

Editor's Desk

Welcome to the first issue of our quarterly newsletter *The Write Place*. I know that studying and writing at home can sometimes seem lonely and our aim is to make you feel that you really are part of the Writers Bureau community.



Diana Nadin
Director of Studies

Those of you who already login to the Student Forums know that there is a thriving community there where students offer each other help and advice. There's **General Chat** – if you just want to introduce yourself or strike up a friendship with others. **Ideas Exchange** allows you to swap helpful writing tips – like the one below from Nicola R. It's one of the best suggestions I've seen for a long time:

When I'm heading towards completion of an article aimed at a specific magazine, I find it quite useful to have a copy of the magazine in front of me and my article on my computer screen, and then literally read out loud one paragraph from the magazine and one from my work. It won't make sense in the slightest, but I find it's a good way to check I'm writing in the right style of the magazine. Sometimes I also format my article temporarily on my screen into 4 columns so that visually it looks more like a magazine, again for

checking how it flows and whether it 'works'. Probably won't be everyone's cuppa tea but I find it very helpful. Hope everyone out there is getting on ok!

Nicola

In addition there is **Help with Assignments** – you can always contact Student Services or your tutor, but sometimes a little reassurance from fellow students doesn't go amiss. And there's even **Have A Laugh** – though I'll leave it up to you to decide whether everything published there is funny!

Finally there's my favourite – **Successes**. We'll be looking at a few I've taken from recent posts shortly.

So, if I've whetted your appetite and you've not already got access to the forum then simply contact Student Services (studentservices@writersbureau.com) and we'll set up access for you.

OK, this intro has been rather long, and I promise not to be so verbose in future. So what can you expect from future issues of *The Write Place*? We're going to be telling you a little about what goes on here at Head Office and introducing some of the staff that keep your studies running smoothly. In each issue we'll have an interview with (and advice from) one of our team of writing tutors and good news about the success that some of our students have had with their writing recently. Plus we'll be telling you about the latest competitions we're running and bringing you some great special offers.

Student Successes

Starting a New Chapter

In August, after more years than I like to count, Writers Bureau moved to new premises. It really was an upheaval, but it was also a very valuable lesson. It's amazing just how much useless 'stuff' you accumulate and it takes something like this to make you realise and be ruthless in throwing it away. With all our records on computer, there's little need for cupboards full of paper. But we're now settled in and it's great!

Around the time we moved our newest Student Services Advisor, Emily Ashton, started with us. I'll let her tell you a little bit about herself:



Emily Ashton

I joined the Student Services department of The Writers Bureau in August this year and have really enjoyed working here so far – not least because I only live ten minutes' walk away from the new offices! I've loved reading and writing stories for as long as I can remember and I graduated from Lancaster University with a degree in English and Creative Writing in July. It's

been great working somewhere that puts my degree to good use, and having spent the last three years submitting my own writing for weekly assignments I know exactly how nerve-wracking it can be to send off your hard work to be assessed by a complete stranger! At The Writers Bureau I spend most of my day answering student emails and letters in between taking phone calls. Student Services are usually the first point of contact for any students wanting to discuss their assignments and as I'm one of three Student Advisors the chances are that if you've called us with a problem recently you've probably spoken to me already!

Thanks for that, Emily. Working in our Student Services department can be a demanding job – but the feeling of satisfaction when we hear from you

about your successes makes it all worthwhile! So here now are a few that we've heard of recently.

William s says:

Success! Just heard that I have won first prize in a whisky company short story competition! It will be published in their web newsletter. The prize is £1000 towards my next adventure holiday.

Helen k says:

A couple of months ago I sent in a small snippet to RD (Reader's Digest) which was accepted and published and which I received payment for. Off the back of that I was asked by RD if I would like to contribute to a feature they are doing on secrets. I sent something and today they emailed me to tell me it would be published and that I would get paid too.

Emma c says:

Hi all! Just to share the news (which i am a bit late in announcing) that I have recently had a reader's letter/picture published in Full House magazine and I have also had an article accepted by Ireland's Own to be published in their Halloween edition.

I have also just sent them another Christmas themed article so fingers crossed they accept that too. Good luck all for your submissions too!

Natalie R says:

I have a two page feature in Simply Beautiful Magazine this month (Sept issue) and the Editor has just bought another from me. It's really starting to happen now. I'm so excited.

Congratulations to all of you – and we'd be delighted to hear from anyone else who is making a success of their writing at the moment. Each year we hold our Writer of the Year Award (www.writersbureau.com/writing/writer-of-the-year-entry.htm) and we're now accepting entries. If you have a story to tell about how your writing has flourished (and it's not just about the money you've earned) then you should seriously consider entering. There's a first prize of £250 and four runners-up receive £50 each. And the real clincher is that you'll all get a slot in the 'hall of fame' on our website!

A Writer's Life!

