

Anya Anand – Lincoln

Inspiring. Tradition. Evolving. How do these three words describe the Rose Festival?

From a young age, I have been passionate about issues regarding education. An organization that I am the president of is REAL, or Rural Education and Literacy, in India. As part of the REAL, I visited PPES, an initiative in a remote village in India to give free education to underprivileged girls. This is to encourage girls to be self-sufficient, independent, and secure a better life for herself, in an area that predominantly doesn't provide or allow education for girls.

When the school first started, they could only get 45 students in the door. Over the years, the school has evolved in size, scope, and importance, and now enrolls 1400 girls a year. Students at PPES get paid to go to school, incentivizing the parents to let them go to school. By the time they graduate, they have enough money to go on to higher education. When I visited PPES, I stayed at the village to experience their life. I taught them english, geography, and etiquette. It was amazing to see how much confidence and excitement these girls had to learn, even with less than basic facilities. PPES supports the girls in a variety of aspects from providing meals, to teaching them, to providing real world applicable skills and tools to be successful in the world. Several young girls are educated, and some of them have even graduated from high school to go on to higher education here in the US.

I should say that I went there to impart a few skills that I had, teach and inspire young girls, but I was the one who was inspired by these amazing girls who had so little and so much to give and so much to learn. By visiting this school, it was heartwarming as well as inspiring to see how an education can encourage tradition, how it can evolve, and as a result, how it can inspire a community. Tradition contributes a sense of comfort and belonging. It brings families together and enables people to reconnect with friends. This is just what PPES did for this little village. Speaking of tradition, the Rose Festival has been around Portland for over 100 years. In the early days neighbors in the community donated roses to decorate floats and wagons in the parades. The initial parades even has some horse-driven floats. Since 1906, the rose festival has been an integral part of the Portland community, rooted in its tradition of bringing the entire community together. Traditions are what make the Rose Festival special. Picturing the Grand Floral Parade, the fireworks, the energy of the crowds, it warms my heart. The festival inspires thousands of fellow Portlanders to come together to celebrate our culture, tradition, volunteerism and patriotism. People from various walks of life all united to experience a sense

of a culture, enjoying an age-old tradition in the Rose City, bringing us closer together as a community.

The Rose Festival also makes a positive impact on thousands of people from Portland, and other visiting, bringing cheer and joy while witnessing the culture and tradition of Portland. Through the years, the Rose Festival has continually evolved, embracing the idea of blending cultures, and diverse interests. As the number of people from different backgrounds has increased, floats in the parades have evolved from wagons and horse-drawn floats to electric floats of various local communities, through the years to signify this diversity and cultural immersion. There is a love and appreciation of the beauty within the differences.

One of my favorite parts is also the iconic Rose Court, which embodies empowerment of girls, as it aims to inspire the community with the next generation of strong confident women. I know that for me, the tradition of seeing the princesses in the Grand Floral Parade has inspired me to be just as confident growing up. Young girls are inspired to be passionate about their community, volunteer, and contribute to the community, and to strive for excellence. So whether it is the Rose Court or an initiative in a distant rural village in a developing country, I would hope that there would be more platforms like these to carry on such work and have opportunities available for a better future. Being in the 21st century, basic rights like education are taken for granted in the US, but change and evolution is necessary to make things available for girls around the world, and I pledge to help bring about this evolution in areas where these opportunities are not available to young girls around the world.