

Sonam's Mom

Sonam: Oh, hi there. I am Sonam. This is my taxi and this is my life. I like to keep my car nice and clean. When people ride with me, I want them to feel at home. ... You never know who is going to get into your taxi. And you never know when life will surprise you.

Sonam: I am a Tibetan. But I grew up in India. I was a refugee.

Lawyer: How long have you lived here?

Sonam: Seven years. I have been driving a taxi for five years.

Sonam: What's your line of work?

Lawyer: I am a lawyer and I volunteer in the community. I help immigrants get information about living in this country.

Sonam: That sounds important.

Lawyer: Well, we all need good information. Do you have family here?

Sonam: No, but my mother is coming for her first visit to America next week.

Lawyer: That is wonderful.

Sonam: Thank you

Lawyer: It's just up here.

Sonam: On the left?

Lawyer: Yes.

Sonam: Okay.

Lawyer: Thank you.

Sonam: You're welcome. Have a nice day.

(Sonam is telling his story.)

Sonam: I was looking forward to seeing my mother in one week, but then my story began to change.

(A taxi driver picks up a woman at JFK airport.)

Osman: Welcome to New York. Please, make yourself comfortable. Where are we going?

(inside Sonam's taxi)

Passenger 1: It looks like someone forgot their purse.

Sonam: My last passenger must be really surprised to not have her purse. I will bring it back to her. I remember where she went.

(The lawyer is giving a presentation to a group of immigrants.)

Lawyer: That is my IDNYC card. The card is for everyone 14 years and older who lives in New York City with or without immigration papers. ... There is information on the table about free immigration legal help in New York City. Our volunteers will hand out information too. Talk to the people next to you about it. The information comes in different languages. If you want it in your language, please ask a volunteer.

(The lawyer notices Sonam in the back of the room and approaches him.)

Lawyer: Hi. You're the driver who brought me here.

- Sonam:** Yes. You left your purse in my car. I found it in the backseat.
- Lawyer:** My purse. I didn't know I lost it. Thank you Sir.
- Sonam:** Can I ask you a question?
- Lawyer:** Of course.
- Sonam:** I have a friend who is paying a notary a lot of money to do paperwork to sponsor his family to come to America, and I don't think the guy is a real lawyer.
- (Sonam tells us about his friend.)*
- Sonam:** My friend Giddel is also a taxi driver. He came here from Chile five years ago. We met during training getting our taxi licenses. We have lunch in the park together almost every day. So I asked the lawyer what should my friend do.
- (The lawyer advises Sonam.)*
- Lawyer:** That doesn't sound good. A notary in this country is not the same thing as a lawyer. Please tell your friend to call 311 and ask for free immigration legal help. He can ask in his language too.
- Sonam:** Thank you.
- ***
- (Giddel is at his notary's office, on the phone with Sonam.)*
- Giddel:** Sonam, I can't talk now. What do you want?
- Sonam:** Are you free for lunch? I have really important information to give you.
- Giddel:** Sure, I'm at my *notario's* right now. Let's meet afterwards.

Sonam: You are at the notary's? Don't go in there.

Giddel: What did you say?

Sonam: Don't go in there!

Secretary: Giddel, the notary is ready for you.

Giddel (on the phone, to Sonam): I can't talk now. I'm starting my meeting. Let's talk at lunch.

(in Osman's taxi)

Samten: The Empire?

Osman: Yes, the Empire State Building.

Samten: Do you know my son? He is a taxi driver too, like you.

Osman: I don't think I know him. It's a big city. There are a lot of taxi drivers from all over the world. ... Why didn't your son come to the airport? Why didn't he meet you?

Samten: Today is not the day. I told him next week.

Osman: So he doesn't know you are here?

Samten: No... I want to supervise him.

Osman: I think you mean, you want to surprise him.

Samten: Yes, that is the word. *Surprise.*

(inside Soman's taxi)

Passenger 2: Good morning.

Sonam: Good morning, sir. Where are we going?

Passenger 2: 34th Street and 5th Avenue.

