

Meet Lily Chan

This month, our Young poet in residence is local student, Lily Chan. She tells *FN* about her inspiration, her teachers and her conviction that being a lawyer and a poet can comfortably co-exist.

Lily Chan is a law student who hopes to become the first lawyer-poet in the universe.

"People think poetry/creative writing and studying law are incompatible," Lily explains, "but I'm in my final year and loving it. It's surprising how the two can be reconciled. I've read judgments written by judges who summarise legal concepts in eloquent metaphors.

"There are 'found poems' in legislation – section 269 of the criminal code for instance states (and I paraphrase) 'an embryo becomes a human capable of being killed when it emerges, in whole or in part, from the body of the mother, whether it has started breathing or not, whether it has a heartbeat or not, whether it the umbilical cord has been severed or not.'"

An enthusiastic reader, Lily loves J D Salinger, *The Life of Pi*, *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse and anything by Eckhart Tolle. "Oh, the saviour!"

"Sometimes I'm overwhelmed by the variety of talents and enormity of the genre," she says. "A poet from Melbourne, Tim Ham-



Lily wearing one of her many hats: Publicity Officer for Universities Spring Poetry Committee

ilton, once said, 'if poetry is air, please listen to the sound of my breathing' and that's how I feel. Writing and performing poetry is an affirmation of existence."

Lily didn't suddenly discover poetry, but considers it was "more of a gradual awareness that what I was writing was poetry. That awareness surprised me."

On reflection, Lily says it was a combination of factors such as good English teachers who urged her to enter poetry/writing competitions, studying such luminaries as Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, Seamus Heaney, Bruce Dawe and Judith Wright in high school, and seeking out different styles, structures and themes that propelled her to the poetry realm.

"Preconceived notions of poetry were dislodged over and over. My parents surrounded me with a home library when I was a child, including some volumes of poetry. This has had the effect of creating a whole generation of avid readers in my siblings. My sister Anabel offers good critique, often suffering through midnight renditions of poems with exasperation and good grace."

Lily has had several poems published "here and there", has won prizes in short story competitions and has been "filling up acres of journals" since she was ten years old.

"It all started on a trip to Bali and I wrote a poem about sea-



gulls and how they 'shrilly cry'. I also write short stories. Poems are jotted down and then reworked and edited later. I find short stories harder to refine, maybe because of the length and the dedication needed. I tend to be happier with my poems, because I like to see immediate result after input. That's not to say I'm happy with them the first time or even second or third time round. I dig up poems from a couple of years ago and always find they need improvement."

Amongst Lily's favourite poets are e. e. cummings, the odes of Pablo Neruda, Bukowski and a variety of Eastern poets including Mirabai, Tukaram, and Hafiz.

She reads a lot of contemporary Australian poetry and especially appreciates the work of Ouyang Yu and Grant Caldwell.

"I recently read an anthology of contemporary Japanese female poets – fascinating subject matters and radical new voices. And the imagery by Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath is brilliant."

Lily is inspired not only by great poets of our time, but also many other random factors such as graffiti, pine cones and going to local readings.

"I especially like it when the night is dragging on a bit and then some open reader gets up



and blows everyone away. Last September's Spring Poetry Festival in Perth was definitely a trigger – I'd never read or heard poetry in public before.

"I experienced performance poetry from Allan Boyd and Tomas Ford for the first time, and received support from Peter Jeffrey of CCTV, Afeif Ismail and the Spring Poetry Committee, so being surrounded by fellow poets and constantly interacting with them is definitely an inspiration."

This inspiration has turned Lily into a do-er: she currently con-

venes Poet's Corner at Pages Café, State library every third Saturday of the month from 2pm; and co-convenes Voicebox with Nandi Chinna at La Tropicana Café the first Thursday of every month.

Lily stays motivated and focused by creating structure.

"The residency will definitely help. It's structuring the creative writing process which is great. Otherwise I don't stay motivated – I frequently feel unmotivated. I feel frustrated if I don't churn out a poem at least every week or so."

Lily's residency begins on July 12. In addition to writing new poems, she will be re-examining past work.

"I want to consolidate my first collection and am planning to write thematically linked poems based on Hindu texts such

as the *Mahabharatha* and the *Ramayana*.

"The surrounding view [of TCH] is stunning so I'm planning on writing poems triggered by that environment. I've met FAWWA members who regularly meet at TCH and the emerging poet, Sarah French and really enjoyed it. I'm really looking forward to having that space and time."

An emerging poet herself, Lily tells other like-minded souls to "Write when you feel like writing, sing when you feel like singing, do whatever makes you feel good, as long as it doesn't hurt anybody including yourself, physically, mentally, and spiritually."

Lily also suggests reading plenty of poems from plenty of places.

"Get a good creative writing tutor, they're totally invaluable. My hat goes off to Marcella Polain and Miriam Wei Wei Lo. I also think anyone wanting to write poetry should read Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*. Revolutionary."

And perhaps a law text or two.

—Tanya Dewhurst

A mathematician in a Mills & Boon

he traces her curves as reverently as a parabola
dissects the trapezium of her ribcage with gentle fingers
measures the indent of her dimple with his mouth
explores the circumference of her chest
and marks all her x-intercepts with kisses

he wants to taste every cubic centimetre of her
increase her smile to frown ratio by 2:1
hold her until all the digits of π pass by the window
he wants to be adjacent to her hypotenuse
he wants to quantify his emotions into a quadratic equation
which falls off the graph and flows on indefinitely
he wants to reduce them into the smallest composite fraction
and divide their lives into children

parks
birthdays
barbecues
coffee
and dances in the rain.

Lily Chan

Lily Chan's residency starts on Wednesday 12 July and runs for two weeks.

She'll be working in the back room, so please respect her privacy.

However, she is looking forward to meeting members so do stop in at Tom Collins House and say hi!