

Hooked On Recovery

July 21, 2006

Bridge Over Troubled Water

“But for the Grace of God, go I.”

I love vacation. Always have, hope I always will. The Valentines just returned from another awesome vacation on the Cape of Cod. Let the stories begin. One evening, I took the boys, Joshua (11) and Matthew (4), fishing after dinner. We wanted to fish where the road crossed an estuary in Wellfleet. I have had some luck there on previous occasions and Joshua was hot to try it. As we pulled up to the spot, I could see that some local bait shop wasn't exactly keeping this place secret. There was a crowd but some were leaving.

We lined up on the rail and began casting. The water wasn't flowing out yet so there was no action. Until a middle aged man (like me), his wife, her friend and a couple small girls showed up. There was a lot of clamor and commotion. I sat down on the steps and watched them and my boys fish. After taking some time to get set up, the wife made her first cast, but her bait never reached the water. The hook ended up in her husband's leg. He was very calm. But she wasn't. “Oh my God! Are you OK?!?” After realizing her very quiet husband wasn't going to bleed to death or need a trip to the ER to have the hook removed, she declares, “I'm done! I'm never fishing again. I'm leaving.”

“He doesn't seem too upset”, I offered as she trudged up the steps. With fear in her voice, “Oh no... you don't know him like I do.” She was terrified. And with that she went and sat in their truck. The husband, wearing dark glasses and a baseball cap, remained cool. In fact, he started chatting with another fisherman. Her friend, a brave soul, was still giving it a go. She got a few casts off and then moved into the center of the platform and let one fly; however she forgot to hold on to the rod. With a huge splash, the rod and reel hit the water and disappeared with the current under the road.

I'm not sure what the guy was feeling; he had no outward emotional response. The woman however was shocked. She threw her arms up in the air and cried in desperation “I'm done too!” She vaulted up the steps, crossed the road to see if maybe by some miracle the rod floated all the way through. It didn't. It was down at the bottom of a strong dangerous current pinned against a metal gate. To try to retrieve it would be suicide. The rod was history. The guy never said a word. That worried me a little. Joshua and Matthew were having a hard time believing what they were seeing. After a few minutes and thankfully after the lady went to the other side, Matthew asked a little too loudly, “Daddy, why did that lady throw her fishing rod into the water?” Joshua turned away from the angry man to hide his laughter. “Matthew, I believe it was a mistake.” Matthew still didn't get it.

Over the next half hour or so, the wife made attempts at apologies, and seemed to be in a better spirit. After all, she only hooked her husband in the leg; she didn't throw his gear over the bridge like her friend. The two women started making suggestions like, “Can we come back at low tide?” “Maybe, when the tide turns the rod will float out?” The guy had an audience so he controlled himself. His displeasure was apparent. Behind those cool shades he was smoldering. His silence was deafening. All his women danced on eggshells. One daughter pranced over, oblivious to all the undercurrents and asked to reel in one of his casts. Reluctantly he let her try,

but after just a few seconds, he ripped the rod out of her hands. “You’re not doing it right!” The girl seemed unfazed, like this was a normal occurrence and pranced back over to the other side.

As I observed this troubled soul, a line from the Promises came to mind, “we will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us”. Was this guy was baffled? He seemed to be. I could sense him justifying his anger. But did he see the humor in it? I couldn’t tell. Faced with this baffling situation, he only responded in anger and silence. It’s what he knew. I prayed for the women and girls around him. I prayed for their protection and safety. Alcohol had established a stronghold in this family. The women were talking about going “out” after fishing. “After this fishing trip, we need a drink”. The man talked to his new buddy about how everyone commented on his “favorite” hat which bore a trendy beer manufacturers emblem.

I could relate to this guy. I knew if I had still been drinking I would probably have responded similarly. No, I would have been worse. Even now, after years of recovery, I could see reflections of some of my own behavior. I get quiet when I’m upset, I can turn away, and I have flashes of anger. There are times when I don’t respond or behave in the most appropriate manner. It’s nothing I’m proud of. Thank God, I have a program to help me work through my stuff.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying that if tomorrow, I was in the same position I would respond well. If Sandy hooked me in the leg and then her friend threw my fishing rod off a bridge I might get pretty frosted. Or I might laugh uproariously. Depending on what rod I lost, I might cry. I have enough experience with baffling situations to know that my intuition will kick in. Whether I choose to follow my intuition or not, well I don’t have that answer.

At least I would have a choice, thanks to recovery.

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.