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By: Emma Hill

I never lived in a sheltered household, but rather one that hushed up about the less than average mental struggles held within our family. It wasn't until a class at school introduced me to a recovered alcoholic, that I had my first real exposure to what can happen to those who let unavoidable genetics in.

As he stood there, I noticed his hands uncontrollably shaking.

I wondered if it was his older age, Parkinson's, perhaps?

Until, he revealed that he was only in his mid-sixties

And that chronic disease was not the cause

Of his beyond aged skin,

Or trembling limbs.

He paced back and forth,

Walking on a limp,

And appeared to stomp

With every step,

Rather than heel-to-toe.

And as he began his story,

The class went silent.

"You see," he said,

"I was born into this life. "

Alcohol addiction within his family co-worked with emotional abuse.

He continued a tale of no ups, only downs,

Of how he struggled with addiction

And

never

wished

To change.

In and out of rehab,

The man could not find

Motivation

Or happiness

Anywhere,

Except at the bottom of a bottle.

Or eight.

Or ten.

"Until one day," he said,

"I knew I was going to go insane,
Death is inviting
Insanity is not.
I knew I would rather die than go insane,
Because once you go insane - really insane,
No one can save you,"
"Right now," he said, "I can be saved."

Which led him to another center for rehab where he stayed for months and even longer after they felt he was good to go. He chose to stay to save himself. I won't forget when he looked at the class and said, "For the first time in over sixty years, I'm happy to be alive."
Wiping the tears from my eyes, I was glad to hear his words. Because only being aware of textbook-style hyperbolized stories is nothing compared to real ones.

I pitied him at first,
But then I realized
To be excited for him
And all of his unexplored opportunities
He has yet to discover.
And will do so,
With a hell of a survival story
To make each and every new moment
Exceedingly precious.

And I'll remember him
That nameless man with the shaking hands
As someone who was eager
To greet the life that had passed him
Throughout so many years before
As an old friend
With a handshake that is just as
unsteady, but strong
As he is.