

Hooked On Recovery

August 17, 2007

Blitz

“Sandy, would you be OK if we moved from here to the other side?” “Sure.” “I just want to see how the fishing might be, if there’s nothing going on we’ll just head on back to the house.” “OK.” ~Sandy and I discussing whether or not to move the truck to another spot.

We’re pretty relaxed on vacation. This summer we were able to go for three weeks. When I told people about our plans, they usually had one of two reactions. The first was “Three weeks? Oh my gosh, that must be great.” Or “Three weeks? I couldn’t go for that long.” Not many people I know go away on vacation for three weeks. Most are one and done. Two weeks is also rare for a lot of people, but three? How did I justify (maybe rationalize) three weeks? My family has an established Cape Cod summer vacation tradition. We visit a lot of the same places, stay in the same house, eat at the same restaurants, shop at the same stores, frequent the same beaches and take pictures at the same sites. It’s what we do during summer vacation. Also, as one leader of a respected recovery community organization, it is my obligation to model appropriate recovery self-care. Yeah, most people immediately smell the stuff I’m tossing around, too. OK, I need the rest. I just do. And I work with a staff that can handle things without me.

This year the days flew by, maybe because they were all such great days. Unfortunately, it didn’t take me long to get back into work mode. I returned Monday and after one hour of catching up with Cheryle, Normajean, Pat and scanning 800+ emails my left eyelid started to twitch uncontrollably. It hasn’t really stopped since.

One overcast and windy day, we had gone oversand out to Race Point. I had positioned the Durango in our favorite nook at Hatches Harbor to shelter us. As the tide filled the harbor, the kids were not swimming or digging holes or kayaking or boogie boarding or catching crabs, it was a little too cold. So we moved to a spot called the Anthill. Once parked, I took a few casts with different rods rigged with different lures. Nothing, but I could see through polarized sunglasses that massive schools of baitfish were in close to the beach – always a good sign. I rummaged through my surf bag where I keep all my favorite lures while Matthew and Mary offered their advice. Two year old Mary pointed at a black and purple Bomber and said “Daddy, that’s my favorite!” This was a fairly light lure, but since we had the wind at our backs I said “Why not?” First cast, bang!! Fish on. I landed a decent sized bluefish. Next cast, another bluefish, but it broke me off. Good-bye Bomber. Joshua grabbed a rod. He hooked up immediately. I tied on a favorite bubble gum pink Bomber, hooked a fish, then seconds later broke off. Good bye pink Bomber. I was sad about that one.

The fishing then became ridiculous. In the words of a twelve-year old boy, it was “mad, sick, nasty.” That means good, really good. We hooked fish after fish after fish. As soon as the lure hit the water, pow!! There were so many fish that when you hooked one, another blue would come along and try to eat the lure in the mouth of one of his buddies. He’d miss and chomp the line sometimes sending me and Joshua to our backsides much to the delight of the rest of our crew. Lines snapped frequently. Ten to fourteen pound bluefish make you dig your feet in the sand, lean back really hard and work your arm and shoulder muscles into an intense burn. Matthew, who is the strongest five-year old boy I know, needed a lot of help to hold the rod. Big blues do a number on your gear. Soon, I had no rods left ready to cast. Five rods were left in

various states of disrepair broken lines streaming in the wind. The gears in one reel were completely fried. I started making adjustments, tying on wire leaders and the oldest crappiest lures. Once the wire leaders were gone, I used sixty-pound monofilament as a leader and re-tied after every fish. I'm pretty sure anything would have caught a fish; that's how mad, sick, nasty the fishing was. Up and down the beach people were fighting fish, wrestling with a seal or re-tying. Other trucks stopped and watched the action.

Huge male seals were soon in on the action. As you strained against a fish, a seal created a huge splashing ruckus as it grabbed the hooked fish. Often the fish was tossed into the air several times as the seal mercilessly toyed with it. Matthew and Mary sat in their mom's lap wide-eyed, smiling, watching the seals and the fish and their dad and brother running around like mad men. Mary squealed when a bluefish used his tail to flip sand in our eyes in a last act of defiance.

During all this, as I was busy tying up one rod for Joshua, the screams of my wife rang down the beach. She had my favorite rod and was battling a fish. She had taken it upon herself to take my rod, cast on her own (she had been keeping this a secret – who knew she could cast?!?) and was now shrieking for help because a vicious brute of a bluefish was trying to rip the rod out of her hands. “Hey, you hooked it, you deal with it.” I smiled as she struggled and yelled some more. I loosened the drag a scooch to help her a little. I had set the drag tighter than normal to help get a fish in before it fell prey to a seal. As I watched her battle this fish, I noticed how wild the sun, sea, salt and wind had sculpted her hair. Her skin was tan, her eyes sparkled, she was battling a fish barefoot in the sand... oh my! Sandy was looking spectacularly beautiful at that moment.

We caught fish for four straight hours. We laughed many, many times. We marveled at a seal's playfulness and power. We yelled a lot. We did it together. After things simmered down a little, Joshua helped me clean and bag seven big blues. We had let another twenty go (at least) and hooked another 50 or so. I had never experienced bluefishing like this before. We drove off the beach shortly after sunset, exhausted, smiling, reeking of fish. Sandy was so excited she had to call Shortcast on the ride back to tell him all about it.

Reflecting back on the experience, it occurred to me that I had many hours of preparation geared to handle a blitz. Two big tackle boxes well organized. I had five rods on the truck; the two beefiest ones were the only ones that could handle the size of these fish. I had the right leader material, good pliers to remove hooks, the right knife to clean the fish. Sandy even had the right size plastic bags to preserve the fish. The only injuries we sustained were sore arms, backs and legs. I learned from the blitz too. The next day, I spent a delightful morning re-organizing and repairing my fishing gear making small adjustments in hope of the next blitz. Often, when we think of recovery, we think that all the tools in our box are for the difficult times and indeed they do help us through those times.

However, I learned that the tools of recovery allow me to enjoy the good times as well.

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.