

Jen FitzGerald

From: NTRWA Newsletter <newsletter=ntrwa.org@mail72.atl11.rsgsv.net> on behalf of NTRWA Newsletter <newsletter@ntrwa.org>
Sent: Friday, December 12, 2014 12:24 PM
To: Jen FitzGerald
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Happy Holidays! #GiveMas

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Letter from the President

#GiveMas

This week on the Kidd Kraddick in the Morning Show one of the hosts, Jenna Owens, talked about how she's at the point in her life where she doesn't really want presents. If she wants something, she just goes and buys it herself. But what she does value from her friends is time spent together because in their busy lives that seems to get rarer and rarer.

So this year Jenna is spending quality time with each of her friends while they go do something to give back to the community. They decided on working at a soup kitchen for

this first year and even coined the hashtag [#GiveMas](#) for anyone else who wants to share what they will be doing this season toward less spending, more giving.

This struck a chord with me because the limited time I get to spend with my sisters, my friends, my critique partners (who have become my sisters and friends), and all of you at NT is time I cherish above any tangible gift.

(Not that I don't like presents. Who doesn't?)

I'm beyond excited to see as many of you as can make it to our Holiday party. Some of you I haven't seen for a long time as circumstances have made it hard to come out through the rest of the year.

But whether you make it or not, my "intangible" gifts to you all, besides the giving of my time, are these:

(This is the part where you pretend I'm the #GiveMas fairy, waving my magical wand over your collective heads.)

To you, er, I mean, y'all, I give:

- An abundance of creativity and story ideas.
- Continued joy and enthusiasm in the day to day craft of writing.
- Confidence that what you are writing is good. Really good. Your work has paid off.
- Hidden pockets of extra time to pursue your dreams.
- The understanding to measure your success by whatever standard you define it for yourself.
- Good writer friends to surround you with encouragement and knowledge from their own experiences.
- Along with empathy and wisdom to do the same for others.
- And finally, the courage and perseverance to continue the journey on whichever path or paths you decide to take.

Have a most wonderful excellent Holiday Season! It's been my pleasure and honor to

serve you this year!

Clover Autrey
NTRWA President

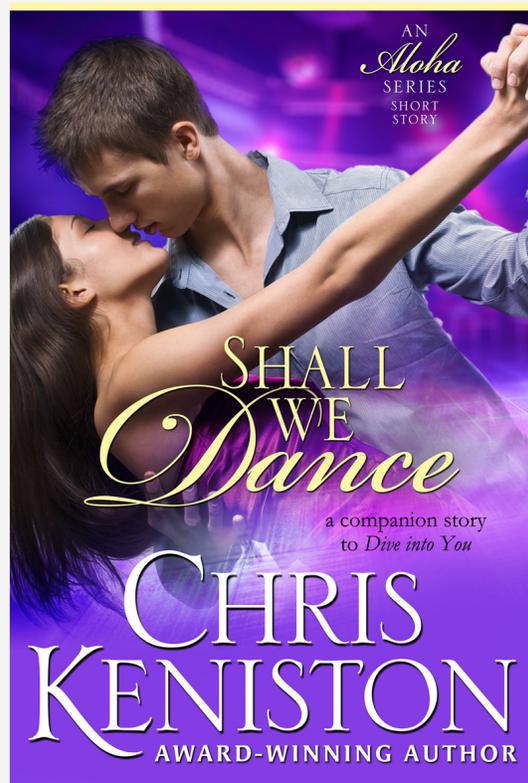
Upcoming December 13th Meeting:

Annual Holiday Get Together

We will be celebrating with an ornament exchange. If you wish to participate, please bring a wrapped ornament.

Member News

Chris Keniston - New December Release
Shall We Dance



The following article appeared in the NOV 2014 issue of LARA Confidential, the newsletter of the Los Angeles Romance Authors RWA chapter. It may be reused by RWA chapters with appropriate credit given to the author and chapter.

