

Hooked On Recovery

May 18, 2007

T-Ball and Michael

I'm sitting on the sidelines of Matty Boy's T-Ball game. His concentration is remarkable. While he is focused on fielding his second base position, most of his teammates are kicking up dust, drawing in the dirt, and swinging their glove hands around and around. One girl has a bright pink glove, matching black shorts and spikes with pink trim unaware of how they don't quite match Maloney Cleaning's dark green T-shirt and black Manchester Little League cap (worn backwards) as she turns pirouettes on her heels. The two boys behind her have just erupted into a spirited contest of kicking sand on each others feet. Another outfielder is tossing his glove as high as he can in the air; he's not having too much luck at catching it. The ball is hit occasionally off the tee and about half the team responds. Matthew is oblivious to all the extra-curricular activity; he's here to play baseball and for the most part behaves himself.

I'm getting better at handling the "phases" of life. T-Ball used to aggravate me a lot more than it does today. This is my third round of kid activities. Matthew and Mary will be our last go round. I'm at this game with my new iPod, watching, writing, reflecting, getting a little choked up as I watch my youngest son, savoring the moment, trying to make sure it is saved on the hard drive of my mind. I want to be able to pull it up later in life. Oops, a grounder just went through Matty's legs, but he remains unfazed. It's nice to not know what an error is. But now he has just redeemed himself by fielding cleanly another grounder hit to him. I don't think he knows what a good play is either. No hurry my boy, all that comes later in life.

Maloney Cleaning is about to hit now, Matthew is up second. The girl in pink is hitting after Matthew and she just donned black and pink batting gloves and a bright pink helmet. Would a boy ever wear a pink batting helmet? Matthew doesn't notice all the pink and smacks the ball to the shortstop and streaks to first base where he stands proudly. I give him the thumbs up; he smiles briefly then turns back to the task at hand, getting to second base and stares intently at his target. The girl in pink hits it pretty good and Matty comes around to score. He high-fives the coach and doesn't seem too impressed with himself. Knowing Matty, he has it all figured out. He's supposed to hit, run around the bases and score. That's what you do in baseball, right?

I actually enjoy watching Matthew play T-Ball now. It's just another phase. He'll move on to other things and we'll watch him do that too. I've gone through all kinds of "phases" in my life. Some are short, some last several years. Phases are usually blessings (sometimes the blessings are not obvious until much, much later). Thinking about all this on the sidelines of the game, iPod playing some praise music in my years, I became grateful. And that got me to thinking about Michael because here was another phase in my life that was heading toward conclusion.

Michael Askew has been a blessing to me since the day I met him more than 9 years ago. When I came to CCAR, Michael was already here. Diane and Roberto were here too. Michael impressed me the moment I met him. He had driven from Norwalk to Middletown to attend a CCAR organizational meeting. That's pretty far and it was a trip he would go on to make hundreds of times. His dedication and commitment immediately inspired me and they still do today. Michael spoke with authority, confidence and humor. That's also still true today. Over the years we've shared car rides, speaking engagements, workshop presentations, television and radio appearances and conferences. And he's leaving this year.

Michael has a call on his life to take his family to North Carolina. Personally, I believe that call and understand it. That Michael is following through with this major life move makes me respect him even more. What a courageous thing to do. I'm not sure I could do it, but if it ever comes I can draw on Michael's experience, strength and hope. So, I want to reflect a little on just some of the things I've learned having had Michael in my life.

- Recovery unites people from all walks of life
- I now know how a Recovery Walks! should be emceed
- Courage takes many forms – I've never met a man who has handled adversity better
- I never knew a spoon could be used for... ah, never mind
- People can live incredibly productive lives with HIV and Hep C
- Nobility is alive and well
- Integrity is alive and well
- People from NA are pretty cool (who knew?)
- An amazing amount of work can get done from a very, very small office
- Love crosses all boundaries, including race

Michael, our relationship will enter a new "phase". It may take a while to get over not seeing you regularly, to fill the very large hole in our staff and mostly, I'm going to miss your steady and calming influence. In a lot of ways, you have helped CCAR stay the course for the last 9 years and for that I thank you. Personally, you have touched my life in ways you can not know and may never know. Just trust me on this. I guess there is a bright side. We have the internet and the phone and I know that whenever I'm in North Carolina, I can drop in and visit with my old friend.

No, you're not just an old friend. You're my brother from another mother. I'll miss you. And I love you.

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.