

# PORTSMOUTH

CITY LIFESTYLE™

*The Men's  
Issue*

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## On the Cover

"The carp leaps through the dragon's gate" is a Chinese brush painting from Alexandra Chan's book referring to the idea from Chinese mythology that carp are actually dragons in larval form. The carp metamorphosis has parallels with Chan's spiritual journey in her book.

Photography:  
Alexandra Chan

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# Reconnecting To Our Wonder

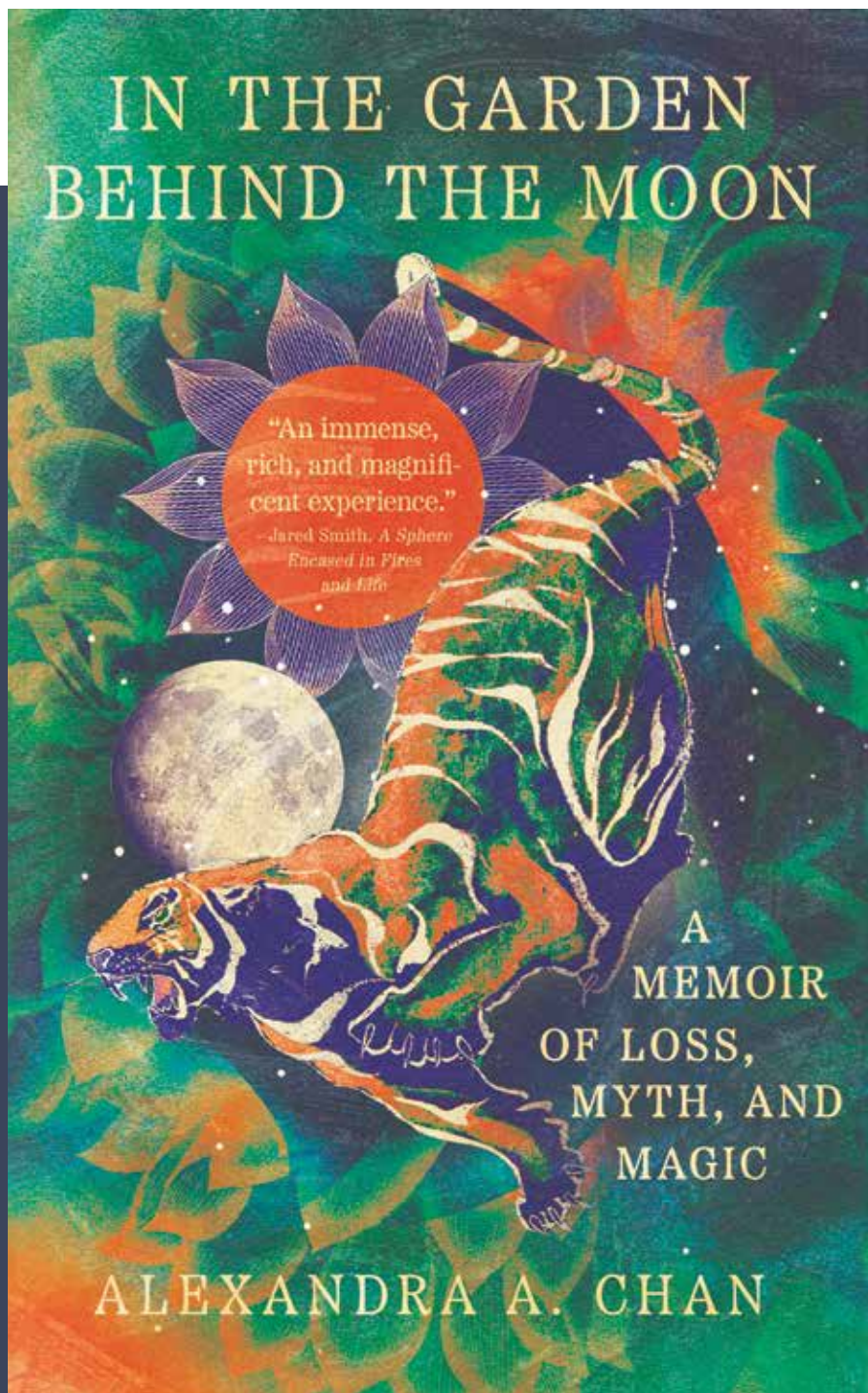
ARTICLE BY ANN KATHRYN KELLY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDRA CHAN

In the Year of the Ram, 2015, Alexandra Chan's 102-year-old father, Robert Earl, died. She writes about finding her way back to meaning and wellness, told through the lens of this devastating loss, in her new memoir, *In the Garden Behind the Moon*.

A Portsmouth-based painter, photographer, archaeologist, and author, Alexandra reconnects to family stories and ancestral wisdom to rebuild her life and resurrect her spirit. Readers will journey with her from China's mainland, to the Jim Crow South, through the Pacific theater of WWII, to the present day. Alexandra's original, full-color Chinese brush paintings throughout the book frame her messages with additional meaning. Published on May 28, 2024, the book is available locally at RiverRun Bookstore in Portsmouth and through online retailers. Alexandra's artwork is available at [risingphoenixarts.com](http://risingphoenixarts.com). Learn more at [alexandrachan.com](http://alexandrachan.com).

**FAMILY WISDOM HELPS  
AUTHOR ALEXANDRA  
CHAN WRITE HER WAY TO  
WELLNESS AND SHARE  
UNIVERSAL TRUTHS**





**WHAT I LEARNED AFTER MY FATHER DIED IS THAT HE AND THE ELDERS I WAS RAISED AROUND NEVER CEASED TO WALK WITH WONDER.**

**WELCOME, ALEXANDRA! FATHER'S DAY PROMPTS REFLECTION ABOUT OUR FATHERS' IMPACTS ON OUR LIVES. HOW DID WRITING THIS MEMOIR DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR FATHER?**

I first intended to create a family keepsake—one that would capture all the adventures that had been hallmarks of my father's life. Yet, the more I wrote about him, the more I realized I was writing about the human condition. I came to see my father as multi-dimensional, a perspective many of us can overlook with our parents. It became clear my story wasn't for personal reflection anymore, but contained universal themes of ancestry and wisdom that I wanted to share with a broader audience.

**AND IN WHAT WAYS DID WRITING ABOUT YOUR FATHER REVEAL NEW INSIGHTS ABOUT YOURSELF?**

I got back in touch with myself. We're all born with an innate sense of wonder and possibility, but we lose this as we get older. It gets tamped down. What I learned after my father died is that he and the elders I was raised around never ceased to walk with wonder. I call it "Old Chan Magic." I started to remember and reconnect with that, and as I did, I became softer. Gentler. I was writing myself to wellness.

**WHAT DO YOU HOPE READERS WILL TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR MEMOIR?**

Nurture your creativity, in whatever form. Pursuing our passions infuses life with meaning. Be open to intuition—your own, or advice you receive from someone you trust. I discovered Chinese brush painting years earlier and completed many pieces during my father's illness. I always saw it as a hobby. His final words urged me to sell my paintings, revealing a deeper purpose to my art. Many are now the essential framework to my book.



*Book 1: Year of the Ram*

