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MCC student Alex Dodt wins second national literary award for 'Lenny'

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Dodt found creative writing again after leaving journalism and has since won

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two national awards for his fiction and poetry. Photo by Jenna Dodt.



20h

Mesa Community College (MCC) creative writing student Alex Dodt won a League of Innovation Student literary award for his short story, “Lenny.” Dodt, a high school teacher and Walter Cronkite School of Journalism alum, spoke about his journey to success as an author at MCC.

“I’ve always read fiction and poetry. But I think, as I have moved away from journalism in terms of a career, I kept looking for outlets as a writer, and I have naturally navigated back to fiction and poetry, which I have always been into,” said Dodt.

“Lenny” is about a family going out to pick a Christmas tree. More than anything, it is a highlight of the commonalities of the human experience. The characters aren’t superheroes. They don’t save the day, or fall madly, deeply in love—they live. It is a beautiful honoring of the simple and slow parts of human



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“A particular person, or a character trait about a person, or a thing they say. Just kind of taking those pieces from daily experience, and, whether it’s a poem or a story, just trying to build something out of it even if it ends up being almost entirely unrelated to the original,” Dodt explained. “...I pull a lot in that sense, you know? Images and moments and characters that I will want to go to the page with and explore.”

This is Dodt’s second literary award from the League of Innovation. The institution awarded a \$500 prize and published his work in the 2019-2020 Artists of Promise publication titled “Passages.”

“This story for this competition really felt like the first one that I kind of had a sense of completion with,” said Dodt. “Where I was like, okay, it could be better, it always can, but I feel at least content with what I have completed.”



He also won in 2019 for a short poem called “No one wants to clean the dishes.” The poem was based on the roommates of his past living situation, but he said it wasn’t autobiographical. It was another example of Dodt “exploring” characters he had invented.

Dodt was shocked when he first was awarded in competition for his poetry. Back then, he considered himself “green”. He still does today. He never expected his poetry to be chosen when it wasn’t his primary focus, when there were so many other talented writers at the school.

“Poetry was always something to do when I didn’t have a story I was working on,” Dodt said.

Some of Dodt’s favorite authors are Denis Johnson, Søren Kierkegaard, Ernest Hemingway, and Gabriel García Márquez. When asked about personal inspirations, he first named an MCC professor.

“Definitely Joshua Rathkamp. Above



all else. He was the first professor I worked with,” Dodt said. “I really started getting into fiction and poetry in 2017. His class was the first I took and it made a big impact on me.”

Dodt said since then Rathkamp has become his mentor and writing coach, and he has continued to sign up for the MCC professor’s creative writing courses.

When asked about his time with Dodt, Rathkamp explained he always knew Dodt had potential.

“I think Alex started taking classes around two and a half years ago,” Rathkamp said. “You could tell right away that he wanted to be in the classroom. He was apt to learn, asked lots of questions and was there every day.”

The journey Dodt and Rathkamp took to improve Dodt’s writing was extensive. Rathkamp edited and suggested improvements time and time again for “Lenny” and other



works. They spent hours going above and beyond what was needed to pass any course. Rathkamp admitted Dodt displayed incredible drive to improve his work before sending them to competition.

“Alex was very interested in getting extra feedback on work in determining which story to submit,” Rathkamp explained. “...That was one thing about Alex, he worked hard. He was doing multiple drafts and revising and revising and revising until he could make something the best that he could.”

The future of this young author seems to be bright, according to Rathkamp. Above everything else, he felt Dodt should continue his dream of pursuing a master’s degree in fine arts.

“Alex is very talented,” Rathkamp said. “There’s things that you can’t teach, you know, and then there are craft elements that you can.”

One of these unteachable elements



was passion, something with which he felt Dodt brimmed from the start.

“A keen sense of detail, right off the bat. An interesting eye for interactions and world views. So I could tell right away he was willing to work,” Rathkamp continued.

After Dodt won his first and second award, Rathkamp felt proud. He said literary competitions were always subjective, but that he always knew Alex had real potential.

Dodt himself is content at MCC for the time being. He stated he is very satisfied with his experience at the school. Not just with professor Rathkamp, but with all of the experiences he shares with other student writers.

“The MCC program has been just a great experience, an extraordinary experience. There have been great professors of course... but also the students,” Dodt said. “... Just to have these opportunities to both read other people’s stuff and have them



read yours and get to know people who are trying in some way to be a writer—it has been super fulfilling.”

A video of Alex Dodt reading “Lenny” can be found at youtu.be/8XtZgVN_I3g. For more information on MCC’s creative writing courses, see mesacc.edu/programs/creative-writing

About Author

Brock Blasdell



Brock Blasdell is an American student journalist from Mesa, Arizona. He was hired onto the Mesa Legend in late 2018 as an Opinions Editor, and soon became the publication’s News Editor in 2019. He is now an Alumnus Correspondent for the paper. His writings emphasize college history, civil involvement, and personal reflection on modern American issues, while also analyzing and critiquing the role of modern media in national politics. Twitter @Brockblasdell





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