

What a Coincidence!

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October 11, 2012

This is the last day of this century when you can type month, day, year in the sequence M(month), M+1(day), M+2(year), 10-11-12. What a coincidence, that the month, day and year would be related that way. A similar one will be 12-12-12, which will also be the last time this century for that opportunity. I can't wait. (Just kidding.)

Granted, that's pretty lame for a coincidence.

Some friends, Jack and Darleen, got married five years ago, on 7-7-7. It was a special combination of numbers. Someone told me that more than the usual number of people got married on that day, because of that combination of numbers. That wasn't what one would call a coincidence, I guess, but I remember the date because of a convoluted coincidence involving a book. More about that later (below, #22, "THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED").... This number idea – On the web is a discussion at

<http://thegoldenagedaily.wordpress.com/number-sequences-not-a-coincidence/>

"Your angels often communicate messages to you by showing you sequences of numbers."

I'm not saying I agree with that. But I am tempted to!

1) NUMBERS

This just in (I'm editing this 10-15). The Washington, DC Express has great headlines:

PROBABILITY

Man Celebrates Birth of Child With Illogical Use of Money

A dream alignment for numerologists has come true at a Des Moines, Iowa, hospital. Laila Fitzgerald weighed 8 pounds, 9 ounces when she was born Thursday, 10/11/12. She arrived, in military time, at 1314. The numbers associated with her birth are thus 8-9-10-11-12-13-14. Laila's father said he would buy a lottery ticket as soon as he left the hospital (AP) Express, Wash. DC October 15, 2012, p.2

(See <http://www.viewzone.com/synchronicity.html>)

In these ramblings, I'm not being clear on whether I'm talking about "coincidence" or "synchronicity" but no matter. I'm relating things I've experienced that seem to have been "aimed at me," although I know they were not.

2) THE PREGNANT PARKER (image is not part of copyright of this document)



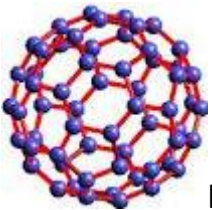
Here's a coincidence which I related to a co-worker this morning, and which gave me the idea for this article. Yesterday he found both his rear tires deflated to 22 pounds, apparently because he had parked too close to someone's car. The coincidence of both tires being the same pressure, made him think it wasn't accidental. That reminded me of when, several years ago, I found a note on my windshield related to having apparently done the same thing. The note read like this: "Thank you for parking your car too close to mine, you insensitive SOB. I am pregnant and had an awful time getting into my car. I hope I did not injure my fetus." I felt appropriately chagrined. Although I shouldn't have been expected to know she was pregnant, I could understand her frustration. Unfortunately there was no way to apologize. I kept the note. Several months later, again I found a note with almost the same wording on my car. Again I felt remorseful, but this time I enjoyed the coincidence. Apparently I had parked too close to the same car as months before. And the woman was still pregnant. OK, maybe the person made that up. But it was a good coincidence. And since then I have been very careful not to park too close to other cars. If I have a passenger, I say, "I don't want to annoy someone who may be pregnant," and then enjoy explaining my remark.

3) THE APPLE EYE (image is not part of copyright of this document)



When I got an Apple computer, a friend had a T-shirt made for me, saying "I am the eye of my Apple." I visited home a while later, and my mother said she would do my laundry. I had the T-shirt with me, and showed it to her, in the laundry room. A small TV set, on a shelf by the washing machine, was playing a game show where people guessed popular sayings. Just as I was saying, "Look at this T-shirt, Mom," a voice came from the TV set: "She's the apple of his eye."

4) DEMOLECULARIZATION (image is not part of copyright of this document)



I was watching an episode of Cheers, and reading an issue of Science News. The article was about using buckyballs, which are large molecules of carbon (C₆₀) in a shell whose shape is something like the geodesic domes designed by Buckminster Fuller (they are also called "fullerenes"), to hold other molecules in place while a laser beam focuses on them, breaking apart the molecules inside the buckyball. The Cheers episode involved a fantasy about Sam and Diane living together years in the future, much older. Their granddaughter was in college, and they were reading a letter out loud, where she described her graduate thesis. It was on "laser beam demolecularization." This jolted me. I was recording the show. I made an audio cassette and put it, with a copy of the Science Newsletter article, together in a Ziplock™ baggie to keep a record of the coincidence.

