

Chinese poet Yang offers poetry nights

Monthly sessions reflect freedom she sought in the United States

by **Jason Pafundi**

Managing Editor

When Susan Yang came to the United States from China in 1989, one of the things she was most looking forward to was the opportunity to express herself freely, a freedom not allowed under Communist Chinese rule.

The way Yang, 49, chose to take advantage of that freedom was through poetry and more than 20 years later, she is still writing and reading poems. That passion is on display 11 times a year at the Fresh Meadows Barnes & Noble at 176-60 Union Turnpike, where Yang hosts a monthly poetry open-mic night.

The readings are held on the second Monday of each month from 7:30 to 9 p.m., except December, and are open to anyone who wants to read.

"Every time is a different crowd, sometimes as big as 50 people," she said. "Sometimes we have groups of students, sometimes groups of Spanish poets. We have a variety of different people, different styles and different participation from all different cultures."

As host, Yang reads her own poetry as a way to encourage first-time readers, who she said are shy and unsure of the quality of their writing.

"Some people have never read in public before," she said. "They call themselves 'closet poets' and they need a lot of encouragement."

Yang is especially thankful to the bookstore for providing space and the opportunity

to host this event, and though it is open to anyone who wants to read or listen, there is one rule — no profanity.

"There are poets who want to freely express themselves with profanity, but they can't do it here," she said. "This is a rule we have to obey, especially because there are often children who come to the readings."

Despite the jitters of first-time readers and the randomness of the audience, Yang said there is always a poem that stands out during each program.

"Every time I host this event there is always someone who reads an amazing poem," she said. "I ask them to send me a copy of the poem so I can read it again and again and again."

The poet said there are so many people who don't know that they have amazing talent and that it is a "great bond to share this kind of passion with a total stranger."

Yang said that though it's easy to tell that most of the poets are beginners, they "write from the heart and it's very touching to hear people's raw material. Nobody is an expert in poetry because it is a free style."

Her birth name is Xia and she came to the United States after the Tiananmen Square uprising. She said she gave up an important government job in China to come here.

Now, Yang works as a real estate broker and massage therapist.

"I'd probably have a lot of power now in China," Yang said. "I'd probably be as corrupt as other government officials, but I



Susan Yang, left, hosts monthly poetry readings in Fresh Meadows. With her is poet Huang Xiang, who spoke at a recent session.

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don't regret anything. I don't have the power I'd have [in China], but I have freedom and choice."

She hopes to eventually build up enough interest from the local community to increase the frequency of the event.

"A lot of people don't realize that they

can benefit from just listening to poetry," Yang said. "It's a great way to just feel inspired."

For more information about the readings, those interested should contact Yang at susanthewinner@gmail.com or call (718) 454-6868.