

I ran across a movie the other day and got caught up in it. The title was "One Week." The premise was what would you do if you suddenly found out you had a terminal illness? How would you want to spend the rest of your life? It made the main character in the movie examine his life. He discovered a couple of things that relate to our business. First, he'd written one novel and had it rejected. So he never wrote another one. He took the word of that editor and decided he didn't have the talent for it. Just like he took the word of his first grade teacher who said he couldn't sing. Sad, really. Second, he examined what was important in his life. Rearranged his priorities. It caused him to break an engagement among other things. Pretty big decisions.

Well, I hope none of us has to face a catastrophic illness before we decide if writing is one of our priorities. I also hope that one rejection isn't going to send us away with our tails between our legs. Hey, if that were the case, I wouldn't now have twelve published books to my credit and another one scheduled for December. I received form rejections, personal rejections and one really mean one from editors and agents when I was trying to get published. I have several finished manuscripts that never got anointed. They were what I learned with. I wrote short contemporaries first. An extra historical. None of them are wasted efforts. But if I hadn't developed a thick skin, I might have quit writing long ago. My critique group helped me develop it. My editor too. If you can't take criticism, this business isn't for you.

But what if you've been trying to sell a book for YEARS and it's not happening for you? Honestly? I was close to quitting when I finally got THE CALL. I had been writing and submitting for many years. I'd finished in the Golden Heart and won another contest. But hadn't sold. I was sick of it. Sick of always being a bridesmaid. I wanted to be the bride, the one who was fussed over at the RWA conference with a First Sale ribbon. I desperately wanted to see my name on a book in a bookstore. But there had been so many sacrifices without the rewards. My family had put up with my holing myself up in a room instead of being with them in front of the TV. I'd stayed up late instead of going to bed with my husband and you know what that means. I'd spent every Sunday afternoon for years meeting with my critique

group instead of going on family outings. I'd poured money into books, paper, contest fees, conference costs and RWA dues. Money was tight in our family. I even let my RWA membership almost lapse one year because of finances. But I scraped the money together. My parents even helped pay for me to go to a conference. I had to live with the guilt when I still didn't sell a book.

So with the guilt, the discouragement and the negative comments from contest judges, on top of the rejections, why didn't I quit? Call it fire in the belly, ambition, whatever. I **had** to keep going. Maybe you have that too. I kept that quote on my desk that I'll paraphrase here, it was in the movie too: A failure is someone who quits right before they succeed. Could that be you? I was sure it was me. And I was right. The summer of 1998 my friend and critique partner Nina Bangs got the call. We celebrated. She'd almost given up too. One month later, I got mine. Yes, it was that close. And I sold two books to that publisher. I'll never forget the feeling. Joy, anxiety, vindication. My family celebrated. We were all sure this was the beginning of a great career.

Well, there are no guarantees. It's been up and down. The stress never goes away. Will I get another contract? Have another great idea? The tough hide comes in handy constantly. Don't read your reviews or you'll never write again. If you feel like all the joy is out of the writing, that it's a chore you dread and you avoid it at all costs, that's not necessarily a sign you should quit. Trust me, published authors go through that constantly. Writing for money makes it a job. And like any other, it can become a drag. But maybe it's more than a drag to you. You are no longer sure this is worth it. All the sacrifices you make. Only you can decide that for yourself. I was lucky to have a supportive family and friends who became my cheerleaders. If you have had enough, stop. Decide. Maybe this isn't for you. There are other creative outlets. Paint. Make jewelry. Quilt. Or stop for a while. Then if you itch to go back to that computer, you'll know it was meant to be. Keep writing.

How did the movie end? Spoiler alert. The narrator is reading from the book that the man in the story finally wrote and got published. It's our hero reading. He's older and obviously survived his cancer.

And there's his book in the bookstore window. Yay! He did write again. He finally got over his bad rejection and took his career into his own hands again. Can you do the same?

Gerry Bartlett is the nationally bestselling author of the Real Vampires series for Berkley. You can find other Perils articles at [gerrybartlett.com](http://gerrybartlett.com). Her first two books were romantic suspense for Kensington and are out of print but she hopes to update them and put them up on the 'Net someday.