

Current



Have you ever wanted to send a love letter... To a place? But not just any place, the neighborhood where Cameron House was born and your favorite Chinese delicacies are found. Where grandparents flock to shop and gather for Tai Chi. Maybe even where you go to church.

Call her a Chinatown Cupid, alumni **Carmen Chen** is out to deliver your message.

(At least once Shelter-in-Place orders have lifted.)

Love Letters to Chinatown

How did you first get involved with Cameron House?

I've been involved with Cameron House since 6th grade as a youth participating in the Bilingual After school Program and Friday Night Club. Cameron House to me has always been a place of learning, building, and deepening my understanding of how growing up in Chinatown has shaped my identity. Although I am not currently involved in any Cameron House programs or services, most of my friends are Youth Development Leaders for the Friday Night Club program.

Tell me about the project, what inspired you to start it?

Love Letters to Chinatown was actually a project started by the [W.O.W \(Wing on Wo\) project in New York City](#). My friend Vida and I were inspired to bring this project to San Francisco and Oakland Chinatown because we are disheartened by the

increased amount of xenophobia directed to the Asian community. With the establishment of this project, we want to recognize and bring home the love and unity that have always existed here in the Bay and uplift our neighborhood in it's darkest times. This project asks the participants to create a message that is addressed to someone who lives or works in Chinatown, a business, Chinatown's spirit, and/or organization. The love letters can be poems, stories, illustrations, paintings, audios, etc., all of which will be translated and posted around Chinatown in the upcoming weeks.

What does this project mean to you?

Growing up in Chinatown, I have witnessed layers of dispossession and displacement that have taken place. The many rapid transitions have made me question my sense of belonging in Chinatown. Thus, what motivated me to organize and bring Love Letters to

Chinatown San Francisco/Oakland was the hope of reconnecting with "home".

What has been your favorite submission thus far? Why?

There have been so many wonderful submissions, but the first one we received was probably the most memorable. I remember that exact moment of sitting in front of my computer watching the response number going from zero to one. That moment was filled with so much excitement and validation to how much our community was calling for love and tenderness. The submission was a black and white pen drawing of the center of a bok choy starting to root at the base. The artist shared that the drawing represents the healing and growth that can happen through all this, despite rocky starts and hard struggles.

(continued on pg. 3)

From the Executive Director

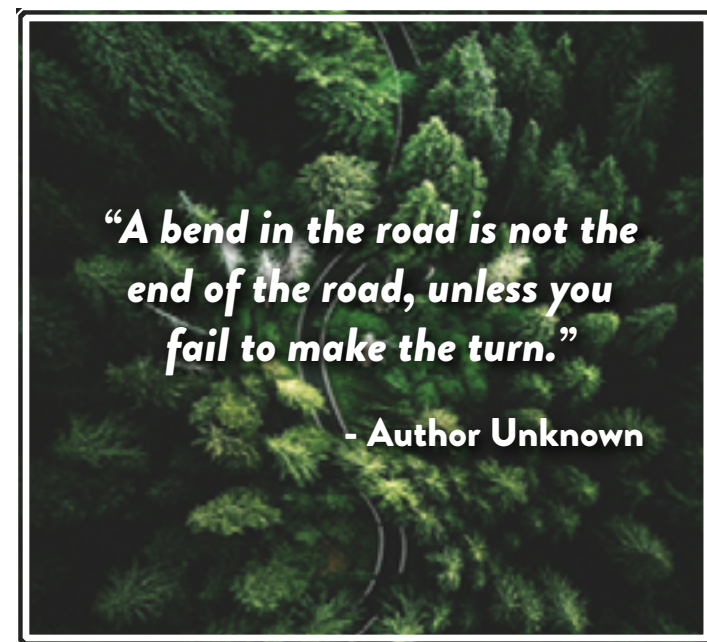
We find ourselves in the midst of a cataclysmic social and health upheaval that has unprecedented implications for us as citizens, people of faith, and as a community benefit organization. Words fail in describing the recent unspeakable acts of hate, racism and oppression and I ache for our brothers, sisters and those of every color, creed and orientation.

In the midst of this tumult I remain hopeful and grateful.

