

I was driving down the freeway the other day, on my way to take my mother to chemo, when I started counting my blessings. I've been doing this a lot lately. First, because it's not *me* doing chemo. Second, it's because the chemo worked and my mom's now cancer free. Thank you, God. So I drive down the freeway and I go through my list. My writing is always on there. I'm published, my books are selling well and I have a contract, for now, and a due date. Yay! But I surprised myself this time with a new blessing. I realized courage was pretty high on the list. Yes, I was grateful, as always, for my talent. I have no idea where it came from, but I get daily emails from fans who thank me for making them laugh and giving them joy. What a rush!

But it took me soooo long to get these books published. *Any* book published. I joined RWA in the eighties. Sold my first book in 1998. Whoa. Wait much? Trust me, I didn't need that stress. I had plenty at home. I had a full-time job, a young son, a husband who was periodically laid off and never learned how to turn on the dishwasher or clothes dryer and I was doing post-graduate work in teacher administration. I'm still not sure when I had time to write, but I know *why* I wrote. It was a great escape. Like when I got a chance to read. I dove into the world of fiction. Ahh.

But writing and submitting are two different things. Especially after you get rejected a time or two. That's where the courage comes in. Even showing your work to someone else for the first time. To a critique group or daring to enter a contest. Trust me, not all contest judges were as thrilled with my prose as I was. Did I focus on the positive comments? No way. I obsessed over the negative. Why do we do that? No idea, but it's human nature. And enough to send the weak scurrying away from the fray. Lots of people who started out with me are long gone. Too bad. They had the talent, just not the stones to stick it out. So my blessing got me here.

I had the courage to try different things. I wrote romantic suspense. Sold two. Line folded. Wrote an historical. Sold it. Times got tough in that genre. Jumped to paranormal and the vampire craze and here I am, writing book 7 in my series and earning good money. My day job is history. I can't even remember my teaching days. My son is grown and happily married. My sweet husband has passed away and I could afford a housekeeper if I wasn't too lazy to want someone disturbing my peace twice a month to clean around my clutter. Times have definitely changed.

I still need courage. Every time I sit at the computer, I gird my loins. Will I have a new idea? Will this be good enough, funny enough, strong enough for the market? I just went through one of the worst revisions ever with my editor. What? On book 6 of this series? Yep. So my confidence is shattered yet again. Time to suck it up. My well has never gone dry yet, and I refuse to accept the fact that it will now. Because after I count my blessings, I thank the powers that be for every one of them. I have no idea how I got so lucky, but RWA was certainly put in my path by design, not chance. It got me here and it will help me stay here until I decide I'm done.

Gerry Bartlett is the national bestselling author of the Glory St. Clair series. *REAL VAMPIRES HAVE MORE TO LOVE*, book 6 of the series, will be a December release from Berkley.