

(iii) Some further digressions. A tale of coincidences.

The above coincidence concerning Karen Mittman(n), leads, I am afraid, to further digressions on the theme.

1. In Spain. In 1956, during the summer when foreign students usually had to shift to private lodgings, called 'digs'. I was staying at 3 Clement Gardens, near the Round Church in Cambridge. My land-lady was a Mrs Johnson, whose late husband, a plumber, had worked at the Cavendish Laboratory during the time of Lord Rutherford. Lord Rutherford, she said, used to tell her husband Frank, about the discovery of the atom, and how they had been able to smash it. "But luckily", she said Lord Rutherford used to tell Frank, while wringing his hands, "These atoms are quite harmless. No danger at all!", he would add. "And now see what the Atom Bombs have done", she would remark in conclusion.

Leastways, during that summer of 1956, I decided to make a trip to Spain (bought a 5000 kilometre rail ticket and criss-crossed the whole of Spain, from the South to the North and across the middle. (Which reminds me; I had flown from London to Barcelona on a student ticket. So that was my first flight by air – not to Pakistan in December 1956 as stated above). I was in Madrid, walking in my gabardine suit – in that burning heat – and wearing ill-fitting shoes that made deep wounds on my feet, as one of the Pension land-ladies was horrified to observe and gave me a basin of hot water with some soothing salve in it to assuage the wounds. I suddenly saw a slim young man, wearing a straw hat, dressed in sensible shorts and wearing comfortable sandals – walking a few paces ahead of me, with the folded *Times* of London tucked under his arm. I accelerated to catch up with him, and said: "Excuse me. Do you come from England?" "Yes", he replied. "I too", I said. "Whereabouts from, may I ask?", I added. "Oh, I am at Cambridge at present", quoth he. "So am I!" I replied. "Whereabouts in Cambridge?" I persisted. "Oh, a street called, St. Clements Gardens", he said. "By Jove, that is where I reside at present", I replied with mounting excitement. "And what house number I pray?" "Number 3", he says. "Are you Mr Radcliffe?", I asked. "How did you know", he asked incredulously. "Because I am staying in your digs, while you are away in long vacations, and I have been reading your books. I very much enjoyed reading your book 'Marjory Morningstar'," I said. "Well, that is a fantastic coincidence!", remarked Richard/Robert(?) Radcliffe. "That proves the proverb that the

Spaniards have which says: World is like a handkerchief”, he said, to conclude our conversation. (I wonder what the statistical chance is of such an occurrence. One in a billion? One in a billion-billion?)

2. In London. In 1961, I was living in London. My old friend Zafar Ismail had written to me from Karachi to say that he would be visiting London sometime in September, and would get in touch with me. (I think he was en-route to Oxford to start his PhD studies with my old supervisor, Denys Wilkinson.) I waited and waited – but no news from Zafar. Inge had then just arrived from Germany, and I invited her to a lunch or a snack at the well-known café/restaurant, Forty’s, in Piccadilly. We were sitting at a table, drinking our coffee, when I suddenly saw Zafar Ismail walk in; he came almost next to our table, held a large menu in front of his face and started perusing it with great concentration. He had not spotted us. “Baked beans on toast are quite a nice snack here”, I remarked in very even tones, without raising my voice. Zafar Ismail was visibly startled. He looked at me, “Saeed, you are here”, he added excitedly. “And what are you doing here, Zafar Ismail – and why have you not contacted me?”, I asked. “Sorry”, he replied, “but my suitcase has gone astray during my journey by air, and along with it my diary. I have been wondering how on earth to get in touch with you”. “Never mind”, I said, “I have a knack for locating missing objects and missing persons”. I then introduced Inge to him. What is the chance of that happening? One in 8 million – the then population of London? Surely the odds would be much longer!

3. In Cambridge. In December 1955, I was to fly from Cambridge, via London, to Karachi (and then to travel on to Lahore by train) – for my Mother wanted to see me hale and hearty after my illness and subsequent recuperation in a sanatorium, when I had lost a kidney which had been infected by bovine TB – though another version some of my friends and relatives believed was that I had contracted berylliosis drying experimentation with thin beryllium films at the Cavendish Laboratory. (The journey had to be started before my 26th birthday, which fell on 8 December 1955 – in order to avail myself of a much cheaper student-airfare. So this was my first air travel – not the one to Barcelona as stated above under the impression that I flew to Karachi in December 1956.)

