

The Perils of Being Published—Check the Attitude by Gerry Bartlett

You've all known her, the person who sold her first effort. The phenom. The person you wish you were. Or maybe you **are** that person. Lucky you. Most of us are the long haulers, struggling to get published with a few, maybe more than a few, manuscripts under the bed and a boxful of rejections to our credit. Some of us may never sell. Oh, I did not say that. Yes, I did. Anyway, this is a touchy subject but here goes. When success hits, and I hope and pray it does for you, then I hope you handle it well. Let me tell you a story.

I had a "friend". I'm going to use a lot of quotation marks in this story so bear with me. This "friend" "sold" her first novel to a "publisher" and was elated. She was immediately sure she was the next Diana Gabaldon, another author who sold her first effort. Now Diana is a rarity who got it right the first time. We wish we were her, but I digress. Back to the "friend". She became very full of herself and aware of her new status. A "published" author. This happened many years ago, before e-books, and her "publisher" never actually got books on the shelves. In fact, that contract my "friend" signed didn't mention a lot of money, but did mention recruiting other authors and being paid in books. Hmm. Not that my "friend" ever shared this with the RWA chapter. Oh, no, she only made sure the unpubs knew at every opportunity that she was now an expert in everything to do with publishing. That her writing had to be better than theirs because she'd "sold" her manuscript and they hadn't.

Now I'm here to tell you that, despite what some writing teachers may tell you or books you've read may say, the best writers aren't necessarily the ones who sell. What? Oh, yes. Haven't you realized by now that luck and persistence are just as important as talent? You may be way more talented than that author who is making good money cranking out two or three books a year for a major publisher. But you never found the right editor at the right time. Yet. But I'm digressing again.

Back to my "friend". She didn't make any new friends with her attitude. She got copies of her first book and had a signing at a local new/used bookstore. Everyone turned out because that's what our chapter did back then. She tried to get people to submit to her publisher. Thank God we didn't. Seems this publisher had never paid her what they owed her. Just sent her some books. She foolishly sent the publisher a second manuscript and celebrated when they "bought" it. Of course she never got a cent or books for this one. The publisher vanished and caused RWA to get tough and create policies that some of you are complaining about today. My "friend" wishes RWA had been tougher sooner. Where is my "friend" now? No longer writing. She wanted things to be easy. When she realized she hadn't really sold her books, she disappeared from our group. We weren't sorry to see her go. You see, her superior attitude hadn't won her any sympathy.

Why did I put "friend" in quotation marks? Because I defended this person. I was fooled into thinking she was sincere and just misguided when she got defrauded by this publisher. But she lied about what happened and kept trying to get the rest of us to sign on even when she knew she hadn't been paid what was owed her. Not how a true friend

behaves. Right? If you want to be part of a community, you have to share the bad along with the good. You have to give back, not just take.

And, hey, no one likes to be put down because they aren't on the same fast track as you are. Guess what? Your train can come derailed in a heart beat. Then you'll be hoping for a sympathetic ear, a hug or a smile when you have to start from square one again. It's happened to me. I went several years without a sale and had to switch genres. Even the phenoms have their bad days. And if they don't? Well, a little humility doesn't cost a thing. Our goddess Nora still comes to RWA National conferences and shares her stories and her advice each year. She doesn't have to. She probably would rather be on vacation. But she gives back. It's a concept to remember.