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Faculty member’s poetry collection shortlisted for literary award

Edmonton—Jenna Butler, a faculty member in the Department of English at MacEwan University, has been shortlisted for the Stephan G. Stephanson Award for her collection, Wells.

“I was stunned,” said Butler. “It was completely unexpected.”

When she began her collection, Butler was writing a personal account of her relationship with her grandmother and her grandmother’s decent into Alzheimer’s. She hadn’t expected her poems to connect with the number of people it has.

Whenever she has performed a reading for an audience, she asks those in attendance to raise their hands if they’ve known anyone who has had Alzheimer’s or dementia. Usually all the hands go up. She says the moment creates a sense of community when they look around and see each other.

“That was a big thing when I was writing this book,” she says. “You think this is so personal and you’re turned inward on it that you know – but really can’t believe – there are that many people going through the same thing.”

Butler adds, “Whether I win or not, I’m just glad it’s resonating with people.” Her advice for students who are aspiring writers: “Read everything, write a ton, and find people you can look up to and people who can give you constructive criticism.”