

The people of the 6:59 R7 are a family, bonded together by a mutual early morning fatigue. We board on different stops, but we share some common goals (to someday cheat the SEPTA rail pass system, to figure out what the giant mural at Market East is, etc.). In fact, some days I feel as if I'm at a family reunion, reconvening after parting for the long work day.

We break into all the familiar groups. There is the lovable uncle, the conductor. The conductor is an African American man in his 30's who strikes up conversations with the aunts (I'll describe them next) as he checks tickets. He always willing to let you slide if you can't find your pass, and his booming voice over the intercom is almost comforting. Next there are the crazy aunts. This group of African American ladies who get on at Washington Lane are the soul of the train. Their early morning conversations, whether it be about last night's American Idol or the presidential election are eavesdropped on by all. They also love when little kids take the train, and have been known to butt in on conversations, such as one between me and Langston about whether Howard was an all-black college.

The grandmothers and grandfathers of the train are a cranky bunch. They are old white ladies with pursed lips who smell funny. They have been known to ask kids to leave cars (okay, so that is me because of the newly minted QuietCar which me and Langston found out was Grandma central). They do not enjoy the company of their family on the train and mutter things to one another while they glare at the riff raff that are children nowadays.

Speaking of the riff raff, the next group is the kids. We are not the loudest group at the reunion (that honor belongs to the aunts), but we are the most talkative. Whether it be homework, or an argument, the free time that a child savors before school is spent on the 6:59 R7. We speak in tones quiet enough to hear eavesdrop on the aunt's and loud enough to annoy the grandmas.

At every family reunion there are the people you vaguely recognize but don't quite know. For me, it's kindly great-uncle whoever, that really tall guy with glasses who stares straight forward. There's second cousin whatshisface, that kid with acne who I think goes to

Roman. Without these strangers who I recognize, I couldn't truthfully describe the train as a family. But the strangers are the same strangers every day, people you might vaguely recognize if you saw them on the street. This leads to the feeling that every day, you know more and more of the train, of your family.

And finally, at every family reunion there are the black sheep. In our case, it may be the high school student who blasts his music at levels audible to everyone within a five seat radius, or it may be the lady who lets her kid play Gameboy with the sound on. These are the people we would rather didn't show up.

Perhaps I am only imaging this sense of family. Because at 7:00 in the morning, everything is kind of haze anyway. But there are many interesting things about our family reunion every day. For instance, the rich white men board in Chestnut Hill followed by the upper middle class around Mt. Airy, followed still by the middle class of Germantown. The starkness of the amount of African Americans boarding at Mt. Airy, my stop, and Washington Lane is another issue entirely. But like at any family reunion, it doesn't matter if you came from Chicago or four blocks away. All you want is a chance to see old friends, and some good barbeque. Or in my case, a comfy seat.