

Coincidence

The blue Buick breezed by at about 55 to 60, slowed for a few seconds and rolled to a stop by the side of the road. I paused, then sprinted over to the passenger door. "Where are you going?" "Greenfield." "Okay, hop in the back." It was the first car that had passed, not counting a farm truck pulled by a small tractor.

I was about 16 or 17 and, with coat and tie and carrying a small duffel bag, leaving Mount Hermon School (now Northfield Mount Hermon School) for a weekend visiting a friend in Connecticut. The school is located at the extreme northern edge of Massachusetts right at the juncture with Vermont and New Hampshire.

It was early Saturday afternoon, after morning classes, and I planned to hitchhike (times were different!) to Greenfield and catch a train or bus to Springfield where I could get a train to New Haven and change to another train to Fairfield. All in all, about 140 miles. With luck and good timing, I would be there by early evening, in time for dinner.

Turned out to be a nice elderly couple. As we talked in the car, they let me know that they could take me direct to Springfield and as we talked more it became clear that they were going to a house on Greenfield Hill in Fairfield, Connecticut, exactly 100 feet away from the home of the girl I was visiting. Next door, actually.

The north end of State Route 10, outside of the school gates, was then and is now a country road. Then, in 1954, traffic on that portion of Route 10 was almost all farm related and very sparse. The combined populations of the two neighboring counties were then less than 1,500, after subtracting out the two boarding schools. There was no Interstate 91 and driving south to Connecticut was slow and meandering on two lane roads.

What were the odds of this happening? Maybe once in a few months you might have found someone driving by who was going to somewhere in that area of Connecticut, but to that particular house? And, just when I happened to be standing there hitchhiking, with my thumb out? The odds must have been vanishingly small. Let's call it "coincidence."

Sixty years later and I am in Maui, Hawaii on vacation. Sitting with my laptop, I type into Google the name of my great grandmother who had lived on Maui in the mid to late 1800's. Zap! Her name is on an eBay listing.



Diamond Head in Moonlight

It is the missing third painting of three that she did of Diamond Head in Honolulu in about 1880. My grandmother had one of the paintings (which is now in our possession) and we knew that a cousin had another, but "Diamond Head in Moonlight" had been missing for many years. We bought the painting.

Let's presume that the listing had been live for a couple of months. I had never before thought to look up my great grandmother online. What were the odds that I would type her name into my laptop at that short interval in my then seventy-six years? Again, vanishingly small.

Maybe coincidences come in threes. Should I now expect another? Perhaps there have been lots of others, but I haven't noticed.

Certainly, the more years any of us live, the greater the probability of our experiencing occasional events so unlikely that they can only be described as random or coincidence.

Perhaps Plutarch, almost 2000 years ago expressed it best:

"It is no great wonder if in long process of time, while fortune takes her course hither and thither, numerous coincidences should spontaneously occur."