

Nearly Afloat  
by Sophie Pierszalowski

When I left for Pasadena at four in the morning after staying up for New Year's Eve, I knew I was facing a great adventure but I was clearly oblivious to what I would learn from the challenge that laid ahead. The minute I stepped into the judging tent later that day, I was swept into a whirlwind of flying petals, smiling faces, and last minute touchups (one being the application of a few seeds with the use of tweezers). That had to have been the moment when I realized how big of a deal this parade actually was. Another early morning followed the first as my parents and I found ourselves walking under a major freeway in the pouring rain before the sun came up. My feet were drenched as we finally found our float sitting waterlogged on Orange Grove Ave. My new friend Sophia and I found a few seconds of warmth in a porta-potty nearby while we waited for the parade to start. It was another four hours before we actually stepped onto the float but we found comfort in everyone's determined disposition. While on the float we made jokes for a while until we were silenced by complete wetness. Many thoughts raced through my mind during the five mile parade route. I felt guilty for innocently jumping onto a float that had taken months to create by someone else but felt so thankful for being given the life changing experience. Even though my wave was handicapped by my numb ring finger, and regardless of the fact that I was drinking rainwater (and mascara) from my face, people were smiling at me. This, more than anything, served as my source of inspiration. At one point I glanced up to a sign that read "Thank You!" and I was confused, considering that I was mentally thanking them for watching me in the downpour. I perked up at this and tried to wave more energetically and smile even wider. I forgot all my menial worries as I looked into the joyous wet faces of thousands of parade goers soaked with tradition and hope. The instant we finally pried ourselves from the mobile garden, a lady met us with cups of hot cocoa. Even though we were shaking so violently that the cocoa mostly spilled onto the grass, I witnessed the generosity of human nature and found comfort in the fact that everyone in Pasadena that day wanted to help and thank everyone else. While changing in a public restroom a few minutes after the fact, a woman innocently inquired as to if we were rained on during the parade, and all I could do was smile to think of the bonding that was provoked by our storm. It brought out the true meaning of life and everyone seemed happy to merely be alive and together.

*Thank you for a great time Bill*