Gratitude

by Claire Davon

I am part of an email group of people who post a daily list of things that they are grateful for. Sometimes it's small stuff – such as finding a parking space – and sometimes it's larger things like getting good news about major health scares. The list is designed to remind us of all the reasons we have to be grateful.

We are galloping towards the major American holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas, traditionally seasons of gratitude when we reflect on those things in our lives that bring us joy. Often, at other times, we overlook these things in the daily hustle and bustle of life. I am a glass-half-full type of person by nature, but daily gratitude makes me look into everything that I truly have that has made my life wonderful. I want to share some of those things with you.

Since this article is for my local RWA chapter's newsletter, I will focus mostly on the things that I am grateful for in relation to writing. In no particular order, those are:

I am grateful for discovering that half the battle is showing up. Too often in the past, when faced with a bump or a snag, I simply sidestepped the whole idea and moved onto something seemingly easier. By doing so, I short-changed who I was and what I wanted to be as a writer.

I am grateful that I did not throw up my hands and give up when I received my first rejection from a contest. That rejection was followed, a day or two later, by a "yes" in another contest, one I ultimately placed second in.

I am grateful that I only placed in two out of the five contests I entered. Each victory was that much sweeter for the pain of seeing "We're sorry, but..." in the days prior to that. It also taught me humility and to appreciate each win.

I am grateful that I joined LARA, the local RWA chapter in my area. I had thought about joining for years, but allowed my insecurity to stop me. I decided that they were all Very Accomplished Writers and I would have no place among them. How wrong that turned out to be (the “no place among them” part, anyway, as there are dozens of Very Accomplished Writers in the chapter).

I am grateful for the seemingly mundane: my health, a great job, a home of my own, purring felines, and the love and respect of my friends. These are easy things to take for granted when you have them, but if one slips, the whole house of cards can come tumbling down.

I am grateful that I don't live in fear anymore. Anticipating the future gives it power it hasn't earned. The future never turns out the way we imagine it will.

I am grateful I have learned that I cannot – and should not – control what other people think and do. I have to let them be who they are, just as they need to let me be who I am.

I am grateful that I try to live each day as it happens and not live in anticipation of what “might” happen tomorrow. There is a sign on a saloon in New Orleans that says “Free Beer - Tomorrow.” You never get that free beer, because it is never tomorrow. It is always today.

I am grateful for today. Today is full of possibilities and tomorrow, which will soon be today, will have just as many possibilities in it. Today is never too late to live your dreams. For that, I am infinitely grateful.

Claire now lives in Los Angeles, and many of her stories are set there, but she is originally from Brookline, Massachusetts. Claire started writing when she was a pre-teen, and today wishes she still had some of that Starsky & Hutch fan fiction! She spends her free time writing, doing animal rescue, and enjoying the sunshine. She specializes in writing romances of all kinds and never shies away from the “between the sheets” elements!

Claire's website is www.clairedavon.com People can reach her through the website. She also has a Facebook author page, which is www.facebook.com/clairedavonindieauthor

The following article appeared in the October 2014 issue of Heart of the Bay, the

newsletter of the San Francisco Area chapter of RWA. Permission is granted to RWA chapters to reprint or forward this article with proper credit to the author and chapter.

The Hidden Motivation: Shame

Part 1: What Is It and How Does It Manifest?

By Theresa Rogers

Your character's relationship to shame is the most important psychological relationship to understand. Shame dictates more of our actions than any other emotion—more than rage, more than grief. As Dr. Brené Brown, who's been researching shame and vulnerability for over a decade, found, “[w]hat makes shame so powerful is its ability to make us feel trapped, powerless and isolated. What makes it so dangerous is its ability to make us feel like we are the only one— different—on the outside of the group. Shame demands that we hide our ‘shamed selves’ from others in order to avoid additional shame.”^[1] It explains the inexplicable actions people take every day and, when we understand that and understand the source of it, we can harness that to craft powerful, meaningful characters and explain otherwise inexplicable character growth arcs.