Thank you – our donors, volunteers, staff, board, alumni, and friends – for the outpouring of moral support and prayers, volunteer service, and your financial contributions.

We surpassed our May appeal goal, raising \$108,000 from individuals. We received an additional \$25,000 from the Metta Fund, Women’s Foundation of California and United Parcel Service; \$17,000 in tribute gifts honoring 100 individuals; and we received a planned gift of \$184,000 from a Cameron House alumna to the Cameron House Foundation.

The May appeal provided critical cash resources to support operations when the pandemic forced cancellations of our income-generating Carnival event and our entire slate of summer camps.



We offer a special shout-out to our food pantry volunteers and staff for performing an essential service to about 200 families at risk of food insecurity. Our team distributed 61,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables, rice and protein over the past 12 weeks. 585 volunteer-hours were

contributed overall; these volunteer hours are valued at \$18,000 by the Independent Sector.

In light of a Philanthropy Today report of 1.6 million job losses in the nonprofit sector since March, our success in securing a Payroll Protection Program (“PPP”) Loan of \$383,000 through the CARES Act facilitates us to keep our valuable staff on payroll. This loan will convert to a grant to pay for salaries/wages, payroll taxes and benefits not covered by our City service contracts through October.

This loan opportunity and our City partners have enabled us to replace a van, install a new partition in our classroom, provide supplemental food for 40 of our after school families in need, purchase gift cards for people at risk for domestic violence, purchase Chromebooks for our after school learners, and create activity packs to support virtual connections with our youth. We’ve invested in professional development for our teams, equipping them to model deescalation practices, perform and communicate more effectively and to facilitate difficult teachable moments that our youth face.

Our Social Services and Youth Ministry teams continue to conduct essential wellness checks with our counseling and case management clients and youth by phone and Zoom. Despite the disruption, our youth are engaged in producing a yearbook, learning peer counseling skills, and engaging with alumni about career pathways.

Our senior management team is preparing for a cautious, phased re-opening, in coordination with the Department of Public Health and the public schools. Rather than hoping to return to “normal” I prefer to say that we’re all working with the concept of “getting back to better”.

Leading a recovery from this pandemic will challenge us to manage adaptively under constantly changing conditions. It will also catalyze a shift from being inwardly focused to outwardly community-facing, acquiring and developing new skill sets and expertise, and shaping a sustainable business model in a new era.

We are committed to a strategic planning process that engages our stakeholders and helps us define our “North Star” and an exciting path forward. Until then, I hope this Current finds you safe, secure, and healthy of mind, body and spirit; and resolute in your faith and convictions to stand up, speak out, and act in service to justice, equity, healing and love.

Michael Lee

Where can people learn more about your project? How can people support? Who can submit?

Love Letters to Chinatown San Francisco/Oakland are still accepting submission and we encourage anyone to submit through the Google Form: tinyurl.com/ChinatownLetters. We hope to overwhelm our community with love and care, while continuing to stimulate intergenerational dialogues and exchanges built on the history and present day issues of Chinatown. I also want

to send my deepest gratitude to the wonderful translators who have graciously offered their time to support with translation, making this project accessible to our elders and people in our community who don’t speak English.

Keep up with Love Letters to Chinatown on Instagram

[@madeinchinatown.sf](https://www.instagram.com/madeinchinatown.sf)

Cover Art by Kimberly Au

Here is a Love Letter submitted by Timothy Hsu:

Dear Cameron House,

It’s been 9 months since I moved to San Francisco. I knew when I got here that I wanted to find ways to serve and plug into community around Chinatown, but as a Mandarin-background ABC who could barely speak any Cantonese, I wasn’t sure if there was a place for me.

You became that place. I asked God to lead my steps and guide me to where He wanted me to be, and He lead me through your doors. I fell in love with your story: the legendary, fiery faith of Donaldina Cameron and her heart to rescue the broken and share God’s love with them; the girls who came out of their bondage in the darkness and found shelter in you and the freedom Jesus gives; God’s gracious hand that preserved both them and you through the devastation of the 1906 earthquake and fire; the generations of families and friends that have served and made countless friendships and memories within your walls; the warm, joyful community that has inherited that legacy and still thrives today.

