

Hooked On Recovery

June 9, 2006

Sandy

"I don't need a whole lots of money, I don't need a big fine car. I got everything that a man could want. I got more than I could ask for. I don't have to run around, I don't have to stay out all night. 'Cause I got me a sweet ... a sweet, lovin' woman, and she knows just how to treat me right. Well my baby, she's all right. Well my baby, she's clean out-of-sight. Don't you know that she is ... she's some kind of wonderful. She's some kind of wonderful ... yes she is, she's... She's some kind of wonderful, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeahhh ..." — Grand Funk Railroad

The van was full of Valentines. I was driving; Sandy rode in the usual shotgun position, Matty and Mary in the second row captain's seats, Samantha and Joshua in the way back. We had just scaled Soapstone Mountain, ate at Rich's drive-in and shopped at Bob's Store. I had to delay our arrival home. The mini-adventure, lunch and shopping were starting to wear out my wallet. Keeping the secret was starting to wear on my nerves. It was November 19, 2005 and our niece and nephew were cooking food in the house, decorating for a surprise birthday party and greeting guests as they arrived. When we finally turned onto Henry Street at the 4:00 pm designated time, Sandy saw too many cars on the street. Then she recognized certain ones and the reason they were there sunk in. She looked over at me in shock. She was agitated. "There is no way you could have done this... NO WAY!" Pulling into the driveway, the kids were all stunned. I danced a little driveway jig in delight. I had kept it a secret, even from the kids. The house was full of people eager to celebrate Sandy's 40th birthday with her. And she had no clue! The kids walked slowly into the house wide-eyed at all the guests, the presents, the cards, the decorations and the food. We had a great afternoon that spilled into the evening, the whole time punctuated with love and laughter. Sandy is well loved and deservedly so.

One of the true miracles of my recovery, and Sandy's, is our marriage. We have come to believe that next to our relationship with God, our marriage relationship is the most important relationship in our lives. Neither one of us was too successful at previous relationships, so we agreed early on that we would commit, and commit completely, to this one. If things got tough we'd stick it out. We have both kept our promise. Now that we are the parents of 4 children, (and my daughter from my first marriage), we have to work together. What a challenge, what a responsibility, what fun! We are also aware that our relationship will affect our kids deeply for the rest of their lives. How I treat Sandy is how my sons will treat their wives. Perhaps even more enormous in weight; my daughters will subconsciously look for traits they see in me in their husbands. Wow. Not quite ready for the enormity of that thought. Let's move on...

I love to watch how Sandy handles (or doesn't handle) things, especially things with the kids. For example, recently 18 month old Mary decided she had enough of dinner and worked herself into a standing position while in her high chair. All the other kids had scattered, when the showdown commenced. Sandy said in her most authoritative voice, "Mary, sit down!" I must mention that Sandy's voice has gotten more authoritative over the years; the children have done a good job of training her. However it wasn't working on our littlest. Mary just stared back defiantly. "Mary, I mean it. Sit down!" She stared some more. She wasn't budging. Maybe it was the reassurance of having a binky firmly planted in her mouth, but Mary kept up the brave front. I stayed out of it. One more, "MARY, sit down!!" Mary continued to meet Sandy's gaze

and then with the defiance of an 18 month old, slowly, very slowly shook her head no. Sandy was shocked. I turned my face away (so Mary didn't see me smiling) and let the drama unfold. As their eyes stayed locked on each other, I thought Sandy was going to get angry. I prepared to make a dive under the table. Instead the tension drained out of Sandy's face, her eyes lit up and she started to giggle, then laugh out loud. Mary started to laugh too - still standing in her high chair. It was definitely very funny. As for our combined parenting skills, sometimes you just have to chalk one up in the "Parent Error" category.

I love that she makes birthdays and holidays and vacations special. Samantha just turned 10 and Sandy helped her stage "Survivor Kamanaka" in the back yard. Kamanaka is Hawaiian for Samantha, at least that's what they told me. Immunity challenges included fishing by scooping gummy fish out of the wading pool with tablespoons into a cup. We didn't have a million dollars to give as first prize, but Sandy cleverly improvised and gave the winner ten \$100,000 candy bars. Cool, huh?

Other things I love about Sandy in no particular order: the way she hides her face in her hands when she's embarrassed (like the time she swore at the pastor's house), the way she says things quickly and honestly sometimes without thinking – a trait that she and I share, and the way she enjoys the people in her life. She loves to laugh, she loves the beach, she loves being a mom. But perhaps the best glimpse into her character comes from one of our children. Joshua wrote, "Mom is always there for me when I need help. She's devoted to her family and cares about them most. It's hard to imagine life without her. I love her with all my heart, because of her unique personality, what she's done for me, and her never-ending kindness that flows from her like a river into an ocean."

Sandy, without recovery I don't think I could have ever understood marriage and the deep joy it brings. You have been the greatest blessing of my entire life. We may have another 40 years or so together, God willing and the creek don't rise. I look forward to sharing all of it with you. And I ask you to please keep putting up with me. I love you.

You're some kind of wonderful.

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.