

# HOWARD BERGERSON

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Howard Bergerson was born in Minneapolis on July 29, 1922 to Margaret Jeske, who six years later married Ludvick (or Louie) Bergerson. Howard served in World War II, and moved in 1951 to a small house in Sweet Home, Oregon, down the block from a shingle mill where he was employed for over 40 years.

In 1967, Howard met Nellie, suffering from multiple sclerosis, with three young children, Gerald age 10, Earl age 8 and Merla age 4. Not wanting to see this family broken up, he married her, exhibiting a nobility of character inexplicable to many (Dave Silverman, Kickshaws editor from 1969 to 1976, wrote me “The poor fellow is the only martyr I know. And I don’t even know to what!”). He found Gerald’s “disruptive, destructive and criminal” tendencies were too much to deal with, even resorting to hypnosis (with some success) to modify his behavior. By the age of 15 Gerald had left home, to live with relatives. When Merla “fled the coop” in 1982, he had to get a home health aide to watch Nellie while he worked. Nellie died sometime in the 1980s; Howard later married the teenage home health aide, but this apparently did not last long.

Howard himself suffered from grand mal epilepsy, fortunately well-controlled by medication.

When Faith and I visited Howard in the summer of 1979, he was living with Nellie and Merla (the boys by then had left) in straitened circumstances. His somewhat dilapidated house was filled with books which Howard had collected over many years, piled from floor to ceiling (Faith joked that the books in the living room were helping to hold up the roof). There were at least twelve thousand of them on a variety of subjects, principally linguistics, philosophy and sociology, which he donated to the Sweet Home library in 2005. It is likely that he read many of them, for he is a polymath, knowledgeable in a variety of fields, from mathematics to numerology, from physics to reincarnation. A journalist who interviewed him in 1995 commented “You might think he was a professor of philosophy or mathematics...he speaks clearly and precisely, pausing frequently to gather his thoughts.” Howard denied receiving a formal education in reading or writing, adding “to me, education implies something systematic—there was nothing systematic about the way I got to be who I am”.

Howard’s first passion was poetry. In his youth he wrote many poems, published in *The Spirit of Adolescence* in a limited edition in 1950. As a result of this work, the state of Oregon nominated him as its Poet Laureate in 1957, but he declined. His reason? “At that time, McCarthyists ran the government and anyone who took an official position was subject to intense scrutiny” which he did not want.

His interests broadened to palindromic poetry in the winter of 1961-2. Howard had discovered Bombaugh’s *Oddities and Curiosities of Words and Literature* (the 1961 Dover reprint) which contains the palindrome “Egad, a base tone denotes a bad age”. He became fascinated with the thought that maybe there could exist a full-length palindromic poem containing a coherent story; aided by a friend, he generated lists of palindromic words such as *redder* and reversal pairs such as *ergo/ogre* and *dual/laud*. He felt as if he were under the spell of a magician with a kind of excitement he had never dreamed of before! In the middle 1960s he finally got around to

composing “Edna Waterfall”, a palindrome of 1034 letters which later was cited by Guinness as the longest palindromic creation in the English language. Here is his description of its creation:

The poem expanded and contracted for three weeks; it would expand to points where where the *poem* was still developing but the *palindromic* paths were all closed off, so it was necessary to go back to the nearest point where alternative palindromic paths existed, from which point it would expand anew. Every day for three weeks I filled a wastebasket with these crumpled dead ends. Toward the end of the third week I came to an impossible situation: I needed a word that would work somehow at the bottom end, but at the top it had to be a verb, adjective or adverb, and only one word was available and it was a noun: waterfall. So I decided to make that Edna’s last name, and soon the palindrome was finished.

The poem itself, perhaps Howard’s first palindromic creation, is given below.

Deliver no evil, avid diva I saw die.  
Render an unsung aria for erotogenic id.  
O never egg Alec Naif, fairer Edna Waterfall,  
A nonassimilative, volatile reef-dweller—apparelless rag!  
Natasha I saw die, render an unsung aria.  
For Edna Waterfall—a liar—familiar feuds live:  
Dastard Ogre and Edna!  
Pupils, one tacit song or poem—or didos deft.  
Celestial lives (Ida rapt as Naomi)  
Laud smegma, alas—keep never a frondlet on.  
So did no solo snoop malign  
Irised sad eyen. Oh dewed yen—  
O tressed May noon, hello! Tacit songs rev!  
Love’s barge of assent carts base tarts,  
A cerise deb abed, unreined flesh.  
Sin—a viand—Edna sees and Edna has,  
Or bust fossettes, or redder rosettes.  
Soft sub-rosa hand Edna sees,  
And, Edna, I vanish—self-denier!  
Nude babe, desire castrates abstractness.  
A foe grabs Evolver’s Gnostic Atoll, eh? No!  
On, yam (dessert-honeydewed), honeyed as desiring!  
I lampoon solos on didos. Not eld nor far  
(Even peek! “Salaam, gems dual,” I moan)  
Sat Paradise Villa, its elect fed.  
So did Romeo prognosticate no slip up,  
And Edna, ergo, drats a devil’s due:  
“Frail! I’m a frail all a-fret, a-wander!  
O fair Agnus nun, a red Nereid was I.  
Ah Satan, garb’s seller,  
Apparel (lewd fee) relit a love vital I miss anon.  
All a-fret, a wanderer I affiance—  
Lagger even odic—in ego ‘torero.’  
Fair Agnus nun, a red Nereid was I.  
Avid diva, live on reviled.”

