

How do you stay motivated in the face of rejection?

Keep your eye on the finish line--even when you're stumbling down the track

Everyone knows publishing is a tough nut to crack, never more so than in today's tight markets. And everyone knows it's going to take a lot of hard work to get you there. That there will be some tough breaks to weather before it's your turn to shine.

But what if you're already working hard, and you have been for a while? What if you've learned a lot, and you're producing good work, and your fellow writers love your stories and keep telling you you're sooooo close? Yet the rejection letters keep coming. Maybe an editor or agent even likes your voice, they think you have a bright future ahead--but this or that story just isn't right for them. *Good luck with your career. So sorry we couldn't pick you up this time, but keep at it.*

Keep at it! You're exhausted, you've been at it for so long.

What's the point, many might ask, if there's no guarantee--no formula to follow to earn what many who started before and after you have achieved? In the end, is it finally going to be worth it? Or will you still be stumbling around years from now, no closer to your victory than ever?

Okay, if you've been asking yourself these questions, let me offer a bit of a reality check.

To begin with, remember that you are first and foremost a writer. In fact, you can't imagine being anything else, right? When you turn off your day and let your mind quiet, there are all these people running around inside your head, whispering their stories until you can't sleep for needing to write them down. Wait a minute... Maybe that "hearing voices in the night" thing is just me, but you get the general idea. Being published might seem like your ultimate goal, but aren't you really writing because you can't help yourself?

Selling your first book is a major milestone, and being told you have to wait a bit longer to get there bites. But what does that have to do with your compulsion to share your view of the world by telling stories--your drive to make people laugh by turning a funky phrase, or to get them to think a little deeper about whatever drama is playing out in your work in progress? Each and every time you put your fingers to the keyboard, you feed your need to write. And with each and every project, you get better at the craft you love.

Your drive to publish is admirable--the stronger the determination to accomplish something, the harder you'll work at it. But you WILL stumble along the way. We all do. In fact, there will be inevitable disappointment once you sell, take my word for it. So maybe the dissatisfaction we sometimes feel isn't about publishing at all. Could it be that we're looking to the wrong things for affirmation as we race toward our prize? When did

we start believing we needed editorial approval and agent representation before we could consider our efforts successful?

In my honest opinion, my friends, we're not frustrated with the end-game of publishing a book. We're hassled by our inability to face what we love to do, and love it for what it is. Published or not, we write. And what feeds us, in the end, is producing better stories. Writing better, faster, and more creatively--that's our race. Thank heavens, I say, that our real goal isn't to publish without ever being rejected. Because that sort of thinking comes with a truck load of destructive self-pity, the next time a project comes back with a *Sorry, not for us* note attached to it.

Maybe your work isn't right for a particular line, and maybe you're not doing exactly what a certain agent wants. But what on earth does that have to do with whether you're getting better at your writing? Be honest. Are you trying your hardest? Are you reading, and attending workshops and learning? Are you writing as much and as often as you can, putting what you know into practice? And are your results getting better? Answer no to these questions, and maybe you should rethink whether or not you're in this writing gig for the long haul. But don't you dare let a rejection letter stop you in your tracks, because, gasp, you're not published yet. Neither was any published author you know before her first *Yes!* letter arrived. The key thing to learn from that published author's journey, is that she never quit working, no matter what. She stuck it out, focusing on her craft, until the publishing world wised up and realized just how fabulous she was after all!

Stumbling is part of any journey. Quitting, by definition, is THE END of all forward progress. If your goal, your race, is to become better at what you already love to do--writing--why on earth would you stop doing just that, because someone doesn't like one of your stories? Rejections are some of the roughest parts of our business, but don't let them control how you feel about your work. Achieving your writing goals is the kind of finish line you can set your sites on and keep running toward for years to come, publishing contract or no publishing contract.

Keep running my friends, and may all your dreams come true!

Best-selling, Romantic Times award-winning author Anna Destefano writes for Harlequin Superromance. Her latest Super, *A Family for Daniel*, is a June 2005 release, and *The Runaway Daughter*, the sequel to her award-winning debut novel, will be out in February, 2006. Come share your dreams and thoughts about writing in her daily online journal, at www.annawrites.com.