

## The Perils of Being Published: Priorities, the Shift by Gerry Bartlett

Last month I talked about priorities. Deciding what they are and going for them. Some of us have been in this writing business a long, long time. I met my critique partners at an RWA chapter meeting back in 1991. Yes, over twenty years ago. Back then we had one priority: to get published. It took me until 1998 to sell that first book. I was so focused on reaching that goal that many other things took a back seat to my writing. Maybe you are in that early stage now. Unpublished, all you can think about is getting the validation that comes from making that first sale, getting your book in print or purchased by a publisher. Maybe that's on-line. The business has changed completely since 1991. But one thing hasn't—that desperate feeling you have when you're afraid you'll never sell a book. Be careful. Don't grasp at empty promises. Make sure it's a good sale.

Now I've sold thirteen books, have a successful series going and actual fans who follow my work. Obviously my priorities may not be the same. I still have that drive to sell and sometimes I get that desperate feeling again. When one contract ends and I don't have another one, my stomach hurts. Will I ever sell another book? The actual rush of walking into a bookstore and seeing my books there is what I live for. Well, sort of. You see, over time, your priorities can change. Once you've made that first sale, you realize that you can't sustain forever that intensity you had when you were so determined to make it in the business. Not and avoid burn out.

Call it fire in the belly or whatever, writers have to push themselves. No else will. Yes, you can have deadlines. But they are just a number on a calendar. You are the one who has to decide how you will pace yourself to meet that challenge. No one is standing over you making sure you do your homework like they did when you were in grade school. Suddenly you have to be a true self-starter. Writing that once was fun and your creative outlet has become a job and a chore. Oh, no, you say, that won't happen to me. Want to bet?

Here's what happens. You say you write category romances about ranchers. You sell one. Now your publisher knows you can write those. They want more of the same. No, not that single title you've got in the drawer, but another ranch book. And throw in a secret baby. Because once you're pegged as a certain kind of writer, you are pretty well stuck. Grind them out. And I do mean grind. Become creative within that framework of editor expectations. Your fans will be expecting a story like you wrote last time only even better. Not too different, mind you.

Challenging enough yet?

Now here's where priorities come in. You're grinding away, the joy is seeping out but you're dependent on that income. It lets you go to conferences in other cities, make a few forays to good places in the name of "research" and actually upgrade that ancient computer. Then your personal life might intrude. A loved one dies. You get sick. You lose your day job before you can afford to quit it. Now you are scrambling to find your creative well. But it's running dry. Of course you know you can't force it either. We can stare at a blank page for days and either write dreck or nothing at all. And still that deadline looms. This is when some writers call it quits. And maybe they should. If you don't love the work, the work will show it. Take a break or break it off completely.

I have written through my husband's death and my mother's battle with cancer and eventual death. Even one of my dogs died. It's been a rough five years. And I write comedy. Some of us go to our fantasy world to escape. We can read or we can write. I do both. I made writing a priority but not THE priority. I couldn't have gotten through these tough years without my family and friends. I found myself running away from my empty house to be with them, shopping or lunching. It saved my sanity. And filled my well. Take care of yourself. Examine your priorities and decide if what you want is worth the sacrifice. If it is, go for it. I don't think I could enjoy life without my writing, but that's me. If your life would be better off without it, make the choice.

Gerry Bartlett is the nationally bestselling author of the REAL VAMPIRES series for Berkley Publishing. REAL VAMPIRES KNOW HIPS HAPPEN, # 9 in the series, will be out March, 2013, and she just signed a contract for number 10. Read more Perils articles at [gerrybartlett.com](http://gerrybartlett.com).