So what is it, and what do we need to understand to wield this powerful tool?

Shame is not the same as guilt. Guilt registers when we feel we've *done* something bad—we've taken an action and it goes against our moral code, or the code of our community. Shame is the feeling that we *are* bad—our deepest secret is that we're unlovable, and if anyone ever really gets to know us, they'll uncover that awful secret, too. Or, as Dr. Brown puts it, “Guilt says: ‘you’ve done something bad’ or ‘you’ve made a bad choice.’ Shame says: ‘you are bad.’ There is a big difference between ‘you made a mistake’ and ‘you are a mistake.’ Guilt can often inspire us to change a behavior, make amends, apologize or rethink our priorities. When we feel shame, our self-worth is so low that there is little possibility for change.”^[2]

When shame is triggered, it influences everything we do, everything we say, the way we move our hands, our heads, the way we smile, what we react to, how we act in crowds or with people we don't know ... you begin to see how it seeps into every single area of our lives.

The only people who don't feel shame, says Dr. Brown, are psychopaths.^[3] “[M]ost of us, if not all, have built significant parts of our lives around shame.”^[4] It can be stronger or weaker in people, but there is almost no one it does not affect.

What does it look like when a character is coming from a shame reaction? “Even now I talk too much and too loud, claiming ground ... I sometimes meet women and recognize in them an instinct to run, to be gone before harm can come again, mixed with a ferocious recklessness because nothing else can be taken. I

wonder what they could have done to be paying such a price. [Shame] makes me feel wildly vulnerable. I struggle still to claim a permanent space, an immutable relationship to those around me. It negates forever the ability to have a real friend. To speak in a room with confidence. To walk anyplace without believing that I have no right to be there and that I am in danger.” [5] “The moment when you just want to crawl into a hole and never be seen by the world again[.] You might find yourself defensive like a cornered animal. [I]t triggers a familiar wave of self-doubt. You might be overwhelmed by feelings of self-hatred or even self-harm.” [6] These behaviors are characteristic outer manifestations of shame.

But shame also has an inner voice, and this is a powerful storytelling tool. “‘I knew it—you are just a fraud. You don’t deserve to be here. Nobody likes you—they are just pretending.’ Other shame voices might harp on how lazy or slow or stupid you are. When the shame voice gets going, it can seem awfully loud.” [7] A character’s inner voice reveals to a reader the truth of what a character is dealing with, *even, and especially, if the character is lying.*

And that’s the most powerful piece of information for mining this character trait and using it well: when in a shame reaction, characters will do inexplicable things which continue to do them harm. How can we use shame to explain the inexplicable? Here’s Dave Barry: “Your brain cherishes embarrassing memories. It likes to take them out and fondle them. This probably explains a lot of unexplained suicides. A successful man with a nice family and a good career will be out on his patio, cooking hamburgers, seemingly without a care in the world, when his brain, rummaging through its humiliating-incident collection, selects an old favorite, which it replays for a zillionth time, and the man is suddenly so overcome by feelings of shame that he stabs himself in the skull with his barbecue fork.” [8] We, as writers, provide the backstory necessary so if your happy, well-adjusted-seeming character goes for the barbecue fork, the reader nods their head instead of throwing your book across the room and vowing never to read you again. Shame adds weight; it adds depth.

Shame has the power to drag people down like nothing else but depression (which has been described as an offshoot of shame). This phenomenon is so common it has a name: the shame spiral. Here’s one in action: “She messed up a presentation at work; didn’t get an award she was up for; went out and drank too much, ate even more, called her toxic ex and cried on the phone until he agreed that she could come over. The next morning, she woke up sweating, her heart racing. She wanted to throw up, purge herself of the booze and junk food she’d consumed during her nocturnal binge when she was feeling powerless and feral. *I keep screwing up*, she thought. She wanted to scratch the skin from her body, remove the stench left by her ex, an illogical choice of people to turn to when she was feeling isolated and alone as he had a history of making her feel worse and, right on cue, as they were in the throes of passion, all she kept thinking was: *I am such a loser.*” [9]

