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Build writing memories.



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## Letter from the President

### REMEMBER WHEN?

I've been scanning pictures for Throwback Thursdays. Just a few at a time. Remembering. Laughing. Crying a little. As I write this, we've just finished up the first round of the Great Expectations contest. I probably have a distinct memory from every year I've helped. Well, that would be since 2001. This year was my 14th year. *Wowzers*. Being involved on the ground floor again with collecting scores and returning entries... makes me think how fortunate I've been to have NT as my home chapter.

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NT is so far ahead of the game. Each month we have great speakers that put national workshops to shame. Each month I receive the encouragement that inspires me to go out there and write my heart out again. I hope you get your NT fix this month, too.

Back to the contest. I'll admit that we had to scramble on the last day for a few judges who didn't return their entries. Now, I've made a lot of friends through the GE. Some of our judges (outside the chapter) have been around 6 years or longer. And when two of these ladies didn't return their entries I told Lisa something had happened. Sure enough, something had, but they were still willing to try to get their entries in--if needed. (BUT WE'RE FAST and done.) The contestants are already sending back thank you notes, praising the quality of judging. Things like constructive comments, encouraging their writing, and two ladies wanting to know if the judges were instructors or mentors. Some judges did offer to stay in touch with the contestant. I love connections like that. One of the first major contests I entered, resulted with a relationship of friends and mentor.

None of the good feelings and encouragement would happen without the enthusiasm and instruction we receive from NT. So I encourage you to make a writing memory. In a couple of years, you'll pull out the picture and use it for Throwback Thursday.

Angi Morgan  
NTRWA President

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### ***Upcoming February 21st Meeting:***

**Tex Thompson - The Comma Sutra: A Better Punctuation Guide to Spicing Up Your Text Life**

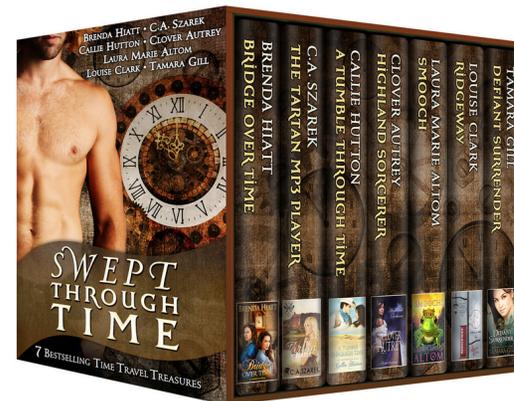
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Does your writing lack a certain...variety? Does your manuscript suffer from premature exclamations, heavy or abnormally frequent periods, or have difficulty maintaining even a semi-colon? Don't suffer in silence! You too can enjoy the satisfaction and self-confidence that comes with knowing how to please your critique partner. In this class, we'll practice the ins and outs of good punctuation (and yes, it WILL be raunchy.) Join us, won't you, as we embark on a journey of true textual healing.

There will be a board meeting at La Hacienda Ranch at 9:00, February 21st. Board meetings are always open to general members.

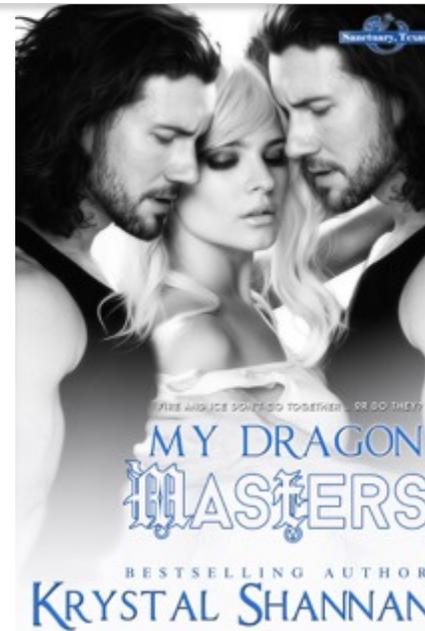
## Member News

Clover Autrey and C.A. Szarek - contributed to a box set, *Swept Through Time: 7 Bestselling Time Travel Treasures*, with five other authors. Released Feb 1st.



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Krystal Shannan - has a new release out, *My Dragon Masters (Sanctuary, Texas Book 2)*



Angi Morgan - A series about West Texas from Harlequin Intrigue releases January, February & March, called The West Texas Watchman. **THE CATTLEMAN** received a Romantic Times Top Pick. It's also been a top seller on Amazon (pssttt...before the electronic version released). **ANGI SAYS:** "WOO HOO!" and probably jumped so hard they thought Irving was having another tremor.