It’s hard to imagine what you must feel like right now. Your building is mostly empty. The throngs of ABC kids, the streams of grandparents picking them up, the laughter-filled staff and volunteers... now reduced to a trickle.

But you have endured so much before. You rose from the ashes and chaos of the earthquake and fire so long ago. You have kept your community strong and found healing through times of deep pain and injustice covered by silence. Through the afflictions and trials of the past, by God’s grace, you have endured. And I trust that, by that same grace, you will endure through this time and emerge stronger than ever before. God began a good work in and through you, and I don’t think He’s done yet.

I’m thankful for you, Cameron House. I look forward to seeing you again, full and hopefully soon!

Gratefully,

~ Timothy

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

~ Jesus (John 14:27)

The 2020 Senior Commission, Ripple, has just graduated from their respective high schools, some of them have even received scholarships from Cameron House. We asked them how their time at Cameron House has affected them and their future plans.

the **RIPPLE** effect

How have Shelter-in-Place orders affected your senior year and college transition?

The transition from the end of school to summer, it was all the same, because of online classes it wasn't a transparent transition, we were just in it, then we were suddenly out of high school. Since it was my last year, I was expecting to have a whole graduation ceremony, and see all my friends to tell each other, "We made it, man! We graduated high school!" But because of the shelter in place orders, we weren't really able to have an actual graduation. As for my college transition, now that everything's online, I decided to go to the City College of San Francisco because I feel like if you spend tuition on just online classes at a four-year university, it seems kind of inefficient if you similarly get online education through City College. Even before shelter-in-place, I didn't really know what I wanted to pursue in the future, I decided I could further try to discover what that was through City College.

How has Cameron House shaped you into the person you are today?

I have been a part of Cameron House since I was in 1st grade so it's pretty much been like a second home to me. I started in the summer Bilingual Youth Program and then went through Solid Ground in middle school. I became a day camp leader in high school for four years and was a Summer Intern for one of them. I attended Friday Night Club and was also a part of the Cameron House ACBA (Asian Community Basketball Association) team, Boys2Men, and Kitchen Medicine for a bit. I think my experiences at Cameron House have shaped me to be a better person, to be helpful, and to be a good friend to people I don't know, especially those that need help.

If you could send a letter to your high school freshman self, what would you say?

I would tell myself to work harder and don't try not to procrastinate because you just get one opportunity in high school but also don't work too hard because there will be future chances to make up for it.

Do you have any plans after college, like a big picture plan?

I kind of want to go towards a psychology major now, after thinking about it for a bit, at least some type of social work maybe, just to be able to help people, that's all, just because Cameron House made me want to be helpful, and to help others, I feel like being a psychologist, therapist, or social worker would help me help others.

How have Shelter-in-Place affected your senior year and college transition?

I have ideas of how people normally end their senior years in high school, ideas of students having a lot of fun and dropping all their school work trying to hang out with their friends as much as possible, but, of course that's not the case for us. I actually found out during quarantine that I'll be attending UCLA and plan to study neuroscience in the fall. Now there's the likely potential that we'll move to online schooling. It's pretty sad. I've heard a lot that freshman year is where everyone is new and they're willing to make a lot of friends, so I'm not sure we'll still have that same experience. I guess we will, but it'll be delayed.

What Cameron House programs have you been through?

I joined the Ventures program towards the end of third grade and continued to go through the summer program all the way until junior year as a summer leader. I attended Friday Night Club starting in 6th grade, I went to West from 8th to 12th grade, and I was a part of the Cameron House ACBA (Asian Community Basketball Association) team from sophomore to senior year. I still remember my first season when I scored my first point, and I was almost completely new to the sport. It was the easiest layup from the right hand side of the backboard, and I made it, my whole team was cheering for me. I scored 2 points that entire season: Career. High.

How has Cameron House shaped you into the person you are today?

I think that Cameron House has made me more responsible, and helped me see from different points of view. I say that because obviously through the Summer Leadership Development Program, that's what they aim to make high schoolers become: leaders. I think without Cameron House, I wouldn't have gotten a lot of opportunities to lead, not only younger children, but try to work with people my age, cooperate with them, and lead them when necessary. It exposed me to ideas that can be very useful in any group dynamic no matter what age. Cameron House also made me like to challenge myself. There were a lot of challenges my way, whether it was taking care of younger children or dealing with other scenarios, it's very encouraging and motivating to tackle them head on.

