

Hooked On Recovery

September 15, 2006

Attitude Adjustment

"I cried because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet." – Anonymous

"I cried because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet. So I said, "Got any shoes you're not using?" – Steven Wright

It would never have occurred to me that a double scoop of Edy's gourmet chocolate ice cream had the potential to blow up an airplane. Apparently it does. I was in Washington National airport on my way back to Hartford when the gentleman I was traveling with was told to either "finish his ice cream or throw it away" just as we were about to board. Seems that ice cream meets the new federal standards for "liquid" and "liquids" can no longer be carried onto a plane. I thought I knew this man, but could it be possible that he had concocted some kind of devious scheme? Was he going to take the ice cream, melt it, then mix it with some other gel hidden in his tube of toothpaste that would ignite a horrific blaze and send our plane hurtling into the Atlantic? Makes you wonder. Realizing he had been stopped cold in mid plot; he inhaled a couple more plastic spoonfuls, tempted the dreaded brain freeze, and with a smile of disbelief tossed the ice cream away. The security guard nodded in professional satisfaction. We dared not speak, for fear of saying dangerous words like ice cream bomb, or chocolate explosive, or deadly frozen concoction – any of these phrases spoken aloud could have resulted with us in shackles, or worse.

Prior to the ice cream scenario, I had settled in with my traveling companions to enjoy a comforting bowl of clam chowder at Legal Seafoods in the airport. I stop for chowder almost every time I'm in this airport. The soup didn't let me down. I was suitably comforted. Yet, I was still nervous. I was about to pass through Security with contraband concealed in my luggage – a stick of Old Spice deodorant - tucked away in a zippered pocket. Since no liquids or gels were allowed on any flight, I knew I was tempting fate. Fate caught up with me. It was a good thing a cab driver had helped me shift my perspective a couple days earlier. I met this mini-ordeal with some peace and humor.

After heaving my gear on the belt to be x-rayed, I stepped before the metal detector. The guard waved me through. The alarm went off – twice. Crap. He ushered me to the glass doors and I stood in the glass hallway shoeless and resigned to my fate. I thought that this must be what George La Rambunctious, our hamster, must feel like in his glass cage at home. The guard pointed to my luggage and brought it to a table. After all my worry, the Old Spice made it through but now I was imprisoned temporarily. They unlocked the door and told me to stand on the footprints. I got wanded. The wand kept beeping near my butt. Thoughts of a strip search surfaced, but I steadily maintained my serenity. I told him it might be the coin in my wallet. It was. Ironically, it was the coin commemorating my most recent sober anniversary. Usually, I put my wallet in the bin with my jacket, shoes, belt, glasses and laptop but this time I forgot. I choked under the pressure of trying to sneak through my deodorant. I was relieved when he said "you're free to go". I was smiling as I put my belt and shoes back on, and assembled all my other gear. Why did I handle this situation with more maturity than is normal for me? Because of what happened on the way to Washington.

I had the last flight out of Hartford so I could spend most of the day with Sandy and the kids. I got to the airport and decided to check my bag. I usually carry all my luggage to avoid baggage claim nightmares, but I was worried then about my tubes of gel and other personal hygiene items might not make it through. So to avoid that hassle I checked my bag. I made it through Security easily and arrived at the gateway early. Instantly, I was greeted with an announcement: a 35-minute delay. No reason given, just that the plane was late coming out of Philadelphia. After a long wait, I finally settled in my seat and the flight attendant announced that since this was an “express” flight that there would be no blankets available. The combination of leaving home, flying, checking through security, being late and being tired was not helping my disposition. And now no blankets? My mood soured. I dove into a book about long-lining swordfish. In Washington, I made my way to the baggage claim only to wade into a sea of humanity drifting around piles of off-loaded luggage. After an hour, with my internal temperature rising even more, I spotted my solitary green bag, rumbling down one of those whatever they’re called baggage claim things. Quickly, I rolled my gear outside and found I was about 40th in a long line of people waiting for taxis.

After many minutes I finally got a cab. I started lamenting about my long trip and missing most of the Giants season opener (Manning vs. Manning), when the cab driver asked incredulously, “You got your bag?!?!?” I said, “Why, yes I did.” He said almost in disbelief, “You’re lucky, very lucky.” I sat and mulled that over all the way to the hotel.

I became grateful. Yes, I did have my suitcase. And that was good. I had my recovery, too. That allows me to continually adjust my attitude.

Oh, and watching the end of the football game on a 42” flat screen HDTV in my gorgeous hotel room drove the point home.

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.