

*Writers
of the*

PURPLE SAGE

Newsletter of the Ridge Writers

East Sierra Branch, California Writers Club

September 2024

“THE ANATOMY OF SUSPENSE” ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5



Author Michael Raff will discuss “The Anatomy of Suspense” for our September 5 general meeting that starts 6:30 p.m. in the meeting room of Ridgecrest Presbyterian Church, 633 W. Las Flores. No admission. Public welcome.

To be successful, a writer must keep readers turning the pages. There’s no better way to hold their attention than to infuse your work with suspense. Writing horror stories as his specialty, Michael Raff has abundant knowhow on building that particular emotion—from subtle to spine-tingling. His power-point will not only divulge his secrets but will possibly keep you on the edge of your seat.

High Desert Branch member Michael Raff discovered his love for writing at thirteen-years-old. He attended writing courses at Cypress College, became a psychiatric technician and worked in state hospitals until he retired. His flair for writing horror reared its monstrous head in 1983. His romantic coming of age memoir, *Special*, was published in 2011, followed by four horror anthologies, three horror novels, and one non-horror anthology

featuring several award-winning stories. Two of his short stories have been published by Dragon Soul Press, a traditional publisher, and four more have appeared in CWC's *Literary Review*. His memoir *Secrets: My Career Behind Locked Doors*, which unveils the truth about working in four California State Hospitals, will be published by December. Mike lives in Hesperia, along with his assortment of animals.

A book signing will follow his presentation. We hope to see you there and please bring your friends.

MIC DROP: OPEN MIC NIGHT AT RIDGE WRITERS

Report on the August Meeting written by Daniel Stallings

Ridge Writers and the general public gathered to share their wonderfully written words at our August 1



Janis Kunz reads her piece about her recent trip.

meeting: The Annual Open Mic Night. That evening, we were treated to seven lovely pieces from members and even one of the guests. Janis Kunz read “Sorely Tempted,” a piece about her recent trip to visit family in Texas. Charlotte Goodson read

“The Bell Rang,” a story about elementary school in the 1940’s and the new baby rabbits in their hutch. Guest Kelli Cutts shared an excerpt titled “Voiceless Voice,” which came from her novel manuscript. Gerry Wisdom read a memoir piece titled “My Room,” which can be read on



A guest reads at Open Mic Night 2024.

page 3. Daniel Stallings shared his ekphrastic poem, “Ouroboros,” inspired by and describing Brooke Dyer’s photograph “Reflections at Golden Hour,” both published in the CWC’s *Vision & Verse* collection. Rebecca Parker gave us a fantastic preview of the 2024 edition of *Planet Mojave* by sharing her poem, “Aftershock,” which will be in the book. Donna McCrohan Rosenthal closed the program reading an article she found about F. Scott Fitzgerald’s financial philosophies. It was great evening of sharing true labors of love. Thank you everyone who read at Open Mic Night 2024!

Mark Your Calendar...

September 5 – Michael Raff, mystery and horror author, “The Anatomy of Suspense”

October 3 – Viviana Hall, poet, journalist, clinical social worker, shares her bilingual poetry collection *Poems of Love*

November 7 – S. Kay Murphy, family legends and living legacies



Daniel Stallings shows the picture that inspired his poem.

Continued on page 3

Focal Point



What does it take to focus your mind, so you can finish what you're writing? What helps you zero in on your goal: a completed story, poem, novel, article? Do you block out all sounds—no TV, no music, no probing family members? Or does that chaos sustain you? Do you need your own space? Can you work anywhere under any circumstances? Is it a different method for every piece you write? It can be helpful to any fledgling writer to learn about their work ethic and what they need to focus, no matter how wild it may be to outside eyes.

For example, I am currently working on several projects including a play script, the newsletter, a few short stories, etc. As per my M.O., I have a lot of irons in the fire. Finding a focal point story to work on isn't one of my strong suits; I tend to have an army of open tabs on my laptop. All of them screaming for attention. And I don't really have a standard ritual for my writing. Whatever worked for the piece worked. But this month, I have noticed an odd trend that watching the Olympic Games has helped in allowing the words to flow from my fingers to the page.

