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Danny's new chance pays

By Peter Foley



Chance De Lune (nearest camera) races to victory in the Poco Vino Maiden Plate (1965m).Aremkay (purple cap) was second ahead of Blood Red (blue cap) third. (TracksidePhotography)

Danny Peisley knows where drugs and alcohol can take a person. He spent eight years trapped in addiction before finally turning his life around.

Danny battled drug and alcohol addiction in his late 20s and early 30s. He has been clean for the last six years. Now he wants to pay it forward.

He's ridden 400 winners, but it would have been many more if not for his lost years.

Nevertheless, brimming with positivity, he reckons his best is yet to come.

Rather than hide from his past, he embraces it; speaking publicly about the eight years he lost to addiction and the suicide of his brother, Nigel.

"It's my life, isn't it? You know, ups and downs, highs and lows and people die," Danny said.

"And sometimes when we're reaching out for something to help ease a pain, it's not always the best thing we're reaching out for."

A sensitive and anxious child growing up in Port Macquarie, he initially found solace in cannabis, then used alcohol and harder drugs.

"I had a loving family; very hard-working family; probably workaholics," he said.

"My Mum owned a lingerie shop in town, and my Dad owned a lot of trucks.

"Dad trained lots of winners back in the day and I was always going to the races with him."

Danny's talent in the saddle flourished but away from the racetrack he was heading down the wrong path.

"I didn't have the knowledge when I was younger of what I was doing. I thought I was just having fun, which I was. It was a lot of fun," he said.

"But it just became a problem. And then it became a problem that I couldn't stop.

"It just escalated and got out of hand. I was hanging around the unwanted."

The turning point eventually came with growing responsibilities and the painful realisation that his health was deteriorating.

Most importantly, he became a father. That forced Danny to confront a difficult truth.

"I got brought up with better values than I was showing. And I'd not long had a kid and he needed a role model and better values," he said. "I had responsibilities, and it just wasn't about me.

"I had to stop for me, too, because my health was going down."

The rebuilding process began when he linked with Eye Liner Stakes-winning trainer Daniel Bowen in Ballina who, Danny says, "taught me how to ride and be a jockey."

Now based on the Gold Coast, Danny is again building momentum in the saddle, earning support from some of racing's most respected stables.

"I've worked hard to get back to where I'm at right now, and I'm starting to get very good backing. Chris Waller puts me on and I'm stable rider for Shailer Racing," he said.

"So the best is going to be ahead of me, with their support."



The Tony Gollan-trained Hot Majesty (left), with up-and-coming apprentice Archie McColm inthe saddle, wins the TAB Class 2 Plate (1965m). Down Under Stunnah was second. (PeterFoley)

At Ipswich recently, Danny Peisley had another win, a two-length romp on Chance De Lune in the Poco Vino Maiden Plate (1965m) for trainer Jan Aitkenhead.

But Danny measures success by more than winners these days. He is studying a Certificate IV in Mental Health and hopes to use both his education and lived experience to help people facing mental health challenges.

"It's paying it forward," he said. "There's been a few people that I've helped already get off alcohol abuse and all that, just by getting clean myself. "I've got good experience, and you can't beat experience; that's the best way to teach people.

"If I told everybody in the world my story and it helped one person, well, that's enough."

Last Saturday, Danny rode at the Men Matter Raceday on the Gold Coast, which has raised more than $500,000 for men's health initiatives.

He ran second in the Arron Kennedy Memorial race, named after the Group 1-winning jockey who battled addiction before dying by suicide in 2007.

For Danny, it was another reminder that recovery can never be taken for granted.

"The moment I think I'm healed from drugs and alcohol or tough times is the moment I'm in danger because I've let my guard down," he said.

• The Ipswich meeting last Thursday was washed out by rain. The next meeting is scheduled for tomorrow.



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