

Coincidences

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Sometimes the gap between hearing an idea and figuring out how to write about it is substantial, says Malcolm Gladwell. And for one of his short stories it was almost a decade!

I've often wondered if we run into people by accident, or by design, and if we fully recognize the meaning of those encounters. And I've thought about coincidences since I was in high school. But it wasn't until recently, that I had a good story to use in my speech that clearly illustrates the power of coincidences and what some people can make of them.

A few years ago my friend Orlin came back from a skiing trip in a country in Europe that I didn't even know existed – Andorra.

He said that every night, after a full day of skiing, they went to a bar called The Underground, where he and his friends were having unlimited amounts of drinks and cocktails every night for 2 weeks for FREE! That's right! They never paid for any of their drinks. What's more, every time they insisted on paying for anything, the bartender would not accept their money. It all sounded like a bit of a mystery, especially since cocktails at that sky resort can run about 6 to 8 Euros.

But there was a story behind that mystery. Apparently, the group leader, my friend Yassen who lived in London at the time, had been going to Andorra on vacation every winter for a few years. On one of his flights he was sitting next to a girl from England, Christie, and they started talking. They got so busy talking that when they landed they never remembered to exchange phone numbers.

My friend Yassen was absolutely convinced that he had to stay in touch with Christie and blamed himself for not taking her phone number. In fact, he felt so bad, that he even looked a little sick to the bartender at The Underground. So Michelle, the Dutch guy who runs the bar, asked Yassen if he was sick and what in the world was wrong with him. Well, Yassen said, I'm so stupid for not taking Christie number, I don't know what to do now. I really thought that was the girl for me.

At that moment, coincidentally, Christie walked in the Underground, exactly on her last day of vacation! Yassen recognized Christie immediately and the bartenders played out a scenario telling the whole bar that today was Yassen's birthday, that everyone was getting a free round of drinks, and that Christie had to give Yassen a kiss as a birthday present. Then one thing led another, Christie and Yassen dated in London for a couple of years, got married and had a baby boy called Yoan. And now Michelle, the bartender is the godfather of the boy. Michelle, himself was so proud, that ever since, all of Yassen's friends who come to Andorra drink for free for the entire duration of their vacation.

Stories like that make me wonder, did Yassen and Christie sit next to each other on the plane by accident? And then, did Christie walk into the Underground on her last day, exactly when Yassen was there, also by accident?

I believe not. I believe people bump into other people because of a series of decisions they'd made earlier (either consciously or unconsciously) so that they ended up at the same place at the same time. And then it was up to them to recognize that fact. I believe there are no coincidences when we meet people. And most of the answers are in the people around us, we just have to pay more attention to them.

APPENDIX

[Andorra is a small country of 70,000 people between Spain and France. It only has 2 or 3 ski resorts and its only industry is skiing. Before Andorra discovered skiing as its major economic activity, smuggling of tobacco and alcohol was the main occupation for many people. These interesting facts about Andorra, but what was more interesting was what my friend told me about his experience during his skiing vacation there.]