Fru Jørgine Bangsund
Formann 1904—1906

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

The Acurate Journal of Experimental Pantopragmatics

is published by John Bangsund, PO Box 80, West Brunswick, Victoria 3055, Australia, for members of ANZAPA and FAPA, and maybe a few other people, depending on how it turns out. This issue is number 69, an odd sort of number however you look at it, and I am typing this on the third day of Ramadan, 12 May 1986.

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When I read that David Grigg and Leanne Frahm had resigned from ANZAPA I wondered whether it was time for me to leave, too. I haven't done much for ANZAPA or FAPA in recent years, which means (rightly) that hardly anyone talks to me, but I do look forward to the mailings, to the things that my favourite members of these associations write for all of us. Losing Leanne and David is a blow, but they are striving for a wider audience, and I wish them well. Since you are all the audience I have, I think I'll stay on a while yet, if that's OK by you.

Bangsunds All Over

PG 66, commenced October 1984, was somewhat unfortunately subtitled *Youth's Magic Hooter: Fanzin eines unfahrenden Gesellen*. It was one of the better issues I have done, but the 'non-wayfarer' of the subtitle (by which I meant myself) turned out to be that issue: it was never printed, and exists only in the form of five or six photocopies. (If you would like a copy, please ask; it's no trouble.) In that issue I recounted my sudden and most unexpected discovery of American Bangsunds, and invited readers to find more, since I had not previously heard of Bangsunds outside of Norway, Australia and (believe it or not) Wales. I wrote to John Berry and Denny Lien about this, and John replied before I'd reached the third page of PG 66:

There are, in fact, a couple of Bangsunds in the local phone book: Marvin O., at 10341 Fischer Place NE, and Norman A., at 838 NE 81st Street. (Their zip codes would be 98125 and 98115, according to the zip code map in the front of the phone book.) I'm not surprised at the presence of Bangsunds, since the two centers of Scandinavian immigration in this country are northern Minnesota and Seattle...

Denny took a little longer. 'Sorry to be so long in answering your letter of 12 Nov 84,' he wrote on 19 February 1986, 'but I was in the bathtub.' And he went on to list more Bangsunds than I'd ever heard of, *including another John Bangsund!* Right there in Prairie Home Companion Land: John and Amy Bangsund, of Bass Lake Road, New Hope, Minnesota. Altogether, Denny found seven lots of Bangsunds in Minneapolis and one or two in St Paul (Tim and Pat, unless there are two sets of Tim and Pat Bangsund, I suspect crossed the river while Denny's search was in progress); also eight in Oslo, where you might more or less expect to find Bangsunds. Denny's library, unfortunately, is so computerized that at the time of writing he was able only to look for Bangsunds in Minnesota and outside the USA.

But he did do some other searches, outside the telephone directories, and came up with three more American Bangsunds: David R., of Portland, Oregon; Katherine Margaret, of Lincoln, Nebraska; and Edward L., of parts unknown (where the wrestlers come from).

Katherine Margaret was the American Business Women's Association Woman of the Year, 1975 (*Who's Who of American Women*, 1979-80). Edward L.

was co-author (with Andy K. Hepler) in 1978 of a study done for Boeing and NASA called *Technology Requirements for Advanced Earth Orbital Transportation Systems* — summarized as 'Feasibility study of reusable aerodynamic space vehicle'. I know how I felt when I saw Challenger explode on my TV screen, and have no words for that feeling; I can't imagine how Edward L. Bangsund felt. All I do is edit books, and the worst I can do is edit a book so badly that it has to be pulped, which so far hasn't happened. Of all the Bangsunds I've never met, my heart goes out most to Edward.

My sister Joy, who has long since been to Redlands, California, and met Clifford Bangsund (whose phone call from somewhere in downtown Melbourne back on 21 October 1984 set off this search) and his family, tells me that America is teeming with Bangsunds. The big problem, she says, is working out how we are all related. Cliff knew nothing of the Tromsø Bangsunds; we know of no others. But there was a town in Norway, maybe still is (it was in the Oxford Atlas ten years ago), called Bangsund, and maybe that's where we all came from originally. Where Joy and I differ (among other things) is that she wants to know where we came from, how we are related; I reckon we'll work that out in time, but just now I want to get in touch with all these Bangsunds and say: Hi! What's it like being a Bangsund where *you* are?