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## Member Shout Out!

by Angi Morgan

Let me just say that I adored Lisa (Fenley Grant) before the contest and I'm totally in love with her now. Her son just passed his Eagle Scout Board...CONGRATULATIONS. She's done an amazing job and didn't faint halfway through the contest process. I encourage all of NT to drop her a line at [FenleyGrant.author@gmail.com](mailto:FenleyGrant.author@gmail.com) or on the FB contest page: < <https://www.facebook.com/pages/NTRWA-Contests/1463821457229524> >

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## Romance 101

by Cara Lauren

*“Words are like paint: each one is distinct, yet are fully “blendable” in their creation of a masterpiece”*  
~ C.L.

Recently I had the pleasure of attending Christine d’Abo’s fabulous workshop, **Romance 101**. I came away with a fresh perspective on what romance is, and how best to connect with readers to achieve maximum, *positive*, emotional impact. Below is a summary of tips I’ve collected from my own experience, as well as studying other authors and of course, from Christine’s wonderful presentation.

### **If you can take the romance out of the story, then it’s not a romance!**

At the end of the day (or in this case, by the end of the book), both the hero and heroine must end up together, and enjoy a “HEA” or happily ever after. If the book can stand alone in the absence of romance, then it’s a title with romantic elements, versus a romance story. Characters must overcome internal and external obstacles, with the help of one another. And finally, the romance must *change* the characters in ways that will help them achieve their goals and dreams, whether for the good of others, for themselves, or both.

### **Keep it believable, even if your romance takes place on Enceladus, one of Saturn’s moons**

No matter what the world in which your characters live, it needs to be believable and consistent throughout the entire story. Keep track of all the details, whether they are large or small, and be sure to carry these “threads” from start to finish. Readers will immediately notice if, for example, the seaside town in which your heroine lives in Chapter 1, has “moved” to an inland location in Chapter 22. There are rules to everything. Ensure yours make sense, and address common elements that apply to all. A good rule of thumb

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is to consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs are outlined.

### **Stories need to feel familiar, yet fresh, as well as resonate with readers**

Stories need to have a sense of familiarity about them so their themes resonate with readers. Romance stories in particular have to focus on the hero and heroine where both characters end up together and start the next phase of their lives. Common themes such as love, loss, faith, family, home, children and finances can apply to contemporary, paranormal, historic – all romantic genres. It's the author's unique *spin* on the familiar, which makes a story fresh and alive. Although a good romance should not have "falling in love" at the center of its plotline, "love" needs to weave throughout the entire story so that readers travel alongside the characters on their romantic journey.

### **GMC: No, not "Good Morning, Canada," but "Goals, Motivation & Conflict"**

Goals relate to the characters' internal and external objectives. Motivation relates to the "why" they strive toward these goals. Conflict arises out of internal and external circumstances and beliefs, as well as characters' actions and inactions. Tension arises when to achieve (A), (B) must be let go of. And when that happens, the result is (C) which means that (D) now needs consideration. Think of a story as the web of a spider: synchronous strands woven together in a cohesive and seamless form. A highly referenced book is "Goal, Motivation and Conflict" by Debra Dixon.

### **Save the Whales! Save the Cat!**

Another excellent resource is Blake Snyder's book, "Save the Cat." Initially written for screenwriters, Snyder breaks down a story into "beats" where plot pacing, character development and emotional/spiritual growth are addressed. His structure is widely respected amongst writers of all walks and genres and solidifies a story into an emotionally driven one where the desired outcome is reached in the most satisfying of ways.

### **All stories need to answer this one question: "Why should readers care?"**

The single, most important question one must consider when creating a story is: "Why should my readers care?" If readers aren't emotionally invested in a story, the story won't make a *deep and meaningful*

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impression, and the author won't have gained a follower. Ask yourself this: what resonates with you? What moves you into cracking a smile? Taking a particular action? Shedding a tear? Unlike some characters, readers are human and respond to human emotions, challenges and triumphs. Be sure to take that paintbrush, a.k.a., writer's pen, whether virtual or solid, and let the letters flow into words; words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs – all “flavored” with emotion and feeling. ©

*Cara is based in Toronto, Canada and holds a B.A. in English Literature & Film Scriptwriting from York University. She is a member of the Romance Writers of America — Toronto Romance Writers and Fantasy, Futuristic & Paranormal chapters. Cara is writing her first, feature-length novel, High Tide, an aquatic paranormal romance with strong spiritual and environmental elements. You can follow Cara on Twitter at @WriterCara. ©*

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*The following article appeared in the January 2015 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.*

## **Clutter and Clarity - and Characters**

By Theresa Rogers

I've spent the last two weeks rearranging and cleaning up every room in my house. My living room feels bright and airy, my dining room is inviting, my bathroom sparkles, my kitchen is easy to work in, and my son's room is so cozy there are times every-one in the family, including both dogs and the cat, are in there.

