



EVERETTE COFFMAN
**ONE MAN'S JOURNEY
 TO HELPING OTHERS**

Left to right: Tasha, Everette and Wesley

EVERETTE COFFMAN's '17 (MSMFT) story is quite a miracle — he journeyed from drug abuse to helping those who abuse. As a registered marriage and family therapist intern and a registered mental health counseling intern, Everette founded a counseling business along with a nonprofit in Clermont, Fla., earlier this year. The business and nonprofit, which he founded with his best friend Tommy Moore, work hand in hand. The business, Priority One Coaching, Counseling

and Consulting, provides counseling for families in the community. The nonprofit, Priority One Community Center, provides scholarships for counseling, helps raise money for people who can't afford treatment for substance abuse, provides educational workshops in the community and raises money for substance abuse intervention.

Although Everette has been able to help others dealing with drug abuse, he didn't always know a life free of addiction. Born into a family of drug abuse in Groveland, Fla., Everette started using drugs at the

age of 12. Later in his life, Everette lost friends and family due to drug abuse.

"Addiction was prevalent and encouraged by some family members. Growing up, I didn't know people who were sober. I didn't believe people could be sober," he said.

Despite his addiction, Everette seemed to have a promising future, receiving letters from a few Ivy League schools. Because of a lack of guidance from his family, Everette missed most university acceptance deadlines and ended up barely



Everette with his family



Left to right: Tommy Moore, Everette and Dr. Adrian Manley

meeting the admission requirements in time to attend the University of South Florida in 2002. Although he was admitted late, Everette still received full tuition, including a presidential award from the university.

Everette doesn't remember much of his undergraduate years, spending most of his time partying and using drugs. He recalls not having any friends or making an effort to talk to other students. "I was consumed with drug use. It's by the grace of God I got through my first year," he said.

In 2007, he met his girlfriend, now wife, Tasha. She was the first person to tell him that it was strange that he started using drugs with his family. Two years later, while dating, they had a son, Wesley. After a few years of being a family man, Everette chose to distance himself from Tasha and Wesley. He didn't want his son to go through the same things he went through.

"I lived in darkness. I was consumed by addiction. I was using by myself and felt as if I had no options," said Everette.

It wasn't until 2013 that Everette experienced a life-changing event. He

was driving over the speed limit down I-75 with drugs visibly in his front passenger seat when a police officer pulled him over. At the time, he had been trying to get clean and had been through treatment, but it didn't seem to help. He was put on probation and later found himself violating his probation.

With failure to meet his probation, a judge gave him the option of being a part of a six- to 12-month residential recovery program or be sentenced to multiple years in prison. Although a bit hesitant to try another recovery program, Everette decided to undergo the treatment with the encouragement from a disposition specialist from the Pasco Public Defender's Office, Billy Majors.

"The Pasco County Drug Court saved my life. Prior to that, I couldn't stay clean. I violated my probation," he said.

While undergoing treatment, Everette entered into a program known as ACE Opportunities in New Port Richey. It was there that he met a group of men in Alcoholics Anonymous who helped change his life. Every day, he was surrounded by a group of people who were sober and, unbeknownst to him, were Christians. It was there that he

started listening to Christian music. One song stuck out to him the most — "Proof of Your Love." Everette had grown up in a home that believed that God was real, but it wasn't a central part of their family.

"I started praying to God, 'If you are truly real, transform my life,'" he said.

On December 19, 2013, Everette felt the urge to pray for his salvation. He asked to be alone in the room he shared with five guys. He prayed to be stripped of everything. He confessed how he was devastated by what his life had become. He soon began to feel physically sick. The next day he felt completely changed.

"I knew God was real. God made himself evident to me. My obsessions and thoughts to use were gone. I committed everything to God," he said. From there, Everette saw his life start to come back together.

Prior to his arrest, Everette had worked for Marriott International for several years. During the time that he was arrested, he was put on a leave of absence from Marriott. After receiving Christ, he went to his employer telling them that he was a different person. In response, he was told that he could write a letter

of appeal in order to return to work to headquarters in Washington, D.C. While waiting for a response, his friends from the recovery center encouraged him to help people and that God would take care of him. Trying not to focus on his situation, Everette began to help others. He got a call the next week that he was on the schedule to work.

“God did so much for me so fast. He continued to open doors,” he said.

Soon after, Everette worked to reconcile with his son and Tasha. In 2015, he proposed to Tasha in a castle in Germany during her grandparents’ 50th anniversary. Everette shared how God ordained his reconciliation with Tasha and his son and it was the best present he could have received. In August of 2015 they were married.

“Nothing compares to being present with my son and wife. It is the greatest gift God has given. My wife is my backbone,” said Everette.

Soon after, Everette heard about SEU on the Joy FM radio station and decided to tour the university. The first person he met on campus was **GEORGE ZIVKOVICH ’11**, director of adult and graduate enrollment. At the time, Everette didn’t meet the prerequisites to be admitted to the master’s in marriage and family counseling program — his undergraduate GPA was too low and he had a record. In spite of these obstacles, George encouraged him to continue the process.

During the admission process, Everette was open with the professors on his past experiences, sharing how God delivered him from his addictions. He was accepted on probation and he was ecstatic. He

“My life has been restored, my family is restored and God has been at the center of it all.”

went on to receive straight As in all of his classes.

While at SEU, Everette had an instant connection with Dr. Adrian Manley, associate professor of counselor education, who was from his hometown of Groveland. Manley soon became Everette’s mentor and now works with Everette at Priority One.

“I felt like I got a great education. I took classes with highly skilled practitioners. I developed really great relationships,” said Everette.

In order to complete his 1,000-hour practicum, Everette was offered a position with Sandi Burchfield at Family Life Counseling Center as she began to open her own private counseling center. “I learned everything I could from her,” he said. He helped serve as a counselor for over a year and a half, until he felt God calling him to start his own center.

In August of 2017, Everette made the decision to step down from his position at Family Life to start his own counseling center, with hopes of one day starting a drug court program for Lake County, Fla., where he had grown up. On February 1, Priority One opened its doors and in the past few months he has been able to help more than 15 clients.

“My life has been restored, my family is restored and God has been at the center of it all,” he said.

Early in 2018, Everette found out that he had been accepted into a Ph.D. program in counselor education at the University of Florida. UF offered him a teaching assistantship position that will pay for his degree and provide him with a stipend. Everette plans to continue his business while in the Ph.D. program.

He is also in the process of submitting a research article, “Connection: The Missing Link in Substance Abuse,” he wrote with **DR. ROSALIND (SHARPE) GOODRICH ’91**, associate professor of psychology and counselor education, and Dr. Tom Gollery, professor of education.

“I learned to get out of the way of God. I feel as if I never deserved all of this,” he said.

Now, as a counselor and looking to the future of pursuing his Ph.D., Everette is committed to helping others overcome their issues.

“I believe we need to be open and transparent with people to be successful in therapy. People just want help. We need to explore our own dungeon and do our own self work. The changing point for me was asking God for help,” he said.

Everette recognizes that he wouldn’t be where he is today without the support of many. In particular, he is grateful for the help of his grandparents, mother, sister, great-aunt and in-laws. He is also grateful for the help of many churches and ministries, including Hope International Church, First United Methodist Church Clermont, South Lake Christian Church and the Celebrate Recovery Ministry.