

Characters:

Jim (Matt), a middle-aged businessman riding the train

Henry (Samuel), a young rider on the train too

Ora Lee Patterson (Stayci) a woman in her 60s

Ruby Hunt (Peggy), a woman in her 80s

*Sounds of the Green Line light rail. It is late summer in 2014.
"Robert Station"*

JIM

Excuse me! Anyone know long it is to downtown Minneapolis? ... Anyone?

HENRY

You got about 40 minutes.

JIM

What's the point of this thing if it's even slower than driving?

HENRY

Faster than walking. Not everyone has a car.

ORA LEE

May I sit with you? I don't want to ride backwards.

RUBY

Of course. Me too, I like to see where I'm going.

ORA LEE

Wait a minute, are you ...? Ruby Hunt?

RUBY

Yes I am. Have we ... [met]?

ORA LEE

Ora Lee Patterson. We met when you were a County Commissioner and I was Assistant –

RUBY

To Mayor Latimer! Of course! What a small world. That's St. Paul for you.

ORA LEE

That's St. Paul for you. You still live in the city?

RUBY

I do. I'm at Episcopal Homes, just a few stops up the line. It's lovely. Where do you ...?

ORA LEE

I live in the suburbs now, finally had enough of the city, but I do miss running into people like this. Used to happen all the time. Now my neighbors, we don't even know each other's names.

"Capitol Rice Street Station"

RUBY

So, what brings you to town?

ORA LEE

Family. Got six grandkids to check in on.

RUBY

I've got three. Growing up fast.

ORA LEE

Mayor Latimer talked about you all the time. Only the third woman ever on the City Council, how you helped to create the "strong mayor" system, so that his office could do all that we did.

RUBY

That's sweet. He's always been good at sharing credit. We each do our part, right? Did you stay in politics after ...?

ORA LEE

I stayed involved. Always believed that things you do in life have to have a purpose. You know, I quoted you once in a little speech I gave. "The eyes of the nation will focus on Saint Paul. Let this be the place where the challenge to human rights was met and overcome."

RUBY

Oh! Did I say that?

ORA LEE

You did. Indeed, you did and so did I.

*They both laugh gently.
"Western Avenue station"*

RUBY

Well, I guess that doesn't happen overnight.

ORA LEE

Overcoming prejudice? No. Not even in one lifetime, I guess.

RUBY

You said you stayed involved ... what sort of work did you ...?

ORA LEE

Education mostly. My friend Vicki and I, we both always talked about the children in our neighborhood, how they needed access to tutoring, help getting to college. We started raising money and then we asked some more ladies to help, and they asked some ladies ... that's how we get things done in my community – we started the Black Women's Network, the Summit University Education Consortium, a parent's network, connected with the Ebony Fashion Fair to keep raising money. Helped a lot of kids right here in town, hundreds. Our black youth needed a lot of support. Still do, it looks like.

RUBY

I didn't know about any of that.

ORA LEE

Well, we weren't in the same circles, I guess.

"Dale Street station"

ORA LEE

Oh, there's the library! This is my first ride on the green line. One of my daughters, she lives in Minneapolis, thought I'd try out the train. Just to see. The old neighborhoods.

RUBY

How do you like the light rail? Took us long enough to get it done. That fight goes all the way back to the People Mover idea.

ORA LEE

That's right, the monorail up in the sky. I'll be honest with you; I liked that idea better.

RUBY

Really?

ORA LEE

I mean no disrespect Ms. Ruby, but where did you grow up in St. Paul?

RUBY

Tuscarora Avenue, off West 7th.

ORA LEE

I was born in a house at 479 Rondo Ave until our family was thrown out of our own home. There are those of us – the ones who saw a community torn up for a freeway – who have been long concerned about yet another "transit solution" coming along –

RUBY

Ora Lee, I'm so sorry, that was really insensitive of me. You know, sometimes I wonder, with all we tried to do, if us politicians really made anything better, or just made it worse.

ORA LEE

I'll tell you, I wanted to take the train today because I heard they made all these stops along University, and riding it now, with you, I think it might just be good for the businesses, for the community. For people to go a little slower, maybe step off somewhere they haven't been, try some food they've never eaten. Look, the Best Steak House is still here!

"Victoria Street Station"

RUBY

I love Peking Garden back at Western, and Los Ocampo at Dale. Riding the train reminds me of the old streetcars, do you remember?

ORA LEE

Sure do, they ran right up and down Rondo. I remember just sitting there sometimes as a little girl and looking at the streetcar as it passed by. Sparks used to come out of them, and when they hit certain little things, it would look like firecrackers.

RUBY

I remember on hot days like today the windows would be open, people would let their arms hang out, chatting in that slow way you do in the summer. I love trains. My father was a railroad blacksmith. Hard work, but a good paycheck.

ORA LEE

My father was a Pullman Porter. Good paycheck too. If you could tolerate being called "Boy" by people half your age. At least some things have changed.

"Lexington Parkway Station"

RUBY

So? How's the old neighborhood look?

ORA LEE

Not bad. Still a little rough, still a lot more that politicians could do for folks here. When the freeway came through, we moved to Carroll and Grotto, it was real nice there, I knew everybody. But then we got the Hmong community, the Latinos. It was hard. More change.

RUBY

I remember. That's when there started to be gangs even.

ORA LEE

Like the old days of Oatmeal Hill and Cornmeal Valley.

RUBY

Cornmeal Valley?

ORA LEE

Those were the two ends of Rondo, and everyone knew which one you came from. We didn't always get along.

RUBY

Oh, I didn't realize ...

ORA LEE

People always have a choice, I think, between being divided, turning our backs on each other. Or getting to know each other. What I know is it starts on an individual basis, just people, not politicians – no offense.

RUBY

None taken. I'm retired, just a person too.

ORA LEE

One day, I invited my Hmong neighbors to come to church with me. And then they invited me to their church. They said it's the same music, the same songs! Just a different language. At my church we always say, "Love thy neighbor as you love yourself."

RUBY

That's beautiful, I completely agree, it's spending time together that helps us understand each other. Like us, two old gals, from different neighborhoods. Riding on a slow train together.

ORA LEE

I guess your train wasn't a bad idea after all.

Snelling Avenue station

RUBY

Oh, that's me. What a wonderful surprise to see you again after all these years.

ORA LEE

You take care now Ms. Ruby.

RUBY

You too, Ms. Ora Lee. Have a nice visit to the old neighborhood.