5) PENNSYLTUCKY

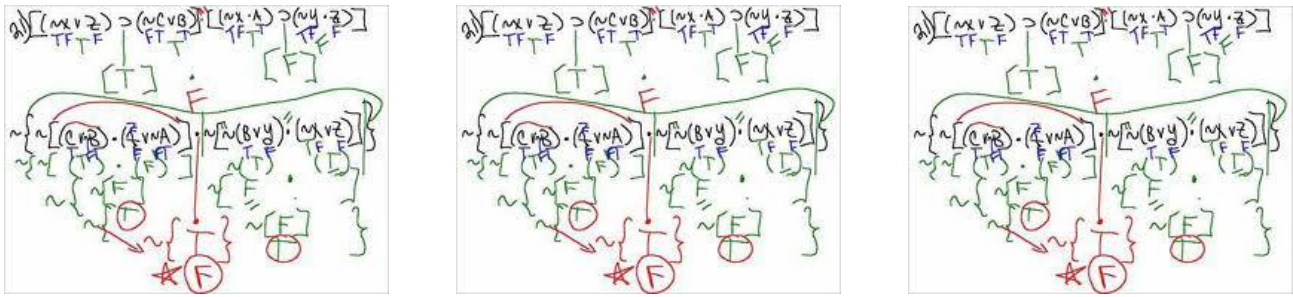
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvtucky>

New Year's eve 1961, Washington DC: Doug Miller and I drove downtown and parked near some bars, with a Norelco reel-to-reel tape recorder and a power converter plugged into the car's cigarette lighter socket. We attached a 100-foot microphone cable, locked the recorder in the car, and stood with a microphone outside a bar called The Speakeasy, pretending to be reporters with a local radio station, and interviewed the inebriated patrons as they exited the bar. One fellow in particular entertained us, saying he was from "Pennsylvtucky." The next day we played the tape for our parents, laughing at the Pennsylvtucky guy. Fast forward (sorry) 22 years: Working for a 4-county alcohol and other drug abuse program in Pennsylvania, 300 miles from DC. One day three of us were driving back from being on a radio program in another city, a couple of hours away. Dan, the program director, described various bars he had visited while he was in the Air Force. He knew I was from Washington, and said, "Bill, I was in a bar in DC over 20 years ago, on New Year's Eve. It was called The Speakeasy. When I came out, a couple of guys from a radio station interviewed me."

Fortunately, I was not driving the car. Very carefully, I said, "Dan, did you ever use the word, 'Pennsylvtucky'?" "Yeah," he replied, "I used to tell people all the time that I was from Pennsylvtucky. How did you know?" The rest of the drive was like being in another world. What a good time we had talking about this coincidence! Dan added up the distances involved in moves he had made, living different places; tens of thousands of miles, over two decades. But that's not all. Back at my house (and I, too, had moved around a lot, over the years), I found that I still had the tape recording on the 7" reel!

I made a cassette copy and took it to work next day. Dan kept that cassette tape in his desk drawer and played it for everyone, including people applying for jobs with us ("Let me tell you what kind of people we have working here. One guy made this tape of me 22 years ago...."), Christmas parties, and so on. Ironically, here he was the director of a drug abuse agency, talking about his inebriated behavior decades ago. He had a great sense of humor. We talked about this coincidence many times. I call him "my Pennsylvtucky buddy."

6) THREE HOMEWORKS (image is not part of copyright of this document)



When I was teaching a course in logic in Pittsburgh, about 50 years ago, three students handed in a homework assignment that was obviously the work of just one person: all three responses were word for word, diagram for diagram, identical. (What's shown here isn't the exact homework, but very much like it.) The coincidence was too stark to be an accident. The plagiarism annoyed me, but worse, there were numerous errors – Likewise all the same. I decided not to confront them directly but instead wrote a chatty commentary about each of the mistakes, as though I were speaking personally to the student, and copied those chatty commentaries and corrections, word for word, onto all three papers. I graded them on the work itself, not deducting for the plagiarism. I figured the two who had copied, would go to the third, the source of the errors, and complain, and then they would compare my remarks. I loved playing that scenerio in my mind, over and over.... There were no more problems with plagiarism for the rest of the course. (At least I think so. LOL)

