continued from Page A1

"It was disastrous," Elizabeth said. "Bottles and weed were everywhere. Her dad kicked her out and called me. Her Facebook page was on the computer and it was open to messages about getting heroin. She had shot up on heroin. That was the night she almost died."

Samantha had gone to a house with other users, shot up and passed out. When she stopped breathing, no one knew what to do.

"The next day, I found her on River Road, walking with a friend," Elizabeth said, noting Samantha believes her best friend and grandpa saved her. "I drove past her. She was so bloated and dirty, I didn't recognize her at first. I flipped a u-turn and stopped. They were both high on heroin. I asked her to get in my car. Once she did, after she looked at me like a zombie, I told her I knew everything and I would do anything to get her help. She asked, 'Why? Why do you care?' If she only could have



Privately owned

understood." Elizabeth got her daughter a sandwich and made her take

a shower before taking her to the emergency room. "I was terrified," Elizabeth said. "I had no idea what heroin does or possible reactions. When I brought her home, my husband and my other daughter Erica just sat there. No one

really knew what to do or say to someone who was clearly high and out of her mind. You sure don't read that in a parenting book."

Things only got worse from

there. "She yelled at Erica," Elizabeth recalled. "Erica went into her room and cried. Erica was 16 at the time and didn't understand why Sam was making these choices. Sam was all strung out, but she felt bad about she'd done to her sister. Erica told her, 'You've always been my hero and promised you would be there for me. You're breaking my heart and killing yourself."

That ended up being Samantha's turning point. Breaking her sister's heart was the worst feeling in the world for her, so Samantha agreed to get help.

Elizabeth took Samantha to the ER, then brought her home and stayed with her for three days and nights as her daughter went through severe withdrawals from heroin.

"Watching someone withdrawal off of heroin is awful," Elizabeth said. "She couldn't even walk to the bathroom. I had to help her to the bathroom. She couldn't keep food down. I shut down into emergency crisis mode."

As if seeing her daughter nearly die of a heroin overdose wasn't bad enough, the next step was just as tough in a dif-

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ferent way: trying to find a way to help Samantha.

'The hardest part is finding help," Elizabeth said. "There was not a list of names or a website with names out there. I never imagined I would find myself in this world."

Elizabeth found out about Hazelden Treatment Center in Newberg, with her mom paying the co-pay to get Samantha in. Three weeks later Samantha was kicked out, with the recommendation

to check out Balboa Horizons in Southern California, a 90-day rehab program. Insurance picked up the bill and Samantha was on her road to recovery.

While Samantha was at Balboa, Elizabeth and Erica went down for family week, where family members are taught about the addiction.

Elizabeth had the stereotypical image of drug addicts coming from trashy-looking families in mind.

"We walked in and I thought it would be all these drug addicts," she said. "But it was families that looked just like us. I started crying, just broke down. It was so good to know I wasn't alone."

Elizabeth, who is still friends with some of the families she met that week, said Jim, the class instructor, taught about enabling. For example, often parents of addicts will make conditions such as buying the addict a car if they get clean.

to get the job done right.

"You have to empower your loved one to believe in themselves and to fight for their sobriety," Elizabeth said.

"If not, you're crippling them." In another example, Jim had a parent sit in a chair while he portrayed an addict struggling to cross the room to sobriety. The parent wasn't able to get out of the chair to help, meaning Jim had to fight to get himself across the room.

"A lot of parents were angry

when we got down there," Elizabeth said. "Erica and I were. We did an emotional check-in every day. Throughout the week, the anger was lessened because you start to understand what you are dealing with. you When don't understand, the fear overwhelms you. It's usually because

you're scared

to death."

- Elizabeth Smith

"No one really

knew what

to do or say

to someone

clearly high

and out of

her mind."

who was

Among other things, Elizabeth learned that when youth become addicted to drugs at a young age, the frontal cortex of the brain's growth is stunted, leading to obsessive behavior and allowing impulses to take over. In other words, things aren't firing correctly in the addict's brain.

"The drugs stop their maturity," Elizabeth said. "They don't have the necessary logic or the stop zone, because the control center hasn't kicked in yet."

