

Write what you know. Have you ever received this advice? I'm getting ready to teach a one-day course for beginning writers. Seems like this bit of wisdom is always part of the spiel. But what does it mean? My first book, which never sold and is in a box in my garage, was the story of a divorced mother of a Little Leaguer. She fell for her son's coach who was a hunky bachelor. When I wrote it I was the mom of a boy in Little League, not divorced but with a rich fantasy life, and could well imagine that scenario. The story was pretty easy to write and almost sold with a good rejection that encouraged me to try again with the publishing house. Today, I can't imagine writing something so... normal. Though contemporary romance is hot again.

What I've been writing for the past fourteen years is a historical Regency romance and my long-running paranormal romance series. Did I know anything about vampires? Well, I'd read Anne Rice and something about immortal men intrigued me. As for the Regency era, I'd read Georgette Heyer too and every romance set in the Regency era for decades. I felt like I'd lived in that time period in a previous life. I was writing what I knew, believe it or not.

Now that I'm ready to start a new series, I'm at a crossroads. Do I chase trends? I know that's a dangerous path. Young adult is hot and that seems to be the only place where paranormal romance is still selling strongly. But I've no feel for today's youth. Even my own former Little Leaguer is now firmly into middle age. Oh, I did not just admit that. Anyway, I tried to write a series as a YA and my agent felt like it didn't sound "young enough," She was right. But I've read dozens of those books. Love them. Just can't write them. Now what?

There's a new genre. New adult, featuring college age and twenty-somethings. Do I have to tell you I'm way older than those kids too? But I have an affinity for their search for identity. For their need to figure out where they are going next. I had that problem when my husband died suddenly a few years ago. Seems like age isn't the issue when you have to start life on your own, whether it's without your parents or your spouse. So I'm experimenting with an NA paranormal

romance. Too bad that seems like a tough sell. Why aren't those kids who love to read the YA paranormals picking up the same kinds of books when they hit college? I have no idea and it seems like publishers are struggling to figure things out as well.

I have a friend who is really into cowboy books. Hey, I grew up in Texas. Admittedly I'm a city gal, but I know something about ranches and those hunky men in tight jeans. And I can write a straight contemporary with a bit of suspense thrown in. Those are selling—now. But will they be by the time I get one finished and off to my agent? Who knows? And would my loyal fans who love my vampy books pick up a Gerry Bartlett Home On the Range book? I wouldn't.

You see my dilemma. Write what you know. Well, let me amend that. Write what you want to write. What makes you laugh or cry. What makes you eager to get to the computer and pound the keys. What makes you think, yeah, this is pretty darned good. If I can't get my agent or editor to buy it then I'll just self-publish this puppy because I like it. There. Sounds like a plan. Too bad I've got four ideas now that I am equally excited about. And then there's shopping for my antiques business. So far the shopping is winning. Because I see the profit from it immediately. I know I can succeed there. The writing? It's a long haul and a crap shoot.

Gerry Bartlett is the best-selling author of the Real Vampires series. Her latest release is "Real Vampires Take a Bite Out of Christmas," an e-novella available now. To sign up for that beginning writing workshop go to hbarwa.org which will be April 26 from 9-3.