7) COIN TOSS

Same logic course, during a section on probability. I wanted to illustrate the point that getting all heads or tails, in a sequence of coin tosses, was no more improbably than any other particular sequence, like HHHHHHHH had one chance in 256, just like HHTHTHHT, I arranged with a student, Bill Frasure, to play a little temporary joke on the class. I would toss a coin eight times, and Bill would report to the class what came up. No matter what happened, he would say it was heads. We proceeded to do this. He said, "heads... heads... heads..." and so on. I noticed him getting a worried expression. I knew he was going to feign surprise, but he looked more than just surprised. At the end of the eight tosses, I asked, "What's wrong, Bill?" He replied, very agitated, "Mr. Johnson, it REALLY DID come up eight heads in a row!" We all got a tremendous kick out of this, and I'm sure some class members thought some kind of Divine Intervention had happened, to "reify" the joke. (As the years go by, now and then I wonder if

there wasn't a joke being played in reverse, on me, by Bill! But that doesn't matter. The drama and the feelings evoked are the point. It's the drama and feelings about coincidences that intrigues me, not whether they have cosmic significance.)(Although "sense of cosmic significance" is how I describe the drama.)

8) LIGHTNING GETS PERSONAL

Still with the philosophy courses, this time in Bradford, PA, an evening adult education class. Rainy evening. I forget exactly what I said, but it was an intentionally provocative remark, and then I said, "May lightning strike me if I'm wrong." With perfect timing, KABOOM, a building-rattling thunderclap, and bright-as-day flash outside the window. A student in the front row held out a cigarette, tip forward, and said, "Mr. Johnson, would you please repeat that remark?"

9) THE SAME ADDRESS

(No illustration)

Another friend, Diane, related a coincidence she experienced, that in moving from Washington to another state, she ended up in a house whose address had the same number. In this case I think she might have had something to do with the coincidence. It's easy to say that one factor in choosing the house, perhaps unintentionally or unconsciously, was that it had the same address. But she didn't see it that way. I respected her viewpoint. Her response to experiencing that as a coincidence, was in keeping with my idea that coincidences evoke spooky cosmic frameworks. I'm also mentioning her here, because she was a factor in another coincidence, that involved my acquiring a black cat.

10) AKRON ANNIE (image is not part of copyright of this document)



My family in DC had been owned by two black cats, at different times, but not at the time I met Diane. My mother, who was living alone, had talked about wanting a cat. I had driven to a conference in Akron, Ohio, from Washington, DC, where I was visiting my mother. After leaving Akron I was planning to go to my home in northern Pennsylvania. I met Diane at the conference. She was also a cat person, and we talked about cats quite a bit, especially mentioning black ones. Then during a break in the conference I visited a bookstore where there was a friendly black cat. A nice coincidence, I thought. In the parking lot that evening, after the end of the conference, a black cat came over to me and was very friendly. I sat on the ground and petted it for a while. A woman in a nearby house came out on the porch. "You can have that cat if you want. It's homeless. It came to us a few days ago, and we've been feeding it on the porch." I hesitated, telling her I was driving hundreds of miles. She brought out a cat carrier. I accepted her offer.

Instead of proceeding to my home in Pennsylvania, I drove all night with the cat, back to DC. It was so calm, I let it out and it slept on the seat next to me. I came into the house at 6am. My mother was surprised and delighted with the new family member.

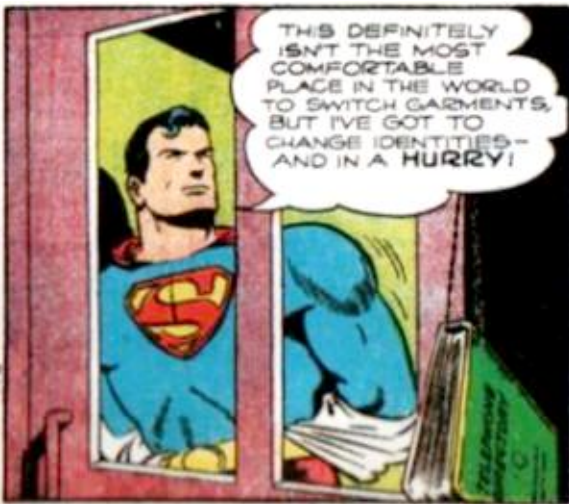
This is a mild sort of coincidence, but my conversation with Diane was definitely a factor, along with the bookstore cat, and I felt as if the parking lot cat was a gift. I completely sympathize with Peck's outlook; I just have a different logical filter. Anyway, my mom and I frequently talked about the kitty as a "such a blessing." Her official name was "Akron Annie." But we usually just called her "Kitty," as we had the other cats.

