

## Hooked On Recovery

November 24, 2006

*Wilson!*

*“We might just make it. Did that thought ever cross your brain? Well regardless I would rather take my chance out there on the ocean, than to stay here and die on this <expletive deleted> island spending the rest of my life talking to a damn VOLLEYBALL!” – Chuck Noland, Cast Away*

Russ made his first trip with Shortcast and me last year on our annual 5 day Cape Cod fishing excursion. He was relatively new to surf fishing but after last year he is officially hooked. As evidenced by his eBay activity over the last year. And his tag sale purchases. He picked up some great deals on rods, reels and lures. Russ is also an accomplished woodworker. In fact, he made the box on the back of my truck that is often admired by other oversanders. So it came as no surprise that Russ found some oldie but goodie wood lures on the internet and tenderly restored them to their original luster. This October, Russ was back with us and he was fully outfitted. Unfortunately we had too much time to experiment with all our equipment. The fishing was poor. If I had to label this year’s trip I’d call it “Barren Seas”. Or maybe we are just really bad fishermen, although we took some solace in that no one else was catching anything either.

Our first clue was obvious, but we were blinded by optimism. The very first morning we stopped in the bait shop only to find that there was no bait. “No bait?” “Yes, we have no bait.” There were no sand eels available. None were even around to rake. There hadn’t been any for weeks. They had some frozen ones from Norway, or Sweden... somewhere over there, but frozen bait is not real bait. Not a good sign. No sand eels, no fish. As we were pulling out of the bait shop, a guy pulled in and stopped us. “Hey, I have a whole flat of sand worms. We haven’t caught anything the last five days, you want them?” Arno says, “Sure!” Into the box (the one Russ made) they go. Just to make sure you have this straight, we took a whole lot of bait that hadn’t caught anything. For the record, we didn’t catch anything on it either.

In the midst of this very-few-fish fishing trip, Russ clipped on one of his prize lures, a red and white floating popper, that not only did he repaint, he also added a handmade red and white bucktail hook. It was a beauty. As he let fly, the bail closed, and SNAP! the line broke and the lure splashed into the sea about 20 yards out. Arno and I looked over immediately, because any fisherman knows that sickening sound. Russ looked at his reel, muttered something, looked at his lure floating out of reach and sadly walked back to the truck. Arno and I didn’t say a word; you don’t mess with a man in that condition but I wasn’t so ready to give up. I grabbed my rod and tied on a floating lure too and repeatedly cast over Russ’s popper. I kept hitting it but couldn’t hook it. Arno joined in. This was a challenge. After many casts, the lure was way out and we could barely see it. It had reached the end of our casting distance. We were going to lose it.

Realizing the fate of this lure, I reeled in one last time. Looking out at the sea, I summoned all my strength, all my sorrow and bellowed, “WILSON! I’M SORRY!” “WIIIIIISSSSOOOONN, FORGIVE ME!” Russ was now chuckling and I kept wailing. It was an emotional release for me as well so I just kept on hollering. Finally, I was wailed out. I was talking with Arno the other day and we fondly recalled this story. We talked about how it related to recovery, more

specifically about how fragile recovery can be. The lure received a new life from the loving and capable hands of our friend Russ. Then the connection, the lifeline, was snapped and the lure was lost, adrift on a rough and ominous sea.

Sometimes, people in recovery lose their connection, to others and/or to God, and become lost again.

A couple nights after losing Wilson (the lure), we were fishing a public beach in Wellfleet, a place where you park and walk down a steep dune to the water. This evening was special; a clear calm night, minimal surf, an abundance of shooting stars. As I slowly fished my RonZ, I became enchanted with the serenity. A few people had a bonfire blazing on the beach and its light flickered off the dune adding to the tranquility. The striped bass cooperated as well by not eating anything we offered. It was one of those rare moments where all was good, true and beautiful. My trance was abruptly broken by a faraway cry from atop the dune.

“WIIIIIISSOOOOONNNNN!” I smiled. Brother Arno was beckoning. He and Russ were at the truck and wanted to go home. I found out later that someone in the parking lot snuck up behind them and startled them by asking, “What??? Did you lose your VOLLEYBALL?!?”

No, they were checking up on a friend and making sure he was still connected.

*“Hey, you want to hear something funny? My dentist's name is James Spalding.”* – Chuck Noland talking to Wilson, his volleyball in the movie Cast Away.

*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.