Anything else you'd like the Cameron House community to know?

I want to say how grateful I am that I've been a part of this community for so many years, everyone is just super inviting and friendly. I'm super blessed to have this community. A lot of people think of CH as a second family, I'm definitely one of those people.



CHRISTOPHER MAK
GALILEO HIGH SCHOOL

LOWELL HIGH SCHOOL
JELIX TSAN



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Meet **MARIE CHIN** food pantry volunteer

How did you first get involved with the food pantry?

I have been volunteering for the food pantry at Cameron House since November of 2018. I first got involved when I came down to Cameron House for summer volunteer meals and kitchen medicine. Nolan asked if I could help him out in the food pantry and I told him that I would help out once I retired from work. I retired on October 26, 2018.

What is your history with Cameron House?

I have never attended any programs at Cameron House. I am from the East Coast. I only got involved in Cameron House when I moved to San Francisco 18 and a half years ago. But my home church, The First Chinese Presbyterian Church in New York City, used to send volunteers to the Cameron House Volunteer In Mission program* for the summer 30+ years ago. And also during the past few years, I would work along with Chris Jeong on the Friday cooking class (Kitchen Medicine) with the BAP children and various summer service and leaders' meals.

What keeps you coming back to the food pantry?

I like helping out and it is also a mission of my church, The Presbyterian Church of Chinatown (PCC). This is also a way for me to give back to my community. We can not just take from our community and never give back!

What changes have you noticed since the transition to a contact-less pick-up process?

I do not have a chance to talk with the clients any more. There is less human contact. We just want them to take their food and go home. I miss all the other volunteers that used to come to help out. Most of them cannot come because they are older than 65 years of age. I hope that once this Shelter-In-Place (SIP) order is over, the old crew will come back to help out. The advantage of having all the food placed in a bag is that we have less leftovers.



There is less "picking" by the clients. Once SIP is over, it will be harder for the old crew to place all the food into bags. As of SIP, the young people come in around 9:30 AM to place all the food into bags. Many of the volunteers now stay for about five and a half hours. There are about 12-15 people that are involved in food pantry now. A couple of people come in early to help unload the truck.

What are your hopes for the food pantry and Cameron House community?

I hope that we will be able to provide food pantry clients with enough food to supplement their weekly food because most of them are low income clients. I am hoping that whoever reads this, this will bring some light into their lives that one day they will also do some kind of volunteer work for whichever community they live in. Jesus came to serve us, so we should follow in His footsteps.

*The Volunteer In Mission (VIM) program was hosted by the Presbyterian Church. Volunteers around the world traveled to volunteer from weeks to months year-round. The program was very active in the 70s, 80s, and 90s. At Cameron House, these volunteers helped in the summer program (like Ventures or BYP). Many PCC and CH alumni participated. Marie was visiting friends who participated during the summer. She was not a VIM participant.

Remembering Alfred D. Hall

1935–2020

By Margaret Zavertnik & Mildred Hall

Alfred Daniel Hall was a loving and caring brother to my sister and me. We grew up in San Francisco Chinatown. Al attended the area schools: Commodore Stockton, Francisco Junior High and Commerce High School.

In 1951, we moved to the North Beach district where we lived as we finished our schooling. Al finally had his own bedroom and privacy, and we each had a bedroom also. We attended American school with the mandatory Chinese school and piano lessons every Saturday. The piano teacher came to the house to give us lessons; our mother was the fourth student! Al played pieces like "Deep Purple", "Poliwog's Cake Walk", and "Malaguena". We all enjoyed his renditions.

