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Fort Worth-Area Author Reacts to Printz Honor Book Recognition: "It was the best moment..."

A few years ago, Benbrook author A.M. Jenkins and five author friends pledged to "do whatever it took" to meet at the 2008 American Library Association's Mid-Winter Meeting in Philadelphia.

Jenkins, a single mother of three, looked forward to spending time with friends she usually communicated with only over the Internet. But at the same time, mired in a struggle to support her family on the unsteady income of an author, she regarded the gathering as something of a "last hurrah."

And then, on Sunday morning as she was wrapping up breakfast with her literary friends, Jenkins' cellular phone rang.

It was the Michael A. Printz Award Committee chairman, Lynn Rutan. Jenkins knew Rutan chaired the committee, so, "my jaw just dropped open," she said.

Seeking to preserve the confidentiality of the news until the official announcement the next morning, Rutan instructed Jenkins to go somewhere alone. Jenkins moved away from her pals, ducking behind "some dead fish" outside a city market.

Once she was beyond their view, Jenkins got the news that her "Repossessed" had been selected for Printz Honor Book recognition.

Because the news would not be made public for another 24 hours, Jenkins had to assure Rutan that she would not tell anyone. But Jenkins' friends didn't even need to ask.

"The second they saw my face," said Jenkins, "they all knew."

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“It’s an utter coincidence that I happened to be up there, because I never go anywhere,” Jenkins added. “It was the best moment because I was surrounded by people who understand what this means, and how special this is.”

On Saturday, Jenkins had told one of her friends, Shelley Sykes, about a dream she just had. Sykes interpreted it to mean that something Jenkins began two or three years earlier would be coming to fruition.

“It was really freaky,” said Jenkins. “I’m usually pretty skeptical about those kinds of things.”

However, she acknowledged, it was about three years ago that she began writing “Repossessed.”

The book emerged from a painstaking review process in which the Printz committee winnowed a field of hundreds of books to four Honor Books and one Printz Award, for Geraldine McCaughrean’s “The White Darkness.”

Rutan, the Printz Award committee chair, described “Repossessed” as a “truly delightful and unexpected book” with much humor, wisdom and depth. The book follows a fallen angel that decides to take a break from being a tormentor in hell and “repossess” the body of a teen-aged boy.

“It really explores both what it means to be human, and it is also very thoughtful exploration of spirituality and faith,” said Rutan. “It is very, very beautifully done, there’s nothing heavy-handed in this book. You truly find yourself opening up to just the simple pleasures of life.”

For Jenkins, the Printz Honor Book recognition revived her literary hopes.

“It was really wonderful to hear,” said Jenkins on Tuesday, back at her home in suburban Fort Worth, Texas. “It’s like, ‘Okay, I’m back in the game.’”

First, for the mother of a college-age son and two younger children with special needs, she has a practical matter to tend to.

“I have a house payment due in February,” said Jenkins. “I’m hoping to be able to make that house payment.”