

Hooked On Recovery

February 4, 2005

Disco Diversion

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I like disco music, too. A month ago I wrote about all those “cool” tunes I used to listen to and still do, but I neglected to tell you about the other side. I’m still a little embarrassed to write about it, I can hear the boys from Stowe B (my college dormitory) taunting me. When I was at UConn in the late 70’s, it was the days of Animal House toga parties, Saturday Night Fever and doing the hustle. One night you could be wiggling on the beer-slimed floor (I think it was beer) wrapped up in a bed sheet and singing, “a little bit softer now, a little bit softer now and then a little bit louder now, a little bit louder now, a little bit louder now... makes me wanna shout, lift my hands and SHOUT!!!”. Then the next night you could be on a lighted floor, with a hand pointed to the sky vying to be the next John Travolta. I lived a dual life. In the late 70’s, early 80’s you were either a rock fan or a disco fan, but you could not be both. I was both. No wonder I drank.

My roommate Danny G. knew of my affinity for disco music, however he hated it. He was a Little Feat, Grateful Dead, Pink Floyd kinda guy. Do you remember when they had that big “we hate disco” thing at some baseball stadium and they set all those albums on fire? Danny G. would have been there. He destroyed my Donna Summer album by ripping it off the turntable and throwing it like a Frisbee down the hallway.

Eight years ago, I was working the most difficult and demanding job of my entire life. I was at home with the kids. Joshua was almost 2 and Sami was an infant. I had ‘em at home for more than two years. I loved taking care of the kids, I’d pile them into the double stroller and we’d walk for miles around town. I’d set up water parks in the summer in the back yard. We’d do all kinds of stuff. But then those other things kept creeping in that would spoil our fun, things like cooking, housecleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, etc. I had a tough time believing Sandy actually expected some of those things done while she was at work. Of course, she was right. With a little help from our friends, we got through those years... barely.

When I was home with Josh and Sami, I had developed two strategies that helped with my parenting. I don’t know about your kids, but mine didn’t come with an owner’s manual, not that I would have read it anyway, so I developed The “Freeze ‘Em” theory and “The Disco Diversion”. Both of these are designed to use a lot of energy and facilitate long naps (for all of us). The “Freeze ‘Em” theory operates under the simple premise that your kids will use a lot of energy if they get cold. In the wintertime play with them outside, in the summertime use really cold water in the little pool. I can remember swimming so long as a kid that my lips would turn blue and my teeth would chatter. My kids still do this when we go the beach. And boy do they sleep early and sleep hard.

The Disco Diversion had to be put into operation when the “Freeze ‘Em” approach was not practical. I have a couple old CD’s, The Ultimate Party Album 1 & 2, that have many of the disco greats on it. We pop that baby in the CD player, crank the volume up and start dancing. This would divert all attention away from being cranky, bored, crabby, hungry, angry, lonely and tired. We play tunes like “Shame” by Evelyn Champagne King (one of my favorites), Funky Town, Disco Inferno, Rock the Boat, Boogie Wonderland, I Will Survive, Celebration and We Are Family. I have sometimes wondered, what neighbors must think, when they look in our

living room window at night and see all our heads bobbing up and down. I'm not a very good dancer, and that's OK. We have a blast and that's what's important.

After dinner the other night we had some cranky emotional stuff flying around the house, so we diverted with disco. I cranked up the tunes, Sami started dancing with me immediately, then Joshua, then Matthew, then Sandy had baby Mary pressed against her cheek and was swaying to the music. All our kids have danced with us since they were born. With eyes blazing and a warm smile Sandy said, "You know, I was working on a good resentment." And that's the whole point; music can move us from one emotional place to another, if we let it. Once in awhile, when our recovery is not where we want it to be, play some favorite tunes, even if it's disco. It works for us.

"Elevate your mind. Free you soul. C'mon, c'mon. Feel the feeling. Let your body take control." –Lyrics from a Soul II Soul song

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