

Author: John Pattison

For the most part, my 10 years riding Metro have been very enjoyable. Ride the bus long enough and faces become familiar, both passengers and drivers. First you share a nod, then a Good Morning, and before you know it you're trading weekend experiences and chatting like old friends. When you begin to appreciate your fellow passengers the commute becomes more than just a ride to work, but it's the other passengers appreciating you that make all the difference, and that's when the magic of Metro happens.

I start work at 6 o'clock in the morning so I catch the bus at 5am. It's one of the first buses on the route so despite it being very early the bus is never empty, in fact sometimes it can be quite full. Even though Los Angeles seems to have 51 weeks of summer, it can still get pretty chilly at 5 o'clock in the morning, especially during the colder months. While waiting for the bus I would keep warm with a jacket, a hat, and sometimes a scarf, but the older Chinese gentleman who often waited at the stop with me would rarely wear little more than trousers and a shirt. What kept him warm were the exercises he'd perform every morning: his arms would pinwheel, his legs would kick and swivel, even his head and neck saw their share of movement, and he'd keep this up until our bus arrived.

Normally I would try to time my arrival at the stop to keep my wait time to a minimum, but sometimes I would time it too close. Some mornings I'd get to the corner and watch as my bus passed by on the other side, while the familiar faces of my fellow passengers looked out at me, sharing my pain. This particular day looked like it was going to be one of those mornings and I watched from the opposite corner as my bus pulled up at the stop. As consistent as the clockwork doll that he sometimes resembled my old Chinese friend was already at the stop. He boarded the bus, just like he did every morning, then he showed the driver his Metro Pass, just like he did every morning. However, instead of taking his seat like he always did, he said something to our driver then he pointed across the road. Our driver looked where my old Chinese friend was pointing and of course he looked at me. My old Chinese friend was letting our driver know that I needed to catch the bus, too. There were just two problems: I was on the other side of the road; and the traffic light was against me and with the bus.

I stood there frantically pushing the button, just as pedestrians the world over do when they're desperate for the light to change. Does it work? Probably not, but it makes you feel like you're doing something, like you're in control even when you're not. The bus slowly crept forward and I could tell my driver was willing the light to change as well, but he had a schedule to keep and he couldn't hold up all of his current passengers just for one passenger on the other side of the road...could he? No, he couldn't. Eventually he'd moved so far into the intersection that he was forced to drive all the way through, and that was when the light finally changed. As I ran across the road the bus drove through the intersection then stopped, but while the driver was once again waiting for me, like earlier he was still stopped on the other side of the road. Being early in the morning it took my brain several seconds to make the connection. Yes, the bus was waiting for me on the other side of the road, but it WAS waiting. It was waiting for me! I wasn't going to miss my bus after all, not this morning.

As soon as the light changed back I was off and running, across the road, up beside the bus, and in the open door, where I was greeted by the smiling face of my driver and cheering from my fellow passengers. As I walked up the aisle I passed my old Chinese friend and I stopped and looked at him. We didn't speak much of each other's language, we couldn't communicate more than allowed by simple body language and commonly known phrases, but that was all we needed this morning. With a smile, a bow, and Xie xie, or Thank You, I let my old Chinese friend know how much I appreciated what he'd done. It's amazing how catching the bus can affect our whole outlook on the day, especially when we've only caught the bus because someone spoke up for us.