beating balls on the range for hours and hours. Sparky also gave me the greatest putting lesson of all time, “pick your line and figure out

how hard to hit it” I love simplicity. The three of us shared many late 9-hole rounds as the sun was setting.

David is 8 years younger than me and I grew to love him like a brother. I hired him as an assistant and together we shared the golf shop life. Looking back, it’s mysterious to me that a deep brotherly love can grow in the midst of an angry active addiction. But that’s what happened. Eventually, I was rightfully fired and David and I went down separate paths. He ended up having some struggles of his own. We’ve been in touch, but not as often or as frequently, as I would have liked. Over the years, I have often looked back at my mentorship of David and winced, one part of my past that still stung. I had a responsibility and I handled it badly, woefully badly.

This past Christmas, we received a card from David’s family. It was a picture of David, his wife and three small children. They were all smiling, but they were not “posing”. The love radiated through the photo. He is now the Head PGA Golf Professional at a nice club about an hour north of Fort Lauderdale. So when I received notice that I’d be in Florida, I called David. I told him how beautiful the picture was and thanked him for sending it. I told him how it had “touched my heart” and “for what it’s worth, I’m very proud of you.” I asked him if we could get together while I was in Florida. We set it up.

After the conference, I rented a car and made the trip. I made my way to the golf course where he worked (wow) and met his staff. They all seemed as fond of him as I am. His wife and three children met us there and we took a drive to a nearby restaurant to have a snack and catch up. It must have been a popular spot. Burt Reynolds sat in a corner booth and we were only three tables away. I prodded David to go ask him, “Hello, Mr. Reynolds. Have you ever made a GOOD movie?” Maybe we laughed a little too loudly because when we looked over a little later, he was gone and had left a full beer on the table.

We ordered food, I watched David interact with his wife and children. His wife is a remarkable woman, very warm, friendly and engaging. The kids were awesome. The conversation drifted to the days of the Knob and I knew it was time to “practice these principles in all my affairs.” I had to make amends. 19 years later and I still had amends to make. “David, I have something to tell you”. I felt the emotion rise, it was good emotion, it was full of love. And as soon as I choked up and water filled my eyes, water filled David’s eyes and his wife’s eyes. After a pause, I barely choked out, “David, I am really sorry. I had a responsibility to you and I didn’t live up to it.” He said, “I always knew you felt that way, but I made my own decisions.” He didn’t hold me responsible at all. He even pointed out that knowing about my recovery may have helped him. We fumbled around some, I mumbled something about me needing to do it for my recovery... then changed the subject. We talked about making plans to get our families together this summer. When we said goodbye in the parking lot, his second child, the shy one, ran up to me and gave me a big hug. I hugged all five of them and as I let go of David, I said “I love you”.

“I love you too, man”.

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.