

## **Hooked On Recovery**

November 10, 2006

*Manhattan Steve*

Back in 1990, with only three years of recovery, my marriage was in deep trouble. My actions, my behavior had wounded the marriage so deeply that communication was nearly impossible. I could talk about the day-to-day stuff, but my emotions were so tensed up and so tight that if anything of substance came up, I just shut up. I dared not to feel anything. I was afraid of what was pent up inside.

Thank God I had recovery. I caught fire for recovery. I dove into recovery. It wasn't so much that I spent every waking moment at a meeting, or with my sponsor, or at a recovery function, recovery was constantly on my mind. I lived it. I worked at changing my entire outlook. I worked on believing. I read. I read a lot. I was in "absorb" mode. I dove into recovery so I could deal with the harshness of my situation. And maybe, just maybe, I dove into recovery to avoid the harshness of my situation.

Throughout my life, God has sent messengers. Sometimes I listened, mostly I didn't. God sent someone that I had to pay attention to. He sent an angel named Manhattan Steve who walked into a Friday night meeting. He sat up front at the table directly across from me. He was tall, handsome and he looked crisp in jeans and a T-shirt. His hair bothered me. It was trimmed close on the sides and short on top, but was full of gel and spiked straight up. My first thought, was, "Who the heck is this guy?"

As I watched him, looking for more reasons not to like him, I sensed an air about him. He was peaceful. I fought that notion. How could a guy that looked like this, all duded up and full of himself, be peaceful? It didn't fit. At least, it didn't fit with my preconceived notion of a man close to God. Then he raised his hand to share and I thought, ""This oughtta be good." I don't remember what he said, I mean I don't remember the words. I remember how he said it. He spoke with gentleness, calmness, softness and authority that I had never experienced. When he was done, I sat staring, mouth hanging open. He caught my eye and the beginning of a smile touched his face. He knew.

I started seeing Steve at meetings on a regular basis. We became very close friends. He told me his story. He had made big money in New York dangling from skyscrapers and sealing cracks with silicon. Alcohol and drugs left him jobless, homeless and broke. He had been clean about four years and in that time had developed a conscious contact with God. He was filled with Spirit. And he only had a few months to live. Steve had AIDS. He was an AIDS activist who had done his work in New York and came to Rockville to die.

He told people he had cancer. It was quite awhile before he told me the truth. He had contracted the virus one evening when he had shared a needle with a medical intern. The intern had already died. He seemed healthy, it seemed impossible that he was dying, until we went up to Soapstone. I brought him up there to look at the view. As we took the short walk to the fire tower, he bent over in pain and had to stop for breath. He looked up and the message from his eyes told me the truth. I knew he was going to die, soon. We struggled up the fire tower, he wanted to go and he enjoyed it. Steve got cold quickly and we left.

Steve had very little money. He lived in a little apartment while the Rockville Connection took care of him. The Rockville Connection were the people God called to help him as he helped us. Smokey the Cab Driver, Philomena (who now works exclusively with AIDS patients), The Turtle Man, Kevin, Perry, Doreen and myself. Whether it was in his apartment or in the Rockville Hospice, Steve was hardly ever alone. We had no active communication with each other, it was God's plan. When one person left, another would show up. I usually visited him at his apartment on my way to work. I was selling life insurance and investments at the time, and I was beginning to realize that I really didn't like this line of work. I would stop and see Steve and talk for a while. Steve always encouraged me to pray and meditate. He pushed me to get closer to God. He talked about Jesus all the time and gently led me in that direction. I will always be grateful for his gift of love and faith.

One morning, I knocked on the door and he didn't answer. I let myself in. Steve was lying on the floor near his bed and couldn't move. I got him to the hospital. He was moved from St. Francis to the Rockville Hospice and we waited for him to pass. People were with him around the clock. Philomena in particular would spend night after night with Steve. The hospice nurses had never before experienced an outpouring of love like they were witnessing with Steve. People in recovery came in droves to visit him, to encourage him, to pray with him. Throughout his ordeal, Steve taught people about AIDS. More importantly, Steve taught people not to fear death. Before Manhattan Steve, I was terrified of death. That is no longer true today. There would be times where he would emerge from unconsciousness and say, "Do you see the angels? They're here. They're everywhere." Then he would slip back into unconsciousness. The authority with which he spoke was convincing. His words opened my mind.

One morning, I went to the Hospice and walked straight into his room. Steve's bed was empty. the sheets were gone and the mattress folded over. Steve was gone. I whispered a quiet prayer as I recovered from the initial shock. I struggled to identify the emotions running through me. Sadness. Peace. And love. Mostly love. I was surprised at the love.

As I walked out, I felt a warm tear slide down my cheek. I hadn't cried for many, many years. Thank you Steve, for your friendship. And love. It's still with me today.

*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.