

New Year's Eve Coincidence 01-31-95

I have not won even so small a thing as a free year's subscription to the Reader's Digest in their sweepstakes. Furthermore, I have not known anyone else who ever won anything. Sometimes I enter in spite of my better judgment.

It's just awful trying to find the secret seal or code, that is mine alone, and pasting it in the correct place. Now it's even worse than it used to be. They hide the secret in a tape that you listen to on your cassette player.

I like the Digest's Swing/Jazz Era music tapes and their piano arrangements and have bought almost everything in this category that they have produced. Recently, but not in time for Christmas, I ordered a pack of compact disks (CD's) from this era, although I did not yet own a device for playing them. A couple of days before Christmas though, I bought a CD player and integrated it with my existing high quality audio equipment. I also bought some classical music: Mozart, Haydn, Gershwin (*Rhapsody in Blue*, etc.) and Handel's *Messiah* from Reader's Digest which owns Pegasus on 12th North in Provo. What an audio feast! This new optical disk sound technology is amazing.

Returning to the Reader's Digest, you would think by now that my huge investment in their products ought to have been given some weight in the process of selecting the numbers so that I could win something. I suppose that the chance of winning anything big from the Digest is about one in 50 million. Uncle Sam's post office really should be making big, big money from all the postage stamps that we suckers have purchased.

Winning a sweepstakes falls within the category of a coincidence, or an incidence in which case my numbers fall upon or are exactly the same as the winning numbers in the Digest's vault. Coincidence also embraces the idea of something occurring at the same time.

Now while I have never won a sweepstakes, I have had several incidents relating to coincidences in time. All of them seem more unlikely that the one in 50 million chances that you have with the Digest.

On New Year's Eve 1990, Ida-Rose and I decided to take the UTA bus to Salt Lake City to see the Christmas lights, inasmuch as this would be the last day that the lights would be on. As an aside, many of you might not know that senior citizens 65 years of age or older can ride the UTA busses for only 25 cents and go anywhere on the line. Recently, the fare has been raised to 30 cents, which is still a ridiculous bargain. If you wanted to, you could get a bus in Springville, go all the way to Salt Lake City, get a transfer and go all the way to North Ogden, a distance of about 110 miles.

Age does have a few advantages. If you are 60 years old or more of age, you should always inquire to see if you are eligible for a senior citizen's discount, which is usually 10%. You'll be surprised as to how often they will have a deal for you. Many fast food restaurants, some regular restaurants, and other establishments have this policy. Be nervy and ask. It will pay off. When you buy a hamburger at McDonalds, tell them that you are a senior citizen and would like a free soft drink. They'll give you one. I've even asked for milk instead of the soft drink. They brought it. And I've always thought that Ida-Rose was the nervy one.

The entire month of December this year has been very cold. Records dating back to 1932 have been broken all over the place. The temperature on the last day of December in 1990 hovered around -10 degrees Fahrenheit. We dressed well for our New Year's Eve

outing. I wore Damart's blue thermal underwear (tops and drawers) over my usual garments. Then there was a shirt over which there was a blue sweater. On top of this was a nylon parka with a hood. Last of all, I piled on the heavy hollow-filled parka with a second hood. Oh, I forgot, under the first hood, I wore a fur-lined Russian-style hat. I wore two pairs of wool stockings on my feet and 3-M's Thinsulate™ ankle-high shoes. I also wore Thinsulate™ gloves. Ida-Rose dressed similarly, and we were never cold.

We got on the bus at the stop just south of the Provo University Office of Zion's First National Bank at 4:28 p.m. The bus was exactly on time. My experience is that the on-time schedule of UTA is good. The bus was brand new and rode smoothly. I had not seen this type of bus before on the Salt Lake run. We chatted lightheartedly like a couple of kids, talked about the good old days, told each other our private jokes (only funny to us), saw a beautiful sunset through the large picture windows, and saw other things that we had not seen before because we did not have to concentrate on the driving. We arrived in Salt Lake City right on time at 5:46 p.m. ZCMI's windows were decorated with lovely, artistic dioramas created from sugar, depicting our mountains and other Utah scenery all lit up from above and shining through from underneath.

Leaving these wonderful works of art, we crossed the street to Temple Square. It is difficult to describe the visual impact of the thousands and thousands of variously colored lights, most of which shaded to the red end of the rainbow. The main thing that did come to mind was immersion. We were figuratively immersed in fire. Here was Pentecost relived. Ida-Rose and I had, during the Christmas season, read through The Acts of the Apostles several times and the symbolism that we sensed on Temple Square was not lost to us. When the apostle Paul came to Ephesus on his return to Jerusalem, and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since you believed? And they said unto him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.' And he said unto them, 'Unto what then were ye baptized?' And they said, 'Unto John's baptism.' Then said Paul, 'John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied." (Acts 19:1-6.)

