

The Lottery Ticket

By Simon Pelletier

The chance of dying in a car crash in your life time is approximately 1 in a 100. The chance of you dying in your lifetime by suicide is 1 in 88. By cancer 1 in 7. By airplane crash 1 in 12,000. By lightning 1 in 140,000. The chance of winning big in a lottery, ie. picking all the winning numbers, is anywhere in the neighbourhood of 1 in 14 million all the way up to 1 in 300 million. The odds of you being the exact combination of genes that you are is 1 in 70 trillion. Odds as low as winning the lottery don't provide much in the way of learning from the myriad of experiences one will encounter in a seventy year life because they only ever happen to one person. Odds provide us with a way of understanding how often something is likely to occur in our life. But the odds of an event gets less and less informative as they get less likely to occur.

When you are afraid, say when the Boeing 747 taxis the last corner and looks down the black asphalt runway. As you hear and feel all four of the General Electric Genx jet engines spool up. Knowing that the odds of dying in this very moment to be infinitesimally small is of some help – at least that's what I've been telling myself all these years. However, odds only really convey information when they are about an event that has happened more than once. If it happens once, maybe it was rare, maybe it wasn't. I could spend sometime trying to decide if it was or not. Either way it happened; even really rare things happen to someone. The interesting part is when it happens again.

And what about when an event you know that is fairly common hasn't happened to you? A car crash is a great example. The odds of Josephs cherry red Jaguar XJ crumpling into egg carton shaped metal ball is greater than 1 in 100. If you've ever experienced this personally you know that the event is an astonishing thing to witness. When I was tumbling around in the projectile filled chaos of my girlfriends midnight blue Toyota Tacoma, rolling over repeatedly in the middle of Hwy. number one, I was struck by the sense of disbelief tainting the entire experience. I couldn't quite believe that a serious highway crash was occurring to me. This was an event that belonged to those "other" people who were inside that wreck of a car I passed on my yearly migration to the red cedar coast. I knew that the odds were rather significant and that getting into a car crash wasn't something I should be surprised about. But here I was with shock and awe painted across my face.

The advantage of getting old, other than the pleasure of paying for ones own dental bills, is that one gets to see the passing of these rare events. This is the thing they call

experience. Many things you can't seem to fathom happening as a young adult are thrust into your life. This is a kind of school that is a markedly different from the one where Mr.D, the gym teacher, is yelling at you for wearing mismatched socks. The collection of hard to digest, sometimes extraordinary (think babies being born, lightning storms, horses running as the golden sun rises behind them) experiences lead one to grasp a larger vision of this life. And the odds of winning a lottery aren't all that informative. All they tell you is that it's probably best to not expect it to happen to you again. Odds that are greater than 1 in 100. These are events we can start to expect to happen and that are informative for an ordinary person like you or I.