

Searching for serendipity

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Are you making the most of life's opportunities?



ANNA

I had my own business, but needed a website. My friend Wendy gave me the email address of a designer called Mark. Unfortunately, Wendy's handwriting is awful, so I sent the email to the wrong person. Someone called Matt replied. Obviously, there had been a mistake. He said he wasn't actually a designer – he was a primary school teacher – but he could help me if I wanted!

Matt seemed nice. And anyway, I didn't have anyone else to help me, so I decided to write back to him. In the end, Matt worked on my website for free. He did a great job and my business started to go really well. Meanwhile, we got to know each other via email. And ten months later, we met. We fell in love immediately, and a year later, we got married. If Wendy had had better handwriting, my business wouldn't have been such a success, and I certainly wouldn't have met Matt!

Two years ago, Anna Frances had some very good luck when her colleague gave her some wrong information.

So was Anna just lucky? Or did she make her own luck? Why do these lucky accidents seem to happen to some people and not to others? And is there any way to make yourself more lucky? Well, it seems that the secret of happiness is to make the most of the opportunities that life gives us. We need to be open to serendipity – the random events that lead to happy, sometimes life-changing, results.

Dr Stephan Makri is working on a project about serendipity at University College, London. He thinks that serendipity is more

than an accident and that we can all have more 'luck' if we learn to pay attention to life's opportunities. He has noticed that many people's good-luck stories share the same basic pattern. First, people notice that there is an opportunity. Then, they take action to make the most of it. For example, if you imagine meeting an old friend in the street who will later introduce you to the love of your life, several things have to happen. First, you have to notice the friend. Then you have to stop and talk to them, even though you might be busy. Finally, you need to be ready to follow up on whatever comes out of the conversation. So, it might be luck that leads you to walk past the friend on the street – but the rest is up to you!

More serendipity stories...



TOM

After university, I didn't have a job. I subscribed to a job website and got lots of emails from them every day. I usually deleted them. One day, I was feeling particularly annoyed by all the emails, so I opened one of them to click on the 'unsubscribe' link. But I spotted an interesting job. It was in the USA and I didn't really have the experience they wanted, but I decided to try. I didn't get the job, but they emailed me two weeks later to say they had another job I could apply for. I got it, and I ended up working in New York City, where I met my girlfriend Paula. None of it would have happened if I had deleted the email.



CARLA

My mum Betty is 71. There's a cafe in town that I like and I persuaded my mum to come with me, just to get out of the house. She didn't want to come at first, but when we got there she really liked the cafe. While we were there, she started chatting to some bikers. My mum said she had always wanted to ride a motorbike! I was shocked! Kenny, one of the bikers, offered to take us both out with the rest of the group. To my amazement, my mother said 'yes'! I was really worried, but actually, my mum loved the experience!

d Complete the sentences with the names in the box.

Anna Betty Carla Kenny Matt Tom

- 1 _____ failed at first, but was right to take a chance.
- 2 _____ did an activity she'd always wanted to do.
- 3 _____ was surprised by someone else's behaviour.
- 4 _____ did some work for someone, even though it wasn't his job.
- 5 _____ made contact with the wrong person.
- 6 _____ did something kind for someone the first time he met her.

e Discuss the questions.

- 1 Which person do you think was the 'luckiest'?
- 2 Do you agree that people make their own luck? Why / Why not?
- 3 Do you think that you are a lucky person? Do you make the most of life's opportunities in a similar way to the people in the stories?