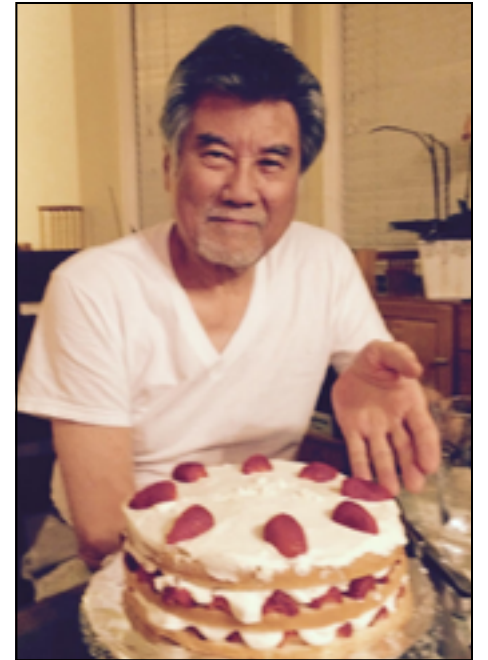
As a member of the Cherokees YMCA club, Al learned to swim and went to Camp McCoy. Al grew up in the Cameron House youth program from 1949 into early adulthood. During those years, he attended UCSF. After graduating in 1958, Al married Sharlene Low; and later they raised their children, daughter Julie and son David. Their participation

at Cameron House as well as the Chinese Presbyterian Church (now known as the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown) continued serving faithfully as leaders, teachers and elders through their lifetime.

Al followed in our father's footsteps. It was already known that he would grow up to be a pharmacist. As a young teen he helped with local deliveries and picking up products from local distributors. Always focused, Al would open his own Hall's Pharmacy in the Richmond District for over 30 years. The patients/customers always asked for Al as they came in to fill a prescription or to ask a question. He was a trusted professional and was referred to as "Doc" sometimes. When there was a lull, Margaret, who worked at the store, and Al would plan a menu for the next family dinner. Some of the customers overheard the plans and would chime in with ideas, whether it be for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, or birthday dinners. Then there was the beautifully delicious strawberry shortcake too. Our taste buds were opened up more and more when our Dad encouraged us to try "everything". And we were game at every chance tasting foods at all the diverse restaurants in San Francisco.

Al also taught first-year UCSF pharmacy students OTC (over-the-counter) classes as a volunteer teacher for over 30 years and mentored student interns. He closed his store and worked for a few years before retiring in 2012.

In the early years of his retirement, he continued to teach at UCSF, volunteered at Cameron House in the



BAP program, and helped cook for CH events. He loved entertaining friends and family with gourmet meals paired with fine wines and awesome desserts. Chef Al prepared amazing private party dinners for several CH fund-raisers. He enjoyed attending the symphony and some jazz concerts as well. He was an avid Cal Bear fan who supported and attended their games and enjoyed watching the 49ers and Warriors season games. He was a wonderful husband, father, brother, uncle, and faithful friend, whom we love and miss.

Many friends remember Al saying he was: "Someone who wonderfully exemplified love of God, family and service to all. His love of food and entertaining friends and family brought laughter and fabulous dinners – meaning great food and drink and conversation;" "Having involvement with church as a caring and kind person;" and, "Someone who represented a lifetime of steadiness, kindness, dependability and intelligence mixed with joy and cheerfulness."

And finally, the remembrance of Al as *One in a Million*.

[Watch the Carnival Play of 1953 featuring Al Hall and other alumni.](#)



Formal Greeting
 Primary Street
 Primary City, Primary State ZIP
 Primary Country

26

Celebrating 26 Years of Cancer Support Group

by Yulanda Kwong

In May 2020, our Chinese Cancer Support Group (CSG) celebrated

its 26th Anniversary. Although, this year, we were not able to celebrate altogether in-person in Culbertson Hall with a half-sheet birthday cake, picture-taking, and karaoke-singing, we celebrated by issuing a special newsletter that was sent to 103 program participants to reminisce our memories and highlights since 1994. The newsletter included facts and questions to program participants so that we could learn more about their thoughts and experiences for being a part of the support group. We also included information and resources that may be helpful for them during this time of pandemic. Lastly, we assigned them homework which each participant could write or make something that is related to the number 26. For example, they could draw 26 roses, make 26 greeting



cards, or compose a poem by using the number 26. When we have the opportunity to convene as a group again, we will share all of our creative masterpieces. To add a touch of festive care, we conducted wellness calls to remind participants of our celebration and wished the support group a happy birthday.



Cover Art by Kimberly Au for Love Letters to Chinatown