

Hooked On Recovery

November 26, 2004

Staying In

This is a busy time of year for me, for all of us. My wife's birthday, our anniversary, Thanksgiving, a baby to be born (this year only), Christmas, New Years... phew. Yet, I really like it. The holidays are special times for me and my family. I especially like that my mind is clean. Nothing like setting out into the Christmas tree farm with four kids and scouting out the 'perfect' tree and being able to remember it for several years! The kids always cheer when Dad finally saws through the tree and the tree falls. And they have been known to giggle when the tree falls off the roof of the car on the way home. Dad doesn't find it nearly as amusing.

I am also keenly aware that holidays are not so good for some people in recovery; in fact they are darn difficult. It seems that I've been witness to too many people who have gone back out, some after significant periods of recovery. Last week, one person told me she took her first drink after six years of recovery while her husband sat on the barstool next to her. I can't even fathom that. This disease IS cunning, baffling and powerful.

In December, by the grace of God, I'll have seventeen years of recovery, yet my program tells me that what I "really have is a daily reprieve contingent upon the maintenance of my spiritual condition". So, I only have today to worry about. One day at a time. Those days add up. I guess that's one key for me. I can get through anything, can do just about anything, for one day. And yes, at times, I do have to break the day down into hours.

Another key is regular attendance at a support group. I need to have people around me who know me, who hold me accountable, who know the warning signs. These are people I can learn from, share with and shed a tear with. We are in the same boat, headed for the same destination and believe in the same thing... working our recovery.

I think the drink through. Sometimes, when I'm in a restaurant I see other people ordering a beer or a cocktail and wonder what it would be like to drink again. I must admit that it LOOKS appealing. Yet, when I think the drink through, it never turns out too pretty. First, I think about all the guilt, shame and remorse that would cascade into my soul. Ouch. Then I think about how drinking would shatter my family life and my work life. Ouch. Then I think about the physical pain and the sick feelings that come in the aftermath of a binge. Ouch. And I remind myself that there is no problem made better, or no success made greater, by drinking. And I think about all the fruit that my recovery has reaped, things like peace, joy, self-control, patience and love. I throw it all away with one drink. So I gladly decide to order a soda instead, just for today.

I'm grateful that early on in my recovery; my sponsor said "Phillip, relapse is not necessarily a part of recovery". When faced with the decision of going back out, or staying in recovery, today I choose staying in.

Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, father of four (expecting number five) and just another surf fisherman. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at phillip@ccar.us. Or visit the website at www.ccar.us to read the entire series.