Each decision this woman made led to a further destructive decision and that’s the definition of a shame spiral. It makes no logical sense—there’s no logic to losing control of yourself and continuing to do things that make you feel worthless. The Urban Dictionary says a shame spiral “characterizes the loss of self-control over something that makes one feel worthless and pathetic. Due to these feelings of low self-worth and guilt, the action that triggered the shame spiral is repeated and the degradation of one’s self continues. Example triggers for shame spirals could be excesses of junk food, alcohol, meaningless

sex, buying unnecessary gifts for oneself and the like.”^[10] A shame spiral could incorporate some or all these actions and more.

Other ways a character can act when in a shame spiral: “[S]hame [is] highly correlated with addiction, depression, eating disorders, violence, bullying and aggression,’ which can all serve as masks or so-called armor we don to keep ourselves from dealing with, simply put, the reality of ourselves.”^[11] Perfectionism is another way shame spirals can manifest. In a shame spiral, a character will do a destructive behavior, then continue to behave in this way more and more, unable to stop. For instance, if a character is addicted to sweets, he will binge on chocolates, then feel awful and use it as proof he’s a terrible person, then binge on donuts. This will happen again and again, as his mindset spirals down into darker and darker places and his self-talk becomes more and more hateful.

What triggers shame? “There are no universal triggers. There are no events or situations that make all of us feel or experience shame.”^[12] So you can use anything in a character’s past about which they’ve been shamed by others to explain their present shame reactions.

In Part 2 of this article, I’ll explore how to use shame to chart character growth and regression.

And by the way, this is a tough article. Unlike most writing on our craft, this has the potential for you to recognize much of what I’ve written about in yourself, as well. I know it was hard for me to research and write. Please know that, wherever you are in relation to this subject, YOU ARE NOT ALONE. As Dr. Brown says, if you are able, grab those people you trust the most and “reach out and tell your story. You’ve got to speak your shame.” If you are struggling, please—help is both available and necessary. Take good care of yourself.

Theresa Rogers, president of the San Francisco Area chapter of RWA, has published both fiction and nonfiction. Take a look into her writing soul at www.theresarogerswriter.com.

^[1] Dr. Brené Brown, *Motherhood, Shame, and Society*, www.mothersmovement.org, August, 2004.

^[2] Ibid.

^[3] Dr. Brené Brown, *The Power of Vulnerability*, www.ted.com, March 2012.

^[4] Dr. Brené Brown, *Motherhood, Shame, and Society*, www.mothersmovement.org, August, 2004.

^[5] Meredith Hall, “Shunned,” *Creative Nonfiction*, Issue #20, 2003.

^[6] Sarah Beaulieu, “The Shame Spiral: A Primer in Shame Monsters,”

www.theenlivenproject.com, April 29, 2013

[7] Sarah Beaulieu, "The Shame Spiral: A Primer in Shame Monsters," www.theenlivenproject.com, April 29, 2013.

[8] Dave Barry, "The Embarrassing Truth," *Dave Barry's Greatest Hits*: Ballantine, 1988: p.140-141.

[9] Jill Di Donato, author, *Beautiful Garbage*, in "The Shame Spiral," *Huffington Post*, 4/21/2014.

[10] www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=shame+spiral

[11] Jill Di Donato, author, *Beautiful Garbage*, in "The Shame Spiral," *Huffington Post*, 4/21/2014. Internal quote from Dr. Brené Brown.

[12] Dr. Brené Brown, *Motherhood, Shame, and Society*, www.mothersmovement.org, August, 2004.

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The Hidden Motivation: Shame

Part 2: How to Use It to Chart Character Growth

By Theresa Rogers

In last month's article, I defined shame and described how it shows up. I outlined the shame spiral, which makes explicable characters acting in inexplicable ways. Now we move on to how to use this tool to craft character arcs.