I was a keen photographer (as I still am!) and was still using the camera that I had bought in Lahore in 1952 with my scholarship money. I took a taxi from my lodgings in Cambridge (8 Victoria Street) to the railway station. There was some time before the train to London was to halt at Cambridge; so I decided to have a cup of tea and a piece of cake at the station’s café. The train arrived and I embarked. After about 20 minutes, it suddenly struck me that I did not have my camera on me! “What would Sherlock Holmes have done under the circumstances?” I asked myself. Answer: he would have hired a train – or at least a

railway engine – to go back to Cambridge (as he had done in one of his adventures). Short of that, I got down at the next railway station, and took a train back to Cambridge. There I went to the restaurant to see if I had left my camera hanging on the chair where I had been sitting. No sign; nor had the café manager seen one. I came out to the platform; there was a burly porter walking about. He looked vaguely familiar. “Excuse me”, I said, “I was here half-an-hour or so ago. Did you by any chance see whether I was carrying a camera?” “No, Sir, I did notice you walking here with your luggage, but you definitely did not have a camera hanging on your shoulder.” What a perceptive bloke he is, I thought, who notices the fact that there is no camera on someone’s shoulder! (To notice something not being there shows a very keen power of observation. Which reminds me of the anecdote my father had told us about Sir Zafrullah Khan, later the Foreign Minister of Pakistan and a judge of the International Court of Justice at the Hague, who had taught my father at the Law College, Lahore, in around 1919. Zafrullah Khan came to the class, with a (roll-call) register of all his students, perhaps 20 or so, on the first day of term. He called out all the names one by one, and asked everyone to stand up or raise his hand. The next day, ZUKhan came without his register, looked searchingly at the class, and said: “Where is Mr Abdullah, and Abdur Rashid, and Ahmed Khan? I do not see them in the class.” Again, to spot the absence shows an incredibly acute observation and a fantastic memory – for which Sir Zafrullah Khan was justly famous throughout his life. Most ordinary mortals – like the humble writer of these lines, which must remind the reader of the Arabian Nights type of multi-layered tales! – cannot remember the names of all ten of their class after a whole term of teaching them! Now back to my digression number 3.)

The burly porter at the Cambridge railway station platform – if you still remember him! – suggested that perhaps I had left the camera in the taxi by which I had come to the station. Why not go out and enquire? Those days, there used not to be so many taxis at the station’s taxi ranks. When I went out, there was just the one lone taxi standing there. I asked the driver about the camera. He said, “Yes, I had seen you, Sir, about an hour ago when you came by taxi. The reason is that it was the taxi that I had sold to Mr X a few months ago. You may well have left the camera in that taxi. Luckily, I know the home telephone number of Mr X. Perhaps you should ring that number.” And he gave me that telephone number. (What, pray, is the statistical chance of all this chain of coincidences?) I rang the number. Mrs X answered, but said that her husband was out on his rounds and would only come home in the evening. I had no choice but to abandon my search here – for I had as yet to travel to London and catch my aeroplane. I rang my good friend, Javad Zahedy – an Iranian engineer working with Pye’s of Cambridge – and requested him to contact Mr X in the evening and try to retrieve my camera. Javad promised to do so – and indeed, did retrieve the camera, and returned it to me upon my return from Pakistan to Cambridge, ~1 ½ months later.

This episode, too, has a chain of several coincidences linked together. I dare not narrate the other two times this very camera was lost and found by me in London (1961) and in New York (1967). Like the old shoes of Kassem, the Taylor in the Arabian Nights, it was almost impossible to get rid of this camera. It kept getting reunited/repatriated with me in all sorts of odd ways! So enough of these long-winded tales of long odds being realized.

4. In Venice. Inge has asked me to add this anecdote to the above tale of coincidences. In late August 1965, while we were living in Munich – where I was a Humboldt Foundation Senior Fellow at the TH (later, Technical University, München) after my stint as Director Atomic Energy Centre, Lahore – I received a letter from my younger brother Khalid, saying that he was returning to Pakistan after some seven years of study in the USA to become an MD (Plastic Surgery) in Chicago, New York, etc. He would be arriving on such and such a date, and then take the Lloyd Triestino boat Victoria from Venice to Karachi. Inge and I decided to travel to Venice (by our battered Volkswagen car) which was not too far from Munich. Our daughter Anjum was then a couple of months short of her 2nd birthday. So Inge asked her younger sister, Wilma – who was then a student in Berlin I think – to come and stay in our 2-room flat in Garching – a suburb of Munich, not far from my place of work, the Atom Ei (Atomic Egg) for 2-3 days to babysit for Anjum while we were away. She readily agreed to do so. Inge said: But how would you locate Khalid, for we don't know where he is staying in Venice. I said, leave it to me. Venice is a small place; we are bound to run into him. So we blithely motored down to Venice.

