

Betty Chinn is a member of our wonderful community here in Humboldt County. She has spoken here at Unity of the Redwoods, and we have committed our support to her “shower project” both with cash to help pay for water and utilities, and with towels, soap and shampoo.

Betty grew up in Mainland China. The daughter of “intellectuals,” she found herself alone on the streets at the age of seven when the Cultural Revolution scattered, imprisoned or killed the rest of her family. She knows all too well the problems of homelessness, and for the last two decades she has worked tirelessly to seek out those she calls “the poor beneath the poor,” those who cannot access the resources available within the framework of the system.

One of the people Betty fed daily was a wheelchair-bound gentleman named Albert. At one point she noticed that each time she delivered food to him, he remained at a distance from her rather than accepting her usual hugs.

After several days, she asked him, “Albert, don’t you love me anymore?”
“Betty,” he responded, I smell so bad that I don’t want you to have to get close to me.”
“Oh, Albert,” she said. “What can I do to help? What do you need”
“Just a towel and some soap,” he replied.

The following day, she took him a towel and a bar of soap along with his usual sandwich and coffee. When she went back a day later, she could not find him anywhere. She asked around and was told that the previous night he had gone down to the bay to wash, and he had drowned.

Last year, when Maria Shriver gave Betty \$10,000 as part of the Minerva Award, Betty used the money to seed the construction of a shower facility next to the St. Vincent de Paul dining room. It’s a beautiful place, designed, built and staffed largely by volunteers and it’s getting a real workout. The stories Betty tells from those who use it are heart-wrenching.

Unity of the Redwoods is proud to be a part of the project, and we were especially proud recently when President Obama awarded Betty a Presidential Citizenship Award.