

## **Draia Shelton - Parkrose High School**

### **What Does Rose City Reunion Mean to You?**

My earliest memory of a Rose Festival event goes back to 5th grade when the word quarantine only referred to obscure alien tv shows and masks were only subject to doctors and dentists. Social distancing wasn't a thing and the only vaccine I knew of was for the flu. Back then, and now, every kid wanted to be at the Starlight Parade; including me. The thrill of this special event never dimmed because of its significance for me. As other kids slowly trickled out of the classroom on that warm sunny day of the Starlight Parade, I was anxious as to when my grandma would finally come get me and my little sister. The moment she came my young heart exalted. I was ready.

I got there and the streets were packed with lounge chairs, bubbles and concession stands everywhere. Little kids played tag and hopscotch as parents set out snacks and blankets for their families delight. As the night grew dimmer and the parade started my eyes got bigger with every bright color, neon light and act I saw. I was eager to see the Rose Festival Princesses stride in on their float in pretty dresses and tiaras hoping that'd be me one day. The night ended and I was excited to come again next year.

That all ended in 2020 along with every other social normality the world knew. My 2 week Spring break turned into the rest of my freshman and entire sophomore year spent online. Masks were and still are an essential, and cabin fever struck me and my community heavily. Time moved entirely too slow. Lockdowns happened every couple of weeks, and every indoor place had a "limited capacity sign" on its door. Summer came quickly but the normality of the world still hadn't returned. With so many restrictions that have kept our world as safe as possible we still couldn't come together the way we used to, and I believe I speak for everyone when I say we wanted it to. As things slowly crept back into our new normal, still distanced and masked some of our favorite community functions were brought back on. The Good in the Hood Parade, Portland Film Festival, Pride and more. Although exciting, for the past 2 years many Rose Festival events have been cancelled due to Covid. That meant no more CityFair, Rozone Concerts and especially my childhood favorite; Starlight Parade.

It is an honor to be a candidate for Parkrose's 2022 Rose Festival Princess and be given the opportunity to participate in something that means so much to me and my community. I'm thrilled that we can have a sense of normality again and bring back things that'll give kids just as much excitement as it did me. It's been rough these past 2 years, but events like this allow us to have hope and joy for the future. I can't wait to see this year's turn out because it really will be a reunion. Thank you.