

I ♥ Rejections

by K.B. Inglee

Whoopie! I just got another rejection from an agent!

Every year the unpublished Sisters in Crime chapter, Guppies, has a contest to see who can get the most rejections between January 1 and March 31. I am getting a bad reputation for being happy to see each rejection roll in. This one brings me up to 11, but there are still 18 out there. I don't know about the well-published writer, but taking rejection seems to be the hardest thing a not-yet-published writer has to do. It can take any form, not being spoken to at a party, a form letter from an agent or magazine.

How you take rejection can influence how often you send out your work. One person is so distressed by a few form letters that she gives up writing, or at least sending out her work, altogether. Another sees each rejection slip as one less she has to get before she gets the 'yes' she is waiting for.

Rejections come in several forms. First the form letter, usually something simple like "your work isn't right for us, good luck." It's amazing how fast some of these can come back. They probably didn't even look at your work before they shot this one back. I have a friend who e-mailed in a query and got a response within half an hour. One step up from that is a note handwritten across a form letter. "Not what we are looking for but keep us in mind in the future." This one feels like getting a promotion.

Then you get the one that is written for you specifically. Sometimes they come with good advice, sometimes they are less than useful, and sometimes they are downright hurtful. I sent a short story in with a grant application and the reply was, "if you plan to write short stories, you should read a few." It sounds funny now, but it hurt at the time.

The joy of belonging to a group of fellow writers at the same stage in the process as you are is that everyone understands instantly and can help stem the flow of blood. "Be angry for a day and then move on" is the general advice.

No matter what you feel as the rejections come in, you will never get published without them. I don't think the answer is to get tougher skin. I think the answer is to reinterpret what you are getting. If I can trade each rejection slip for a chocolate bar, I might just keep sending them out. And someday that "yes" will come.

There are no failed writers, just ones who have given up.