As we began our walk along the north side of the tabernacle to see the manger and other scenes related to Christ's birth, whom did we chance to meet? Lory and Myrtle Joy Free. Now this is an example of a coincidence in time. Neither Ida-Rose nor I, although we were next-door neighbors to the Frees, had seen or visited with them that week. Both parties were totally surprised at seeing the other at the same location on such a frightfully cold night. The Frees had, on the spur of the moment, got in their car and driven to Temple Square. If I were a betting man, I'd wager that this coincidence was problematically more remote than winning the Digest's sweepstakes. But what a better surprise for a New Year's Eve! Lory, Myrtle Joy, Ida-Rose and Tracy, as neighbors, like-minded friends, wondering, pondering, and marveling at the birth of our Savior, Redeemer, Lord and Master on our hallowed Temple Square.

I have thought about coincidences occasionally and have had a number of interesting ones. They are not only remarkable but may have a causal relationship to heavenly things. Is it just a coincidence that Ida-Rose and I married? After marriage, I learned that Ida-Rose, from childhood, constantly prayed that she would someday have a good husband. What a

responsibility that puts on me! Is it just a coincidence that my great grandmother at age 15 heard David W. Patten preach near Ellisburg, Jefferson County, New York and became a member of the Church? The faith and prayers of sincere people, I do believe, bring blessings from heaven through coincidence in time.

My Mother, in 1920, before her firstborn (me) was one year old, took the electric train from Ogden to Salt Lake General Conference in the Tabernacle so that she could hear the prophet Heber J. Grant speak, but mostly so I would hear him.

Thursday, January 29, 1991 was Timpanogos Club night. BYU president Ernest L. Wilkinson introduced me to this club sometime around 1960. University presidents, scientists, lawyers, businessmen, medical doctors, musicians, church authorities, and others have been members—A. Ray Olpin, Henry Eyring, Crawford Gates, Hugh B. Brown, Alexander Schreiner, Richard L. Evans, Wallace Bennett, and Harvey Fletcher, to list a few. I have enjoyed this club, which was founded sometime around the year 1900 because of its stimulating lectures. No one could forget Sterling W. Sill's depiction of an operation that he had in the hospital. He kept us in stitches. Nor could we forget Harvey Fletcher's demonstration of stereophonic sound that he invented while at the Bell Telephone laboratories.

We meet nine times per year and present a lecture to club members in rotation according to seniority. At this point in time, my turn has come around twice. Membership is maintained at about 100 males. The meeting begins with dinner, followed by the lecture and finally a question and answer period. The club does not engage in any fund raising activities or champion any causes. Before the Church abandoned the Hotel Utah as a hotel to become the Joseph Smith Building, we met in the President's Room, where we dined at several very long tables. Looking down on us around the room were portraits of every president of the Church. Awesome! The club has always had some nonmembers. I remember a University of Utah professor who constantly objected to having a blessing on the food. We did it anyway. Two invited guests once smoked in the presence of all those church presidents while we endured their secondhand smoke.

Well anyway, getting back to the subject, I took the UTA bus to Salt Lake for the Timp Club meeting one evening. It gets me there just in time for the 6:00 p.m. meeting, which is now held at the Alta Club, located at the southeast corner of State and South Temple. The meetings last until about 7:30 p.m. Unfortunately, the next bus returning to Provo is the last bus of the day and it does not leave until 10:15 p.m. To kill the almost three hours of dead time, I have gone to the Family History Library or to the Thursday night rehearsal of the Tabernacle Choir. This time, I chose to go to the choir rehearsal. In spite of the cold, the Tabernacle had several hundred people watching and listening. I find the rehearsals to be more interesting than the performances.

I had seated myself close to the front. During the rehearsal, Robert Cundick, Tabernacle organist and former BYU music professor, walked down the aisle past me, and we exchanged pleasantries. Kitty-corner to me across the aisle on my right were a man and a wife. Sensing that they were from out of town, I thought that I ought to be friendly, so I moved over behind them. They had seen me talking to Bob Cundick, so started asking questions about choir personnel, etc. One of them was easy. Don Riplinger, former Ogdenite and associate conductor is a shirttail relative married to a Tracy cousin of mine. The visitors were from Chicago, the wife a piano teacher, and their surname was Alexander. Remember my Nancy Alexander great-grandmother already mentioned. Is Mr. Alexander a

distant relative of mine? Coincidence? I inquired about his family genealogy, but he did not know much about his ancestors.

The audience applauded all the numbers that the Choir practiced. The highlight of the evening was a duet performed by a mezzo-soprano and a young boy soprano. It was tremendous. Unfortunately, during rehearsal, the audience is not informed of the title or authors of the music or the names of the performers.

Occasionally I would ask myself, "Where in the Tabernacle did mother sit while holding me on her lap at General Conference in 1920?" She had passed away on May 23, 1966 at age 79. Coincidentally, Ida-Rose's mother passed away exactly one week later. What are the odds on that? There is seating for about 5,000 people, so the odds are five thousand to one that I could select the place where mother sat. The Alexanders had left now, so I walked over to the north side of the Tabernacle main floor and picked a spot on the wooden bench. It felt that it might be right. But even if it wasn't, it didn't matter. I was in my reverie, reverently thinking of my mother, silently talking with her, with gratitude in my heart and a lump in my throat.