11) DEAD ANTHROPOLOGISTS

(No illustration)

This one is pretty grim, and very sad for me. Several years ago I became friends with a man I worked with, Brian. He was an anthropologist. His sense of humor was like mine and we shared many other values. After four years, he got sick suddenly and died a week later. I still miss him a lot. I realized after he'd gone, that he was a lot like Tim, another friend whom I'd known forty years earlier, who was also an anthropologist. I decided to google him, and found his current address, teaching at a college. But he had died about a month before. This was a very painful coincidence for me. Two anthropologist friends dying close to the same time. And in both cases, I hadn't been able to say goodbye.

12) THE MAN IN THE PHONE BOOTH (image is not part of copyright of this document)



Another coincidence involving a friend, is an encounter with Greg, who lived in Pittsburgh, and visited his family in New Jersey now and then. He rode his bicycle on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, over 300 miles. Amazing. But he was an expert rider, although he didn't compete. (He rode frequently with friends who were training for competitions).

We had lived in the same town at one time, and kept in touch, but hadn't been together for years. So, one day I was driving back from Washington to my home in Bradford, Pennsylvania, 300 miles away. I always stopped in Breezewood, about halfway, on the Turnpike, to call my parents and tell them the trip was going fine. I walked to the phone booth and someone was in

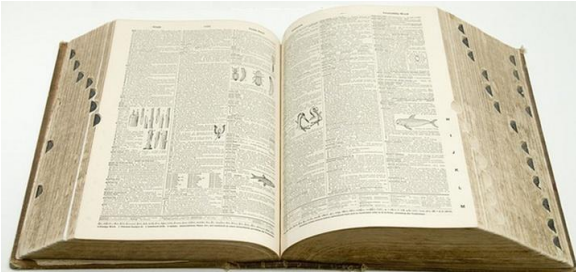
it, so I went into a nearby restaurant to use their phone. Into the restaurant walked Greg! He was the person in the phone booth, but neither of us had recognized the other. But now we did. We spent the night in a motel with a gallon of maple walnut ice cream, watching TV and talking about old times. We appreciated that this coincidence was a near miss, when I walked away from the phone booth. Fortunately, the second encounter in the restaurant worked. Our paths literally crossed; his, going west to east, and mine, going south to north.

Coincidences like that don't seem to serve any particular purpose (contrasted with coincidences that do seem to serve a purpose), but they give me the impression that someone has been arranging things for years so that I will have a profound experience. All the residential and job moves that Dan and I had made, and the conversations we had, and so on, culminating in that conversation in the car; and of course the Master Coincidence Coordinator made sure I kept the reel-to-reel recording. Or making me get a subscription to Science News, and making sure that it would be in the living room when I watched the show, and having the Cheers writer put those words in the script, and so on.

And of course that's silly. Why would I be so important that all those events and people's lives would be arranged by a Master Coincidence Coordinator, just for my entertainment, or perhaps to get my attention? Whatever the reason, this would surely count as a miracle: God intervening in the natural course of events. Have I been the object of several miracles? What was the point? I don't believe it. If there's a point, why keep me in the dark? And I've read that such coincidences happen a lot, and many near-coincidences that people don't notice, and so on. There's a story about a boy who flew a balloon that had his name and phone number on it. It landed far away. The person who found it and called him, had the same name! I looked in snopes.com to see if this is an urban legend, but they don't mention that story.

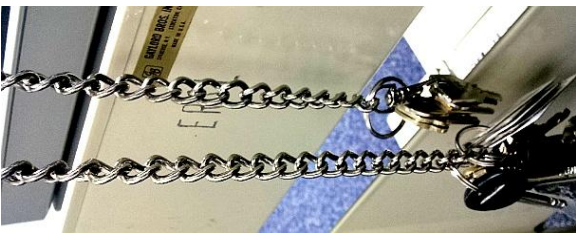
Urban legend or not, here's another one like it, that happened to me.

13) SNIFFING DICTIONARIES (image is not part of copyright of this document)



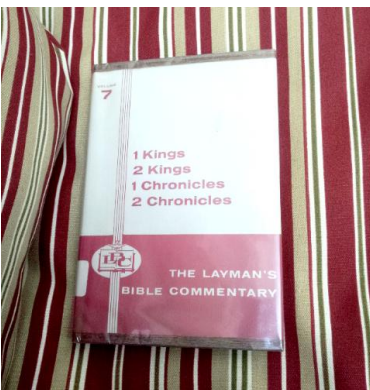
Among the many things that attracted me to the woman who became my wife, was the fact that we both had very old copies of the large Webster International Dictionary, which we would open and put our faces close to, enjoying the aroma of the old paper. When I discovered that, I had “the coincidence response.” It was really special.

