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## The Innocence of the Innocent

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## The Innocence of the Innocent

Call it foolishness, my being naive, or the innocence of my youth—whatever it was, it enabled me to presume that the truths of my father were the only truths of this world. My father was a man who spoke with conviction, especially when it came to his beliefs about alcohol. Opening another bottle, he would drunkenly exclaim in our native tongue, “This right here, my son, is the drink of the Gods! Why would he make something so intoxicating and addicting if he didn’t want our constant indulgence in it? You’ll understand better when you’re finally a real man!” At the time, I didn’t realize that “real” men never abused their families, that “real” men didn’t abandon their wives and children, and that “real” men never guided the ones they love wrong.

In our household, my mother provided the sole income; she was the “breadwinner” of the family. As a result, this would allow my father to spend the hours of the day dancing with the drink. Furthermore, my siblings and I would witness the cold grasp alcohol held on our father every day of our childhood. I remember calling it the “Turning Point,” or the point at which my sober father, who loved his family, died, and the abusive monster took charge. Nothing my mother, my siblings, or I did was good enough for the monster. He would constantly berate, beat, and scream at us for every little thing. The monster knew our weaknesses, what made us cry and our deepest fears, as he accessed them through the sober father we all loved. It was that form of abuse the monster mastered in.

Yet, I still believed that alcohol was supposed to be used excessively, as that’s what God wanted. As sick and twisted as it may sound, I grew up believing that every man abused his family this way. I thought that every man used alcohol as a tool and performed this unjust task as a ritual for God’s acceptance. All the abuse, my father’s words, and confusion caused me to

develop an inner turmoil against myself in determining whether my father's actions were truly what God wanted, or if it was the monster taking over.

Sons are supposed to learn important life skills and lessons through their parents. Was what I learned from my father something I was to infect my own family with? Did his father do that to him? I was never able to ask my grandfather that question as he died of liver failure, due to alcohol, at the age of forty. I knew the answer and immediately began to grow sympathy for a monster that had plagued our household for as long as I could recall. However, it wasn't long until I realized that I had the option to think for myself. As a child, I always thought that sons had to follow in their parents' footsteps and use what they learned from them. It never once occurred to me that my own mind could form its own traditions, values, and lessons to pass on, ones that will be infinitely better than my father's. As I was discovering this, though, I continued to witness the havoc the monster and alcohol wreaked on my family. My little brother passed away in a car accident; my mother's family cut us off because of my father; my mother would find out my father had been cheating, and they got divorced. During this time, my ideals and moral values shifted. Rather than idolizing alcohol and abuse, as my father and younger self did, I began despising it. I blamed the beverage for all of the sadness, grief, and loss my family suffered.

Perhaps in the midst of my father attempting to convince his family that drinking alcohol on an excessive basis was what God wanted him to do, he was also trying to persuade himself. However, I was never able to ask him, as he died the same way his father died. Today, I know better. I have forged my own truths and have learned that I can stray from others'. I know that "real" men treat their families with respect and love. I know that "real" men don't abuse their

families in the name of alcohol and God. I can't tell someone how to know if something is true, or how to tell if they can trust someone. Maybe it takes traumatic life events, abuse, or a bad father, like I had, to teach one. However, I have realized that one must form their own opinions and thoughts, follow their intuition, and become their own self. It took me years to form my own mind, to see that the monster was wrong, and to finally open my eyes and become a real man.