What are still total, cave-like messes are my writing nook and my bedroom. Every time I thoroughly clean my house (which, let's face it, is usually the day before someone's coming over for dinner), I end up taking everything that doesn't have a place and putting it in one of those two areas ... and then leaving it that way.

Standing in my bedroom this last time, I had an epiphany: I've done this pattern for

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years and years, then, was a little girl, my memories were more times I used to bring down everything that could be brought down in my room and once my room was good and destroyed, I'd wander out into some other part of the house, leaving the mess for days. What was interesting, she says, wasn't that I made these huge messes--that, after all, is what kids do, time immemorial--it was when I made them. Invariably, something had happened to upset me, and it was almost like I was creating some kind of outer representation of my inner emotional landscape.

I was thinking about this recently as I was developing a character. I had to show, in a very short amount of time, his emotional state, in order to explain to the reader how, when he attacks someone within a page and a half of the beginning of the story, he isn't really dangerous, but overwhelmed and emotionally devastated, and I wanted to explain without lengthy inner monologue and info dumping.

How?

I looked at my own life, what my own house was showing me about interior landscapes, and I realized I could show everything I needed to through setting. I just needed to show the reader the physical space the character was in.

I showed his bedroom buried in clothes and towels, the kitchen sink filled with every bowl and spoon in the house because all he's eating is cereal, and the balcony where the character sits, day after day, not throwing his mug over the railing, littered with the tiny paper balls that missed when he flicks their siblings over the edge. I made his outer setting mirror his interior mental state.

Using setting to reveal our characters is a powerful emotional tool. And it doesn't have to be through messes. A completely tidy space can be just as revealing, if you want it to be. My same character, after adding an item to a list he's making, positions the note-pad precisely in line with the corner of the coffee table. He lines up the pen with the top line on the paper. When he's shooting little paper balls over the edge of the balcony, he lines them up meticulously, almost painfully exactly. Every bowl and spoon in the apartment may be dirty, but they're all stacked perfectly in the sink, rinsed and filled with water. By doing this, I've shown he's out of control on the macro level (his apartment; his life), and it's partly because he's overly controlled on the micro level (small, manageable objects he can exert total control over; any feeling that tries to come up).

In *American Beauty*<sup>[1]</sup>, there is a scene where a son brings his girlfriend home for the first time. Upon entering, we see the mother sitting in a hermetically clean dining room. Yet, when the son and girlfriend enter, she apologizes: "Oh my. I apologize for the way things look around here." We've already been creeped out by this family, but the juxtaposition between the actual state of the house and the mother's comment shows us how extreme the psychological dysfunction is in mere seconds--and gives us tremendous insight not

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And it's not only objects in the setting that can show emotional complexity--it's how a character interacts with objects and settings.

In the same movie, at one point, Lester and Carolyn are finally reconnecting after years of drifting apart. Lester, a put-upon, emasculated shell for the first part of the movie, has become *ridiculously* sexy<sup>[2]</sup>. He's making a move on Carolyn, his wife, talking about the way she used to be, the way their lives used to be, and it's clear they're about to have mad hot sex on a couch in their living room--when Carolyn gets distracted:

*Carolyn:* "Lester, you're going to spill beer on the couch."

*Lester:* "So what? It's just a couch."

*Carolyn:* "This is a four-thousand-dollar sofa, upholstered in Italian silk! This is not just a couch!"

*Lester:* "IT'S! JUST! A! COUCH! This isn't life! This is just stuff. And it's become more important to you than living. Well, honey, that's just nuts."

And that's the end of what could have been a wonderful, beautiful reconciliation scene. The couch, and each character's reaction to it, is a symbol of each character's take on life as well as his or her interior landscape, beautifully shown. I'd venture to say everything Lester says after IT'S JUST A COUCH is actually unnecessary--we get exactly what's going on without him having to tell us.

What kinds of things can you turn into symbols of your character's mental state? What kinds of objects and character reactions can you juxtapose? What kinds of comments does your character make to others about the setting and the things in it? A character who grew up with an over-controlling parent may react with unease in a very tidy space. Since this is the opposite of what we expect, a reader will notice it, and bingo, you've shown something about your character without telling a word. Is there an object your character never lets anyone touch? Is there an old chair, out of place compared everything else in the house? What's in her purse? What's behind everything else in the medicine chest? What objects/places is your character drawn to? Repelled from? How does your character react to his/her partner's space?

Use everything, down to the weave of the carpet. Use everything you can to add levels of complexity and nuance to your characters and, therefore, your stories.

*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](http://www.theresarogerswriter.com).

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