Determination pays off for Portland Rose Festival princess Naomi Tsai

By Kate Hubbard
The Asian Reporter

Years ago, a little girl sat on a curb with her family, watching the waving princesses in the Portland Rose Festival's Grand Floral Parade, never dreaming one day she would participate in the annual event. It took two attempts to become part of the royal court, but her determination paid off, and now it's her turn to inspire other young women. The young girl who sat on that curb is Naomi Tsai, Cleveland High School's 2015 Rose Festival princess.

"It still feels surreal," said Tsai. "It hasn't sunk in yet."

Naomi is carrying on the festival tradition of being an exemplary student and outstanding individual. While a little hesitant to describe herself, her voice warms up considerably when she begins talking about her family, and about the things that inspire her.

Naomi was born in Taipei, Taiwan. Her parents met when her mother, who is from eastern Oregon, travelled to Taiwan to teach English. Naomi's dad is deaf, and their first date also included a friend who translated sign language to English. The couple moved to the U.S. when Naomi was an infant; her younger brother was born a few years later. She credits her father as one of her greatest inspirations. He never finished high school, but he created a good life for his family. "It makes me feel really grateful for the chances I get," Naomi said.

A long list of accomplishments and interests accompany this young lady as she travels with the royal court. After the 15 princesses are announced, they serve as ambassadors for the Rose Festival, travelling five to six days a week around Oregon. They spend many hours outreaching to communities in the state, and Naomi described serving as a representative of the Rose Festival with enthusiasm: "The other girls are really amazing, and I get to work in the community and see the impact."

In addition to participating in athletics and her extensive volunteer work, Tsai has a full schedule of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and is passionate about being outdoors and exploring the world. Her favorite local spot is downtown Portland; she also enjoys trips to Rocky Butte, Forest Park, and the Columbia River Gorge.

While serving as a camp counsellor at outdoor school for several seasons, she caught the travel bug from international staffers, who captivated her with stories of their homelands. One staff member in the first week of her sophomore year had a huge impact. "He helped me relax, be myself, and not worry so much about what people think," she said.

Such composure and intelligence will serve her well in the future. Although she is still figuring out a career path — debating between health sciences and environmental science — Naomi has a clear picture of where she wants to go: "I want to be in a place where I can have a positive impact on other people." For the little girls planning to watch her during the Grand Floral Parade this weekend, dreaming of their own futures, she has this message: "I hope I can serve as that same inspiration. I would tell them to be yourself, don't be afraid to take chances and try something new, and have fun in life."

As a junior, even though it is uncommon, Tsai campaigned to be a princess. She was not successful in that attempt, but made the difficult decision to try again as a senior. She now raves about the experience and the new opportunities it has afforded her.

"The entire experience has been really incredible," she said. "There's so much to it; it's a great program."

Naomi's parents and family have been very supportive and enthusiastic, attending events, taking pictures, and encouraging her along the way. One can imagine their pride, to see their little girl all grown up, finding success in her own right and sharing her unique perspective with the next generation.

ASPIRING TO INSPIRE. *Naomi Tsai (left photo, center) is seen with her mother and father — Alison (left) and Honan (right) — after learning she was chosen as Cleveland High School's 2015 Rose Festival princess. In the photo on the right, Naomi and her brother Will pose for a photo during an outing on the river. (Photos courtesy of the Tsai family)*

In the course of her travels, Naomi hopes to one day live in Taiwan for a while, learn more about her father's homeland, and work with the community. Wherever she goes, we wish nothing but the best for her and her family. Congratulations, Naomi!

A Rose Festival princess represents her school and acts as the "face of the Rose Festival" at many events in the community, including parades, volunteer activities, luncheons with community and business leaders, and more. The Portland Rose Festival Foundation awards each court member a $3,500 scholarship, courtesy of The Randall Group.

To qualify for the Rose Festival Court, a candidate must be a full-time junior or senior at a 4A, 5A, or 6A high school in Multnomah, Washington, or Clackamas county and have a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0. Potential princesses are evaluated on citizenship, scholastic achievement, school activities, civic involvement, volunteer projects, communication skills, and overall impression.

The Portland Rose Festival Queen is chosen from all of the court members at Portland's Veterans Memorial Coliseum on Saturday, June 6 from 8:30am to 9:30am. To learn more, call (503) 227-2681 or visit <www.rosefestival.org>.

South Korean court frees Korean Air 'nut rage' executive

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ing a crew member. It found her not guilty of interfering with a transport ministry investigation into the incident. Cho pleaded not guilty and prosecutors had called for three years in prison.

The aviation security law is meant to regulate highly dangerous acts such as hijacking. The upper court said there wasn't a big safety threat posed by Cho's actions, and returning a plane that was taxiing did not constitute forcing a change in the plane's route.

Kim Sang-hwan, head of the three-judge upper court panel, said that even though Cho used violence against crew members, she should be given a second chance. The judge also cited her "internal change" since she began serving her prison term as a reason for lessening the sentence.

The upper court also took into consideration that Cho is the mother of two-year-old twins and had not committed an offense before. She has resigned from her position at the airline.

"It appears that she will have to live under heavy criticism from society," Kim said.

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Training and Education
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Contact Oregon OSHA at 1-800-922-2689 for more information, or find us on the web at **www.orosha.org**.

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The Asian Reporter Foundation's 17th annual Scholarship & Awards banquet airs on Portland Community Media cable channel 29 on:

■ Saturday, June 6 at 2:30pm
■ Sunday, June 7 at 8:00pm

For more information, call (503) 288-1515 or visit <www.pcmtv.org>.