

### Editor's Desk

Welcome to this issue of *The Write Place*. Once again, time has flown since the last issue – partly because I was on holiday for a couple of weeks. It was the holiday of a lifetime visiting Los Angeles, the Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, Yosemite National Park and San Francisco. It really was fantastic but the only trouble was, when I got back it took me nearly a week to find my desk under the avalanche of paper that had been left there in my absence. Still, I shouldn't grumble!



Diana Nadin  
Director of Studies

Since the last newsletter, four new tutors have joined us at Writers Bureau: Helen Yelland works on the *The Art of Writing Poetry Course*; Vanessa Couchman on *The Complete Copywriter Course*; Jackie Sherman and Michelle Higgs will be tutoring non-fiction. I hope they'll all enjoy their interaction with students and be with us for a long time.

And talking of tutors and what they bring to the study mix, let's look at some of the more recent success stories that students have reported in the forum.

### Student Successes

heather d says:

*I had never written and sent a letter into a magazine until I started the WB course. I decided to write three and send them all off at the same time. Two of the three have been published. Really chuffed.*

lucy e says:

*I started the creative writing course in July last year and have been a little slow at completing the assignments. I am a dance teacher and wrote an article on the origins of the tutu (a ballerina's skirt). I have just had my first assignment published in an Australian dance magazine. It has given me such a boost in confidence as it was the first assignment I attempted. I have now completed the next three assignments much quicker!*

stuart b says:

*I have achieved my first published article, with a full colour, full page article in the AMEN Saturday supplement men's magazine in the Irish Daily Star. I am over the moon! I have only had a letter published before this, and I thought that was exciting – this is amazing! I am currently on Assignment 6, and this has really spurred me on to keep pitching, and coming up with ideas. Keep plugging away guys, the feeling is worth it when you finally get something published.*

eddie g says:

*Having only started the WB course about 7 months ago, I feel very lucky to have had 2 pieces published this year. My very first assignment has just been published with 12 of my photos spread over 4 pages of the current (Spring 2012) issue of Living Spain magazine. This small success has given me confidence to continue so I thought I'd share it in the hope it inspires you all to keep going.*

# Five Minute Interview

scott a says:

*I recently entered the piece I had previously written for Assignment 1 for the “Just Back” weekly travel writing competition in the Daily Telegraph and was delighted when it was selected as this week’s winner! My article appeared in the paper this weekend and I won £200 in the currency of my choice. I really didn’t expect the course to pay dividends quite so early on but am thrilled that it has. I am also sending off the piece I did for Assignment 2 tomorrow, to another magazine, so fingers crossed!*

**And a great follow-up from Scott that raises an interesting question:**

*I’m once again chuffed as – following my success in the Daily Telegraph’s “Just back” competition – the article I wrote for assignment 2 (“Letters from the Solomon Islands”) will be going into print in Best of British magazine within the next few months. It looks like I will only be getting £20 for this but feel that getting my article printed is the main thing. The question I have is, at what point should a new writer register self-employed? Surely, it is not necessary after selling your first piece for £20, is it? But where should you draw the line? Don’t get me wrong – I’m excited about being able to do this as I will feel like a “proper” writer, but surely you should only do this when you’ve made sufficient earnings from your writing...? Also, I have to admit, I find the whole business/accounts/tax thing a bit scary! Any advice or thoughts would be very welcome.*

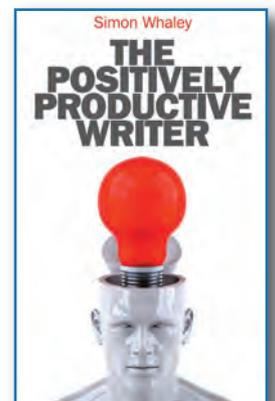
Whether you are already in employment and have used up your tax-free personal allowance or are currently not working, you should still contact HM Revenue and Customs as soon as you sell your first article or story. They will then be aware of the fact so that if your income from writing suddenly increases you can’t be accused of trying to avoid tax. But they won’t tax your income until you have used up your tax-free personal allowance – currently £8105 for the 2012/13 tax year. And the

good news is, you can offset ‘allowable expenses’ used as part of your writing business against your tax bill. There’s nothing to be worried about – the HMRC website is easy to follow and if there’s anything you’re uncertain about they’re usually very helpful on the telephone.

Congratulations to all the students I’ve mentioned – I love looking through the forum to see the latest success stories!

## A Writer’s Life!

Our Five Minute Interview this issue is with Simon Whaley – WB tutor, non-fiction writer and speaker at numerous writers’ events around the country. So, over to Simon to find out about his life as a writer and any tips he can offer to others writers.



