

New beginnings: Life after addiction

By Ashley Varose
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Chris Blankenship doesn't remember how he got home, but when he woke up the following morning, the house was empty.

"My wife packed up everything and took my daughter," he said.

That's when he called his doctor and asked for help with his drug addiction.

"I started off young," he said. "I started smoking marijuana when I was 11, and in high school I got involved with cocaine. When I started using pain pills, that's when it got real bad. I started with Xanax – benzos – but I started using Roxies (Roxicet), which are like Oxycontin. Those really grabbed me and pulled me down."

He started taking one a day, then two.

"So I went to detox in Tallahassee and got cleaned up," he said. "Two months later, I thought I kicked it, but then I woke up one day and out of nowhere, I was like, 'I want a Roxie.'"

His addiction escalated from two pills a day to 10.

"I was lying, not paying bills, borrowing money from this person, but using it for something different," he said. "Slowly but surely, I started losing trust from my wife, started losing trust from my mother. It got to a point where it was me and Roxies and that was it."

So the 21-year-old from Tal-

lahassee packed his bags and headed to Twelve Oaks in Navarre, where he stayed for 45 days.

"I had a good experience," he said. "I was sick, I was about to lose my wife and daughter. They helped me medically detox and helped me through the withdrawals."

While in rehab, Blankenship said he gained the tools he needed to return to his hometown and deal with sobriety.

"The best part is that they bring people from outside," he said. "People fresh out of rehab, and we interact with people who are 10 to 15 years sober. They've done Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, they're familiar with the 12 steps."

On Feb. 5, Blankenship will celebrate four years of sobriety.

"The big thing is not to get cocky," he said. "I went to rehab in middle school, then high school. I would do good, and think 'I got this,' but I always messed back up. The main thing is trying to stay humble."

Blankenship stays in touch with the people he met at Twelve Oaks, and he keeps up with his AA meetings.

"I'm about to graduate college," he said. "We had a second daughter, so we're adding to our family. My relationships are much better. The best decision I ever made was to go get clean and take it seriously."

Dana Esneault, 42, shares a different story of addiction. As a mom with four kids under 8



Submitted photo
Chris Blankenship almost lost his wife and daughter because of his drug use. Almost four years sober, he and his wife welcomed a second daughter and he's about to graduate college.

years old, she began taking pain pills.

"Not only did I like the feeling, I was managing my kids by myself," the stay-at-home mom said.

"I was a room mother, a typical Louisiana housewife," she

said. "For years no one ever knew. I was able to hide it very well."

She said at one point she had four different doctors prescribing her pain pills.

"I didn't know how to do anything without pills," she

said. "My body got used to it and my body needed more and more."

At \$25 a pill, she finally reached a point where she could no longer afford her habit. But instead of reaching out for help, she found a different "solution." She began writing checks from her husband's business account.

"You're desperate when you're an addict," she said.

When the checkbook didn't reconcile with the bills, the secret Esneault kept for nearly 20 years finally came to the surface.

"I still downplayed it," she said. "I didn't want him to know the specifics. I was taking 30 to 35 a day, but I told him I was taking eight."

After she got sick from detoxing at home, she admitted how many pills she was taking.

"My husbands' face just dropped," she said.

On Dec. 20, 2011, she went to Twelve Oaks and began detoxing.

"I was throwing up for the next four days 24/7, she said. "I was in a bad, dark place. I didn't want to live."

After six days, she left the detox facility and started on her road to recovery.

"A lot of people relapsed," she said. "You've got to be ready to say 'I need a new life.' I was about to lose everything and everyone I loved so much, I couldn't bear it, so I knew I had to give 100 percent."

"They armed with what I needed to know for my life to be changed forever."