

## Melyssa Okazaki – Central Catholic

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

These three words encapsulate the Rose Festival to the fullest. But more than just that, they describe each and every one of us here today.

Take myself for example, I grew up overseas surrounded by diverse traditions and cultures. I can still remember sitting at the dinner table as a young girl, surrounded by endless bowls of rice. This is a common image due to my family's Asian heritage. I was serving some rice to my YinYin (my Chinese grandmother) and she said, just like always, "Give a little more." It's a tradition passed down from generation to generation in my family that for good luck you have to scoop more rice in someone's bowl than they ask for.

This tradition has been an inspiration in my life. Although it started with rice it has since evolved into a custom that I apply to everything I do. I always "give a little more." Whether it's my homework, my golfing, or simply just attending a concert, I always "give a little more," so that the experience is truly something I will cherish forever.

Portland's Rose Festival is steeped in tradition and is always "giving a little more" to the citizens of Portland so that they too can cherish their memories of the Festival. For more than a century, the annual festival has celebrated everything that is great about Portland. We look forward to its traditions - the Starlight Parade, the treasure hunt, to the Queen's coronation, and, of course, the Grand Floral Parade. Most of us here have enjoyed many of its traditional celebrations. It has made Portland a better place to live, work and visit.

As Portland has changed, the Rose Festival has evolved as well. As our city has grown more diverse, so has the festival. It has been wonderful to see the list of schools participating in the Rose Festival Court broaden to include all three counties. This outreach has meant more diverse women are included on the court, which better reflects the student populations within our schools. This evolution of a long-standing tradition is one of the most inspiring aspects going into the future with our new 2020 Rose Vision.

My hope is that just like myself, and just like the Rose Festival, all of you will remember to "give a little more" so we can cherish the moments of our Portland story, together.