

## The Perils of Being Published: The Secret Handshake by Gerry Bartlett

I've just returned from the RWA National Conference in New York City. I'd been looking forward to it for months. Unfortunately I didn't get to see much of the city itself. Of course I wasn't supposed to. The IRS will be happy to note that I was there on business. I had meetings set up with my agent and my editor. I signed my latest release at the Literacy book fair. I also signed at the publisher book giveaway and was happy when all my books disappeared in less than forty-five minutes. Yay! Mission accomplished. Did I go to many workshops? No. Did I have a book in the Rita hunt? Are you kidding me? Though it was a moving ceremony and I got to sit with unpublished friends who were up for Golden Hearts. One of them won. Fabulous. Will this be her ticket to publication? We can only hope.

So what about the secret handshake? Oh yeah. Well, that's the PAN track. Yes, the Published Authors Network or PAN that you saw on our nametags let those of us who have met certain criteria attend special workshops. Are we allowed to share what happened there? No. Were secrets whispered? Not really. I hear the same things on many loops daily when I'm hitting the Internet. I wish I had come away with juicy gossip. But let's be honest--the needs of the multi-published are different from those just starting out. I didn't attend a single craft workshop. If I don't know my craft now, after getting eleven books published, then I'm in trouble. Could I benefit from a fresh approach? Of course. But I don't need to waste precious hours in NYC learning about it. I can buy the workshop CDs and listen at home if I feel the urge. So what were our PAN workshops about? The business, of course. The scary, changing market. The rug that can be jerked out from under an author at any time. Would an unpublished author like to hear these speakers? Sure. But it's too soon and a few would give up and quit writing if exposed to some of the home truths shared in that atmosphere of desperation and, yes, hope.

What were the highlights of RWA this year? For me they were the inspirational stories at the general meetings which are open to all members. First, there was Sherrilyn Kenyon's luncheon speech. I was moved to tears as she shared the hardships she had to overcome to get to publication. When I want to goof off or slow down on achieving my writing goals, I will remember how she pushed herself through a bitter childhood, personal tragedy, and disability to become a best-selling author we all respect or admire. Then there was the last speaker of the conference. A lifetime achievement award went to Sharon Sala. I've always known this was a kind and generous lady. She's spoken at meetings in our area before. But I never knew her personal story. Both ladies had to overcome so much to become the successes they are today.

It brought home the lesson we have to learn: that writing isn't easy and there are no guarantees. If you want to make this journey, have your own happy ending, you have to be willing to push through the tough times and stick with it no matter what. Perseverance. I've known that. It took me way too many years to sell my first book, get an agent, make decent money from my writing. And I still feel like I could lose it all at the end of every contract. Writing is not for sissies, boys and girls. If you don't get that, get out.

Do I love walking around with PAN on my nametag? You bet. It's a badge I wear proudly. I was a Golden Heart finalist in 1998 and sold that same summer—just not the book I'd finalled with. I eventually did sell that book, three years later. But just entering contests isn't enough. The beauty of the Golden Heart is that it forces you to finish a manuscript. That's important. And PRO is wonderful because it forces you to begin submitting. RWA is doing all it can do to keep you aiming toward publication. If you haven't been to a national conference, start saving your pennies for Anaheim next year. You'll find yourself inspired, invigorated and maybe a bit overwhelmed. I hope you arrive there with your own PAN badge ready to use the secret handshake. Did I forget to mention we also laughed until we cried? Oops, probably wasn't supposed to say that.

Gerry Bartlett is the author of the bestselling Real Vampires series from Berkley Publishing. REAL VAMPIRES DON'T WEAR SIZE SIX, book seven in the series, hits shelves August 2, 2011.