This palindrome is remarkable for the number of long words it incorporates, as well as the palindromic words or two-word phrases (and Edna, avid diva, deb abed) it contains.

Howard became the second editor (after Borgmann) of *Word Ways* for one year, in 1969, but was in no financial position to personally assume ownership of the magazine when it was axed by Greenwood Periodicals. Still, one benefit did result: he wrote a book, *Palindromes and Anagrams* which was issued by Dover Publications in 1973, for a flat fee (no royalties). At least 13,000 copies had been sold by 1979, with ongoing sales at that time of about 80 copies per month.

To help Howard keep the wolf from the door, Dave Silverman in 1970 took out an advertisement in Howard's name in *Fate Magazine*, offering spiritual aid through logological analyses. Fourteen years later Howard reported the result of a *Fate* ad offering to examine the logological significance of personal names. The sole responder was one Leliani Ramona Schaible, for whom he wrote a 146-line poem, each line of which anagrammed her name. A sample:

Born in a chill, a malaise,  
Ill on a balmier China sea,  
All able oarsmen I chain;  
Sail *Mab*, a canoe. Ill in her  
Cabin, I ram a lee shoal—nil!

One can anagram HOWARD BERGERSON to the inappropriate GRABS NO WORD HERE or ABHORS WORD GENRE. Beyond anagramming personal names and composing palindromic poetry, Howard made several significant contributions to logology:

1) In the first *Word Ways* he edited, Howard combined the concept of transposition (PICTURES to PIECRUST) with that of letter-shift (COLD-dpme-eqnf-FROG) to produce the shiftgram MUSIC-nvtjd-owuke-pxvlf-qywmg-rzxnh-sayoi-tbzpj-UCAQK-QUACK

2) In the same issue, Howard introduced Vocabularyclept Poetry—taking the words of a poem and rearranging them to create another poem. In particular, he listed alphabetically the 479 words of a poem he wrote in 1944. With them, J.A. Lindon created a new poem, published in the next issue. Although the story line was quite different, the mood of the original was captured.

3) In the February 2010 *Word Ways*, Jim Puder points out that Howard was (along with J.A. Lindon) the first composer of rhyming end-to-end palindrome verse. The following appears in the February 1969 *Word Ways*:

Rail at natal bosh, aloof gibbons!  
Snob-bird named “Red Rose of Mine Desire!”  
Rise, denim foes! Order—demand ribbons,  
Snob—big fool! Ah, so blatant a liar!

4) In the August 1975 *Word Ways*, Howard introduced the Automynorcagram, a literary composition in which the initial letters of the words replicate the text:

Blue Lovebirds Under Evening's  
Large Orb Vow Eternal Byronic Imprinting. Red Devils Skulking  
Under Night's Doleful Eye Rape  
Elfin Violets Emotionlessly...

The letters BLUE starting each row form a second-order automynogram.

5) In the August 1980 Kickshaws, Howard created a 132-letter panalphabetic window exhibiting Xan Xu's disdain toward Howard's bawdy anagram of THE UNCOLA:

"well, ABout porn, i Can say DEFinately that althouGH I loathe JunK Like that Myself, i doN't prOPose to Question otheR people'S righT to it, becaUse, in my VieW, if seXY magaZines and x-rated movies are what they want instead of the real thing., more power to them!"

The shortest panalphabetic window known in literature has 535 letters.

6) In the August 1982 Word Ways, Howard created an "interview" with Ronald Wilson Reagan in which the President's replies used only the eleven different letters of his name. When the interviewer asked if we are better dead than Red, Reagan answered:

I answer in a single drawled word: Roger! We, as losers in a war, will all die—or are as good as dead now. In a war or in no war, we, sans ideals, *are* dead now! In an aligned and realigned slogans-and-ideologies land, God is endangered—ergo, we need a dossier on God also, ere God is dead as a dodo.

And when asked to comment on his China policy, Reagan answered:

Good dinners on good dinnerware endears one and all, erases ills.

