



Richard Holm | The Daily Herald

Woodland resident Ashleigh Bryant Phillips recently won the 2019 C. Michael Curtis Short Story Book Prize award of \$10,000 and publication through Hub City Press.

Small town girl living in the writing world

BY RICHARD HOLM
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A Woodland resident won the 2019 C. Michael Curtis Short Story Book Prize with an award of \$10,000 and publication through Hub City Press.

Ashleigh Bryant Phillips won the prize based on her collection of short stories titled "Sleepovers" that she submitted for the contest, according to the press release from Hub City Press.

Phillips said Wednesday that she was surprised she won because of the other writers she was up against.

"I will just say that the winner of the prize from last year had been published in a lot of really reputable places," she said. "I was living back home in Woodland — I still live in Woodland and everything felt really kind of stagnant and there wasn't a lot of things to look forward to. Sounds really sad but I was like, 'I'm just going to

"Most of all, however, I responded to a palpable sense of fearlessness. I see in this collection a steely writer, one deeply moved by her place and her people, but also fully committed to the truth no matter how dark or difficult or complicated it may be."

— Lauren Groff
New York Times bestselling author and contest judge

get my stuff together for this contest and see what happens."

Lauren Groff, New York Times bestselling author and judge of the contest, said in the press release, "Ashleigh's prose often holds an incantatory crispness that, while I read along, lulled me into forgetting that I was reading. These stories derive their power from an almost unbearable dramatic irony and an equally deep hunger for human connection and compassion. Most of all, however, I responded to a palpable sense of fearlessness. I see in this collection a steely

writer, one deeply moved by her place and her people, but also fully committed to the truth no matter how dark or difficult or complicated it may be."

Phillips said it was a big deal for her to have someone like Groff praise her work.

"For somebody who is in that polished world and to say, 'Hey, I'm taking this collection,' that's really nice and flattering," she said. "Really nice encouragement."

With a Masters of Fine Arts in Fiction Writing from the University of North Carolina Wilmington, Phillips said some of

the short stories in the collection were from when she was in school and continued to write after getting her degree.

One of her short stories in her collection, "7-Up Cake," was inspired by a young girl from Riverview Elementary School in Murfreesboro, she said.

"I took her story and kind of meld it in with what I knew about being a fifth grader and that story came out of that," Phillips said. "I wrote it in response to an essay that I heard in my graduate program where the writer was using Golden Corral as the comedic relief moment and I thought that was culturally disrespectful because a lot of people love Golden Corral [giggled]."

Her mother, Beth Phillips, said she remembered her daughter writing while she was elementary school.

"She's always had a large imagination and

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always creative," she said. "She would always write stories — always writing stuff down. When she was little, she would love to dance — she was always dancing and dancing around the house."

Beth believes her daughter draws most of her inspiration from life experiences to write most of her stories.

"Not only as a child growing up and being raised in Woodland, but also as a young lady growing up and going off to school in Raleigh, then going to Africa to do study abroad and Wilmington — all of those experiences shine in her writing,"

she said. "It's amazing and I'm very proud. Her family — we are all very supportive and we are just so happy for her."

Ashleigh said she enjoys writing short stories and that she would consider her writing to be realistic fiction.

"I get my inspiration from what I've observed and what I've experienced and what I'm curious about and what I'm trying to make sense of," she said.

When asked what she will do with the \$10,000 she won from the competition, Ashleigh said, "I think the wisest thing to do is put it toward student loans and put it in money market accounts."

Ashleigh said she is going to continue writing because she

still has many ideas to get out to the world.

"I'm always going to keep writing," she said. "We will just see if anybody likes this book and if anyone will want any more stories of mine."

When asked why she was so passionate about writing, Ashleigh said, "Because I've always figured things out that way. I kept a diary when I was a kid and I was pretty stringent with keeping that diary. I've always been comfortable figuring things out that way."

Ashleigh said that most of her stories carry life lessons with them.

"I think mine would be that you can still find joy when you feel trapped," she said. "There are still blessings to find when you're in rough spots."

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pleased that the received the grant.

"With this money, the department's officers will be equipped to serve the county," he said. "All of the equipment that the department has purchased with this grant will be used to update the department's existing equipment that is within the department's control."

Davis said the department will go to buy new equipment for the department's officers, including a new shotgun, new and four automated breathers. The AEDs in the WPD office will be replaced. He said the first time the department received a grant from the state was the department received grants in 2011.

According to information provided on the N.C. Department of Public Safety's official website, the grant was for \$2Tycr70, the C

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