Shame is a powerful way to show character growth. Dr. Brené Brown, who's been researching shame and vulnerability for over a decade, outlines three steps to follow to break the cycle of shame. Starting with a character lost in shame (as outlined in Part 1), chart a character's recognition and use of them to chart growth:

1. Talk to yourself like you talk to someone you love. "I would say to myself, 'God, you're so stupid, Brené,'" Brown says. "I would never talk to my kids that way." *Show a character's self-talk shifting.*
2. Reach out to someone you trust. *Show a character moving from isolation to increasing levels of vulnerability with others.*
3. Tell your story. "Shame cannot survive being spoken," Brown says. *The ultimate level of vulnerability is sharing a shame story. This could complete a growth arc as a character finally shares her/his deepest secrets.*

Secrecy, silence and judgment: those are the three things shame needs to grow exponentially in our lives. The antidote? Empathy. [Shame] cannot survive being spoken and being met with empathy." [1] *Your character will need to find someone who has empathy for them in order for these steps to be possible. [Italicized comments mine.]*

These are not easy steps to follow, so don't show them as easy in your story. It's a hard truth that "the greater the humiliation, the more strength of character will be required to overcome it."^[2] Please don't show a character overcoming such a challenge alone. It's unrealistic, and it sends the shaming message that asking for help is weak. As someone who has suffered from a crippling level of shame her whole life, I can tell you with authority and from personal experience that it's not until you ask for help that anything can really begin to shift. But asking for help is as difficult as living in the prison of shame.

There are three reasons overcoming shame so difficult to do. "We change of shame, powerlessness and from a place of self-worth, not a place isolation."^[3] So first a character must deal with powerlessness and isolation; only then can they shift their self-worth.

Powerlessness: "Shame often produces overwhelming and painful feelings of confusion, fear, anger, judgment and/or the need to escape or hide from the situation. It's difficult to identify shame as the core issue when we're trying to manage all these very intense feelings. It would be highly unusual to be in the middle of a shaming experience and think, "Oh, I'm aware of what's happening—this is shame. What are my choices and how can I change this?" Even when we recognize it, the silencing and secret nature of shame makes it very difficult for us to identify and act on the choices that could actually facilitate change or free us from the shame trap. This is what I mean by powerlessness."^[4] A character is powerless to change in the face of shame because they can't necessarily recognize it's in control. The first step is to recognize what is making them feel powerless—the secret they can't bear to share with anyone for fear of the isolation threatened if they do.

Isolation: "Jean Baker Miller and Irene Stiver, Relational-Cultural theorists from the Stone Center at Wellesley College, have beautifully captured the overwhelming nature of isolation. They write, "We believe that the most terrifying and destructive feeling that a person can experience is psychological isolation. This is not the same as being alone. It is a feeling that one is locked out of the possibility of human connection and of being powerless to change the situation. In the extreme, psychological isolation can lead to a sense of hopelessness and desperation. People will do almost anything to escape this combination of condemned isolation and powerlessness."^[5] As awful as this feeling of isolation is, because of the secretive nature of shame, sufferers feel trapped in it. Why? Because it is combined with powerlessness.

Then they must deal with the issue of self-worth. "It's no easy feat to admit to flaws, because that means they're real and we have to confront them. Accepting our mistakes or shortcomings— choices that may not have served us well, unflattering ways others may perceive us, or subtle imperfections that gnaw away at us—is uncomfortable."^[6] To put it mildly. Empathy from another character is both how your character develops trust *and* a big part in how they begin to change their self-talk, which reveals self-worth. "[S]elf-talk is essential in breaking free from the shame spiral."^[7] When a shamed person recognizes another's empathy, the hold shame has on them begins to lessen, and there is room for their self-talk to shift, as well. Showing our character's inner voice is how we chart this shift.