7) In the November 1985 issue, Howard concocted an elegant fable to explain the meaning of a seventeen-syllable haiku consisting of seventeen letters. Computer expert Schmuck Schmidt, offended by the Ronald Wilson Reagan anagram INSANE ANGLO WARLORD, introduced a worldwide computer virus to erase all W's (and hence the offending anagram) from the Internet. Arrested, he was pardoned by Reagan who uttered the following speech:

W's, X'd, I	W's crossed out, I
XQ's a no-W	excuse a no-W
XPDNC	expediency

8) Even at the age of 79, Howard discovered logological curiosities. The February 2001 Word Ways contains an article by him and Mike Keith describing joint research into pi-words. The underlying idea, due to Howard, is to create for any word the following fraction:

- For the denominator, determine the letter values (A=1, B=2, etc.) and sum them
- Fro the numerator, multiply the letter values, factor this into its prime components (multiplying equal primes together), and sum them

To illustrate, UNIVERSE has a denominator of  $21+14+9+22+5+18+19+5$  and a numerator of  $497712600 = (2 \times 2 \times 2) + (3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3) + (5 \times 5) + (7 \times 7) + 11 + 19$ . This yields the fraction  $355/113$  which equals pi to six decimal places, 3.1415929. Mike Keith's computer revealed that, amazingly, no other English word comes close. One must salute Howard's determination and patience to discover UNIVERSE by hand!

Who but Howard could see that INTEGRITY anagrams to *tiny tiger*, BABYLONIA to *a baby lion*, and BUCKLE to *elk cub*?

One of the most significant events in Howard's life occurred at the end of July 1975 when he was unexpectedly visited by his 18-year-old stepson Gerald, accompanied by a 17-year-old friend from Duluth, Bill Mayo. Bill expressed a strong desire to be hypnotized by Howard, and when Howard tried it, he found that Bill could be placed almost instantly into an apparently deep, somnambulistic trance. In early sessions, Howard used the well-known psychological gambit of age regression to unearth Bill's long-forgotten memories. But when he asked Bill to regress to a time before his birth, Bill assumed the persona of a British Columbia youth named John Peterson who said he had committed suicide by jumping into a river in 1892. Further age regression led to a more shadowy persona named Onee who communicated in a mysterious language decipherable by a twenty-question strategy after Howard inferred that *neeta* meant "Yes" and *noogish* meant "No". More alarmingly, when Howard age regressed Bill to times outside the lives of John Peterson or Onee, Bill seemed possessed by a demon who made him gesticulate wildly, roar "Gaaarr!" and slam his arms down forcefully on the arms of the chair. During the week or so of hypnosis, Howard invited more and more neighbors to witness Bill's words and actions, some of which were tape recorded and filmed.

Howard was so convinced that Bill had previously inhabited the bodies of John Peterson and Onee that he decided to write a book about it, taking two years to do so. Entitled *Posterity Is You*, he regarded it as a vehicle to prove reincarnation's validity, in the hope that later appearances on Earth would convince humanity to reverse its self-destructive downward spiral (the nuclear arms race with Russia, the impending exhaustion of oil reserves). Howard may have been encouraged by the enormous success of another book arguing for reincarnation, *The Search For Bridey Murphy*, published in 1956, even though it was thoroughly debunked by research into the author's childhood. Howard's efforts to corroborate John Peterson's stories with nineteenth-century British Columbia events met with failure.

So what was the explanation for Bill Mayo's revelations? It seems possible that Bill, egged on by Gerald (who never witnessed any of the hypnotic sessions, even though he was staying at the home of a Sweet Home neighbor) faked the whole thing to make Howard look silly. Perhaps Gerald, who even then (according to the book) harbored resentment of his stepfather, may have seized on his earlier hypnosis sessions as a vehicle for the prank. Bill was all-too-easily hypnotized and age regressed; the fact that he could respond so quickly and glibly suggested greater awareness than a hypnotized subject would have had. Howard suspected that Bill was observing through not-fully-closed eyes.

In 1979 Howard discovered an interesting number-theoretic result described in the unpublished *Origins and Terminals: A Hall of Mirrors*. He performed what he called an Alpha Operation on a product of primes. For example, 3, 5, and 7 multiply to 105 which can be modified to create a set of eight Alpha-constructed integers:

$$\begin{aligned}
 105 + 3 + 5 + 7 &= 120 \\
 105 + 3 + 5 - 7 &= 106 \\
 105 + 3 - 5 + 7 &= 110 \\
 105 - 3 + 5 + 7 &= 114 \\
 105 - 3 - 5 + 7 &= 104 \\
 105 - 3 + 5 - 7 &= 100 \\
 105 + 3 - 5 - 7 &= 96 \\
 105 - 3 - 5 - 7 &= 90
 \end{aligned}$$

If similar constructions are carried out for all possible prime products, an immense number of Alpha-constructed integers are generated. Many integers, of course, can be Alpha-constructed in

more than one way; for example, 5 is the result of  $3 \times 2 + 3 - 2$ ,  $3 \times 2 \times 2 - 3 - 2 - 2$ , and  $2 \times 7 - 2 - 7$ . Howard enlisted the aid of a computer-savvy neighbor, Dick Bowler, to discover that the collection of all prime products under 100,000 revealed four integers unreachable by Alpha constructions: 28, 108, 6902 and 16068 (which he termed Origins). Although Howard was firmly convinced that no more such integers existed, I persuaded him to continue the computer search which yielded 30662, 84662, 117157, 175844 and 305804.

