

*There is nothing like serendipity to make my day at the office*



I enjoy words and I particularly love this one: SERENDIPITY (n.). Both its [sound](#), and its meaning, which is difficult to precisely capture. Although it has synonyms (e.g. happy accident, fluke), none seem to describe it and its significance, especially for non-native English speakers. Often used in the context of travel, serendipity can be defined as something that is valuable and pleasant and yet not sought after or expected. Unfortunately, for many of us, the pandemic has put paid to our serendipitous travel adventures, so I thought I would attempt to explain it using examples from the office, as we prepare ourselves for the physical return to our workplaces.

A little before 9 am, on a pre-Covid-19 Monday, with my kick scooter folded and hung across my shoulder, I fumbled through my bag in search of my entrance badge to OIE headquarters. Lip balm, pen, lunch bag, wallet.... Along came Ely Adicolle who readily swiped his card and held open the big heavy door to the entrance porch for me, accompanied by a genuine, 'Bonjour chère Tamara, did you have a nice weekend?' To which I responded, 'Merci, cher Ely. Yes, very nice' and we proceeded to have a quick exchange before going our separate ways to our respective offices.

Later in the morning, I headed upstairs to check on the post and, in the stairwell, I accidentally ran across Claudia Campos and Stéphanie Beau. '¡Tamaritaaaa!' 'Comment ça va?' We exchanged pleasantries on our way up. I solicited Stéphanie to describe the concert she and her son, Matt, went to that weekend. One of their all-time favourite heavy-metal bands, [Dream Theater](#), which I came to learn, has a guitar player, John Petrucci, who plays a seven-cord guitar rather than a 6. That is a big deal and makes all the difference apparently. 'Have a rockin' day, Ladies,' I said, as I made my way back to my office. 'You too, Tamarita.'

Not comfortable in a noisy room, I usually avoid the bustle of the 11 o'clock coffee break and go either before or after the big crowds. On this day, I happened to hear Sara Linnane's contagious laughter, and I grabbed my empty coffee cup and joined her and Martine Risser as Isabelle Cusin amused us with one of her hilarious anecdotes. This one was about her search for wild mushrooms during a driven hunt of wild boar in the [Forest of Bellême](#). We learned that nothing, absolutely nothing, will deter Isabelle from picking edible forest mushrooms!

I have come to realise that my workday at the office is filled with these impromptu and in-person encounters and although they are brief, it is their unexpected and pleasant nature that makes them important. While I have finally gotten used to working remotely, and, presumably like many of you, I am a bit apprehensive of transitioning back to the office, I honestly do look forward to these serendipitous encounters at headquarters come September.

OK, I must sign off now, a pop-up message on my computer is telling me I have a scheduled virtual meeting in exactly two minutes. See you live and in-person very soon.

*We wish to thank Tamara Benicasa from the OIE News Team for writing this article.*

■ *OIE In-house Times* – 13 August 2020