

Coincidence? Serendipity? *Something Else?*

By Joy Belle Conrad-Rice

Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.

– *George Fox, 1656*

In past autumns since emigrating to Canada, I have traveled with other Friends to Western Half Yearly Gatherings. In 2005, I experienced the fruits of a gathering not with Friends near northern high bush cranberries, but with myself and softball players on roads and ball fields bordered by sage brush and sand.

For several weeks in early October my consciousness altered from my normal daily to something else. The catalysts were twofold: being tuned into traveling to and from slo-pitch softball competitions and being tuned into my son. The circumstances were similar in that I was traveling solo in a state of heightened awareness and anticipation. Unexplainable things happened. I believe I was “walking in the Light.”

What was happening? How and why? The first I can describe, the second I cannot, for I have not the wisdom.

I am a person who gets high

on sport, that is, doing a sport. For most of my adult life the sport which has lifted me and sustained me away from mundaneness and towards sparkle is squash. Squash is mainly a winter sport, so three years ago when I discovered a women’s 50 plus slo-pitch softball team in Kamloops, I turned out for it. After three seasons of playing on local teams of both women and men, I found myself invited to play with a Vancouver based women’s 60 plus team headed for the World Senior Games in St. George, Utah. A warm-up tournament would happen first in Las Vegas, Nevada. Three other players from interior British Columbia would also be driving down.

The World Senior Games featured over 9,000 athletes from 54 countries in dozens of sports. My team placed first among eleven slo-pitch teams in our age group. Our warm-up tournament in Nevada had prepared us well for a high level of determined ball playing. My attitude traveling to and from these tournaments — and later to Olympia, Washington, to witness my son being admitted to the bar — was one of openness, optimism, and courage. By habit I was extending my antenna of communication, and reminding myself that I had been turning, turning, turning till I came down right.

Choosing to participate in these tournaments meant that I would not be able to travel to Canadian Western Half-Yearly Fall Gathering at Shekinah, Saskatchewan. For me to give up such a trip (highlights: the Flying Fox, high bush cranberries, worship sharing and chatting with Friends) was indeed telling. What I met up with instead was fresh engagement with that mysterious force we like to be open to and hope to experience at Friendly gatherings.

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While driving, I had several experiences that could be categorized as coincidence, serendipity, or Something Else. The first one happened the morning I left Kamloops to begin my trip south to Nevada. My three teammates had started from a neighboring town that morning. At the U.S. border crossing at Osoyoos, British Columbia, as I pulled up to the green light at Customs, my teammates pulled up in the lane next to me. We waved at each other and grinned. My spirits rose, as I thought perhaps this portends wonderful things to come! Coincidence? Serendipity? *Something Else?*

I spent the next two days driving through Washington state, eastern

Oregon, a bit of Idaho, and desolate Nevada, keeping my awareness primed to safety first, learning second. During this stage of my travels, I showered smiling, friendly empathetic attention on clerks at visitor centres, flaggers at construction detours, and strangers at rest stops.

The third day I made it to southern Nevada. I drove into the parking garage of the hotel in Las Vegas where my team was staying, found a parking spot, got out of the car, walked up a ramp, and

cashiers, hotel room housekeepers, the shoe shine man, a teammate of vexing personality, and umpires who never got enough validation.

By now most of the team had driven northeast to St. George, Utah, site of the World Senior Games. I had spent a restful day and night at nearby Overton, Nevada, studying up on ancient Pueblo people at a museum in the Moapa Valley. That magical afternoon I became acquainted with an archeologist who let me hold an atlatl (a throwing device usually

bling. Then as I drove into the parking lot of my team's motel, I saw a teammate from Kamloops walking toward her car and hailed her. She and two other teammates were on their way to the stadium for the opening ceremonies and did I wish to join them? Of course! I even helped them find it because I could remember where I had just driven. Coincidence? Serendipity? *Something Else?*

Our last day at the Games was punctuated by winning the gold medal, having won all our games. Needless to say we were thrilled, having put ourselves through extraordinary performance in the face of illness, injury, high heat, and fatigue. We had risen to the occasion as a group and prevailed.

My walking in the Light became running the bases, playing catcher, and switch-hitting. I took time to give thanks, whisper my own code-talk with my inner and outer Resource, and to let my spirit-filled energy flow towards everyone on the field, indeed the field itself, the birds, the soil, and the red rocks in the distance.

