

Hooked On Recovery

February 18, 2005

Matty Boy

Matthew James Valentine turned three yesterday. Our MJ has the same birthday as THE MJ, Michael Jordan. Matty boy is the fourth of five. And is he something! Just the other day, Sandy and I decided to “divide and conquer”. We split up the kids to keep them out of each other’s hair. I had Matty. Sandy had Joshua (10), Samantha (8) and Mary (9 weeks). We considered it an even split. Matthew has a lot of energy. He is very bright, intuitive and highly dramatic. He loves Spiderman. He wears his Spiderman costume (from Halloween) around the house. People visiting have made the mistake of innocently asking him if Spiderman is his hero. “No! Spiderman is a SUPER hero!” Oh, excuse me.

Matty teaches me. He gives me insight into recovery. The other night Sandy was trying to gently coax him upstairs into the bathtub. Matty spreads himself out and pins himself against the wall and shouts “NEVER!” The conversation continues, “Matthew honey, you know you like your bath. Come on, now.” “NEVER!” Now Sandy’s starting to giggle a little and he picks up on it. “Come on Matthew, I’ll read you a story after your bath.” With a twinkle in his eye, belly up against the wall and with even more drama, he cries, “NEEEVVVEEEEEERRRRR!!!” I grab him under the arms, chuckling, and all the way up the stairs he’s yelling, “NEVER! NEVER! NEVER!” Sorry, Spiderman the Superhero, you lost this battle. Into the tub you go. The story reminded me of my early recovery, trying to defy powers greater than myself and stubbornly bawling, “Never!” It would have been much easier to surrender. It took me a long time to understand the whole “surrender to win” thing.

Now, I have a couple stories about Matty but I’m not sure how to bring them up. I guess I’ll just tell you. They are about training, potty training. Any parent who has gone through this probably has a story or two. Normally, I would keep these things within the family, but I can’t help myself. Just hope the kid doesn’t get traumatized when he reads this later on in life. For the most part, recovery is not neat, pretty and clean. Neither is potty training, to get anywhere it’s gonna get a little messy. We started Matty on a weekend. He loves his new big boy underwear. Guess what kind they are? You got it. Spiderman. By late afternoon, all his Spiderman underwear was in the laundry. The last time, we were in the bathroom and he was smiling (!?) and saying, “Dad, I had an accident.” I’m thinking this is not going quite as we planned. I was helping him take off his wet corduroys, when he started jumping up and down and yelling, “It hurts, it hurts.” I plopped him in the tub quick and washed him off. The combination of corduroy and wet had seriously irritated the insides of his legs. “Matthew, if you go on the potty this won’t happen any more.” He liked that idea and he hasn’t had an accident since. Not a wet accident anyway. The recovery analogy is simple, “When the pain gets our attention, we try to do something about it.” How many times in the rooms have we heard “alcoholism is the two-by-four God used to get my attention”? Matty’s trial re-reminded me.

Just last week we had another accident. Chalk this one up in the category “Parent Error”. Lesson learned? Do not give your recently potty trained (and slightly lactose intolerant) child chocolate and milk after dinner then put him in one-piece feet pajamas with a zipper that sticks. At 4:30 in the morning, I hear a soft cry, “Daddy, help me.” The light in the bathroom was on. I jumped out of bed, adjusted my eyes to the light and quickly assessed the situation. Both feet, both legs full. Completely full. No choice but to turn on the water in the tub, strip him down

(carefully) and hose him down. He wouldn't be wearing these pajamas ever again. Sandy stepped in just as I was finishing scrubbing down Matthew. She looks at the mess and says, "I'll dry him." I finish cleaning up. Sandy gets Matthew back to bed. Finally, lying in bed, I remember Matty's quiet, desperate cry to his Daddy. He was confident that I would answer him and help him. Just over 17 years ago, my Father in heaven heard my simple and urgent prayer, "Help me." And even though I was up to my neck in... trouble, He helped clean up the mess.

Matty, boy do I love you! And to all my children I make this pledge, as long as I'm on this planet and in recovery, I'll be there when you need me. I'll be there when you call me. I'll be there.

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.