

## The Genesis of a Poetry Collection by Bruce Harris

Writing for a cause makes different kinds of demands on the writer. Preaching and tub thumping might well put readers off, and if making the argument blatantly dismisses everything inconvenient to it, most readers will remain largely unconvinced.

However, when the cause relates to someone close to you, objectivity becomes very difficult, and if the cause is about an illness which remains incurable and untreatable even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a case to be made which is pretty much unanswerable. Of course, as with all kinds of writing, defining specific aims can create as many problems as it solves.

Anthony has been my partner for over thirty years and my civil partner for twelve. In October 2016, after a series of exhaustive tests, he was diagnosed with Huntington's Disease, a hereditary condition caused by a faulty gene and involving deteriorating cognitive and physical problems and eventually death. It is, essentially, a disease of the innocents; no-one brings it on themselves by self-harming lifestyles or a lack of fitness, and those who find themselves suffering from it do so simply because of a gene inherited at birth.

When lives are invaded by this kind of unwonted disaster, there is a need to try to come to terms with it and find an outlet for the emotions it inevitably lets loose. I have been writing poetry on and off all my life, and in 2016, I have already published two collections, both of them miscellanies covering many different subjects. Now there was a focus, and a twin aim of helping me to deal with the situation as well as raising awareness in relation to Huntington's Disease, which most people seem to know little about. It almost beggars belief that there is still this incurable disease among us, affecting almost every nation in the world and striking at people of all ages and both sexes, and in spite of continuing research efforts, no sense of urgency on the part of governments to make a determined push towards finding some answers and offering proper support to patients and carers while they're doing so.

I discovered that one of the editors who've published me, Alan Morrison of the Recusant, published his seventh collection, 'Shadows Waltz Haltingly', in 2015, and it included a number of poems making reference to his mother's illness and death as a result of HD. By that time, I had already written about our experiences before and after diagnosis, and Alan, who had previously reviewed my 'Kaleidoscope' collection, was prepared to put my collection out on his Caparison imprint. Of course, I consulted with my partner, and he also believed that, personal as some of the poems are, the dual goal of raising funds for the Huntington's Disease Association and spreading awareness of the illness justified making some of this part of our lives visible.

Writers sometimes struggle to find themes and inspiration, and in that respect, I found working to such a specific subject made it easier to gather ideas around it. How typical it is of how others put together a collection, I don't know, but the project had a centre which can support diverse approaches around it. As well as our experiences before, during and after diagnosis, it also refers to places where we've travelled (and will no longer be able to do so) and more general but linked themes.

The collection is called 'The Huntington Hydra', referring to the mythological many-headed beast and connecting with the variety of ways HD strikes at its victims. All the takings from it will be donated to the Huntington's Disease Association, [www.hda.org.uk](http://www.hda.org.uk), who have provided a Foreword to the book, and while we hope writers will support it for that reason alone, I feel that anyone who has, either now or in the past, had their lives invaded in this kind of way might find the book useful as a source of ideas about how they can express their feelings about the situation and find positive ways of reacting against such pain and negativity.

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**Bruce Harris** began writing in 2004 after a career in teaching and educational research. To date, he has published four short fiction collections, the first two consisting entirely of stories which have won prizes, commendations or listings in U.K. competitions. He has also published two anthologies, including published and award-winning poems. A new collection of 'rites of passage' fiction, 'Fallen Eagles', will be published in 2019. Another poetry anthology, 'The Huntington Hydra', came out in January 2019. Following his partner's diagnosis of Huntington's Disease, he is donating his takings from his writing to Huntington's Disease charities.

**The Huntington Hydra:**

<http://www.therecasant.org.uk/#/caparison-books/4538998565>  
[www.bruceleonardharris.com](http://www.bruceleonardharris.com)

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