We obviously couldn't exist without our tutors – they're the people who put so much time and effort into helping you get published. So in each issue we're going to have a brief interview with one of them, and to start us off we've got Simon. So, with a quick flourish, I introduce Simon Maginn, novelist and Writers Bureau tutor!



Simon Maginn
Writers Bureau Tutor

How old were you when you knew you wanted to be a writer and what was the trigger?

When I was thirteen I had one of those teachers who change lives. She was called Mrs Keenan, and she encouraged creative writing. She gave us special red notebooks to write our stories in, and always praised my clumsy efforts. She was particularly taken with my use of the word 'perfunctory'. I knew then that I would always want to write something, though I had no idea what. Mrs Keenan, you wonderful woman, I salute you! Every writer should have one.

How would you sum up the kind of novels you write?

My first novel was Sheep, which was marketed as horror, though I think of it more as a psychological thriller. Stephen King's novel The Shining was the prompt here. It is a book I read and reread in my early twenties, and I recall sitting on a train reading it, thinking: I'm going to do something like this. Sheep came out very differently from The Shining, though: John Lennon said once that he always set out to copy something, but always got it wrong, and in so doing accidentally created something original. I hit a career wall four novels in, and took a wholly different tack; raucous urban comedies under a different name. I think I just needed to get some air. My stories always involve people being put into extreme situations: I suppose I just like tormenting my characters. Not, perhaps, a wholesome or admirable trait. Scratch the surface of any author and you will often find a person you wouldn't want to trust to look after your dog.

Do you have a writing routine or are you very flexible about how you work?

Alas, I have no writing routine worth the name. Once I've got my teeth into a story there's no stopping me. I tend to be up all night, and this has always been my time for writing. But there are long fallow periods where nothing much seems to be happening, although of course the ideas are always there bubbling away in the background. Writers tend to talk a lot about 'writer's block', but often I think they just mean they're having a little ponder. There's a lot of truth in the saying 'Life is research': sometimes you just have to let life happen a bit and not worry too much about the writing. It'll come when it's ready.

When you're sitting down to start a novel does the plot come first, or do the characters dictate the action?

I find that a story idea usually comes in the form of a picture: a man standing on a bridge, say. What's he doing there? Who is watching him, and what are they doing there? How long has he been standing there? What is that thing he's carrying? Gradually, sometimes painfully slowly, the picture will extend a little bit, I'll be able to see round the edges of it, and I'll start to understand what the picture is telling me. I'll get a sequence of these pictures, and then I have to find a way of connecting them together into a story. I find that often this process is more like understanding or remembering something than inventing anything.

As a Writers Bureau tutor, if you could give one vital piece of advice to students, what would it be?

Learn how to accept criticism. I've been given wonderful advice by some excellent people, and, to my regret, I haven't always welcomed it. When you're caught up in the thrill of a story it can be very hard to accept there's something wrong with it. But you'll never grow as an author if you can't take advice. The opposite is also true, though: no one knows what you're attempting to achieve except you, and only you'll know when and if you've achieved it. You must transcend your teachers – but you have to be able to listen to them first.

Thanks to Simon for that last piece of excellent advice – and for sharing something of his writing motivation and methods.

Miscellany

The latest issue of **Chapter and Verse**: (www.writersbureau.com/students/blog.php) is now available in the student area. This is our online magazine created by students for students – it's even edited by a student. Each quarterly edition has a different theme that you've to write on and it provides the opportunity to hone your skills and get used to writing to specific editorial requirements. So, check out the theme for the next issue and if you decide to submit a piece, make sure it is with us by 14th January 2012.

Competition Time

There's nearly always some kind of competition going on at Writers Bureau that students can take part in. This month you've still time to enter our Caption Competition (www.writersbureau.com/writing/monthly-competition.htm). It's free to enter and you could win one of our Freelance Journalism (www.writersbureau.com/courses/freelance-journalism/) courses. But get your skates on because the closing date is 30th November.

There's also our Annual Poetry Competition (www.wbcompetition.com) that is accepting entries until 31st December. The fee is £5 per poem, but it does give you chance to win the following cash prizes: 1st, £500; 2nd, £300; 3rd, £200 and 4th, £100. Also, the winners will appear on our website for up to twelve months and the best poem will be published in Freelance Market News (www.freelancemarketnews.com).

You can read the entry rules, download an entry form or enter online if you visit the website.

**Special
Offers
(Students only)**

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In Conclusion

That brings us to the end of our round-up of what's going on at The Writers Bureau, but until the next issue, you can keep up-to-date by joining the Student Forum, or following us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/writersbureau) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/writersbureau). And, don't forget to check out my blog (www.writersbureau.com/blog/) each week. You won't have to put up with me wittering all the time – I have lots of interesting guests willing to pass on their writing experience.

If you have any queries about your course, just contact studentservices@writersbureau.com and if you've any comments or suggestions regarding this newsletter I'd love to hear from you – dianan@writersbureau.com