**What was the trigger that made you decide to give up your day job and become a full-time freelance writer?**

I was extremely lucky (or should that be talented? No, make that lucky!) because my first published book, *One Hundred Ways For A Dog To Train Its Human*, sold over 100,000 copies in three months and spent four weeks on the UK non-fiction paperback bestseller lists in December 2003. The book had been published in September 2003 and, at the time, I was working for a local authority, who were looking to relocate staff to new premises. By November 2003, I knew my book had already sold 40,000 copies and my employers planned to relocate me in January 2004. This would have doubled my commute to 90 minutes each way, every day. For me, this was fate giving me a clear signal. I decided that in January 2004, I

# Five Minute Interview Cont ...

would jump ship from the world of being employed, and set sail on my own as a freelance writer. When the book hit the bestseller lists in December, I realised that I could afford to support myself financially for the next 12 months. I left my paid employment at the local authority on a Friday in January 2004, and the following Monday, I travelled down to London to have lunch with my publishers, Hodder & Stoughton, who then commissioned me to write a second book, *100 Muddy Paws For Thought*.

**You are probably best known for your non-fiction books. These days, as well as publishers promoting your books, you're expected to share some of the burden. What would be your top three tips for promoting yourself and your writing?**

Tip 1 – Have a website. Not only can this promote your books, but it can also promote you. On my own website: [www.simonwhaley.co.uk](http://www.simonwhaley.co.uk) there are pages about my books, but also about my articles, short stories and my photography. Connected with a website, a blog is a good idea too. On my website, the blog is my news page, where I post news about my writing and writing-related experiences. I also have a blog for my Writers Bureau students, or any writer for that matter, which is <http://simonwhaley.tutor.blogspot.com>, where I offer advice to budding writers. It's also a useful method of publicising my latest book, *The Positively Productive Writer*.

Tip 2 – Social networking. I'm not as good at this as I should be. I'm on Facebook, but I'm not a fan of it, however, I'm trying to learn more so that I can develop a page for each of my books. I much prefer Twitter, because it is short and succinct and you can use it to disseminate information to a lot of people, quickly. I often tweet about an update I've made to my website, which encourages people to look at the website for more information.

Tip 3 – Offer to do talks at local groups. The best way of publicising a book is by word of mouth – your mouth. I've done talks to writers' groups, local Women's Institute groups, PROBUS and civil service pension groups. Most of these community groups are desperate for speakers and want someone to chat for about 30 to 40 minutes and then answers questions from the group. It's great fun, and these groups often support you by buying your book afterwards. Put it this way – I've sold over £3,000-worth of my books from doing talks.

**As well as writing and tutoring, you speak at some of the best known writers' conferences each year. What are the main benefits writers can expect to gain from attending such events?**

Meeting other writers, face to face! By its very nature, creative writing is an isolating experience. These conferences offer an opportunity to meet up with other people, where you share your experiences and knowledge. Go to any such event and you'll make friends, swap contact details and, suddenly, when you're back home in your writing garret, and you're stuck, you'll then realise you have a wealth of other writers to contact for help. These conferences offer an opportunity to listen to jobbing writers, who'll share their advice, and it gives you an opportunity to learn new skills and perhaps dabble in a genre you've not considered before. Often there's a huge range of workshops and talks to go to – so many, that it's not possible to go to them all – but it's a great way of supplementing your existing knowledge.

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

I tend to be quite flexible, purely because I have a lot of fingers in a lot of pies! Sometimes I might be

# Nearer Home

working on a big project, such as a book, whilst at other times I'll be working on articles, short stories, or even readers' letters, as well as creating more workshops and talks. And that all has to be fitted in around marking student assignments. I produce walking routes for *Country Walking* magazine, which means I often keep one eye on the weather. It's better to take photos when the weather is good, so if I wake up and discover it's a sunny day, I sometimes change my plans and go and tackle a walk, so that I can take photos with blue skies!

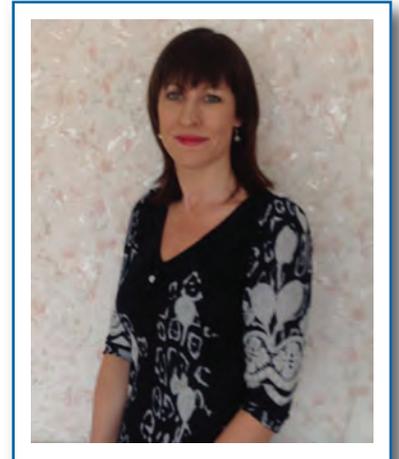
**As a Writers Bureau tutor, if you could give one vital piece of advice to students, what would it be?**

Sometimes, students seem keen to tackle one assignment and then crack on with the next. I understand that – it's the eagerness to learn! However, the assignment is the first opportunity a student has to put their new skills into practice, although in my opinion it's just the start of the learning process, not the end. The best way to consolidate your learning is to produce more work of your own, between assignments. So, if your assignment asks you to write a travel article, when you receive the feedback from your tutor, learn from it, and instead of moving onto the next assignment, write three more travel articles. And send them off. My students who succeed are the ones who do this extra work. Of course, the more work you produce, the more you have to send out, so the greater the chances of publication!

