**Surviving ‘Nearly There’**

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Anyone who’s been in the writing game for a while knows there is no easy stage in the journey to getting published. But having just achieved that magical leap over the final hurdle, I can say categorically that the hardest part for me was ‘nearly there’.

In the beginning, there is so much to learn. Once you get into the romance writing community and join RWA (and, for me, eHarlequin), the world opens up for you. The amount of help and advice is truly amazing, if a little daunting. It’s also inspiring to have everyone, from the best in the industry to the most recently published, as well as the ‘nearly there’ group, sharing their experiences, writing processes and techniques with a lowly newbie. And, you find others who are in the same boat as you - some of whom will become the dearest friends you’ll ever have.

You have to be brave to make the next step and let someone, a stranger, read your work. It’s probably the first time you’ll learn the double-edged sword of constructive criticism - the thrill that someone believes you can write and despair that your work sucks! You learn to revise. Then you cross your fingers as you reach the next stage - submitting to editors, agents and contests.

Somewhere along the line, you’ll learn a little gem that will help you make the step-change your writing needs to change those pro forma, ‘Dear Author’ rejections into ‘Dear Anna’ nice rejections (asking to see more). You’ll begin to creep up the standings in those contests until you finally join the divas as a finalist!

Then, you’ll find another gem, make another step-change and you’ll start to win those contests. The rejections become revision requests and your manuscripts get passed up the line. You’ll start giving workshops, judging contests and writing articles.

That’s when you hit ‘nearly there’.

At this point, contests lose their value - the feedback is of limited use and you can get yourself in front of the editors or agents you’re targeting. Even the lovely bling loses its appeal ;). Similarly, it’s hard to find workshops that can help you. Not because you know everything, but because it’s hard to know what it is exactly your work is missing. Besides, most workshops are targeted at beginners/intermediates or published authors. Not much in-between.

Submissions become a more complex process as you revise and revisit, trying to find that elusive ‘something’ that will help you over that final hurdle. They also become more heartbreaking - so close, but still a no.

Then, there’s the bittersweet scenario of your friends selling. You’re thrilled beyond belief for them, but you wouldn’t be human if you didn’t have a pang of ‘when will it be my turn?’

So, how do you survive ‘nearly there’?

I wish I had a magic answer that would ease the pain of those of you at that stage. I don’t. But I can tell you what I did to help myself survive.

1. Keep Going!

My lovely husband always says that the only way to guarantee you won’t make it is to give up. If you’re still in the game, there’s still hope.

This may sound obvious, but for every success story, there is another of someone who just gave up. Who knows if that next submission would have been The One?

But it’s hard to keep going, when all you get is ‘sorry, but no’. When you get so close to that sale you can almost smell the contract, but get let down at the last minute - believe me, I know!

So …

1. Take a Short Break

This may sound like it contradicts the one above, but actually it can help recharge your batteries and keep you going. Plus it’s a great time to refill the creative well; read, watch films, do something different, learn something new.

The key is that writers have to write. While you’re busy doing something else, that writer’s mind will clear out the cobwebs and wash the windows to let the sunshine in. You can say you won’t write for a month and almost without fail before the first week is up, your mind is whirring with story ideas.

Which leads me to …

1. Write Something New or Different

We all have that one book inside us that we yearn to write. The one that will never get published because the market isn’t there or because it’s outside the traditional publishing box. The one that we plan to write some day, when we’re ‘grown up’.

When you’re struggling to be motivated, the perfect antidote is to start something new - that is just for you. It doesn’t matter that it may never get published, although these days, the publishing dynamics are changing daily, so you can never say never. This is the book of your heart, the book you dream about. The one you can write for fun.

Also …

1. Get an Expert Opinion

Good critique partners are wonderful. Often, though, they’re at the same stage of the game as you. They can look at techniques, story arcs, character development and plot. They can help you refine your voice and make your story sing. But, nine times out of ten, they can’t help you find that elusive ‘something’ that will make the difference for a sale.

Find someone who can decode exactly what is needed for your work - an editor, an agent or a NYT bestselling author. Invest in their opinion. There are plenty of fundraisers (eg Brenda Novak’s Diabetes Auction), give-aways and chances to pay for expert opinion. Including buying a freelance editor’s services. I know, for sure, my agent’s invaluable advice as well as her insightful input into my manuscript helped make the difference that finally got me the sale.

Finally …

1. Make Your Own Luck!

At the end of the day, there is a certain amount of luck involved in success. In publishing, it is no different. Having the right story hit the right editor/agent’s desk at the right time, just as the market is taking off or a slot opens up for that book … boy, do you need luck!

The thing is, to paraphrase Samuel Goldwyn, the harder you work, the luckier you’ll get.

Keep writing. Keep revising. Keep learning. Keep networking. Keep submitting. The luck will come.

You can survive ‘nearly there’. It’s not easy and, most of the time, it’s not fun. But no matter how bad it gets, if you keep going, you can make it over that final hurdle.

I know, because I did.