During our days at the World Senior Games I felt in tune with myself, my place in the universe, my coach, my teammates, the ball fields, the weather, the rocks and the desert. I felt balanced and fully charged.

Another unexplainable happened on my return trip. I reached southern Washington after caravanning for a day behind my coach and her husband, then losing them as a consequence of driving slowly

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saw two people gesturing to me — it was the coach of our team and her husband from Vancouver, BC. They were getting their luggage after checking in. They were relieved to see me since they had not heard from me for several days. I was relieved, too, for seeing them meant that I had made it safely and on time. Running into my coach in a parking garage — Coincidence? Serendipity? *Something Else?*

The days in Las Vegas were filled with playing softball, watching softball, and resting up from softball. Again I found little ways to bring a smile to those I interacted with — unduly stressed hotel reservation clerks, restaurant waiters and

consisting of a stick fitted with a thong or socket to steady the butt of a spear or dart and extend the length) and pretend to throw it. Because of the mechanics of this ancient throwing spear, it could have been thrown by women hunters in prehistorical days. For thirty years I have wanted to grasp an atlatl. Meeting this archeologist on this afternoon — Coincidence? Serendipity? *Something Else?*

That evening as I arrived in St. George, Utah, I missed the exit turnoff that would take me directly to the team's motel. Instead, I took the next exit and meandered back to the motel via a stadium where I noticed many people were assem-

through the Nevada desert between gas stations, prudently conserving fuel. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to communicate with my coach to tell her my car hadn't broken down, because my cell phone couldn't connect with hers. Still slightly giddy with the joy of playing well, I carried on with my antennae out through Jackpot, Nevada, Buhl, Idaho, the Oregon Trail cities and into Kennewick, Washington. When I reached a hotel, I called my coach at her home in Vancouver, BC, from my hotel's landline. Having driven since six that morning, she and her husband had just arrived and she was on her way out to buy milk when she heard her phone ring. I had caught her at the right moment! Coincidence? Serendipity? *Something Else?*

An additional extra-communication occurred a week later. I had driven from Kamloops to Seattle, then to Olympia, the capital of Washington state, where my son was going to become a member of the Washington state bar association in a ceremony officiated by a judge for whom he had externed as a law student. He and his wife took their car, while I drove from a slightly different starting point. We both had to find parking spots. I arrived early and drove around near the capitol buildings in search of free parking on side streets — to no avail. So I meandered into visitor parking near the Temple of Justice, got out of my car, walked up to the parking ticket pay box, and lo and behold, my son walked up behind me! Coincidence? Serendipity? *Something Else?*

On the ball field while I was

playing defense and while I was batting, I opened myself up to out of ordinary focus. I called upon a combination of skill and responsiveness. I paused to recognise the

beauty of what we were doing, to appreciate the sunshine, the air, and the moment. Our inspired coach was the one who nudged, the players were the ones who executed outs and hits that led to wins, and the fans -- even the umpires — sometimes gave us smiling acknowledgment of athleticism expected from much younger legs.

Steely pitches from the pitcher for strikes, sprints from the outfielders for remarkable catches, stretches and gyrations from the infielders for crucial outs, and hits dropping into holes in the outfield for a winning run batted in — all this came through us. Something there was to help us play through injury, illness, heat, wind, and fatigue.

At the World Senior Games we thirteen women, ages 60 to 64, opened up synergistically to the best within us. Some would say it was Spirit within Sport exercising with glee.

Friends, these experiences capture my curiosity. What was going

on? I have had many such experiences; never have I understood them. Did my version of walking cheerfully over the world and answering that of God in every

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person, action, and breath (I'm not exaggerating!) influence the rest of the players and others with whom I came into contact?

I find that there are times, often when I am going solo and in new circumstances, when I feel protected, almost as though I am accompanied by a "guardian angel." By staying faithful to staying open, I have again experienced the unexplainable. For over four decades I have been a seeker, have had many unexplainable experiences, some more profound and awe-inspiring than I describe here, yet the language with which to convey my extraordinary experiences is no more available to me now than in the past.

A friend says if you are connected to your spiritual self, it is going to show up everywhere. Wherever you go, you take Spirit with you. Maybe that's a simple way to express it. But knowing the how and why of these experiences is still a mystery to me. Perhaps it's meant to be. 🐞

*Joy Belle Conrad-Rice is a member of
Vernon Monthly Meeting.*