14) CHAIN CONNECTION



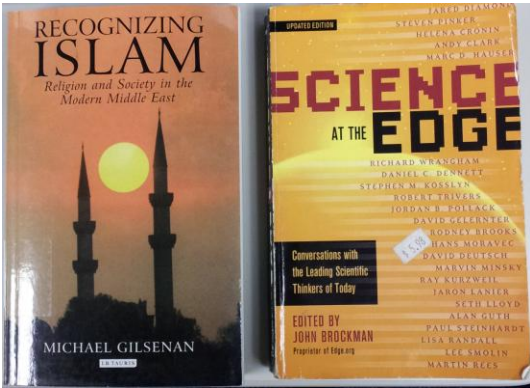
At a Subway restaurant I sat down at a table with a stranger and struck up a conversation. As she was about to go, she took out her keys and I saw they were on the same kind of chain that mine were on. This amused us and we talked a lot more. We became friends. (This picture is sideways.)

15) KINGS AND CHRONICLES



I took this book into a reading area and tossed it down on the bench-cushion, then noticed it had lined up with the lines on the cushion. Also that the multiple lines are similar to the multiple lines on the cover, also the similar colors. Since this a religious book, I'm even more tempted to see this as somehow significant. But of course it's not.

16) TWO BOOKS



I picked up two books at random to take to lunch in the cafeteria, and found that they were almost the same color, and now I notice that they're the same size. The colors look closer in room light here. This is a meaningless coincidence, as far as I'm concerned. I have no sense of The (Hypothetical (hypothetical)) Coincidence Master being at work. Another coincidence: If you transpose the letters in one title, you get the other title! NO NO JUST KIDDING. However here is a transposition coincidence that intrigued me. A Presbyterian minister told it to me:

17) BRITNEY SPEARS / PRESBYTERIANS --- An anagram! (images are not part of copyright of this document)



(John Calvin. He's not really looking at Britney. That's

just a ... never mind.) ←18)

Thanks to my good friend, Chuck Booker, for that one (Pastor at the Bethesda Presbyterian Church). I just noticed another coincidence here: These are two of my favorite things—My favorite singer (except maybe for Lady Gaga) and my favorite religion(17). This could also be another favorite: My favorite anagram. This leads to the question, if two coincidences occur together, is that a third coincidences? Like happened here, also the fact that I found two coincidence related stories in the Express for October 15, 2012 (described in this article.)

Probably not, because having two coincidences constituting another coincidence, would lead to an infinite regress- Those three could be a fourth, and so on. And I think Russell's Paradox is present.... No. That was for contradiction, not identity. But it had to do with classes of classes that were members of themselves (or not). More about this later (perhaps).

19) BLONDIE (image is not part of copyright of this document)



What's the coincidence here? I forget why I took this picture of a YouTube video. Hmm. Oh, yeah, the fact that the group is named "Blondie" and the lead singer is blond. I looked into this on the Web, having heard years ago that the group was not named after Debbie Harry. I couldn't find anything definite. So it may be a quasi-coincidence, whatever that means. HOWEVER there is a valid coincidence here: Her first and last name both have double letters. And they rhyme. Sort of. Incidentally, Debbie Harry competes with Britney Spears for my favorite singer, aside from Lady Gaga. Now I notice that both Debbie and Britney are blondes. (God knows what Lady Gaga's hair color really is.) And have names that sort of rhyme.

20) NO, I AM BILL JOHNSON (like in the movie, Spartacus) (image is not part of copyright of this document)



I'm in a book group that meets monthly at Politics and Prose in Washington DC, with about 15 people. We welcome newcomers just sitting down uninvited, joining us again next month if they have a good time. One evening a fellow sat down next to me, and said, "Hi, I'm new here, my name is Bill Johnson." I said, "No kidding. How did you know my name?" and I was wondering why he introduced himself in such a bizarre way. "No, that's my name, Bill Johnson." he said. I said, "No, that's MY name." We looked funny at

each other. Things heated up slightly. After a few more interchanges, of course we got out our driver's licenses. His name was not exactly the same as mine. It was Bill Jonson.

