

Three Wishes

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My birthday was last Saturday, and twice now I've had the chance to blow out a traditional candle (yes, one candle is sufficient!) and make a wish. Both wishes were the same – that our Centennial celebration would be a huge success.

Back in 1943, Princess Phyllis Turner of Jane Addams High School made a speech at the Queen's Coronation that referenced a 'wishing ring' and reminded the audience that "wishes do come true."

Phyllis had three wishes that year. The first was that the war would be over and peace would come before the following year's festival. Her second wish was that the Rose Festival would surpass the prior year's sale of war bonds (which was one of the primary reasons the festival was held during WWII). Her last and final wish was that the "very best of us princesses" would be chosen queen to reign over "our war court of Rosaria."

While her first wish wasn't realized and we don't know for sure about the second, we can only assume that the third wish did come true. Shirley Howard of Commerce High School was the one chosen queen. And this year -- for the first time -- both Shirley and Phyllis will ride on a float in the Grand Floral Parade, an event that was cancelled for four years during the war years of the 40s.

Princess Phyllis and her son visited our offices in February and brought us her scrapbook (where I found her type-written speech). It was delightful to meet 'Phooty' and see the wonderful photos and memorabilia from her year. She even got a chance to sit in the throne and wear the real Crown of Rosaria – the same crown that graced Shirley's head 65 years ago. Phyllis is still "petite" as she was described by The Oregonian in the 40s, but is no longer "demure and dark haired." Her hair is now a beautiful, soft, shimmering white.

The idea of having the wartime princesses ride in the parade during the Centennial was inspired by a March visit I made two years ago to a local nursing home. I don't often get the opportunity to take the Rose Festival Queen out on her visits, but the Marquis Care Center at Mt. Tabor had asked us to participate in a special ceremony they had organized for one of their residents and our Special Events Director, Jenny O'Bryan, asked if I wanted to escort Queen Priscilla Isaacs to this event. I was happy to have the chance, so I picked Priscilla up from her job downtown at PGE, and we drove together to Mt. Tabor to meet Leona Kunce Lodge from the 1942 court.

I loved looking at Leona's Rose Festival memorabilia on display that day in the crowded cafeteria, and one of the things that struck me immediately was a comment someone made that Leona had never gotten to ride in the Grand Floral Parade -- an event I've managed since 1988.

I came back to the office with a clear mission: To get the wartime princesses in the Centennial Grand Floral Parade. We were in the middle of planning the 2005 Rose Festival,

so we weren't specifically working on 2007. But I started telling everyone I could about the significance of serving on the Court during the wartime years, and how the ladies who were willing and still able should be rewarded with the chance to ride. We needed to find someone to sponsor a float that could carry them.

The fantastic people here at the Rose Festival are used to me and my adamant 'suggestions.' People know enough about me to usually get out of the way if they can't get on board with my ideas -- and certainly I never heard a discouraging word about putting the wartime princesses on a float. But one day I repeated this plan in the right room at the right time, and Bob Strader – this year's Rosarian Prime Minister – happened to be sitting in the meeting. He didn't hesitate. He said, "Marilyn, the Rosarians will take that suggestion. We'll put the wartime courts on our float."

This was one of the first tangible results of a long, long wish list for the Centennial celebration. And we certainly had a lot of work to do to make it come true, because we didn't have contact information for most of the 1942-45 royalty. Our friends at the Oregonian helped with that effort by publicizing our plans, and I got the chance to talk to so many helpful people who wanted to aid our search, as well as meeting many of the women themselves or the surviving members of their families.

Like so many of the things we're doing for our Centennial, this idea was born of a particular inspiration. The word 'inspiration' has the same etymological root as the word 'spirit' – spirare: "to breathe."

Our inspirations have breathed life into our Centennial Rose Festival, and our spirit has enabled those inspirations to come true . . . working a lot like Princess' Phyllis wishing ring from 65 years ago. "Are you all making this wish with me?" she said in her speech. "Are you ready?" We've asked the same question over and over this year, of our board, our volunteers, our staff and of the community.

And the answer is: Yes.

As I write this I can see the photo taken that day in 2005 of Queen Priscilla, Princess Leona and me pinned up on my bulletin board. It's a reminder of something I believe: Everything happens for a reason. I was meant to meet Leona Lodge and be inspired by her story. And Bob Strader was meant to be in a meeting one afternoon when I talked about it . . .

And, of course, just like your parents always told you: If you work hard enough, wishes do come true.