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I have never once been to a carnival. In fact the closest thing I've come to being at one is Buckaroo, a small little festival that happens every October at my elementary school. So, you can imagine my puzzlement when I found out that the theme for this year's Rose Festival is Carnival of Roses. I quickly began raking through my mind trying to find one experience involving loads of cotton candy, Ferris wheels, and clowns only to discover that there was none. What I did remember though, was that at Buckaroo there was a ton of laughter and it brought me so much happiness. Now I can think of so many similar times in my everyday life when Portland has brought me a similar joy. For example, although I may never have stuffed my face with cotton candy, I sure do love the food carts. The Portland Soup Cart has amazing mac and cheese. Although I have never ridden a Ferris wheel before, Portland's Tri-Met system is remarkable and my mom loves how independent I've become because of it. I may not have encountered clowns at a carnival but the manager of the Pizzicato on Northwest 23rd knows my order by heart, a slice of cheese and a PTL salad, and she always makes me giggle. I've come to see that Portland has been my carnival for the past 18 years.

Portland has been a place that has taught me lifelong lessons and has brought me lifelong friends. These friends are a very diverse group of people and we celebrate and honor each other's differences. On a larger scale this whole city is diverse and Portland celebrates its uniqueness. Where else would you find a Buffalo Exchange and a Powell's? How many other cities have an Elephants Café, a Pioneer Square, or five Starbucks within walking distance from each other? And isn't it pretty exceptional that on those rare sunny days a walk by the waterfront around the esplanade can just make your life so much happier? My friends and I have had a blast exploring and discovering these hidden carnival treasures of Portland. And you know along with cotton candy, Ferris wheels, and clowns, friends are a key element of the carnival experience.

Carnivals are seasonal. I am lucky enough to have lived in a city that has provided me with a carnival for the first season of my life. As I head off to college, the mac and cheese at the Portland Soup Cart, Tri-Met, and the manager at the Pizzicato on Northwest 23rd will be my touchstones. I will remember them and cherish the growth and worldly perspective I've gained from Portland, I will keep my friendships and my family close to my heart knowing that just like Portland they will always be there. So I guess the statement, "I have never once been to a carnival" isn't completely accurate. The city of roses has given the carnival of a lifetime.