Close enough.

The book group is on the subject of spirituality. Needless to say, we had quite a conversation about the meaning of coincidences (if any) and so on, and we look forward to meetings where we're both there, and we start off saying our names, one after the other, around the table. We sit together, and watch people's faces when one of us echoes the other person's name (and of course we explain).

21) THE PERFECT PLACE



(Politics & Prose, the bookstore where my reading group meets. (170-deg. panorama made by melding 8 individual pictures, made with Samsung Galaxy S2 cell phone.)) (An unusually busy afternoon. Stephan Pastis was giving a talk. (Pastis' sense of humor is outstanding. One of his special talents is in building up to excruciating puns. I experience a pun as sort of like a coincidence, except of course it is intentional.)) One of the owners said it was the biggest crowd they'd had. The line was scores of people long, and went way out into the parking lot. I counted over 140 people, some time after the signing line started. It took a couple of hours to finish. I sat nearly all the time in a chair near where he was signing books, and enjoyed the interactions. When there were five people left, I went to the back of the line.

In a way, the fact that that the place that coincidence (similar sounding names—Two Bill Johnsons) happened, was in a spirituality group, adds a nuance of coincidence. Why? Because, to my mind, there is a spiritual element involved in such experiences. Not necessarily indicating that some Higher Power is manipulating events to make a point, but bringing the mind into a certain modality where "large thoughts and concepts" are happening, accompanied by a sense of the existence of some vast influence outside ourselves. The German philosopher, Friedrich

Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834), put it this way: "Religious feelings are... produced by the reception into consciousness of large ideas - nature, mankind and the world; those feelings are the sense of being one with these vast objects. Religious feeling therefore is the highest form of thought and of life; in it we are conscious of our unity with the world and God; it is thus the sense of absolute dependence... It is neither a metaphysic, nor a morality, but above all and essentially an intuition and a feeling." A profound coincidence gets us (me anyway) thinking on a broad scale, and feeling for a while, even though the fantasy, like my life depends on the whim of a vast intelligence, and that I'm being graced by an entertaining and awe-inspiring miracle. The feeling is real- the fantasy is not- but "It's the thought that counts."

That's my take on it, anyway. Others have a different take. M. Scott Peck argues, in *The Road Less Traveled*, that coincidences are miraculous evidence of divinity.

This brings us to my story about the book, which I mentioned above, on the first page.

22) THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”

(From *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost, 1920)

When I was preparing for a trip to attend J&D's wedding in Pennsylvania, on 7-7-07, I decided to take along M. Scott Peck's book, *The Road Less Traveled*. I had picked it up many times over several months, but lately had read quite far into it, and didn't want to leave it behind on my 600 mile trip. Now, here's where I had stopped reading it:

Peck described visiting a friend's home, to use his personal library in which to study. His wife was home. Peck described her as usually being aloof. He went into the library and proceeded to work on a book he was writing. He became involved in an annoying dilemma of presenting a particular idea: a thorough discussion would have more clarity but distract from the flow of his exposition. The man's wife, in an uncharacteristically helpful gesture, and with unusual gentleness and deference, came into the library and offered him a book she said might help whatever he was working on. He didn't expect it to be helpful, but he was touched by her friendly demeanor, and he examined the book. It turned out to be exactly what he needed to solve the dilemma with which he had been struggling. Now, to repeat, that's where I had

stopped reading Peck's book: At his description of the coincidence of a book he needed, appearing out of nowhere, at just the right time.

Well, I couldn't find my book, so I went to a library to get a copy. A used book sale was going on in the back. I decided to let myself be distracted, and went over to the sale table. It was a mess. There were hundreds of books, all jumbled up, piled high, on a table about four feet square. I picked up the book on top. Yep, you guessed it. The Road Less Traveled.

This blew my mind. Not only finding the book right there on top, but that I had stopped reading it where Peck described a similar coincidence, of a book which he needed, turning up by chance! Like an echo; more, a reverberation. An experience with a spooky sort of depth, almost like The Coincidence Coordinator was punctuating His Gift so I would know for sure it was exceptionally improbable, in an exquisite convolution of self-reference. This just had to be intentional. Or so it felt.

Peck describes what happened to him as "Grace". He discusses other instances of synchronicity, negative ones as well as positive ("freak accidents", which he says happen less often), and "the miracle of serendipity". OK end of Peck coincidence.