

One Book One Aurora campaign heads into home stretch



By Brock Weir

If you haven't picked up a copy of Marina Nemat's harrowing memoir 'Prisoner of Tehran', there is still time to join in on the community-wide discussion centring on the book.

Spearheaded by the Aurora Public Library (APL), the book is the centrepiece of the One Book One Aurora campaign, focusing on the bestselling book written by Ms. Nemat, an Aurora resident, about her ordeal being imprisoned and tortured in Iran aged just 16.

The book was chosen by APL to get the community talking on wide-ranging local and international issues. You may have seen the books at small portable libraries set up in community hubs, free to take and pass along to the next reader, but although supplies in these boxes are running low, copies are still on hand at the Aurora Public Library and making the rounds amongst local bookworms just waiting for the next reader.

The campaign kicked off on April 1 and, since then, One Book One Aurora has hosted a number of community events including a writers' workshop with Ms. Nemat and a Human Rights Panel bringing together advocates from different fields across York Region. According to Jill Foster, CEO of the Aurora Public Library, the best is yet to come.

'Imagine your 16-year-old self, sitting at home, a typical teenager,' said Ms. Foster. 'You have got friends, you go to school, you have lots of activities on the go, and one night a revolutionary guard knocks on your door, hauls you out of your house, and takes you to a notorious prison for political prisoners. Your family has no recourse. You can't be freed from this prison. You are tortured, sentenced to death, and left to basically languish in a terrible situation.'

'Marina Nemat was 16 in 1982 in Iran when this happened to her. She was held as a political prisoner for over two years. She was tortured and sentenced to death. It was only by a strange fluke and if you have read the book, you know what I am referring to that her life was saved, but she was to be executed. Prisoner of Tehran is an unflinching memoir of life in prison. From Marina's brutal torture during her night of arrest to the squalid living conditions in the prison and her near execution, that is just the beginning

of her amazing story of courage and survival.?

For the past 20 years, Ms. Nemat has been a resident of Aurora. She published her memoir in 2008 and it subsequently became an international best seller, published in nearly 30 countries, and garnered many awards for its author, including the Geneva Human Rights prize last year.

While the One Book One Aurora program is now in the home stretch, the campaign's Grand Finale will take place on September 27 as part of Aurora Culture Days with a series of events throughout Aurora. First, the Aurora Cultural Centre will host an afternoon of Persian dance and music from 12 noon to 2 p.m. This will be followed with a special presentation at the Aurora Public Library lead by Ms. Nemat herself, and a performance of an excerpt from ?Prisoner of Tehran? performed by Theatre Aurora.

With ?Prisoner of Tehran? forming the basis of the inaugural One Book One Aurora program, Ms. Foster says that judging by the amount of books doing the rounds and the number of people who have participated in the program so far, it has been a success.

?Few books have been returned but the main part is the books went and we are hoping they have been passed from hand to hand,? she says. ?We really have no way of knowing, but it is not that kind of project and we're not too worried about the numbers. We just want everyone to be engaged.

?This was our first attempt at a community-wide reading project and I think it has been successful. We chose this project because we thought it would be a valuable way of providing some cultural cohesion within the community and because it addresses the key goals of our strategic plan, which is engaging our community, mobilizing knowledge, and collaborating and partnering, and we managed to meet all three goals with this project.

?We have been able to deliver a shared experience to the Citizens of Aurora.?

To join in the discussion, visit www.onebookoneaurora.com.