On arriving there, I said, let us sit in St. Mark's Square and have a coffee in the open air; everyone who comes to Venice ends up strolling around in St. Mark's Square amongst all those pigeons being fed with corn by hundreds of tourists. Sure enough, after only half an hour or so, Inge remarked: "Look there, someone emerging from a side-street, wearing a felt hat. He looks as if he might be your brother" (whom she had never met before – but whose pictures she might well have seen). It was Khalid – and I promptly approached him and invited him to join us for coffee.

But I don't think the odds of that happening were too long – the 'cross section' of such an encounter (in the parlance of an atomic collision) was, in fact, quite high. Incidentally, Khalid's subsequent experience was more unexpected. When his boat reached Karachi, the six-day war between India and Pakistan on Kashmir had just broken out (on 5th September 1965). His luggage could not be taken down at Karachi Port and was carried on to Bombay (although I think Khalid himself did disembark at Karachi). It took several weeks – or longer – for his luggage to be restored to him in Karachi. A further incident concerned myself – as follows:

I knew that Professor Abdus Salam – the future Nobel Laureate in Physics (1979), whom I had got to know quite well at Lahore when I was the Director of the AEC Lahore and who was a frequent visitor to that Centre in his capacity of Chief Scientific Advisor to President Ayub Khan, and a close collaborator of Dr I. H. Usmail, the chairman of PAEC – had recently founded the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) at Trieste under United Nations auspices (Lahore, his first-choice, having been lost for want of support the Government of Pakistan in terms of finance, etc). Now Trieste is only an hour or so away from Venice. I had written to Salam, asking him whether he was at Trieste at that time (for he was still spending half or more of his time at Imperial College, London, as Professor of Physics there). Salam had sent me a postcard, saying: Yes, I shall be here. Do drop by and come and see me. On the way back from Venice, I remember we arrived at a junction where one road went to Trieste and another to Munich. I said to Inge, “shall we go to Trieste to call on Salam, who is expecting me – or go to Munich?” Inge said, “I feel we should be back home as soon as we can; I hope Anjum is OK – and I don’t know how Wilma is coping with her baby-sitting.” So, after a bit of hesitation, I decided to choose the road to Munich. I have often wondered what my life would have been like, had I chosen to visit ICTP instead. It is quite likely that, at that early stage, had I got into ICTP ‘on the ground floor’ as it were – for Salam had got to know me quite well and would probably/possibly offered me a position – I could have had a brilliant career there. But: ICTP was a haven mostly for theoreticians only at that stage, whereas I was an experimentalist. Secondly, I firmly believe that one can only follow one scenario in life, out of a multitude of scenarios – so it is futile to hanker after ‘what might have been’. If you are lucky enough to have done reasonably well on the road you chose, be content. Perhaps we are pre-destined – or it is all a game of chance and happenstance. Whatever hand you get dealt, make the best of it.

It was a bit funny when we arrived back a day early in Garching (for we had told Wilma we might stay a night at Trieste before arriving back). We found Wilma to be sitting on the balcony of our flat, drinking a glass of gin and tonic and Anjum playing happily nearby. I think Wilma was actually a bit disappointed that we had not stayed away for another day or so! So all that rushing back had been unnecessary – but perhaps the fates had already decided; *che sera, sera!*

Speaking of Munich, I cannot help recording one further episode full of coincidences.

5. In Munich (and Lahore). I have mentioned above, I think, the birth of the NUCLEUS, the quarterly journal of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission – PAEC – (and if not, I shall now). Dr Usmail had provoked me into picking up the gauntlet he had thrown in the summer of 1963, soon after my taking up the mantle of Director, AECL. He had said, “I don’t suppose, Durrani, that you could found a journal for the Commission?” “Why not?”, I had asked. “For

two of your predecessors, whom I had asked, had failed to do so.” I asserted that I would be happy to take up his challenge (after all, I had been the joint editor of the *Ravi*, the GCL’s renowned house organ, etc., etc.). From the beginning, I had asked my old class fellow from GCL days (1946 -) Raheel Akbar Javed – an engineer by training but a dedicated painter, short-story writer, etc., to devise all the art work, get-up, dummy-making, etc., for the new journal. But that had come later.