Sonam: Very good, sir. 34th and 5th. That's the Empire State Building, right?

Passenger 2: Empire State? No I'm going to Brooklyn.

Sonam: Oh, I'm so sorry. 34th Street at the corner of 5th Avenue in Brooklyn?

Passenger 2: Right.

Sonam: Not a problem, sir.

Passenger 2: Great. I'm going to meet my mother.

Sonam: Oh yeah?

Passenger 2: Yeah, today is her birthday and I'm going to surprise her.

Sonam: Very nice, sir. You know, in my culture, birthdays are not such a big deal. We never plan a big surprise for someone's birthday.

Passenger 2: Same for me. But hey, here we are in America.

(inside Osman's taxi)

Osman: When was the last time you saw him?

Samten: Seven years. I saw my son seven years ago. And today is his happy birthday.

Osman: Happy birthday. ... There it is. Your son's building.

Samten: Big house. ... Keep the change.

Osman: Thank you so much. Do you have everything?

Samten: Yes, I have everything. I hope to meet you again sometime.

Osman: Me too. Have a great day.

(at the notary's office)

- Secretary:** Today's visit is the most important one.
It's \$1,000.
- Giddel:** Do you have a pen?
- Secretary:** I'm sorry, Giddel, but for this visit, the notary requires cash.
- Giddel:** Oh, cash? Usually I pay by check.
- Secretary:** Yes, but this may be the last payment. It's cash only for the final paperwork.
- Giddel:** I understand. I'll be back. I just have to go to the bank.
- Secretary:** Okay.

(Giddel leaves the notary's office, and gets a phone call from Sonam.)

- Giddel:** Sonam, what do you want?
- Sonam:** I know where you can get free legal help.
- Giddel:** Free?
- Sonam:** Yes.
- Giddel:** Are you sure? Nothing is free in New York.

(Sonam explains what happened next.)

- Sonam:** At first, Giddel was not sure. He did not believe me. I talked to him some more and he agreed to cancel his meeting with the notary and meet me in the park for our lunch like we do every day. Meanwhile, Osman is looking out for someone too.

(Osman returns to see if Samten got in her son's building. He is concerned about her.)

Osman: Sonam's mom... Where is Sonam? He isn't home?

Samten: No.

Osman: Hmm.. He might not be home till the evening. His shift might not end till later today. What are you going to do?

Samten: I don't know. What are you going to do?

Osman: Actually, I got to get lunch and return the car. It's the end of my shift. And then I'm going to Baruch College. I'm studying business.

Samten: Smart man, like my son.

(Samten and Osman are waiting in Osman's taxi for her son.)

Samten: Thank you for letting me sit in your taxi.

Osman: Why don't you call your son? Here, you can use my phone.

Samten: No, I will surprise him.

Osman: Are you sure?

Samten: No problem, I will be fine.

Osman: Okay.

(Samten has an idea.)

Samten: I'm hungry too. Let's eat!

Osman: Good idea.

Samten: Where do we go?

Osman: Hmm... What kind of food do you want?

Samten: I don't know. What do people in New York eat?

Osman: Everything. There is a lot of food in New York. Burritos, biryani, kabob, ramen, mofongo, pad thai... You name it, we've got it all here.

Samten: Hamburger?

Osman: I got it. ... I'm Osman, by the way.

Samten: My name is Samten.

Osman: Nice meeting you, Samten.

(Osman introduces Samten to some taxi driver friends at a diner.)

Osman: You guys don't mind if we join you?

Jamal: Osman, of course.

Alex: Oh hey, Osman. How are you?

Osman: I am good.

Ariana: Who's your friend, Osman?

Osman: This is Samten. These are some of my taxi driver friends. Ariana drives a yellow car. Jamal drives a green car. And Alex drives a black car.

Samten: Nice to meet your colors. My son is a taxi driver too.

Ariana: Who is your son? What's his name?

Samten: Sonam. Do you know him?

(Samten shows the group a picture of her son, and they pass it around the table.)

Ariana: I don't think so. Do you guys know him?

Alex: No, I don't.

