

## Blog 24 – A Helping Hand



What would you do if you need to patch up a bicycle tire in the U.S? You'd probably buy a pack of "Patch it up" bicycle repair kit and fix it yourself. But in China, you gotta do it the Chinese way. As a foreigner, it's very common to get stuck in big situations involving language, culture and habit differences. You're mentally prepared for things like that. But some minor situations, like patching up a bicycle hole, can also challenge you when you're least prepared.

One day, a lady was standing in our school parking lot, groaning and staring at her deflated motorbike tire. My mom and I were just passing by when my mom asked: "Petra, Do you need help?" My mom happens to know her from school's PTA (Parent Teacher Association) meeting. "Yes! I need someone who can translate for me! Do you speak Chinese?!" Petra answered with a desperate voice. And just like that, my mom found out that she has spent the whole afternoon in the supermarket rummaging through the bicycle aisle, trying to find a bicycle repair kit. But she was in no luck. She was just wondering what to do with her helpless deflated tire. She asked if there was a bicycle shop that could help her solve the problem. My mom simply shook her head and said: "The bicycle shop won't help, but I know who can handle this. Follow me."

Petra is from Germany and has been in Nanjing for three months. She's still trying to settle in and get familiar with the neighborhood. The three of us walked a couple of blocks from my school. At an unnoticeable street corner, we saw a guy with tools scattered around him, who was busily working on a broken bike. "This is the guy for the

job.” said my mom. The guy glanced at Petra and then at her deflated bicycle tire. He softly murmured: “5RMB per hole.” Just then, Petra nodded her head and proudly stated: “You know, I KNOW how to do it, but only if I had the tools. I couldn’t find the kit from the local supermarkets!” My mom shrugged her shoulders and replied: “for 5RMB, people would rather have someone else do it; the repair kit would cost more than that.”

When my mom was having this conversation with Petra, many local people came around and surrounded us. “Wow! This man is quite busy! What a good business.” said Petra. My mom giggled. “They’re not here for the repair carpenter. They’re here for you.” “Really? ...” She replied with a hint of surprised emotions in her voice. Petra is a blond hair lady with icy blue eyes. In this traditional Chinese neighborhood, I believe people are welcoming her in their special way.

I watched as the repair carpenter skillfully examined the tire. I took a closer look at him. His skin was toned down to a dark copper color. His hands were covered with black dirt and oil. He was wearing dusty and tattered pants and shoes that had holes forming near the soles. He was happily having a conversation with one of his customers. I couldn’t understand what he was talking about with his strong Nanjing accent, but one thing that stood out in my mind was his smile shining through. He must be very proud of his pair of helping hands.