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

Inspiring: When I was a young child, I was captivated by the beautiful floats and sparkling carnival rides of the Rose Festival. The smell of various sweets on the riverfront, the sparkling lights of the attractions, the spiritedness of the parades melded all together into a beautiful mural of happy summer childhood memories for me. Yet the event I had always looked forwards to seeing the most were the rose princesses. Blooming amongst the City of Roses were girls transformed into the truest versions of themselves, their shining hearts visible to all.

I grew up on a healthy diet of Disney movies and even today, love seeing princesses. Like most girls that liked Disney princesses, I wanted to become one. Nowadays, that plan has changed a *tiny* bit. I want to be a film director. However, there still is a small part of me that still wants to become a princess. Every year, I look forwards to reading the Oregonian's Rose Court announcement article. 15 young women, just like me, rising to inspiring heights. Their shining faces encourage me to do my best in hopes that one day, I too, can become a rose princess. Now that my time has come, the Rose Festival has inspired me and other young girls alike to step up to the challenge and show our shining hearts.

Tradition: For many Oregonians, including my own family, the Rose Festival is a summer highlight. The Rose Festival is a celebration of Portland and Oregonian pride, putting on display our best communities and individuals. It is an event that everyone can enjoy, from young to old. And it unites us, as a community. When we are in the same place, breathing in the same air and seeing the same sights, we become connected to the people of the past that have done the same. Where we are standing right now, how we became who we are, and what our city has become is all due to tradition.

Deep, strong, unbreakable roots that connect us all as Oregonians are seen so clearly during the Rose Festival that I cannot help but feel a sense of overwhelming pride for our state. We grow under the same rainy skies as past Oregonians have had. We see the same trees, same rivers and walk the same roads as many past Oregonians have. And we go to the Rose Festival in order to renew our strong traditional roots.

Evolving: We live in a society that is changing at a breakneck pace. With the influx of technology and social media, we have become more disconnected, yet more connected to each other than ever. Like its namesake, the Rose Festival has also evolved over the past few decades. Floats have become more brighter, flowers have become even fresher than before. And rose princesses are not your traditional idea of a princess anymore. From what I have seen and learned, rose princesses are not chosen because of a particularly pretty face and a lackluster personality.

Rose princesses are chosen for the quality of her character and the potential she possesses to evolve into an active member of the community. Roses evolved thorns to protect themselves. Rose princesses evolve into confident leaders. Thirdly, the Rose Festival evolves by connecting tradition to the present in hopes of inspiring the Oregonians of today. If we, as a society are changing, then the Rose Festival will change with us. After all, the Rose Festival is a reflection of Oregonian society. Thank you for listening to my speech.