Osman: I took her to her son's address, but he wasn't there. She came a week early. She wants to...

Samten: Surprise him.

Osman: Today is his birthday.

Ariana: Oh, that's really nice.

(Sonam and Giddel meet for lunch in the park.)

Giddel: So, how do I get free immigration legal help?

Sonam: Call 311. They will tell you.

Giddel: I don't believe it. Are you sure?

Sonam: Hey, where's my food?

Giddel: Was it there when they gave it to you? Did you eat it on the way?

Sonam: Of course not! I never eat while I drive.

Giddel: It's okay, Sonam, we can share my food. I don't think it's enough for both of us. I will be back in a few minutes. Call 311.

Giddel: Okay.

(back in the diner)

Ariana: Your English is great, Aunt Samten.

Samten: Thanks to you, I practice a lot. When I see my son, I want to surprise him with my

English.

Ariana: I want to see Sonam's face when you meet him.

(Sonam is driving to pick up his missing food.)

(Samten is looking at her menu. Then she speaks.)

Samten: What is the American Dream?

Ariana: That's a big question, Samten. What do you guys think?

Alex: The American dream is a house and a car.

Jamal: The American dream is freedom.

Ariana: The American dream is the immigrant dream.

Osman: No, no... I think Samten is talking about the menu. The American Dream is a cheeseburger deluxe with fries.

Samten: I want the American Dream.

Restaurant Manager

(on the phone): And piri piri sauce on the side. Anything to drink? Okay, no problem. Bye.

(Sonam enters the diner to find his missing food.)

Restaurant Manager: How may I help you, sir?

Sonam: Hi, I ordered a Cubano and pad thai. But I'm missing the pad thai.

Restaurant Manager: Oh, I'm sorry. When did you pick up the order? What's your name?

Sonam: Sonam. It was about 10 or 15 minutes ago.

Restaurant Manager: Okay, wait here. I'll check the kitchen.

(at Samten's table)

Jamal: Do they eat burgers in Tibet?

Samten: No, but I have seen them in the movies.

(Sonam is waiting for the food and Giddel appears.)

Giddel: Sonam!

Sonam: Hey.

Giddel: You saved me a thousand dollars!

Sonam: Really, great.

Giddel: Yeah. Did you get the food?

Sonam: Not yet.

Giddel: Not yet? Okay, you wait here. I've got to go to the bathroom.

Sonam: Hurry up.

(Giddel walks past Samten's table and picks up something that dropped on the floor.)

Giddel (to Osman): Excuse me. I think you dropped this.

Osman: Oh, thank you.

(Osman looks at the picture of Sonam again, then looks at the front of the diner. He thinks he recognizes someone.)

Osman: I think it's Sonam. Guys, I think this is Sonam. Hey, Sonam.

Restaurant Manager: Sonam. Sonam... Sonam!

Osman: Sonam!

Alex and Jamal: Sonam! Sonam!

Osman: Hey! You're Sonam, right? It's Sonam!

(Soman turns to the table and sees his mother.)

Soman: *Amala!* [Mother!] What are you doing here?

Samten: Surprise. Happy Birthday!

Sonam: How did you know I was here?

Samten: I'm your *Amala*. ... I would like you to meet my friends.

Sonam: Hi.

Everyone: Happy Birthday. Nice to meet you.

Sonam: Nice to meet you.

Everyone: Happy Birthday.

Sonam: Thank you.

Everyone: Nice to meet you.

Sonam: Nice to meet you.

Jamal: Happy birthday.

Sonam: Thank you. It's nice to meet you all. Thank you so much for taking care of my mother.

Osman: Of course. It's our pleasure. We are New York!

Sonam: My mother.



Giddel: Your mother?
Sonam: Yes.
Osman: Surprise.
Giddel: Hi.

(Sonam concludes the story.)

Sonam: That was a good surprise, wasn't it? I was so happy for my mother to be in New York. I have been here for seven years. But she made more friends than me in her first day. Thanks to her, I have new friends too.

We Speak NYC is a production of the City of New York.

