



♪ Lean on Me ... ♪

Hopefully, this week my fingers will go in the direction I intend, instead of wandering off on their own account! (Although we're starting with another song title, always dangerous, it seems!)

I'm on the train again, making yet another trip down to Tokyo to take care of business affairs relating to the new shop we are opening soon. The trains in Tokyo are of course designed for the purpose of getting from A to B, and this they do very well indeed, but a lot of people use them for other purposes too.

It is quite interesting to see which activities have become acceptable on the trains, and which ones are considered a 'no-no'. Back in Vancouver last year riding the Skytrain, I was quite shocked to see people eating, and sometimes quite substantially eating - very large sandwiches, accompanied by a giant drink, for example. Here in Japan, enjoying a *bento* box is a completely normal part of an inter-city journey, but you never see such a thing on the urban networks.

In recent years, it seems to have become acceptable for young ladies to put on makeup while sitting on the train, peering intently into a small hand-held mirror while doing so, but this is certainly not universally accepted, and such girls have to be ready to be the target of frequent strong glares from other passengers sometimes.

And a few years back, there was a kind of trend for young teenage boys to actually sit down on the carriage floor in groups together. This - thankfully - seems to have been a short-lived phenomenon, as I haven't seen it in quite some time.

But far and away the most common use of the trains over and above the basic one of transport, is that of sleeping. At pretty much any time of day, a typical bench of seven people will contain at least one whose head has fallen onto the shoulder of the person sitting next to them. When I first saw this, I was surprised to find that not only was this considered acceptable behaviour, but that most people didn't 'push back' when becoming the target of the sleeper.

The generally accepted appropriate behaviour is simply to sit quietly and let the person get their rest. This was puzzling to me in my early time in Japan, but after I learned something about the daily schedule of the young students who were studying English with me in those years, and how few hours were available to them for actual bed rest, I understood what was going on. These people were *exhausted*, not simply being lazy.

But even with such knowledge, I have still found it difficult to sit still when this happens to me, and usually end up pushing my shoulder up and down, in an effort to at least get them to leave *me* alone, and switch to the person on the other side!

The other day though, I had an experience that changed my mind, and I think I will no longer be so unfriendly to the train nappers. I had spent the day down in Tokyo with one of our young staffers, shooting video for our upcoming internet campaign to help finance our new shop, and it had been a very long day indeed, dashing here and there around the district, trying to capture the footage we needed.

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The train home was jammed, as are all evening trains leaving the capital for the suburbs, and I swayed back and forth hanging onto my strap. Nobody gave me a seat of course - that's not the custom on these trains - but about half-way along the journey I got lucky and the person directly in front of me got off, and I was able to take their seat.

And you know what's coming next, don't you. Yes. Not two or three minutes later, I was asleep, my head collapsed onto the shoulder of the young lady next to me. And she did the 'right thing', and didn't flinch. It wasn't until the train reached a major station near my home, and there was a general changeover, that I came to my senses and sat up straight, nodding a silent 'I'm sorry' apology to her, which was returned with a matching 'Don't worry about it' nod from her.

So from now on, I promise to be a good citizen, and sit tight when being leaned on. Because the way my schedule is looking for the next few months, I suspect more often than not, it's going to be me who is doing the leaning!

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