

Bay Area Author and Arts Leader Debbie Chinn to Speak at Commonwealth Club in San Francisco on January 31st

Chinn Will Discuss Her Book About Growing Up in Her Chinese Family's "Polynesian" Restaurant / Club and the Chinese Immigration Experience in America Writ Large

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, USA, January 16, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Debbie Chinn](#) - author, arts advocate, philanthropic CEO and board member in San Francisco and the Bay Area, and currently executive director of TheatreWorks Silicon Valley - will be speaking at the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco on Tuesday, January 31st from 5:30 - 6:30 pm (PST).

It will be an in-person and live-streamed event "in conversation with"

Dr. Anne Smith, co-chair and moderator of the Arts Member-led Forum. Debbie will be discussing her book *Dancing in Their Light: A Daughter's Unfinished Memoir* and the Chinese immigration experience in America writ large, as part of the Commonwealth Club's public affairs programming.

A book signing and champagne toast to celebrate the Chinese Lunar New Year will follow at 6:30pm at the historic club.

More information and tickets can be found on the Commonwealth Club's events calendar [HERE](#).

Debbie's memoir captures her remarkable childhood in Syosset, New York, which was spent mostly at The House of Mah Jong, her family's Chinese restaurant / nightclub. She entered the workforce at the age of three, selling cigarettes, and by six, was promoted to inserting umbrellas



Chinn tells the story of her great-grandmother (born c.1850) who, as a young child, was discovered in a church lying next to her deceased mother. A Southern Baptist missionary rescued and adopted her, naming her Mary Hartwell (2nd Row, 2nd from right).

into cherries and pineapple slices for an assortment of exotic drinks while sitting on a bar stool.

As the family business grew in popularity and fame, she was thrust into the land of the South Seas as the restaurant evolved into a Polynesian nightclub with floor shows, a ubiquitous dining experience in the 1960's and 70's. Chinn became an exotic hula and sword dancer performing weekly at nights after full days at school.

All of this and much more is brought to vivid life in *Dancing in Their Light: A Daughter's Unfinished Memoir* (available everywhere books are sold) - which traces the author's lineage back 13 generations and features more than 170 rare family photos.

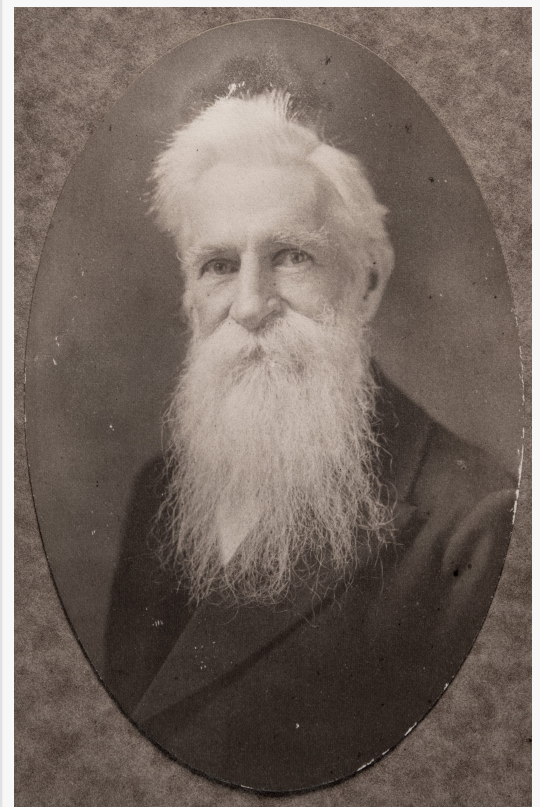
It includes the fascinating story of Chinn's great-grandmother (born c.1850) who, as a young child, was discovered in a church lying next to her deceased mother. They were fleeing the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) in Peking, China, making their way to Shanghai. The first of many twists of family fate arose when a Southern Baptist missionary rescued and adopted her, and named her Mary Hartwell.

The book also sheds light on how Chinn found her calling and - after moving to the San Francisco / Bay Area - has built a distinguished, 30-year career as an arts activist, non-profit consultant, and CEO / executive director - leading some of the region's and country's most renowned cultural institutions and their programs - and championing equity and inclusion. A business philosophy long modeled by her father - long before the emergence of the DEI acronym.

"In their quest to assimilate in the United States," says Chinn, "my parents stressed a strong work ethic, fanatical hospitality, relationship-building, supporting organizations in the community, and always taking care of others. It was a family ethos that is known today as philanthropy."

Adding to her long list of accomplishments in the arts and cultural world, Debbie was named executive director of TheaterWorks Silicon Valley in Palo Alto, California, in 2022. Over the past 25 years, she has held a series of C-suite positions as executive director of Opera Parallèle, at the Carmel Bach Festival, as managing director of California Shakespeare Theater, Baltimore's Center Stage, Shakespeare Theater of New Jersey, and, most recently, of Anna Deavere Smith Projects.

She also serves on the boards of the San Francisco Community Music Center, Playwrights



Jesse Boardman Hartwell (1835 - 1912) - the Southern Baptist missionary who started Debbie's family. He rescued, adopted and raised her great-grandmother, whom he named Mary Hartwell.

Foundation, the Chinese Cultural Center of San Francisco, and more recently as Board President of Theater Bay Area.

For more information about Debbie Chinn, her book and her non-profit leadership work, visit her website.

To request a copy of the book and/or arrange an interview with the author, please contact Scott Busby / scottb@thebusbygroup.com | 310.600.7645

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*Debbie Chinn, author,
advocate, arts and cultural
leader*



Debbie shown dancing in a "Polynesian" Christmas floor show at The House of Mah Jong, her parents' popular restaurant / nightclub in Syosset, New York. She also performed as a hula and sword dancer weekly at the club after school.

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