

Author's tale of looking for love with aid of guinea pig!

Emmalena Ellis tells **Hollie Ryder** how dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia have not stopped her loving writing following the publication of her debut novel

For Emmalena Ellis, seeing her debut novel *Ginsterpigs* in front of her is a "surreal" experience after 12 years in the making.

It has been a struggle for the 31-year-old Bishop's Stortford writer as she has had to overcome misconceptions about her dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia, which she was diagnosed with from a young age, until she finally managed to persuade publisher Burton-Mayers Books to take a chance on her.

And she was welcomed to Waterstones bookshop in South Street where her novel was officially launched.

"I have the book physically in front of me and it's surreal," said Emmalena. "At school I was always writing and got creative writing cups, but there's something rather enormous about having a book and saying 'This is mine!'"

"I'm hoping to write a lot more as a result. I'm dyslexic, dyspraxic and have dyscalculia and have struggled to find work for a long time, but now I have both it's all come at once."

Having grown up in Avenue Road in Bishop's Stortford, raised by her mother, grandparents and uncle,

and attending Howe Green House School in Great Hallingbury and then Herts and Essex High School, Emmalena showed promise as a

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Emmalena Ellis

writer from a young age, starting at just four years old. As well as winning prizes, she was library prefect. She now works as a



Emmalena enjoyed reading and writing from a very early age



Emmalena Ellis launching her debut novel, *Ginsterpigs*, at Waterstones in Bishop's Stortford
Picture: Vikki Lince

copywriter for clothing company Lands' End, having started at the end of January.

"My grandparents always encouraged me to write and my mum encouraged my love of reading and writing," said Emmalena.

"From the age of six I was reading books for 14-year-olds. I think it's mostly the perception people have about dyslexia and how you are affected by it – people assume you cannot read or write, but I love reading and have a fairly good vocab."

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Ginsterpigs was started by Emmalena in 2010 while she was at Keele University in Staffordshire studying English and American literature. It tells the story of one man's journey to find love – aided and abetted by his pet guinea pig.

It is described as "a slice of comedy romance detailing the many adventures of life and love – beginning and ending at a bus stop".

Said Emmalena: "It came about after I overheard a snippet of conversation in the pub. I thought 'I want to see how that turns out' and the whole story is this rambling narrative from the man who doesn't

Emmalena performing on stage as a youngster



know how to find love but who wants to find it desperately, all helped by his pet guinea pig.

"My lecturer at the time said it was very witty and a great yarn on the journeys of life and love – and it is a journey that starts and ends at a bus stop."

Emmalena's interest in the arts doesn't stop with books. As a youngster she performed with Cantate Youth Choir and SNAP Theatre under Andy Graham.

She has performed at the Royal

Albert Hall, the O2 Arena, the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi in Italy, Stortford's South Mill Arts and the Harlow Playhouse. She also plays piano, keyboard, recorder and harp.

"My family were always keen to get me into the arts and I've dabbled with the arts, but writing is the one that has stuck," she said.

Ginsterpigs is available in hardback and ebook. For more details, visit www.emmalenaellis.com.