

# DANCING IN THEIR LIGHT

## *A Daughter's Unfinished Memoir*

### Debbie Chinn

The proud daughter of Chinese immigrants, Debbie Chinn was born and raised on Long Island, New York.

While other children took part in sleepovers, sports activities, and summer camps, Debbie's playground was the world of her family's highly successful restaurant and nightclub: the House of Mah Jong. There, from selling cigarettes at the age of three to performing as a Polynesian dancer throughout her teenage years, she forged an unusual pathway towards an eventual career as a non-profit arts CEO.

Debbie traces her lineage back 13 generations; each carrying forth values of spiritual growth, eternal learning, the centrality of arts, humanities, and true compassion amidst war, poverty, separation, discrimination, and tragedies.

Debbie's maternal great-grandmother, born c. 1850, was a young child when 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, adopted, and named her Mary Hartwell.

*Dancing in Their Light* is the rest of the story.

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#### From *Dancing in Their Light*:

*Growing up in a restaurant and nightclub, selling cigarettes at the age of three, working as a bartender's helper at the age of six, and spending my weekends performing as a hula dancer during my teenage years are naturally good fodder for a memoir. There aren't many people whose childhood included learning how to walk on fire and dancing with sharp knives.*

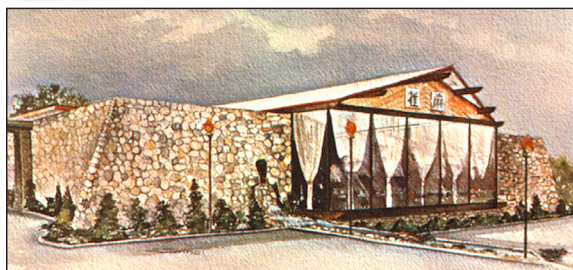
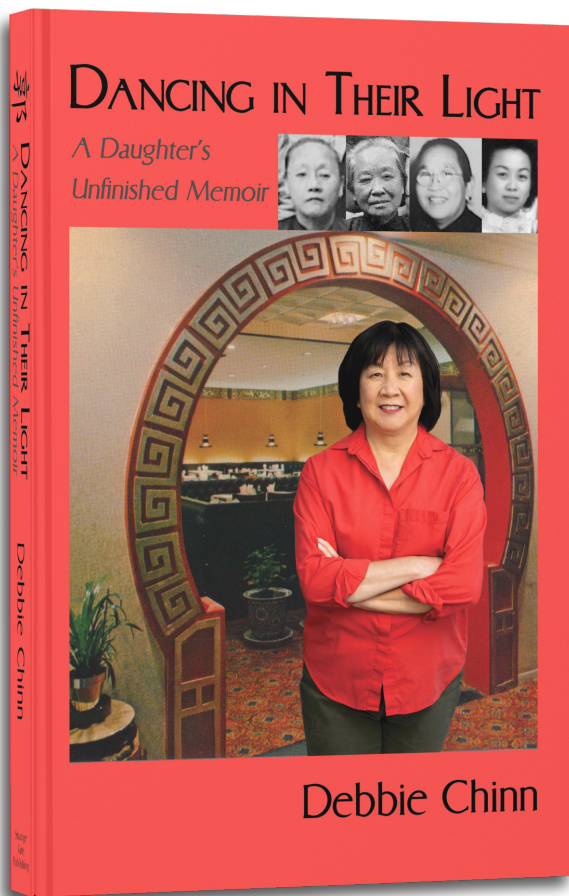
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It is no wonder that Debbie Chinn has forged a distinguished 30-year career as arts activist and non-profit consultant and CEO.

She has long championed diversity, equity and inclusion—a business philosophy instilled in Debbie by her mother and father before it acquired a DEI acronym.

She continues to dance.



House of Mah Jong Restaurant, Syosset, NY, 1960s

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by Debbie Chinn

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Contact: Debbie Chinn

email: [debbie@debbiechinn.com](mailto:debbie@debbiechinn.com)

website: [www.debbiechinn.com](http://www.debbiechinn.com)

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