

## Fifth Estate wins award for Ashley Smith docs

**Prestigious Michener prize given for public service journalism**

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*Gov. Gen. David Johnston, right, presents Jim Williamson, executive producer of CBC's *The Fifth Estate*, with the Michener Award for meritorious public service in journalism June 14, 2011, in Ottawa. The program won for its work on the case of Ashley Smith, who killed herself in an Ontario corrections facility. (Fred Chartrand/Canadian Press)*

The CBC program *The Fifth Estate* has won the 2010 Michener Award, an annual honour recognizing meritorious public service journalism in Canada.

Gov. Gen. David Johnston presented the award for the program's two documentaries on the case of Ashley Smith, a 19-year-old woman who had initially been sentenced to a month in juvenile detention when she was 14, but ended up serving more than four years, mostly in solitary confinement.



*Ashley Smith was 14 when she was sentenced to one month in juvenile detention. She ended up spending most of the next four years in the system, before killing herself in solitary confinement when she was 19. Canadian Press*

Smith, originally from Moncton, N.B., ended up strangling herself to death in her cell in an Ontario institution after many previous suicide attempts. Guards had been given orders not to enter the cell as long as she was still breathing. A coroner's inquest on the circumstances surrounding her death is currently underway.

The Fifth Estate won the Michener for documentaries titled [“Out of Control”](#) and [“Behind the Wall,”](#) which probed the issue of how people with mental illness are treated in Canada's penal system.

CBC had to fight to have some of the court documents released, including a video of Smith's death.

On Tuesday night, CBC's Hana Gartner said she felt she had failed with the story because the government stonewalled questions on the case. But she's reassured that the court battle will have a lasting effect.

"In the years to come, journalists are going to see more access... I'm constantly told the precedents changed."

"Coralee Smith [Ashley Smith's mother] wanted so badly for the public to see what happened to her daughter and what happens to people in the system.

"The award means the world to me because of what it is... especially going out on it," said Gartner, who is retiring from CBC after a 35-year career with the public broadcaster.

**Based on impact, results**

Each year, the Michener Award goes to a news organization that makes a significant impact on the public good and achieves identifiable results.



*Gov. Gen. David Johnston presents freelance journalist Jane Armstrong with the Michener's-Deacon Fellowship award June 14, 2011, in Ottawa. Armstrong's fellowship project will scrutinize the impact of Canada's aid programs in Afghanistan. Fred Chartrand/Canadian Press*

As well as CBC, this year's finalists included the Calgary Herald, for a series on the human costs of Alberta's economic boom; the Eastern Door, a Quebec community paper, for sustained reporting on eviction letters sent to non-natives living on the Kahnawke Mohawk reserve; the Hamilton Spectator, for a series proposing remedies to poverty in Hamilton, Ont.; SRC, for news coverage on shale gas exploration; and the Vancouver Sun, for a series on inadequate safety standards for float planes.

Jane Armstrong, a freelance journalist who has worked for the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star, is the winner of the 2011 Michener-Deacon Fellowship, a prize worth up to \$30,000 to allow the winner a four-month leave to work on investigative print and broadcast journalism that serves the public interest through values that benefit the community.

Armstrong's fellowship project will scrutinize the impact of Canada's aid programs in Afghanistan over the past decade and explore the future of those projects when Canada's military role winds down this summer.

A statement released to announce Armstrong's win said the judges felt confident Armstrong would deliver stories that focused on both the issues and the human beings affected by the aftermath in Afghanistan given her strong reporting skills and clear-eyed analysis of the topic in the past.