

大海撈針

da4 hai3 lao1 zhen1

New Jersey fisherman Jay Bradford was raising the anchor when his wedding ring slipped off his finger and sank to the bottom of the sea. Though Bradford marked the location with his GPS, finding the ring was still rather impossible, especially when the wind was high and the sea was rough.

He called in salvage diver Mark Thompson, who jumped in and found the ring resting on a rock in just 10 minutes. The recovery before Christmas was nothing short of a miracle, so the newspapers called it a “Christmas miracle.” The task, meanwhile, was described as “akin (類似) to finding a needle in a haystack.”

A haystack (大乾草堆) is a huge pile of dried hay, if you drop a needle in it, it is impossible, or at least extremely difficult, to find it.

Instead of a haystack, the area to be searched in this idiom is the big wide ocean. Finding a

Idiom by Lon Yan

lost needle in the ocean is an even more hopeless endeavor. And there is a Chinese idiom that fits exactly the situation - “大海撈針” (*da4 hai3 lao1 zhen1*).

“大” (*da4*) is “big,” “海” (*hai3*) “the sea,” “撈” (*lao1*) “to net” and “針” (*zhen1*) “a needle.” Literally, “大海撈針” (*da4 hai3 lao1 zhen1*) is “to net for a needle in the big sea.” Figuratively, it means a hopeless search.

Finding a long lost friend would be like “大海撈針” in the past. But now with social media and the internet, you have a much better chance of reuniting with the friend.

Terms containing the character “針” (*zhen1*) include:

針對 (*zhen1 dui4*) - to be directed against

針灸 (*zhen1 jiu3*) - acupuncture

針線 (*zhen1 xian4*) - needle and thread

針織品 (*zhen1 zhi1 pin3*) - knitwear