

The Perils of Being Published: Resistance by Gerry Bartlett

I'm done with my rant on being a professional. Yes, I hear that sigh of relief. And you can take the pins out of your voodoo dolls. I've been in a very dark place lately. My mother died after her bout with cancer and the last thing I wanted to do was to write. When I did go to the computer I got sidetracked by the emails I received and sent. It was wonderful to get the words of comfort from family and friends. The Internet has connected us in such tremendous ways. But it is also a time suck I couldn't afford.

I keep a book by Steven Pressfield in my bathroom called *The War of Art*. It's there for a reason. When I'm wasting time trying to keep the orchid plant in my bathroom window alive, it's a reminder that I'm one of those "artists" at war...with myself. It was no accident that I opened the book last week and hit the pages devoted to resistance. That's when you're hitting a wall. You know, when you will do anything to avoid writing--clean the grout in the shower, drive miles out of your way for that special dog food, even reorganize your underwear drawer. Avoidance is another name for it. I should know, I'm an expert. But I have this deadline and several hundred pages left to write. I can't avoid this book much longer.

Pressfield talks about turning pro. A professional writer gets the job done whether he or she feels like it or not. And, yes, I'll quote Nora yet again. Put your butt in the chair and just do it. Easier said than done? Not really. Pressfield (oops, I typed Pressfiend the first time—Freudian you think?) claims that if you start writing and force yourself to keep going, eventually you will get into the "flow". Okay, I gave it a shot. It had been weeks since I'd even picked up the paltry few chapters I'd already done. I had to reread what I had just to figure out where this story was going. That actually helped. Then I had to revise, tighten, edit. I'm one of those weird people who actually loves that process, so that got my juices trickling.

By this time I'd been at the computer for almost an hour. Not bad. Then I opened a new document for the next chapter. It was time to put up or shut up. My stomach churned. Was I hungry? The phone is next to the computer. I have friends I can call who will usually go to lunch. I've been leaning on them a lot lately. My hands hovered over the keys. Lunch or work? The calendar is also next to the computer. I know my due date. Fear is a powerful motivator. This book is the last on my contract. Time to get busy or there might not be a next one. I had a diet soda and a granola bar. Okay, I would live. So I started typing. It was clunky crap. I kept going. Because I remembered what Pressfield had said. Keep writing, push through, and eventually I might hit gold. And I do like to fix pages. Blank ones? Not so much. I plowed ahead. The story actually began to come alive again. My characters started speaking to me. When I finally looked up and my bladder annoyed me to the point that I had to make a pit stop, I realized I'd spent two more hours and produced half a chapter. My chapters are at least twenty pages long. All right.

Here's what I take away from Pressfield. He warns that giving just a few minutes to your writing on a daily basis isn't enough. I have to agree. Yes, I'm thinking about my story most of the time. Doesn't count. Okay, maybe I even solve a plot problem in my sleep.

Really, I do that. But the actual nitty gritty down and dirty writing is done when my butt is in the chair. For a prolonged period. Don't kid yourself. You are not truly in your story until you are actually writing through the weeds, knocking down problems, solving the issues and giving your characters a chance to speak. A paragraph or even a half a page is hardly a fighting chance for them to do that. And all that "thinking" you do and "problem solving" means squat if it never makes it to the page. Hmm.

So carve out some time and commit. I know when I finally let myself go deep into my story that I'm escaping into another world. It's a world with people I've created who laugh, cry and make love (yippee!). They have more problems than I do but they also sometimes have more fun. They can work out their frustrations and laugh until they cry. They say things I wouldn't dare and kick butt on a regular basis. After a while, I wonder why I resisted visiting them for so long. The miracle is that I'm paid to have this kind of power. Am I an artist? Maybe. A warrior? You bet. I've got the battle scars to prove it.

Gerry Bartlett is hard at work on number eight in the Glory St. Clair series, **REAL VAMPIRES HATE SKINNY JEANS**, due out April, 2012. Number 7 in the series, **REAL VAMPIRES DON'T WEAR SIZE SIX**, is an August release from Berkley Publishing. Keeping her butt in the chair has led Gerry to fixate on size as you can see from the titles of her books about the slightly chubby vampire Glory.