The cover of this issue, if it works out, is a photo of Jørgine Bangsund, who (if my Norwegian is as good as my Latin, and that's not very good) was president of the Women's Auxiliary of the Tromsø Workingmen's Association from 1904 to 1906, and died in 1907. The photo is from the centenary publication *Tromsø Arbeiderforening 1853–1953*, a slim volume with an introduction by my grandfather's brother, Erling Bangsund, who was president of the association that year.

Vexations

is the title of a work for piano by one of my favourite composers, Erik Satie, and a month or so back I heard some of it on ABC FM. I taped it for future reference, but somehow suspect I will not be returning to it often. 'Vexations' contains just 180 notes, and takes about 80 seconds to play; or, looking at it another way, it takes 18 hours 20 minutes to play, because Satie directed that it be played '840 times without a break'. In order to do this, he wrote, 'it is as well to prepare oneself in maximum privacy with the aid of extreme degrees of immobility'.

Satie, I think, has not yet been recognized as a great composer (which I have no doubt he was) simply because he was also a great humourist, an inspired eccentric, something of a cynic, and probably depressed as hell. He influenced a whole generation of French composers, at least one of them, Ravel, a genius, and the rest at least entertaining and at best approaching Ravel's stature. He anticipated, and probably would have disowned, Dada, existentialism and absurdism. Among his friends were the greatest artists of his time; and he was one of the loneliest artists of all time. A pathetic little great man.

In September 1963 John Cage and nine other pianists, working in shifts, performed 'Vexations' in its entirety. It was, I am sure, a great and moving experience. And yet: employing ten pianists to perform the work wasn't what Satie had directed. He had written it for just one.

There the matter rested for twenty-odd years. Then Reinbert de Leeuw, arguably the world's finest exponent of Satie's piano works, attempted to perform 'Vexations' in its entirety in a hall in Amsterdam. Unfortunately, the hall-keeper hadn't been informed of the significance of the occasion,

and after the 117th repetition of the piece he turned the lights off and threw everyone out. So far so bad. I have met a few hall-keepers like that in my time, enemies of art to a man, all of them. Undeterred, Reinbert de Leeuw made a record for Philips of 'Vexations', or part of it, a few years ago, and this year ABC FM got round to playing it. The basic piece is played just 35 times, so to get the full impact of the total work you need to play it non-stop 24 times. Reviewing the record in the February 1984 *Gramophone*, Max Harrison said: 'I should prefer not to receive letters from anyone who actually does this.'

He won't be hearing from me. The 35 playings of 'Vexations' are sufficiently different not to be entirely boring, but it's not a tape I'll be rushing back to hear. I don't like 'Einstein on the Beach' much, either. Was Satie the father of minimalism? I don't think so: he was a humourist, and while I can imagine him chuckling over the excesses of minimalism, I can't imagine him endorsing it. Wagner, I think, was the father of minimalism.

Or was it Alexander Campbell? Two days ago I wrote four pages about the Churches of Christ in Australia, my religious experiences, and

The College of the Bible

— where I spent the happiest year or so of my life. Boring, Sally said, in the nicest way. I reread what I'd written, and yep, it was pretty boring. Not only that. Today, looking through some back issues of PG, I realized that I'd written it all before. Vexation...

There was some good stuff about motorbikes. I'd written that before, too.

The only new things I said, in fact, were these: The College is moving, on account of a freeway passing through it and my fond memories, from Glen Iris to Mulgrave. And I recalled two men I knew who entered college the year it was established, 1904: Randall Pittman and Will Gale.

Will Gale gave me a book when I entered college in 1957. He said: Have few books and know them well. I wish I'd done that. I've bought and sold thousands of books since then, and can barely remember what books I have, let alone what is in them.

I suppose it was therapeutic, writing four pages about the College of the Bible. And that I got thoroughly drunk while writing them, I suppose, just goes to show what a sentimental old idiot I am. Ah, what a great future I have behind me! We should all be so lucky.

Youth's Magic Hooter

is not a respectful description of *Australian Science Fiction Review*, and only marginally accurate. Like most momentous things in my life, I was conned into publishing ASFR — twenty years ago, when I was a stripling of 27. Is there such a thing as a fat stripling, with a beard?

ASFR taught me about editing. Then, in 1968, when Leigh Edmonds invented ANZAPA, I started learning about writing. In 1971 I joined FAPA and started learning again. By 1990, I reckon, I'll start getting the hang of it.