Is this a finite or an infinite series? Various probability-based arguments I carried out suggested that it was close to the finite-vs-infinite boundary, a property which often attracts the attention of academic number theorists (the series of perfect numbers 6, 28, 496, 8128, 33550336... is similarly delicately balanced). I tried to interest an academic number-theorist friend to investigate Howard's discovery, but nothing ever came of it.

Howard solicited Douglas Hofstadter's opinion of *Origins and Terminals*. He commented "I have looked it over; it seems delicately poised between genuine number theory and indulgence in numerology. I don't know which mathematicians would take the trouble to consider it seriously. (And believe me, trained number theorists have very good intuition about what is ephemeral and what is genuine.)" No doubt Hofstadter was dismayed by Howard's penchant for extracting many coincidences between the first four integers in the series and various numerical constants associated with the Earth, Sun and Moon. Howard asserted that "order in number is intimately bound up with order among all other things, a numerological view which antedates all known history...my intuition about numbers is different from that of trained number theorists, and it leads to different results." Near the end of *Origins and Terminals* (a 37-page opus) Howard philosophized about his numerology:

I know that I haven't proven anything, and a skeptic can claim that my whole thesis is a will-o'-the-wisp; but, nevertheless, the four Origins have a mysteriously charged aura about them, and they propagate an enormously strong signal through the noise that I for one can actually feel. This is no exaggeration, but an understatement; they fill my nightly dreams. Unfortunately, like the Ancient Mariner, I am doomed to try to tell my tale anyway, proof or no proof. In my case, I will be released from this bleak necessity if and when I can communicate to at least a few mathematicians the visceral feeling that if you squeeze this particular lemon, be it deemed real or illusory, you do indeed get this astoundingly real self-referential juice. I leave it to others to relieve the darkness surrounding its chemistry, and to create a vessel to hold it in—probably a nondenumerably infinitely dimensioned Klein bottle...I will close this essay with a prayer to Saint Jude, the Patron Saint of Lost Causes. My petition: that mathematicians, despite my informal and haphazard presentation, will still read far enough in these pages to see for themselves the same mathematical Apparition that I firmly believe I have seen.

Howard followed this work with *The Cosmic Sieve Hypothesis* in 1986 and *Earth: The Crossroads of the Cosmos* in 1990. In 2000, he wrote me:

My interests concern elaborate patterns I have found in words and numbers. My hypothesis—which I am convinced of because of its fertility—is that infinite minds exist (which can have complete knowledge of, for example, the entire decimal expansion of pi); and that the infinite minds can and do communicate with our own finite minds. I postulate a dual-aspect reality which is both physical and spiritual, the first characterized by space-time-matter-energy and the second by consciousness, underived and totally different. In this case, I find it unthinkable that constants (such as 1836,  $\pi$ ,  $e$ , 137, etc.) so important in the physical world, would not have a role of equal

and commensurate importance in the mental or spiritual world, and I find it manifested in communication of the atomistic kind (accomplished by units such as words, numbers, digits, letters, sentences, poems, epistles, books, etc.)

By 2005 Howard was working on another book, *The Ethical Imperative*. An ethical imperative gives the command to all people about what is wrong or right—but such an imperative can't exist without a divine intelligence implanting or enforcing it. The author of an ethical imperative must be non-corporeal, transcending time and personality. If an ethical imperative exists, then God exists, because no one else could author such an imperative—if not, then God does not exist. However, it cannot be written in any book because anything written has a human bias.

In 2010 Howard left Sweet Home, moving to a home near his stepdaughter in Woodinville, Washington.

## **A RIDDLE**

AL SECKEL  
Malibu, California

*At the 9<sup>th</sup> Gathering for Gardner, Al proposed this riddle.*

Starting with a common NINE letter word in the English language, what word continues to be a commonly used word (no slang or abbreviations) in the English language each time you remove a single letter? When you are finished you will have a list of NINE words, each word having one less letter. The last word, consisting of only a single letter, also must be an English language word, which somehow relates to the number 9.

The answers may be staring right at you. The answer may not be as difficult as String Theory, but perhaps it is not as easy as it would be for Gordon Sumner to sing Happy Birthday.

Try figuring it out for the startling result? Progressive hints are in Answers and Solutions, but it would be a sin to look at the hints!