It has almost been a year since the world went into lockdown because of the global pandemic. Life as we knew it changed completely, and the world seemingly turned upside down. Schools closed, businesses shut down, and in the blink of an eye, Portland, a bustling city full of life, became stagnant. Gatherings of any kind were highly discouraged because staying safe meant staying apart. COVID-19 negatively impacted the lives of many by causing people to lose opportunities, experiences, jobs, and even lives. Last month, my grandmother was hospitalized for over two weeks due to COVID-19 before I watched her pass away on a Zoom call. The virus took away both her ability to breathe and any hopes she had of living to a hundred. The reality is that the pandemic took away what most people had taken for granted; being able to spend quality and meaningful time by gathering with family and friends.

On a lighter note, for over a hundred years, the Rose Festival has united people of diverse cultures and backgrounds together to have fun, smile, and just live in the moment. Events like the Starlight Parade, the Junior Parade, the Grand Floral Parade, and CityFair have brought indescribable joy to many. Now that the world has slowly and cautiously been reopening, the Rose Festival brings so much hope to the community because of its power to help people feel included, happy, and a part of something bigger than themselves. The live music, comforting foods, beautiful floats, and everything else that the Rose Festival has to offer all play major roles in creating memories that will last a lifetime. Now more than ever is a time where unity should conquer division, and hope should triumph over despair. Fortunately, the Rose Festival has a place for everyone regardless of who you are, or where you come from. Thank you.