

Ticket

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Two years ago I got a ticket. I had just arrived in New York from China. My wife asked me to go stay with my friend because her son, daughter-in-law and grandson would be visiting from Kentucky. He and his family would be staying a couple of days in my wife's one-bedroom apartment and she did not want to get me in trouble with him as my English was not good. My wife travels to other states with the performers at her job so she would not be at home when her son was visiting.

I had never met her son but I knew he didn't want to meet me. His Mother and I had gotten married in China and he did not approve of the relationship. So, I agreed to go to my friend's apartment.

My friend is Chinese and lives in a senior living complex, courtesy of the government. His apartment was much bigger than my wife's. So I asked my friend if I could stay with him and he told me that I could visit overnight but I couldn't stay for long because of the housing rules. So the first night I stayed in my friend's apartment and we recalled stories from our hometown.

The second night I sat at my company's gatehouse. I was on duty that day until 11:30 p.m. so I decided that if I took the train and went to my friend's apartment, I would get two hours less sleep. I talked with my supervisor and he agreed. That it was better I stay at the gatehouse so I did.

The third night I thought I could take the train to spend a long night, because the train is warm and safe. I took the F train from Jamaica to Coney Island. There were just a few people in the car that I chose so I soon fell asleep after I sat for maybe one hour.

Suddenly I woke up; a policeman was standing over me.

"You are breaking the law," the policeman said.

"What law?" I asked.

"It is against the law to sleep on the train," the policeman said.

I didn't understand all he was saying but I realized I was in trouble so I said quickly, "I do not know the law of train. I am a good person. You should not punish me. You can help me. I never did this before. This is first time. I will never do this another time if you help me."

My heart was afraid. It did not feel good. I did not know that people could not sleep on the train. And I did not know if he understood what I was saying.

"What is your name?" The policeman said with a soft voice.

"Fu" I said with pride, because *fu* in Chinese means is "happy."

"What?"

"Fu," I said again.

"How do you spell it?" he asked.

"F-u" I said clearly.

The policeman's attitude changed from soft to hard.

His face turned red. He looked like somebody insulted him. He look at me directly then said in a in a cold voice,

“It is my duty.”

Then he gives me a ticket.

When I got to my friend's house my friend helped me call the train station. The people there said they could waive my ticket if I could give an explanation. But my English limited me so I agreed to pay and gave up the chance to waive the charges.

Now I know I got the ticket because of my name. Two different cultures - two different interpretations.