For Samantha, Balboa Horizons was an answer to prayers as it put her on the road to recovery. In May 2013, she did a video for Balboa, telling about

her story. "It was really cool, because like most people I've talked to here, I haven't really had the close relationships with women," Samantha said in the video. "Coming to Balboa, in an all-girl's facility, we really formed a sisterhood. Everyone could really relate to each other and you could get just completely open and honest

REAL

was like family support."

After her time at Balboa, Samantha moved into a sober living house with several friends she made at Balboa. They had to stay clean, do random urine tests three times a week and went through a 12step AA process. Samantha and two others then moved into a condo, followed the same rules and went to work at rehab facilities.

"The biggest thing is to have a lot of people around you who understand, who've been through the same battles," Elizabeth said. "I'd love for her to be at home, but Orange County is the largest area for rehab and sober living. Plus it's sunny around there, which is so nice for addicts with depression. She needs to have a sober support group of people her age. That is lacking in the Salem/Keizer area. The people she's with down there, she can't bullshit them. An addict can spot an addict faster than anyone and is so quick to call you on it. They've all been through

By contrast, Elizabeth said there's a lack of awareness of the issue in Keizer.

"This town needs to wake up," she said. "People assume it will never happen to them. We want to bring awareness to Keizer. We've got to talk about it and have these conversations. When one more kid gets buried, that breaks my heart. We live in a nice neighborhood and look like the typical American family. Don't ever think it can't happen to your

After Samantha was on the road to recovery, Elizabeth reached out to the young man that was with her daughter shortly after her overdose.

"He came from a good Christian family, in a nice Keizer neighborhood," Elizabeth said. "His parents both worked during the day and he did heroin while they worked. He said he didn't think his parents would listen. I told him, 'You'd be amazed. It's a lot better for them to learn it now than to find out after you're dead.' Sam said he got his life together and is married now."

Elizabeth would like to have a public meeting in Keizer to talk about the issue and would about everything going on. It like to see more treatment op-

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tions and facilities locally.

"We need to develop a website of resources," she said. "Oregon is lacking the resources. I had to go out of state to save my daughter. That needs to be addressed. Balboa needs to open a place up here. We have people dying left and right. You need to get them around people who've been there because they speak their language. I don't speak it, but they do. There are no things like narcotics anonymous for young people up here."

Elizabeth has suggestions for parents.

'Watch your pain pills," she said. "Watch your medicine cabinet, your prescriptions, your kids. It's just way too easy for them to get their hands on the pills. Don't bring pain meds into your house. It's so important that we talk about it. We're losing an entire generation to prescription medications. A lot of kids are dying because they got into heroin more than they thought they would."

Even though her daughter is doing better, Elizabeth battles living in fear.

"The risk of relapse is real," she said. "It's always going to be a threat. A relapse can always happen. I am always on edge. I sleep with my phone next to the bed, just waiting for that call. I pray it never comes. I'm more afraid of that knock on the door in the middle of the night."

Elizabeth put the struggle into simple terms.

"It's like staring down the devil," she said. "I'm not going

The whole experience has left Elizabeth infuriated, especially in regards to how dealers get youth started.

"They give it away at parties just to hook them," said Elizabeth, who has shared all the information and contact information from Facebook messages with police to help their efforts. "You know how we tell our kids don't take candy from a stranger? It's the same with drugs. If you knew taking that one hit, to give you that high, could end up like Sam that next day, unable to walk, throwing up because every muscle in her body hurt, you'd realize it's not worth it. It's horrifying. Plus it could kill you the first time."

Having watched her friends Jeff and Hollie Crist bury their son Brandon, who died at the age of 22 in September due to a heroin overdose, Elizabeth knew she had to publicly share her family's story. She posted about it recently on Facebook and willingly shared the story with this paper in the hopes of making people aware of the dangers.

"The one person who was going to call 9-1-1 to save Samantha's life that night was Brandon Crist. I don't believe we've gone through this to just be quiet about it," Elizabeth said. "We would miss the whole point."



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