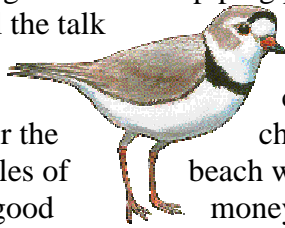


Hooked On Recovery

August 4, 2006

The Eagle Has Landed

The day wasn't going very well. First of all, the weather was windy and cloudy, not an optimal beach day. Thank God the kids didn't seem to mind. Second, I was having a hard time being relegated to the parking lot at Herring Cove because the oversand trails were closed. The trails were closed because of the nesting habits of the piping plover, an allegedly threatened or endangered species. This was all the talk all over the Cape for the first week of our vacation. Seems like New Jersey figured out a way for the beach buggy crew and the plover to co-exist, but not Massachusetts. They didn't want the nests disturbed, or the chicks crushed by passing trucks, so for the sake of a few birds, miles and miles of beach were closed. Fishermen were especially peeved. Vacationers who spent good money on the oversand permit had no recourse. Bait and tackle shops who were most hurt but the closures retaliated by selling bumper stickers like "Close Our Borders, Not Our Beaches" or "Piping Plover – Tastes Like Chicken". Although tempted, I opted not to display one. I don't need to give a Park Ranger a reason to harass me. You have to wonder what the National Park Service is thinking. I don't know of anyone that speeds up when they see those little chicks in the track so they can smash 'em into the sand. I also wonder how the Park Service handles the packs of coyotes that are overrunning the Provincelands, and how about the scourge of foxes? Those critters *feast* on fresh plover.



So with all these positive thoughts renting space in my head, a huge old RV pulls up. A baldheaded middle age guy (like me) jumps out and asks if it's OK to park next to our rig. I'm charitably thinking, "It's a free world, bud – do what you want." But instead, I smile nicely and say "Sure, pull on in." Once RV guy maneuvers his rig into position, he jumps out and asks me, "This is the bay right?" "Well, it is where the bay meets the ocean but I'm not quite sure where the line is." He replies, "No, it's the bay." "Ooooooooooooooooookay", I mumble to myself followed quickly by a "Lord, help me." The next thing he asks is "This wind is no good for fishing, right? You want the wind behind you." I said, "Well actually, when the wind is in your face it pushes the bait in closer and the fishing is usually good. This is the wind you want." His reply, "No, it's not." Ooooooooooooooooookay.

So, I busied myself with one of my rods and strolled on down to the water. After a few casts, here comes RV guy and just when he was about to ask a question or offer an opinion, POW!!!! A bluefish whacked my Kastmaster but I missed the hook set. RV guy, now convinced that the fishing might be good, ran up the beach to get his rod. The next cast, I hooked one and landed a little four pounder. I went back to the truck to switch rods where my wife informed me that the pastor next door can't find a wire leader and would I have an extra one. RV guy a pastor??? Oh crap. I fished one out and gave it to Pastor Bill and after a few minutes, he joined me by the water. I must humbly admit that my perception shifted a great deal (for the better) when I learned of his chosen profession. I must also admit that his enthusiasm was contagious. He landed one with great fervor, wife by his side, and since I had some pliers, I helped him release it. Soon, he was on again and after a short tussle, dragged another blue onto the beach.

I was maybe fifteen feet from him, when the blue spit the lure and lay on the beach. Pastor Bill looked at me and asked if I wanted this fish. I was about to say no when a huge shadow came from the heavens and the biggest bird I ever saw, silently settled on the beach and placed his

talons onto the fish. I got very quiet and very still, so did Pastor Bill. The bird was *very* close. And he was big enough, pushing four feet standing, that I knew I didn't want to mess with him. There was also a small crowd of touristy type people watching the novelty of a couple guys catching bluefish in the surf. The bird stood his ground surrounded by humans, fish underneath and eyed us all calmly. To me, he seemed to be saying, "Does anyone have anything to say about my claim on this fish?" No sir, I don't. The showdown lasted more than a minute. The twenty or so of us gasped when this glorious creature lifted off with one powerful beat of its wings. We stood mesmerized as we watched it fly gracefully over the dunes with Pastor Bill's fish. I thought the bird might be an osprey, but I was wrong. Pastor Bill said it was an eagle. I said, "Nooooooo." A ranger came down and told us that indeed this was a juvenile bald eagle they had been watching. I stood corrected. The ranger was very glad we relinquished the fish (like we had a choice).

My family witnessed the whole thing. Joshua's friend Dylan, got to see the whole thing. A guy claimed to have captured some of it on film and Pastor Bill is awaiting pictures. To me, the sudden appearance of this eagle was a spiritual event. God revealed himself in a way that completely surprised me. From that point on, my mood took a dramatic shift for the better. I knew that I had to give up my petty piping plover resentments and enjoy this vacation time with my family. Most things are simply out of my control, like beach closings. Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today.

We returned from the Cape on a Saturday, the very next day in church we sang the Power of Your Love whose lyrics are, "*Hold me close, Let Your love surround me, Bring me near, Draw me to Your side. And as I wait I'll rise up like the eagle, And I will soar with You, Your Spirit leads me on, In the power of Your love.*" Sandy cast a knowing glance, emotion swelled in my heart and I now know there was even a deeper message in the appearance of that eagle. Something about possibility... and promise. It's not clear yet. For now, it's an awesome memory. I can still feel the spiritual power in that bird. He exemplified nobility as he flew magnificently over the dune, fish held easily in its talons. Cool.

It's only conjecture on my part, but I wonder if later on he might have snacked on a few piping plover, because the beach opened two days later.

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.