To be a writer — not that this is the main ambition of my life — you must do two things. Don't become an editor. If you become an editor, don't go freelance. I became a freelance editor just on ten years ago, in July 1976, and I haven't written anything interesting since. Without the stimulus of everyday life you are reduced to writing about your days in college, motorbikes you have known, books and music no-one cares about.

Working at home, you are almost totally cut off from everyday life. It's right outside your door if you want to step out and see some of it, but then you're not working. I see much the same people most days, and wonder occasionally who they are, what they do, what they talk about when they step back inside their doors. Maybe they wonder that about me. I have lived in West Brunswick for four years now (longer than Sally and I have lived anywhere else, by the way, since I left home in 1957, she in 1970), and people around here are gradually getting used to the idea. It's like a village full of visitors and through traffic, so it takes at least four years to start being accepted as a villager. I'm not on first-name terms yet with anyone — even Shirl next door doesn't actually call me by name — but there are maybe a dozen people I can say G'day to, a few others I can nod to (we're working up to speaking), and four or five, all working folk, with whom I can have short bursts of something approaching conversation. The latter, if they call me anything, call me Mister Bangsund. None of them know what I do for a living, if anything, except Des the newsagent, who thinks I'm some sort of writer.

I handed Des my Tatts numbers this morning, and he said the most personal thing he's ever said to me, about how neat my handwriting is, and I said 'Some of us are neat, and some are rich.' 'And most of us are neither,' Des said, laughing. So I told him a story. Six or seven years ago I went to see a publisher, to talk about a manuscript I'd just finished editing, and one of her assistant editors was in her office, and she showed the manuscript to him and said Look how neat that is: *that's* the way a real editor does it. I was embarrassed for the young bloke, but I needn't have been. He got out of publishing and into journalism, went overseas and made a mint, owns a house in an expensive suburb — and he still can't spell, he can't write a grammatical sentence, except by accident, and his handwriting is atrocious. He'll probably finish up writing books, I said to Des, if he hasn't already — and it'll be just my bad luck to have to edit them. 'You can't win, can you!' said Des. 'Maybe tonight,' I said, pocketing my Tatts tickets. 'Good luck!' he said.

And that's the longest conversation I've had with any of the villagers in four years.

How To Get The Economy Moving

It occurred to me one day in the bank, the ANZ here in West Brunswick, which I have favoured with my custom since the State Bank closed my account two years ago. I always get in the wrong queue in banks, and supermarkets, in fact any place where you have to join queues. So do you? Right! That's what occurred to me this day in the bank: I am probably not the only person who invariably gets in the slow queue; there are probably others. Bruce Gillespie, for example. I'll bet Bruce is someone else who always picks the wrong queue. Well (I wondered), what would happen if I was standing here in the slow queue, and someone like Bruce came in and stood in the other queue?

This, I reckon, is what is going on all over the country, wherever there are queues: people like me, and Bruce, and maybe your good self, are accidentally slowing things down by getting in different queues. What we need is a national identification system — something simple, like a big red S sewn on the back of your coat — that would get all the people who join slow-moving queues into the same queue. I wouldn't make it compulsory. Anyone in plain clothing silly enough to join an S queue would automatically be presented with a free big red sew-on S at the check-out or teller's window. And for those in the S queue, well, we're used to it, and we'd have something in common to talk about while we waited and watched the folk in the other queue hustling the economy along.

Requiescat: Donovan, 1974—1986

Dick Bergeron invited me to write a column for the revived *Warhoon*, one of the greater honours I have had in my years in fandom, and the first instalment appeared in no.29. I called it 'Cheesehenge'. It was reprinted in Patrick Nielsen Hayden's *Fanthology 1981*. The second instalment wasn't to Dick's liking. I received *Warhoon* 30 and a couple of issues of Dick's *Wiz*, wrote him a letter about the absurdity of his feud with Ted White (I think that's the feud Dick was involved in; Avedon Carol may have been in there somewhere, too; none of it of any interest to me, except that I was sad to see old friends feuding, which is roughly what I said to Dick), and I haven't heard from Dick since. That's background. The second column I wrote for Dick started like this:

Spears are OK, I remarked to Donovan (the ginger one everyone forgets: he's never quite got over Dylan being the only cat mentioned in the fiftieth annish of *Amazing*), you get used to spears after a while. He agreed. Donovan always agrees with me. Also, Donovan never sleeps on the typewriter. He's a good bloke. Every night when he pops in for supper he tells me what's been happening in that exciting world beyond and beneath the house that only cats know, and he always ends by saying something like 'Rrrrow', which I think means 'OK? You got it?', and I say 'Rrrrow' with a slightly different inflexion, which I hope means 'OK, I got it,' and this can go on for some time, until he's sure I've grasped the finer points. And that reminded me today, when Warhoon 29 arrived, to mention those spears to him. You get used to them, I said, after a while, the barbs, the shafts, the slings and arrows and things. 'Rupf,' he said.

I'm not sure how to tell him about that hinged gorgonzola [Dick's illustration introducing my column]. Cheese he understands — loves the stuff — but the hinge is a concept that eludes him entirely. When we moved into this house [at Alphington, which rather dates this piece of writing, since we moved to West Brunswick in 1982] I carefully explained the operation of the flywire door to Dylan and Donovan, and Dylan mastered it within weeks — food this side, freedom that side, just push or pull, jump quickly, and the hinge does the rest. In Donovan's world only wicked or futile things are done quickly and noisily, so he waits for a human to operate the hinge. Dylan is a jumping, skittering, noisy sort of cat who appears from nowhere at great speed and knocks things over. He talks to himself a lot. Donovan quietly drools when you stroke him; Dylan sticks his bum in your face.

Dylan is the one people remember. He gets Xmas cards. He is mentioned in fanzines, even in *Amazing Stories*. Some people I know have never been mentioned in any issue of any sf magazine, not even in a fanzine. So there's a lesson for you. I call it Dylan's back-up position.

Cheesehenge was constructed by a Welsh editor of biochemistry texts [long since scientific-editorial consultant to the Indonesian Government], my friend Paul Stapleton, one day when there was a party at his place: he just decided there must be a more interesting way of serving up a plate of cheese, so he made a little model of Stonehenge. He built it, I named it, he laughed, and I decided instantly to publish a fanzine called Cheesehenge. I had not quite got round to doing that when Dick asked me to write a column for him. So now you know.

Donovan was born at Bungendore, New South Wales, about the end of September or beginning of October in 1974. Sally and I were given Dylan early in October (I wanted to call him Wombat, but was overruled), and days later we found ourselves lumbered with a second kitten, a puny little ginger bloke with most of his whiskers missing, and I insisted he be named Donovan.

Dylan was always everyone's cat, still is: you pat him, he's yours. But he was the under-cat (if I can call him that): after a few months of being regularly beaten-up by Dylan, Donovan asserted his dominance, his right to be top cat in our house — and even now his ghost haunts Dylan. There are places Dylan won't go, things Dylan won't do, because they are Donovan's territory, Donovan's prerogative.

Everything that can go wrong with a cat happened to Donovan. Not that he ever complained. He would just come in, talk a bit, maybe fight a bit with Dylan, and settle down for the night. For the first few years he would pick a different place to settle down in each night, but as he got older he would settle in the same spot for maybe eight or ten nights in a row. More often than not, he would pick some spot Dylan liked, belt him up a bit, and stay there until the novelty wore off.

About this time last year we knew he was getting old fast. Then, in August, we were forced to leave Dylan and Donovan with the vet while we were in Tasmania, and over the next six months we realized that Donovan had gone round the final bend during that time. He had always been the outside cat. Dylan's poofy job was being friendly to visitors; Donovan protected the house and grounds. Suddenly he was scared of going outside. He spent his days asleep inside, and when let out — our brave Donovan, who for most of his life terrorized any other cat that came within half a mile of his territory — he cowered under the old bathtub we have here in our back yard.

I remember a day at Bridgewater, not long after we moved there from Canberra, when Donovan seemed to have taken on all the cats of the district in the ravine below our house. We thought we'd lost him then: the fights went on all day, we'd never heard such ferocious sounds, but he limped in victorious. And beat-up Dylan, just for the hell of it, before he retired.