Inge and I had arrived in Lahore on 4th May 1963 (she was then pregnant with Anjum, who was born on 31st October 1963). Our car – which I had shipped from Rotterdam, I think – was still on the high seas. So my younger brother Farrukh had lent us his small Fiat car for use until our own car arrived. (Farrukh, or Khan Zaman, officially, was a brilliant CSP officer, who had spent a year of being ‘polished’ at Downing College, Cambridge, after which he had brought back the Fiat from England (for which, to my lasting regret, I had failed to make a subsidy as he had gently asked me for when I was in London).) It was a small car, sea-green in colour, which came in quite handy. (Inge, who had not yet learnt properly to drive, had travelled even from our home (Father’s home: 1/4 G-block, Model Town) to the PAEC students hostel in, I think, F-block, by that Fiat, and knocking down one *gamla* (flower pot) after another in quick succession in the hostel’s driveway before she could stop – as she later described to me). Anyway, a few days later I drove to the Lord’s Restaurant on the Mall in Lahore, parked our Fiat in the service road, and went in to have afternoon tea in the restaurant. When we came out after an hour or so, Inge pointed out, “Look, there is someone trying to open our car!” We rushed forward to the car – and I was pleasantly surprised to find that the would-be car thief was none other than my old friend Raheel Akbar Javed; whom I had not seen since 1953 when I went to Cambridge. I said, “Hi Raheel, wonderful to see you after all these years – but what are you doing, trying to unlock our car?” He said, “You must be mistaken, Saeed, I assure you it is my own car!” Then, Inge noticed, with some embarrassment, that our own car – identical to Raheel’s in make (Fiat) and colour (sea-green) standing a few metres away in the same row of parked cars! Anyway, I introduced Inge to Raheel and then we met for several times, before, as mentioned, I invited Raheel to become our art work and design advisor for the *Nucleus*. (Dr Usmani, a hard-task mater, fully appreciated Raheel’s artistic contributions – for which he was paid.)

Anyway, that was the first branch of the tree of coincidences. The second was in Munich, in September 1965. My lab (Atom Ei) and our flat were, as stated above, in Garching – which was some 10 – 12 miles outside the Munich city centre. I hardly ever went into Munich during the daytime – although we did often of an evening, for culture (opera, cinema, music) or eating out. But one day I decided to go out – during the working week – into the city in the early afternoon to buy some shoes. (Inge has just reminded me that it was to buy an overcoat – a thick salt-and-pepper design that stayed with me for the next 30

years; and that she was with me, plus, presumably, Anjum in a buggy). Suddenly I saw a bloke coming towards us, with an up-stretched map of the city hiding his face, obviously new to the city. To my amazement, I found it was none other than my friend Raheel! I gently accosted him and asked him what he was doing in Munich.

Raheel was equally surprised to see me/us. Neither of us had known that the other was in Munich. He said that he had gone to the USA and was now on his way back to Pakistan. But suddenly the Indo-Pak war had broken out – and all the PIA (Pakistan International Airline) flights had been cancelled until God knows when. So he was staying with his old flame from Lahore – Brigitte Kammel – a very good-looking, slim German girl, living earlier on in Gulberg, Lahore, who had become his great muse and inspiration and he had become the great love of her life. She, too, was an artist – a graphic artist, mostly drawing commercial art, probably through Raheel's sponsorship. Inge and I had, of course, known Brigitte in Lahore and knew of their relationship. We invited both of them for a meal at our flat. Poor Brigitte was going out of her mind with grief that Raheel was about to go back to Lahore. (He was, of course, married to a college lecturer, Mastoora, and probably already had a son.) Brigitte was weeping in distress almost non-stop – both in our flat and in her own, where we visited them a few days later. We are still in touch with both of them. Brigitte still lives in Munich (having married Kurt Ranneberg – who died some ten years ago), and Raheel with his family in Champaign, Illinois, where Mastoora was a professor in textile design for many years.

But it is amazing how I/we kept running into Raheel again and again. The chances of such encounters must be very rare, indeed, on any statistical basis (e.g. the Poisson Distribution!).

I think I better stop here – and resist the temptation of describing how I lost and found that ancient camera of mine in (i) New York (in 1967) and in London (in 1961 – when I first met Inge. Javed Zahedy, too, figured in that latter story). Indeed, how I first met Inge on that fateful, romantic, spring day in Paris on 31st March 1961, was also a bit unlikely. But I may describe that on a later occasion.