

THE PERILS OF BEING PUBLISHED—Slogging Through or Commitment Part 2
By Gerry Bartlett

I fell into lust and love and got married a few decades ago. Lucky for me it worked out. Yes, there were some rough patches. We had economic downturns and my teacher's paycheck sustained us. But my instincts told me he was my soul mate and kept me committed until the day he died a little over three years ago. It wasn't always easy. There were weeks, months even, when one or the other of us wanted to throw in the towel, but we stuck it out. The rewards were worth it.

I became a mother the same way. I married a man with four daughters but, oops, got pregnant. It was a happy accident. My husband would have been glad for any healthy baby but got the son he always wanted. I was an immature girl who was already overwhelmed by being a stepmother every other weekend. Lucky for me my level-headed husband took my mistakes in stride and taught me what I needed to know. I was committed whether I wanted to be or not. I got a wonderful son out of the deal. He's a responsible adult now with a family of his own. It wasn't always easy or pretty but we slogged through.

Now to the point. I got into the writing the same way. Yes, it's that old cliché. I'd read hundreds of romance novels. Most of them were wonderful and transported me to a place and time that let me escape everyday life. But, every once in a while I felt something was missing, something that I could add. Had I ever written fiction? Not a line. Had I kept a journal or diary when I was a kid? No way. I'd had a great English teacher in high school though who had convinced every student in her advanced class that she could construct good sentences and essays. So why couldn't I write a book? Oh, boy, was I riding for a fall. But I rushed in like most fools and did it. Wrote a book. On a typewriter. Yes, this was a long time ago. I sent it off to the publisher of one of my favorite imprints, Bantam's Second Chance at Love. It took a few months, but I got a nice letter that said they'd almost bought it, but could tell it was my first book. Did I have another one they could look at? Now here's where lack of RWA hurt me. I was devastated. All I saw was a rejection. I didn't answer that letter, just quit writing for three years. Yep, quit.

Okay, stop laughing at me. But I look back and see that I was as immature about writing as I was about motherhood. I didn't know that it takes a commitment and a lot of slogging through. Finally, I decided, after reading a few dozen more books, to write again and to attend a multi-genre writer's conference at a local college. Ah, education. I learned there was an RWA. Got plugged in. Figured out that I'd missed a golden opportunity. Of course Second Chance at Love had folded by then. *Really* missed that opportunity. But new doors opened. I met my critique group. I began a new book. I attended workshops and figured out what I'd done wrong the first time. I slogged and slogged. FOR YEARS. I sent off queries and piled up rejections. I got discouraged but didn't quit. Because I had a group of encouragers around me this time. I knew I wasn't the only one going through this. I learned from contest judges what I was doing wrong. I started finaling in contests, even the Golden Heart. I revised. I put manuscripts under the bed and decided they'd never be right. And finally, finally I sold one.

And after all that slogging I had a group to celebrate with me. Thanks, RWA. I couldn't have done it without you.

Gerry Bartlett's next Glory St. Clair book is REAL VAMPIRES HAVE MORE TO LOVE, a December, 2010, release from Berkley. It's number 6 in her series and her ninth published book.