

Hooked On Recovery

July 8, 2005

Alcohol Musings from the Beach

I'm hanging out on the beach and was tempted to miss my self imposed deadline of writing every other Friday. You may not actually receive this every Friday because sometimes it gets stuck in our email server. So as I've been relaxing on vacation I've noticed some things to share with you.

Drinking alcohol on the beach is more the norm than not. Over 4th of July weekend we were packed in with several other oversanders and mostly everyone was drinking. There were three truckloads of kids (I say kids because they were late teens, early 20's) with beer, beach towels and a really, really loud radio parked behind us. One of the kids was a lachrymose drunk and he staggered from the party. One of his buddies sidled up to him, beer in hand, put his arm around him, then they sat down in the sand a few feet from of us. They talked and reasoned and cried and laughed and after almost an hour, got up and got another beer. I remember solving life's problems with a drunken buddy and capping it all off with another beer.

Joshua caught a keeper striped bass on the kayak with me at the helm. When we paddled back to shore with it, the guy next to us offered to show me a quick way to clean it. He was wielding a knife at the water's edge, so who was I to say no? He had me dig a trough in the sand and lay it belly down to help fillet it. That was cool; I had never seen that before. As he set about the job, he informed us that he and his buddies were throwing back fish our size, 35 inches. Afterwards, Sandy tells me this guy was throwing back a lot of Dewars.

These examples I can understand completely, I lived them. Yet, Sandy and I were really bothered by the number of parents that were drinking with their children present and then driving off the beach. Some had open pickup trucks and the kids would pile in the back. Sandy, working as an insurance underwriter, had to read descriptions of what happened to kids in back of pickup trucks after an accident. She gets really angry every time she sees it and it's affected me as well. We both get upset. Maybe we should do something, but what?

There was one guy in a United States flag bathing suit, camouflage baseball hat, state trooper sunglasses that had a beer in his hand all day and continually cursed out his wife and kids. He was an angry and belligerent drunk. He almost hit baby Mary with a football. And I got angry. I glared at him as I carried Mary away and he put his football away after blaming his kid for not catching his terrible throw.

We overheard three couples discussing at length the pros and cons of Red Bull as a hangover cure. This of course was over several Bud Lights. They also had their young children with them.

We also overheard (mind you we were NOT eavesdropping, but as alcohol takes effect it makes the consumer think that everyone has a hearing problem) a father and mother lamenting about their teenagers drinking. They were both drinking beer. They ultimately came to the conclusion that it was OK because they had done it and who were they to be hypocritical?

Three ladies sat next to us with three little girls at a little restaurant frequented by Orleans locals. They ordered tall mugs of beer... with their lunch. Then they got into a minivan and drove away. Sandy summed up all these scenarios perfectly, "The responsibility of being a parent, keeping your kids safe, is hard enough. I can't imagine still drinking and doing what we have to do every day."

We questioned if we were becoming intolerant. We didn't answer it but I've been thinking a lot about it. I used to say, "I never had a problem with alcohol, only when I drank it." I never had a problem with social drinking; I just don't understand it because I could never do it. Believe me I tried. I don't possess an off switch, once I start drinking the switch stays on. But in all these years of observing others drinking, I've never seen anything to convince me that it's something I want to begin to do again. My latest observations on the beach did not reveal anything appealing about drinking.

Yet, as has happened many times to us, recovery showed up spontaneously. A few days earlier, I had pasted CCAR's new "Hooked on Recovery" bumper sticker on the back of my fish box. A grandmother escorting her grandson to the shallow water of Hatches Harbor passed by our rig and asked Sandy what that sticker was all about (I was off fishing). Sandy asked her if she was a friend of Bill's. And she was. Sandy told her about Hooked on Recovery and the woman went on to say how thankful she was to be 50 years old and in recovery, now on the beach with her grandson when she thought she might never make it to 25. Her gratitude shone through every word.

As Sandy shared this story with me, I could hear and feel the gratitude in my wife. She passed the hope of recovery along to me. Thanks Sandy, I'm grateful too.

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 one more in a long line of surf fishermen. 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.