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To people all over the world Carnival is a huge celebration. It marks the beginning of spring and the vitality of change.

I believe we should use this year's carnival of roses to celebrate our great fortune of living in this beautiful city. There are so many things I love about Portland. I look forward to weekends when my brother and I take the streetcar to Powell's bookstore, or just spend time in Forest Park being walked by my dogs, Beau and Thai.

Here in Portland, I always feel at ease being myself. There is a sense of warmth, mindfulness and acceptance that walks with us on the streets and sits next to us in restaurants.

These things are all worthy of our pride. We should not be shy when we boast to our friends in other cities. When they ask us about the rain, we should ask them, "Have you seen our Douglas Firs?"

And during the parade, we should cheer and dance with pride as those rose covered floats go by.

We should do this, while never shying away from the things that don't work so well. As we celebrate, I also want to take time and reflect on some of the challenges that face Portland, and how with a little time and energy, together we can make a difference.

One of the things my parents taught me was to be proud of who I am regardless of my challenges with dyslexia. Their support and trust in me, even when others questioned my abilities, has given me the strength and courage that I now give others.

Every weekend I deliver for 'Meals on Wheels'. I drive along Burnside passing groups of homeless people waiting for food. There is a particular person on the downtown route who lives above Voodoo Donuts. There is always a long line of people waiting outside for a treat. Yet upstairs, there is a lonely blind war veteran who struggles to survive. I always stop to chat for a few moments. Unfortunately, there are more meals to deliver. When I leave, I look at the long line and wonder, "What would these people do if they knew about the hungry people just 20 feet away?"

For this year's Carnival of Roses, let celebrate Portland, our Rose City. Let's celebrate each other and ourselves. Let's all take a moment to think about how we can add to what we have. It doesn't take super humans, tons of money, or lots of extra time, compassion and love. Start with a smile, or simply saying "hello". Changing our community is only a matter of finding the inner confidence to do so.