These reasons are why it is so terribly difficult to move beyond shame. To do it, a character must reveal the very thing they believe will make them isolated outcasts forever. The arc must follow: a) recognition of the secret being kept and/or the power of fear it has over them; b) the ability to develop a trusting relationship with someone based on empathy; and c) the ability to overcome the fear inherent in revealing that very secret, which can't be done until the character's self-worth is stronger than their fear. This happens when the character realizes a very important distinction: "[W]ho she is [is] distinct from the things she's done."^[8] Again, this cannot be done alone. Please don't show it being done in isolation.

You can also use the reverse of this process of moving closer to show setbacks in your character's growth arc. The reverse involves moving away, moving toward, and moving against. "In order to deal with shame, we have learned to *move away* by withdrawing, hiding, silencing ourselves and secret-keeping. We have also learned the strategy of *moving toward*. This can be seen when we attempt to earn connection by appeasing and pleasing. Last, we develop ways to *move against*. These include trying to gain power over others, using shame to fight shame and aggression."^[9]

The back-and-forth nature of this struggle is tailor-made for the romance genre, or any genre which features a relationship. We add power to our stories when we understand the underlying reasons why we're adding events to a character's arc. Shame, and the ways I've shown we can use it as writers, makes our job easier and adds such depth and sympathy to our characters—and draws empathy from our readers.

There is so much more I could write about this very important subject and its connection to deep characterization and growth. Please, if you're interested, start by reading Brené Brown's *Women & Shame: Reaching Out, Speaking Truths and Building Connection* (3C Press, 2004).

As I said at the end of Part 1, this is a tough article. Unlike most writing on our craft, this has the potential for you to recognize much of what I've written about in yourself, as well. I know it was hard for me to research and write. Please know that, wherever you are in relation to this subject, YOU ARE NOT ALONE. As Dr. Brown says, if you are able, grab those people you trust the most and "reach out and tell your story. You've got to speak your shame." If you are struggling, please—help is both available and necessary. Take good care of yourself.

Theresa Rogers, president of the San Francisco Area chapter of RWA, has published both fiction and nonfiction. Take a look into her writing soul at www.theresarogerswriter.com.

[1] Brené Brown's 3 Steps to Break the Cycle of Shame, www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/08/brene-brown-shame-oprah_n_4059675.html.

[2] David Corbett, *The Art of Character*, Penguin Books, 2013, p.148. This book has several excellent discussions on shame and exercises to explore it in a character.

[3] Dr. Brené Brown, *Motherhood, Shame, and Society*, www.mothersmovement.org, August 2004.

[4] Dr. Brené Brown, *Motherhood, Shame, and Society*, www.mothersmovement.org, August 2004.

[5] Jean Baker Miller and Irene Stiver, *Motherhood, Shame, and Society*, www.mothersmovement.org, August 2004.

[6] Jill Di Donato, author, *Beautiful Garbage*, in "The Shame Spiral," *Huffington Post*, 4/21/2014.

[7] Dr. Brené Brown quoted by Jill Di Donato, author, *Beautiful Garbage*, in "The Shame Spiral," *Huffington Post*, 4/21/2014

[8] Jill Di Donato, author, *Beautiful Garbage*, in "The Shame Spiral," *Huffington Post*, 4/21/2014

[9] Karen Horney (pioneering psychologist who disputed Freud and explained the differences between men and women through culture and society instead of through inherent differences) via Dr. Brené Brown, *Motherhood, Shame, and Society*, www.mothersmovement.org, August, 2004.

A Note from the Newsletter Editor:

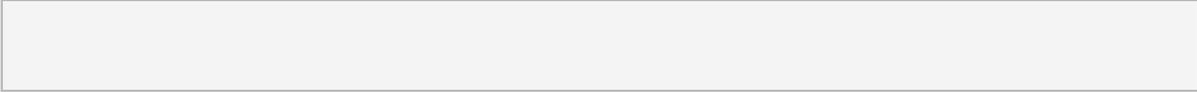
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