

Hooked On Recovery

July 22, 2005

Snappin' Wire

"No one goes there nowadays, it's too crowded." –Yogi Berra

I love vacations. I've had one week back and I'm ready to go again. I like vacations because you don't have to be anywhere at a certain time. Well, except that you should be at the beach at low tide to rake sand eels. You can sleep late or get up early. Laundry takes a back seat. Reading takes a front one: Joshua finished the latest Harry Potter book two days after it came out. Cleaning the house isn't all that important. The things I remember most about this last vacation are spending most of our time on the beach, watching future ambassador Matty Boy Valentine make friends with everyone he talked to, Sami spending more time in the water than out and Sandy peacefully enjoying our youngest Raspberry Mary. I loved when Colleen came to visit for a couple days even though she brought 60 degree temperatures and strong winds. We climbed the Pilgrim Monument in Provincetown and we found a new awesome restaurant that serves BBQ and seafood. Weird combo, I know but great, great food. Just ask Russ and his two girls, they thought it was great too. Plus Russ caught his first fish off the beach. Now he's hooked.

And Matt took me fishing on his boat! Now being a surf fisherman at heart, I always hear the old adage in my head about boat fisherman, "boats are for people who can't catch fish from the beach." Also, I've heard boat owners say, "a boat is a hole in the water that you throw money into" and "the two best days of a boat owner's life are the day he buys it and the day he sells it". Matt has a nice boat, 23' center console and a commercial fishing license which means he can catch fish and sell them on the market. We were going after striped bass. In order for us to keep one it would have to be at least 34" long or about 14-15 pounds.

Heading out of Sesuit Harbor to the famed Billingsgate Shoals of Cape Cod Bay, we cruised until we spotted a fleet of boats on the horizon. Obviously, the first day of commercial bass fishing had brought 'em out. A fleet of boats that big means they must be on fish. Our plan was to use wire line; it's much heavier than monofilament and gets your lures to the bottom as you troll along the shoals. Fishing with wire line is difficult, it can kink and break or it can become an impossible bird's nest. When using such heavy equipment sometimes with smaller fish you feel like you're just winching them in. Some think there's not a lot of "sport" in wire line fishing. Most of the other commercial guys out there were using wire line and there were a lot of hot rods (rods with fish on them), so we set up the same way and plotted our first course.

With thumbs on the spool, Matt juiced the engine so our lines would spool out freer and faster. After reaching the end of the wire and getting into the Dacron backing, Matt brought us down to trolling speed and we began "snappin' wire", bouncing the jig off the bottom. Most guys get their rod in a holder and grab the line with their hand, swing their arm and feel the jig bouncing along the bottom. Some others pump the entire rod rhythmically to get the jig bouncing. That's what I did. We soon hooked up and continued to hook up. Blues, bass and the occasional dogfish. I got the biggest fish of the day, one near 25 pounds. When it hit it ran like a freight train stripping line and giving me a good tussle all the way to the boat.

Yet, there was more to it than just trolling anywhere in the area. Out of the crowd of boats, we found one guy in a small center console Seacraft who continually hooked up in the same spot and kept putting fish in his cooler. He had found a school of keepers. Then he would turn around, head in the same direction, go over the same spot and catch another fish. So you know what Matt and I did? We followed him (at a respectable distance) and we soon had a keeper in the box. We caught many fish, most of them “shorts” and ended up with four nice bass to bring to market.

The next day we launched out of Rock Harbor and went around Race Point to Peaked Hill Bar and found some other boats. Again we picked out a boat, the Dianne Jean, that kept catching fish and followed her. We caught fish too. What was annoying was that many of our fish were 33” or just over 33” that we had to throw back because they were just short of the 34” limit. Halfway through I finally succumbed to Matt’s pressure to jig by hand only because he was outfishing me by about four to one. It worked and it was very cool. Sometimes, I amaze myself how rigid I am. When that fish slams that jig and the line in your hand... whoa! By the end of the day, we each had 3 nice bass in the boat and several dozen shorts we had let go. Our trip was capped off by an amazing run down the back beach, taking in the magnificent dunes from Ptown, Truro and Wellfleet finally pulling into Nauset Inlet.

As I reflect on our fishing excursion, it reminds me of the rooms of recovery. You find a crowd of people who want the same thing you do. You do what they are doing. I was told to “stick with the winners”; to find people who had what I wanted and do what they do. The same happened in the waters of Cape Cod, we did what the fleet was doing: we found the winners - the guy in the center console and the Dianne Jean - and we were successful. Something else happened too. The first day, out at Billingsgate, Matt thought we were doing something wrong. We weren’t getting enough keepers. I reminded him that we were catching fish and that nothing was broken so we didn’t need to fix it. When we got back to Sesuit and hauled the boat out of the water, another boat was nearby. We got talking to the guys, they were out fishing in the fleet and one of the guys said, “You were the guys catching all the fish. Yep, that’s your boat all right – the All-Lures.” Someone was watching us! That’s what happens in recovery, hang with the winners and without even knowing it you’ve become a winner and somebody’s sticking to you.

New to something? Do what everyone else is doing and stick with the winners. You’ll catch fish. You’ll stay in recovery. Remember, somebody is probably watching. And thanks Matt, serving as your “crew” was a highlight of my summer.

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.