

Hooked On Recovery

March 18, 2005

Walking with Samantha

“Take a two-mile walk every morning before breakfast.” –Harry S. Truman

“Time takes time.” –Heard in the rooms of AA

The older I get, the faster time moves. When we were kids, the summers were endless as was the last hour in the school day. I once heard someone put a mathematical spin on this phenomenon. When you're five years old; one year is a whopping 20% of the time you have been on earth. Yet if you're fifty (and I'm getting there), one year makes up only 2% of your life. So time accelerates as you get older.

Time is the most valuable commodity I have. Recovery honors time. Oldtimers are considered the elders of the recovery tribe. And when an elder speaks, people listen. Early on in recovery, I strained to achieve timely landmarks in recovery; 24 hours, 30 days, 90 days, one-year. In one group I attended, you needed at least three years to chair it. I chaired it the month after my three-year anniversary. I was elated. Then they changed the rule. You no longer needed the time. It took me awhile to get over the resentment. I eventually realized the rule was kept in place to help me get to the three year mark. I could probably talk a lot about time, but here's the point; time is also the most valuable commodity I can give my family. Time period. Not “quality” time. Personally, I don't buy into contemporary thinking about quality time. My sponsor relayed some wisdom given to him, “if you want to have a good home life, stay at home.” I adhere to that theory.

Now with four children living under our roof and an occasional visit from the fifth, our home can be chaotic at times. Sandy and I have learned to carve out periods of time where we can be alone with one of our kids. For eight-year old Samantha and me, our time together is walking. She has been walking with me her entire life. When Sami was a baby, I recall holding her against my cheek, softly singing “Amazing Grace” as we walked down the beach in an attempt to calm her. Usually, she'd settle down and sleep for hours. This was a big break for all of us. Samantha spent the first year of her life expressing her displeasure with the state of the world. Or it could have been colic. Like anyone knows what colic really is. My opinion? Colic is just a way of explaining why your kid is yelling all the time. Maybe some kids just need to yell.

I was a stay-at-home dad for the first 30 months of her life. I took Joshua and Samantha all over Manchester in a rickety double stroller. We walked for miles no matter what the weather. They loved going for walks, in the winter bundled up in so many clothes that they could hardly move. I'd pick one up and their arms would just stick out straight, like a huge overstuffed gingerbread man. In summer, they'd cling to their juice cups, smile and say hi to everything – people, dogs, cats, birds, trees, rocks. Samantha is still the first to volunteer to go on long walks down the beach. She's a good walker.

Samantha is one of those girls that a dad looks at and says, “Uh oh.” I'm already thinking about how I'm going to interview, screen and approve all future dates. Would three references and a background check be considered unreasonable? Ok, ok. MAYBE, I'm being a little over protective, but us dads - we gotta think this way. I mean she is absolutely beautiful, inside and

out. She's a tall one and doesn't look eight years old. She's also our quiet one, content to occupy herself with dolls, reading, dress up and the like. The old adage "still waters run deep" applies to her. She impresses me. Samantha has a real gift comforting and taking care of younger children. Sandy thinks she'll be a schoolteacher. And although she may be the quiet one, when we walk together she opens up and talks and talks and talks. Today, she and I connect when we walk. And I think regaining the ability to connect is one of the greatest gifts of recovery.

Lately, Samantha and I have taken on an ambitious hike; walking to or from church. This is a three-mile walk and takes almost an hour. As I write this, I can see her long blonde hair flowing and her working to keep the pace. I hear her questions and responses to my questions. I'll always remember the joy in her countenance, the smile on her face and the love in her deep blue eyes. She's happy. And she's happy because she's spending time with her Dad.

Samantha, the joy is all mine. May we walk together for a long, long time.

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.