

The Perils of Being Published: Giving Up or Giving In by Gerry Bartlett

I've talked here before about persistence. My own road to being published is textbook. I could have given up long before I finally sold my first book. I started writing about, oh, let's estimate fifteen years before "the call". Oh, yes, my friends. It took that long. I took a three year break after my first rejection letter to pout. Didn't know about RWA then or that my reject was actually a positive letter. All I saw was "No, thanks on this book." I wrote more than a few completed manuscripts before I finally sold my first two books in 1998. That sale came after I suffered for YEARS meeting with a weekly critique group that showed no mercy. Yet I didn't give up. Never even thought about it. Okay, that's a lie. I thought about it plenty of times. Especially when I was driving home after a particularly brutal assault by my ever frank crit partners. And then there were the form rejection letters. Those can discourage even the toughest ego. And writers are fragile, aren't we?

But along the way I got a little encouragement. I won a contest, got positive feedback from others, finished in the Golden Heart. Some of the rejection letters had personal notes. But I never got a whiff of interest from an agent. So frustrating. When I had a chance to sell my first two books that I'd written with Harlequin in mind to Kensington for a flat fee, I jumped at the opportunity. Harlequin had already passed and they were pretty much the only game in town for short contemporaries back then. Sound familiar? In a way I was giving in. Like some of you might be today when you accept a contract with no advance. I preach against this. But if the book that is being offered for has been the rounds? Why not? I made more than that flat fee on my Precious Gems (That's what they were called and sold only in Walmart.). Seems they also had foreign sales that brought me some nice checks for years. Go figure.

Now if you are contemplating giving in and going the self-pub route or maybe selling to a publisher that won't give you an advance, then here's my opinion on the matter. There's still no

substitute for the rush of seeing your book on the shelves at a major book store. My latest is sitting at Barnes & Nobles right now. I get an advance. I have a professional book cover, a publicist hired by the publisher and I know my book is in stores all over the United States. Am I entirely happy with everything my New York publisher does? Is anyone? But they have experience, knowledge, and inside info that I will never have access to. I'm on Amazon, Nook, everywhere and I don't have to do anything but write the book. Then a professional editor plus a copyeditor make sure it's the best it can be. Trust me, those two helpers always make it better.

If I had a book that had been shopped everywhere and there were no takers, I would do two things: First, I'd wonder why it wasn't getting a bite. Is it clichéd? Have I failed to find a market? Am I getting lazy in my old age and losing my creative punch? I'd look at that book HARD. Second, I'd consider trying one of the established e-publishers out there. Not a just sprung up from the cabbage patch newbie, but a tried and true e-publisher. They exist and there are authors who can tell you how they pay and whether they are professional and good to work for. I can tell you horror stories about authors who lost good books to fly-by-night publishers who promised them everything but then disappeared without following through. Do your homework. Are you in such a hurry to be published that you don't care how you get there? Do you really think the rest of us are going to be impressed by your contract if it's not viable? And, yes, we are watching how these new companies operate. You don't see seasoned authors jumping on untried bandwagons.

So here's the pitch. Don't give up and, please, don't give in. I wanted to sell a book so bad back then I would have danced naked for a publisher at an RWA conference if that would have made it happen. But tricks, shortcuts, and stunts don't work. What does get you well-published is common sense and patience. So be careful out there. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither was a writing career.

Gerry Bartlett is the author of the bestselling Real Vampires series. Her latest, Real Vampires Hate Skinny Jeans, was an April, 2012, release from Berkley Publishing.