

Bailey Armstrong - Lincoln High School

What Does Rose City Reunion Mean to You?

When I was a young kid, I have fond memories of going to the rose garden in July or August to beat the summer boredom, I would make my way down to the brick walkway at the bottom of the garden and reading the plaques with the names of the past Rose Festival Queens. I was always excited to see who was added to the list that year, and though I was never successful, I would try and keep trying to find a single plaque with my name on it. I remember lining up in front of Maya's Taquería on 10th and waiting what felt like hours for the floats filled with roses and topped with princesses to come by, hoping one would catch my eye and wave. I remember waiting to see the men and women dressed in cream colored suits guiding the floats, knowing my grandfather once was a Royal Rosarian. It was these simple things that made me be proud to be a Portlander, but as we have seen times have changed and I am sure that I am not the only one who can say I have lost touch with my city.

We lived through events that should only belong in movies. Covid confined us to our homes, the actions of politicians angered us and time after time news alerts popped up on our feeds containing what felt like dystopian depictions of how the world was outside. Following the path of our country and state, our city became divided. Divided by belief, by race, by age. In the name of public safety many of us have lost sight of what it means to be neighbors. As a student myself I sat and watched friends and peers go through some of the darkest times of their lives. I watched as what felt like everything we cared about was put on hold, postponed and cancelled. We did our best to keep up, but time kept moving leaving us further and further behind. These feelings are not unique to the students of Portland but what is felt by many across our city.

So when asked what Rose City Reunion means to me, I would say this year's Rose Festival is not only a celebration of the struggles we have overcome, but how we as a community are willing to come together for our future. It is about tying together the traditions and joys Portland holds with the new realities of the world we live in. We can use it both as a moment to forget the harsh realities of the past few years but also as a stepping stone to what is to come. As the Rose Festival comes closer, I get excited thinking about how I might see little girls like I was lined up to catch a glimpse of the action and to meet grandparents like mine whose heart and soul is poured into helping the community. I am excited to see my neighbors, friends and family come together to rebuild something positive.