

As a part of our travels through Scotland this summer, we toured the rolling green countryside dotted with sheep herds by train. In such close quarters, it is easy to connect with the others journeying with you. Meals are the best time to forge new associations.

Thus, one morning we found ourselves speaking with a D.C. lawyer and his wife. For whatever reason, we moved to the topic of fishing. I quickly brought out a picture of my nephew from Montana and a prehistoric-looking northern pike that he had snagged with a fly rod in northern Minnesota. (All my fishing bona fides are transfers from my brothers and their children.) While he caught the fish in Minnesota, I noted that he was from Ennis, Montana. To which the D.C. lawyer responded, “I love Ennis.”

For most of you who do not have any idea where Ennis, Montana is, you recognize how strange such a statement is. Most people have no idea where Ennis, Montana is located. Thus, to travel on a train in the highlands of Scotland with a D.C. lawyer who comments, “I love Ennis,” was a sign.

Indeed, the lawyer went on to describe how he had visited Ennis, Montana a few times as the guest of a lawyer friend of his. They had fished the Madison river, and he underscored the amazing fly-fishing and beauty of that area. He ended his reverie with a slight shift. “Sad thing,” he noted, “my friend died a year after our last fishing trip due to a terribly fast moving cancer.” Marnie, who was eating with us, immediately responded, “Are you talking about Lyman Hughes?”

The man’s jaw dropped.

“How did you know that?” he asked. And then the conversation got a whole lot stranger. Not just six degrees of separation strange but more like *Twilight Zone* strange and two degrees of separation.

I mentioned my nephew, whose fishing picture the lawyer had just seen. “That boy,” I said, “is Lyman’s grandson. Lyman was my brother’s father-in-law.” Because of this relationship, we were painfully aware of the tragedy that occurred in the Hughes family. However, we never dreamed that we would relive the tragedy with a complete stranger on a train in Scotland. The lawyer was equally shocked, physically moved by the experience, and clearly dealing with the loss of his friend and colleague.

What are the chances? Why do these random moments of happenstance occur? What is the calculus of synchronicity that finds us in these moments? It blows my mind. Had we not talked about fishing, would we have ever made this connection? If we hadn’t referenced Ennis,

Montana, would we have ever known our mutual relationship? If Marnie hadn't wagered a calculated guess, given the lawyer's story, would we have even known the beauty and the tragedy that he had known? Call it coincidence. Call it the stars aligning. Call it the spirit active. I don't really care what we call it. These moments are powerful reminders of how connected we really are.

Furthermore, if these moments serve as a reminder of our amazingly intimate connection with strangers in the world, then, perhaps, we should not see them as anomalies, but, rather, we should recognize this as more the norm than the exception. Of course, we do not share this type of connection with the billions of people throughout the world. Yet, if we acknowledge the clear proximity of our experience and existence to those of others, *and* we accept the possibility of the infinite connections that we have as the relationships we possess expand exponentially in work, play, and other circles, *and* we trust that this means that we are much closer to one another than we are apart, *then*, perhaps, our way of engaging the world and the *others* whom we meet might change. They are not strangers. Indeed, if you stumble upon the right story, you might just find a long-lost friend.