

On Parkinson's Disease and the Art of Poetry  
POEM: Stone Harbour Walls

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To rise and still walk, to write and still speak, to reflect and decide with patience and clarity that serves wisdom, we must adapt to an increasingly impaired ability to perform such once-ordinary tasks. To accept such affliction and thus to endure, we must, regardless of spiritual identity, come to terms with the nature of our progressively difficult lives.

For many, this acceptance is found through work with a dedicated international community, tireless researchers of all cultures and perspectives, and our faithful and beloved caregivers. For still others, the path extends to the introspective and reaches its destination in the spiritual, seeking a deeper understanding of the will of the Almighty. Regardless of one's path to such enlightenment, it is only when acceptance is attained that we might fully and courageously dedicate ourselves to undertake the lifelong battle with Parkinson's Disease.

Adaptation thus requires us to acknowledge, accept and work within increasingly significant long-term physical and mental change. More profoundly, it asks us to submit to an emotional and often, spiritual, transformation whose success depends largely on the wisdom that one derives from being forged by the circumstances of life and consequences of our mortal nature. Compounded by the lethargy induced by agonists and progressive deterioration of health, one must ultimately find and summon from within, a voice so resolute and enduring as to oppose and surmount the anguish of all that disease and its consequences portend.

In the final line of *Ulysses*, Tennyson exhorts us, in a statement of monumental transcendence, to arise and command our destiny, to seek and hearken to the voice of the soul. For it is in impaired pursuit of our noble yet frail aspirations that his verse dignifies and sustains us, and all who follow, under circumstances of relentless trial. The form which Tennyson bids us all seek, a voice singular, resolute and enduring, emerges from the literal embodiment of the human spirit in the creation of poetry.

One might argue that *Ulysses* stands as a testament to Tennyson and the universal importance of poetry as art; more profound, however, is what it represents for the afflicted. It is in this gathering of the courageous and hopeful, of those stricken by the sinister mystery of Parkinson's disease and our brothers and sisters, stricken with other disabling disorders, that his words provide an

enduring expression of will – one which opposes physical weakness with emotional strength and endures with unyielding courage our lifelong hardship.

Now reconciled to the emotional effects of an incurable disease and evolving through months of escalating self – discipline dedicated to a single poem, I was blessed by the wisdom of hardship to understand that these new steps were but an ascent. Not to yield to physical and artistic weakness, but to replenish my spirit with the hope that follows from what one gains from the wisdom of physicians and a community of artistic courage. To seek and to find a new voice that speaks in the language of creative goals that fill the abyss and provide comfort to others. These new skills, forged in unrelenting pursuit of those forms, have evolved into what serves me as a path to self-reclamation. It is thus in pursuit of such transformation of our common and afflicted spirits that I humbly, with utmost respect, offer to the Congress for consideration and critical evaluation, the poem *Stone Harbour Walls*.

Whether poetry is the primary force by which we recast either image or essence of our destiny, or it is instead our affliction that drives the poet, I submit that it is ultimately the Almighty's gift of life itself that bestows sanctity upon art.

For it is not the nature of our reaction to this disease, or any other, but the sacred value that we derive from life itself, that ordains poetry and the process by which it is created.

It is thus no less than that, which serves, in our greatest of trials, to sustain our values, awaken our courage, and ennoble our brief lives.

Stone Harbour Walls  
G.W. Hilburger

*Wave upon wave  
of tempest and storm  
lays siege to my life.  
I am weary and worn.*

*With each day anew,  
incessantly, it progresses.  
Tasks for one  
now take two,  
as my spouse, her love  
courageously professes.*

*Each day I go forth  
upon unsteady slow feet.  
My spirit is torn  
and tempted to sleep.*

*But the voice of my soul  
unto me rises and calls,  
like the tide of the Sea  
upon stone harbour walls.*

*Let the voyage of courage now begin.  
Without anger or remorse,  
must we plot anew the ship's course,  
guided by the Voice from within.*

*No towering masts,  
dressed in full sail.  
No hull, trim and fast,  
upon the Sea to prevail.*

*Yet worthy vessel y'are,  
with a strong, sturdy rudder.  
Sailin' at night,  
with nothin' but stars,  
tho' your hands,  
they tremble and shake,  
and they shudder..*

*From this unchosen journey  
must we yet not turn.  
For, from life,  
The Almighty  
has ordained us to learn.  
For whom but He,  
Whose mighty Hand calmeth the Sea,  
Giveth both conscience for compass  
and a will whose essence is free.*