## THE NEW MILLENNIAL HARBINGER

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11th February 1974: Family legend has it that my paternal grandfather, Sigurd Johan Bangsund, was first mate on a Norwegian ship at the time, and that he met my grandmother when she was a passenger on that ship to Melboume. I don't know how much of the story is true; I don't know when they reached Melbourne, but it must have been about 1907-8. The legend has it they were married in St Barnabas' Church of England at South Melbourne. They went back to Scandinavia. My father was bom in Denmark in 1909, my aunt Alfhild in Tromsø, Norway, a couple of years later, and my aunt Evelyn in Melbourne. I don't know when Sigurd gained his master's certificate, but he was always known as Captain Bangsund - usually Captain John. actually, since Bangsund was too hard to pronounce and Sigurd impossible, in those days.

He was always old to me (which is understandable: he was about 60 when I was born). an old, gentle, inward-looking man, his three loves Tromse - and Norway in general -. the sea and his evangelical Lutheran faith. His family? I don't know where they would have ranked among his loves, but I think he didn't have much say about his family in any case: my grandmother, who pre-deceased him by about twenty years, and who therefore is not as strong in my memory, struck me as something of a scold who treated him as she might a small child. He was the one who read and accumulated books, who (come to think of it) probably exposed me to 'classical' music for the first time - in the form of Grieg's plano concerto.

In 1964 I bought my first tape-recorder, and in 1965 my father died. At some time during those years I made a tape of my grandfather translating a letter from his brother, my great-uncle Erling, and I still have it. It is rather painful to listen to; he was then in his mid-80s and had very much withdrawn into himself; we had to keep on prompting him, reminding him why he was

there, what he was doing. Some years earlier I had met him in Finders Street and we had spoken, he as affably as ever, with the nervous self-deprecating giggle which I seem to have inherited from him, but he didn't know who I was. My aunts brought him to my father's funeral, on my birthday in 1965, and again to my wedding in 1966. On both occasions he stood around smiling, speaking when spoken to, but obviously not the least aware of what was going on.

The last time I saw him was probably at my wedding; at least I can't think of an occasion I can positively identify as being since then. And at that time, and even more strongly at my father's funeral, I felt something of a sense of loss when I locked at him, and something of a sense of shame, and a very definite anger. My aunts had brought him to the funeral; he didn't know - he did not know! -, standing there smiling in the sun, that his only son was being buried. And my aunts brought him to the wedding, and again he stood around smiling, not in the way, smiling an easy defence against the outside world that had long since ceased to be his world. And again I felt angry, and shamed for him. Why couldn't they leave him alone? Why must they humiliate him (not to himself, but in my eyes) by bringing him along - him: Captain Bangsund - like a pet monkey?

Does this explain (I ask myself) why I felt no sense of loss two days ago, when my mother sent me the telegram saying he had died last Thursday? Maybe so, maybe not. Maybe I miss my father too much, still, to reel strongly about the death of someone as remote from me as my grandfather. Certainly the death of my aunt Evelyn made no impact on me, and she was a nice person, if a little thoughtless at times (in matters that affected me, I mean: I can't speak for her sons). But the sense of anger returned

today, and returned strongly. And that sense of shame, which might or might not be the same thing.

I rang my mother, and she said she was sorry I hadn't come down for the funeral. I said I wasn't sorry, that I wouldn't have gone to Melboume today even if I'd had the money (which I haven't), that I couldn't stand the thought of grieving publicly for a man who died to me years ago, and that I wanted nothing to do with my relatives especially in that situation.

On Saturday moming the two Melboume papers carried advertisements notifying the death and funeral of my grandfather. He had died on Thursday afternoon. My mother discovered this when she read the death notices,

The main death notice, which lists more relatives on that side of the family than I knew existed, concludes with the words: 'Peace at last. Jesus never fails.' The writer of the advertisement, in her grief, neglected to mention my grandfather's death to his daughter-in-law.

When one considers that the aunt concerned was granted power of attorney over her father's affairs a few years ago, and has since spent all of his money, including the money he had set aside for his funeral, one wonders to what exactly 'Peace at last' refers.

Pardon me for being somewhat cynical. These things tend to happen when there is a death in the family. I am happy in the confidence (one cannot, by the very circumstances, be sure of such things, ever) that my grandfather never really knew what was going on around him. I think he probably died happy.

My father didn't die happy - but that's another story, a story that I still can't tell after nine years.

I have a sort of hope - not really a serious hope, just a kind of wistful feeling - that both Sigurd and his son Leif are now seated on the right hand of the God they believed in and worshipped in spirit and truth. They deserve it, if anyone ever did.

(But if they are so seated it means I will be sort of left out in the cold, so to speak...)

This is just possibly the worst 'poem' I've ever read:

Master Mariner of the 'S. S. Reliance'

Descendent of Vikings this man of the sea Son of a nation who sail round the world, When asleep is the sea he laughs in his glee When troubled and switted his skill is unfurled.

His lullaby song was a song of the waves, Dashed into foam on the rocks and the shore He frolicked on beaches where blue water laves, Baptized by the sea to be her's evermore.

How placid the grandeur of Norwegian Sound, With mirror-like water calm and serene. And pine trees whose plumage and fragrance abound, The snow-capped mountains add charm to the scene.

Environment surely must play a great part Forming and moulding the life of a man, Its noble serenity lives in his heart, Smallness nor meanness go not with its plan,

So clamly he stands by the wheel of his boat Guiding it surely through storm and through calm, Delivering safely his charges afloat The 'Reliance' and he have conquered alarm,

He is monarch of all who enter his ship Seamen and passengers out for the day His standard of ruling is 'good fellowship'. Come with your hamper and be blithe and gay.

Just cast cares aside and be out to enjoy Sparkle of sunshine that gleams on the waves. Forget all your worries and things that do cloy He's at the wheel all anxiety saves.

The wish of your friends who go down to the sea Is 'success to the S. S. Reliance, That your form at the helm they always shall see While you grant all requests with compliance,'

So 'carry on, Skipper', bring joy to the poor Who cannot afford to drink of champagne But whose courage to fight and power to endure All ills of misfortune still they retain.

Sincerely yours, John.
THOMAS N. CUTTLE
'Holmsdale'
Canterbury Rd
Forest Hill (Victoria)

14 August 1938

Pretty rotten - but if Joseph Tishler or William McGonagall had written something about me I guess I would be pretty proud. Carry on, Skipper!