

## **Hooked On Recovery**

September 30, 2005

*Honor Guard*

We were the first ones. Brian and I stood on the stage at Bushnell Park in the darkness of an early September morning. The full moon was setting in the west as the sun was rising in the east. Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. The park was very, very quiet. Yet in a few hours, recovery would walk again for the sixth consecutive year. I have been there for all six.

Big Joe from Parks and Rec arrived. Brian was talking with Joe when Keith appeared. He was part of the tent crew, except the rest of his guys hadn't shown up yet. As we waited Keith asked me quietly, "Are you in recovery?" "Yes, I am." "That's good, that's good." Then he paused, "I need some help." Keith and I talked for a while about his situation. He had been clean for several months, but picked up again after his teenage son was killed four months earlier. He told me his boy was shot twice in the back of the head by a police officer who had pulled him over on a traffic violation and thought his son had a gun. Keith went on to say that his son did not have a gun and was a good kid. Keith was looking to get into a long-term faith-based program and had an appointment the following day. I tried to encourage him and we hugged when the tent crew came. That's how my day started; God put two souls together for His purpose. Keith's trust in me honored me. His sharing with me helped me.

The day brightened and the tents went up, the booths set up, the balloon arch lifted and the sound system went live. I could not help but be impressed by the coordination and effort of the core group of volunteers and staff that, in a couple hours, turned the park into a festive setting for recovery. People in recovery, family members, friends, allies gathered in the park to listen to the outstanding music in preparation for the walk. The weather was perfect, as soon as it started to get a little hot; some cloud cover would materialize to cool things down a little. My perception was that the loving and powerful hand of God was directing the day.

For me, the most powerful touch was felt as a part of our first Honor Guard. The idea was simple really. We wanted to honor the face of long-term recovery, lift it out of the crowd and inspire others. Every person or family member in recovery with 10 or more years was invited to don a purple sash adorned with a large circular sticker with the number of years of recovery printed on it. Some told me the "ceremony" of getting draped brought goosebumps and tears to their eyes.

Just before the walk began, 68 people in the Honor Guard representing an astonishing 1207 years of recovery gathered in the front of about 2500 other walkers. My 9-year old daughter Samantha (who willingly chose to miss a soccer game to be at the walk) and my 3-year old son Matthew shared the privilege of cutting the ribbon. Once the ribbon was cut, the Honor Guard led the walk up the hill. At the top of the hill the Honor Guard split to both sides of the path and encouraged the walkers coming up behind them as they passed through. There were hugs, high-fives, knuckles and many, many words of thanks and encouragement. People walked by with tears streaming down their cheeks deeply grateful for the support offered by more than a thousand years of recovery.

I stood at the top of the hill, wrapped in a purple sash with the number 17, amazed at the number of walkers streaming by. Standing next to me was my wife Sandy, a 14 on her sash, along with

four of my kids and we clapped, cheered and cried as a family. The Honor Guard fell in line after the last of the walkers finally passed and brought up the rear. As we walked slowly and chatted with those around us, I could not help but feel grateful, extremely grateful. In my last *Hooked on Recovery* article I wrote about isolation and being in a “valley” and received a lot of love and support – thank you. At Recovery Walks! 2005 I was definitely not isolated. I became reconnected, rekindling the deep purpose God has for my life. My recovery spirit was refueled and then re-ignited. The healing power of recovery touched me personally and powerfully, just when I needed it.

As Brian and I drove out that afternoon, I looked and saw the tent crew taking down the first of the tents. Keith was with them and we caught eyes. He stopped what he was doing, and standing tall, he raised his fist. Keith was going to be OK. As I returned his “salute”, I knew I was going to be OK too, thanks to Keith and the rest of the recovery community.

*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](mailto:phillip@ccar.us). Visit the website at [www.ccar.us](http://www.ccar.us) to read the entire series.