During February this year Donovan became whatever the feline equivalent is of senile. He sprayed and defecated more or less at random. Sally and I tried not to admit to each other what we knew must be done, but after a week or so we put it in words, and cuddled our dear old friend one last time, and took him to his last appointment with the vet at Pascoe Vale. 'PTS', the vets call it — 'put to sleep'. And that's how it was, all it was, that last Saturday in February. One lethal injection — Donovan was so used to injections, so tough-skinned, he'd actually blunted vets' needles at times, all he was worried about was the odd people, the odd smells, the unaccustomed table and floor and walls, too much to take in all at once — and he was gone. In death he was magnificent, so relaxed, at peace with everyone and everything, so big, so handsome. I stroked him, ran my hand through his magnificent golden coat, and somehow found the way through my tears to the vet's back door, and Sally drove us home.

Miss him? Of course. That's not the hardest part. We *expect* him, still. Dylan's in, where's...? And as I've said, or suggested, Dylan is utterly disorientated. He won't eat where they both ate, refuses utterly to use the kitty-litter box. He's so used to being dominated by Donovan that he doesn't know what to do now, most of the time. Our permission is not enough: he's missing Donovan's instructions. And the oddest thing of all is that he is turning brown. I thought I was imagining it, a trick of the light, but it's true: as if in sympathy with Donovan, Dylan is gradually turning brown.

Me, I'm turning grey (except where I'm getting balder), and a fair bit of this I blame Dylan for. He's the inside cat, and I'm the cat that's worked at home most of the time since July 1976, and lately we haven't been adjusting too well.

Carry On Knocking

One day in 1958 I preached a sermon at the Newmarket Church of Christ — someone else's sermon probably, but never mind — on a text from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 12 and verse 16. You will recall that Herod had thrown Peter in prison, but an angel sprung him, and after he had considered the thing he went to hole-up at his friend Mary's place, where his mates were having a prayer meeting. Well, he knocketh at the door, and this sheila Rhoda came to hearken unto who might be calling at this hour of night, and she was so tickled pink when she recognized Peter's voice that she rushed back to the meeting and said Hey, youse blokes, guess who's outside! And they said unto her, Thou art mad. Well, you can imagine the scene: a real barney, on for young and old, with chapter and verse flying about and Amen and Thus saith the Lord, you know how these Christians carry on. And all this time Peter is out in the cold, probably thinking there's something wrong with the organization when it's easier to get out of Herod's prison than into your cobbers' house. But did he despair? Not a bit of it. Verse 16: 'But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.' Mind you, in the very next verse, after he'd told them his amazing story, he decided to hole-up somewhere else — 'And he departed, and went into another place' — and you couldn't blame him after the treatment he'd had from these nongs. Anyway, there I am, preaching about steadfastness or something, illustrated by 'But Peter continued knocking!' And about the third or fourth time I said it, there's this bloke up on his roof, next door to the church, and right on cue he starts hammering. 'Better let him in,' says some wag in the congregation, and everyone packs up laughing and the entire homiletical effect is ruined. A few months after that I left theological college and returned to civilian life, but that's another story.

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25 May I wrote that on 27 December 1983, probably for an issue of PG that never appeared, and worked it into a long, rambling article about music and religion and things for the March 1984 *Society of Editors Newsletter*. I have produced about fifty issues of that newsletter since 1978, and with luck the April 1986 issue was my last. But giving up the newsletter means that I have to get back into the routine of writing for ANZAPA and FAPA (and paying for printing what I write), and over the last fortnight I've felt I've lost the knack. Maybe you'll let me know.

Today, just for the hell of it, I went looking for the Newmarket Church of Christ. Newmarket is not a suburb in its own right — it doesn't even have a post office; it's just vaguely that part of Flemington surrounding the Newmarket railway station. In turn, Flemington is part of the City of Melbourne, like Carlton — and today it's rather like the way Carlton was thirty years ago, not yet gentrified, an untrendy working-class suburb, with whole streets of elegant and comfortable-looking houses, but far more streets of squalid little weatherboard cottages, dotted with blocks of flats. Finsbury Street seems to have been lost in transition. At the top end there are a few brick houses, but the rest is a mixture of little cottages (some unbelievably tiny) and tawdry flats flung up in the 1960s. The old weatherboard chapel has gone, and with it the house next door; in their place is an unlovely block of flats. I pulled up opposite, trying to remember what the chapel looked like, wondering how a chapel and a house could have been fitted on that small block. The Renault 16 idling unhappily, I realized that I had pulled up behind another Renault 16 — the first sign these days that a suburb is becoming trendy. I drove off thinking maybe I didn't want to remember Finsbury Street as it was. Memories of the church that met there will do.