

Hooked On Recovery

August 5, 2005

Raspberry Mary Veggie Girl

"When the dog bites, When the bee stings, When I'm feeling sad, I simply remember my favorite things, And then I don't feel so bad." -- My Favorite Things (Rodgers/Hammerstein)

When my dear friend Arno (also known as Shortcast) picks up his saxophone and plays the melody above, it always makes me smile. He loves to play his horn. Man, its good listening! His music brings me joy. Other things in life bring me joy as well.

Of all the people I know my 7-month old, Raspberry Mary Veggie Girl, displays the purest joy. The raspberry part of her name comes from the sound she can make for very, very long periods of time. Her world record is 32 continuous minutes (she did take breaths) on a recent van ride. The veggie girl piece comes from her affinity for vegetable baby food. She is the only baby we've had that prefers spinach, peas and beans over banana, pears and applesauce. She's keen with anything green. Just the other day she was yelling about getting apples and chicken, so Sandy pulled some zucchini from the refrigerator and Mary was quite happy. Sandy fed her two or three bites of zucchini and then snuck in a spoonful of apples and chicken before Mary could realize what she was eating. We're not above trickery when feeding our kids. So now when I hold her, play with her and let her chew on things, she hears her dad chanting softly, "Raspberry Mary Veggie Girl, Raspberry Mary Veggie Girl..."

I have a lot to learn from our littlest Valentine. Every now and then I come home from work, a little tired and even more grouchy, and welcomed by my baby girl. She sees me and her whole face lights up with a huge warm smile. In fact, it's not just her face; her whole body smiles. Her legs kick, her arms move, her belly shimmers, her eyes widen and her eyebrows lift. At that moment, I am the best thing she has ever seen. In this sense she has some attributes normally associated with the family dog, she loves me unconditionally. Frankly, at times that can be intimidating, but mostly it elevates my mood. When I see my little baby girl, I see one of my favorite things and then I don't feel so bad. I pick her up, hold her close and my spirit is renewed even as she tries to remove my lips from my face. The time when she will be this little is so short. I have learned to cherish these moments.

This year, Mary took her first Cape Cod vacation. She is definitely a beach baby just like our other kids; although I don't think she ate as much sand. When she was sitting on the beach with the sun reflecting off the water her big blue eyes would fill with light. She is an amazingly beautiful baby girl. Imagine when she actually grows some hair.

Sandy and I wonder what's going on in that mind of hers. What's it like to be the littlest Valentine? We know she gets excited with all the activity in our house. She definitely wants to be a baby on the go. Already she has made the first few motions of beginning to crawl, much to the chagrin of her mom. She seems grateful to have been born a Valentine because Raspberry Mary Veggie Girl is a really happy baby. She smiles all the time. She inspires everyone in the family. Matthew takes great delight in getting her to giggle. Samantha relishes being the big sister, spending a lot of time reading to her and playing with her. Joshua protects her. She brings out the best in all of us. In that sense she resembles recovery.

Recovery brings out the best in all of us. It taps into the innate knowledge within all of us, that small voice that tells us to do the next right thing. Recovery has taught me to remain teachable, and by remaining teachable I have grown as a father.

I've been away for a few days on business in DC. I'm putting the finishing touches on this as I wait for my flight home. I miss my family. As I explore some of my emotion, I come to some understanding. I still have pride issues. My pride wants to believe that my family needs me much more than I need them. But what I've come to grips with is that I need my family. I am not the lone wolf I once was, I need the pack. My family strengthens me, brings purpose to my life. I can't wait to hug and hold my wife, to hug Colleen, Joshua, Samantha and Matthew. And I can't wait to snuggle my baby girl and whisper in her ear, "I love you Raspberry Mary Veggie Girl. I love you."

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.