Thanks to Simon for telling us a little about his working life and providing a lot of helpful tips for would-be writers. If you'd like to watch a video of him talking about his writing, you can see more at: [www.writersbureau.com/video.htm](http://www.writersbureau.com/video.htm)

## Nearer Home

This month's staff profile focuses on Angela Cox, editor of our monthly newsletter – *Freelance Market News*. Angela says:



*When I was asked* Angela Cox  
*to write a few words about my time at The Writers Bureau it dawned on me that I have worked here for half of my life – phew! I first joined The Writers Bureau in 1992 after graduating from Liverpool University with a French Language & Literature honours degree. During the four years that followed I worked in many departments from dispatch to advertising and student services. I jumped at the chance when the position of Freelance Market News editor became available in 1996 and have loved helping thousands of freelance writers to get their work published ever since. Even though I have been doing this job for 16 years I still get a thrill when a subscriber takes the time to let me know that they have had their writing published following a market they found in Freelance Market News.*

Those of you who already subscribe to *Freelance Market News* will know that not only is it packed with potential markets but there's also a monthly competition that's free to enter for subscribers and details of other competitions around the country. Plus you get reduced entry to our annual Poetry and Short Story competitions and a free Review and Appraisal of a piece of your writing (poetry or prose) that makes it fantastic value for money!

# Competition Time

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When the last issue came out, we were just about to announce the winners of the 2011 Poetry Competition. There are some beautifully crafted poems among the winners and if you are considering entering our Poetry Competition later in the year I'd strongly recommend reading them to get a feel for the quality you need to achieve. You can find them at <http://www.wbcompetition.com/competition/poetrywinners2011.html>

Our 2012 Short Story Competition will be running until the end of June – visit <http://www.wbcompetition.com/> for details. I make no apology for repeating what I said in my blog recently about making sure that your story is original. One plot that seems to be common this year is the following:



*A motorist breaks down in the middle of nowhere late at night or a hiker gets lost on a misty moor. A stranger materialises out of nowhere and leads them to a welcoming farmhouse/inn (delete as appropriate). The people have old fashioned clothes and speak oddly but this is more than made up for by their hospitality. Made sleepy by their ordeal, the motorist/hiker is shown to a comfortable room but wakes up the following morning in a barn/ruin. When they get back to the convenient local village in daylight and ask about their hosts – surprise, surprise, they find that the people have been dead for the past 100 years.*

Can I just say one thing – if you're contemplating writing a story like this, please don't. It's one of those hackneyed plots that make judges groan. Just like the far-fetched ones that end... *and then I woke up, it was all a dream.*

So, if you do feel you need a bit of help with your competition entries (whether you write poetry or short stories) you could do worse than enrol on our *Writing for Competitions – the way to win!* course. Iain Pattison and Alison Chisholm put this together for us and there are four assignments where you can have tutor feedback on your short stories or poems. Full details are available at [www.writersbureau.com/courses/competitions/](http://www.writersbureau.com/courses/competitions/)



And talking of this course – it's no coincidence that it's the prize in our monthly competition for May. All you need to do is answer five writing-related questions, but you must get your skates on because the closing date is 31st May. Remember, we hold a different competition each month, with a different course as a prize. So it's always worth keeping an eye on [www.writersbureau.com/writing/monthly-competition.htm](http://www.writersbureau.com/writing/monthly-competition.htm)

## Miscellany

The latest edition of the student e-zine, *Chapter and Verse*, is now available in the student area. It is the last issue that our current editor, Amanda John, will be producing. So, thanks to Amanda for all her hard work. But we have got a new editor already and she'll be introducing herself in the next issue which will be out in summer. The theme for the next issue is 'Winning!' – so if you'd like to contribute, just check out the submission guidelines in the student area.

**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 and Twitter.

If you have any queries about your course, just contact [studentservices@writersbureau.com](mailto:studentservices@writersbureau.com) and if you've any comments or suggestions regarding this newsletter I'd love to hear from you – [dianan@writersbureau.com](mailto:dianan@writersbureau.com). So, until next time...