It's a weird form of disconnection, a kind of multi-tasking. I can throw on a longer race or session through streaming on my computer or TV, sit and let the information from the event wash over me gently, and start typing. When I hear the commentators' lift their pitch, I look up to catch the exciting moment or photo finish. Then back to writing. Even as I type this President's Message right now, I have the Men's and Women's 10K Open Water Swim races in the Seine River pulled up. A kind of background chatter as soothing as a white noise machine or the drone of a fan on a hot summer night. I don't need to be glued to the action; In many events, there's a lot of downtime. Whatever mechanism at play in my brain, it's helped me knock out some new work I needed to finish. So I ask you, my fellow writers, how do you find your focus to complete your writing? And what new methods have you tried? Because no matter what your level of experience, you can always experiment to find the environment, the focal point, the circumstances that suit your needs. Don't be afraid to switch it up. Maybe it can break a writer's block. Improve flow. Whatever it takes to cross the finish line and say "I have done it. I have finished writing this piece." Now that sounds like a win to me.

Membership Dues Are Due Now

Membership dues for the California Writers Club, of which Ridge Writers is the East Sierra Branch, are due now. The dues are \$45 for the year (July 1st to June 30th) and grant you special perks such as newsletters, membership discounts for branch events, *The Literary Review* and the *Bulletin* published by the CWC, ability to publish on the SoCal Writers Showcase website (see below), and more. If your membership expires, you will have to pay an additional \$20 initiation fee to rejoin. Dues must be collected by September 30th.

Ridge Writers Leaders

President – Daniel Stallings
Vice President – Janis Kunz
Secretary – Donna McCrohan Rosenthal
Treasurer – Andrew Sound
Member at Large – Vacant
Historian – Maryann Butterfield
Newsletter Editor – Daniel Stallings
Programs & Publicity – Donna McCrohan Rosenthal
State Rep – Donna McCrohan Rosenthal
Youth Coordinator – Janis Kunz
Webmaster – Julianne Black

To reach any of these leaders, use ridgewriters@yahoo.com.

Visit our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/RidgeWriters and our website CWC-ridgewriters.org.

SoCal Writers Showcase



The southern region of the California Writers Club maintains the "zine"-format socalwritersshowcase.com, containing monthly content from members, ranging from fiction, nonfiction/essays, and memoir, to poetry, interviews, discussion on writers' life, the craft, and news.

The Writers of the Purple Sage is the monthly newsletter of the Ridge Writers, East Sierra Branch of the over 100-year-old California Writer Club. Except where otherwise stated, all articles in this publication may be printed without special permission in newsletters of branches of the California Writers Club and in the State Bulletin, subject to the following conditions:

- The author's name and original publication credit must be printed with the text.
- The text must be printed in its entirety, without additions or changes.
- You must send a copy of the newsletter bearing the reprint to the author.

Contact the editor by mail at P.O. Box 484, Ridgecrest, CA 93556 or by email, ridgewriters@yahoo.com. **SPECIAL NOTICE:** Photographs for publicity and newsletter uses are taken at all Ridge Writers events. By entering the venue, members and guests are granting permission that their likenesses may be used for publicity purposes.

Many uncounted years ago when I joined the Idaho Writers Group and after many workshops, I decided I would write memoir. In the intervening years, the process eluded me. While our perception of time can only be linear, memories come at us willy-nilly, brought on by a smell, a sight, a sound. In my case, my first ideas, I thought, were the kind of stories that I could not speak until the principals were no longer here to either sue me or never speak to me again.

And thus one day, being a voracious reader and just having read *China Court* by Rumer Godden where book had “grabbed me” with the depiction of dust motes, the absence of sound, and the smell of burn polish in the entryway to China Court, I thought if I could depict even a small portion of a room like that, I would be well on my way to claim I could write memoir.

I remembered my dear friend’s house in Boise. It was a two-story structure that had arrived on the train in 1911, bought from a Sears Catalogue. It was set among towering trees on an expanse of lawn, porches front and back and had a one-car garage that had been modified with an incredible invention—garage doors with openers that allowed one to drive straight through to an alley!

When I arrived for the first time, my friend said, “I’ll show you to your room.”—my room! And so it became, at least temporarily.

The room was basically black and white with oak flooring covered by a faded antique Oriental rug. White walls, black lampshades, white down coverlet for winter, white on white brocade cover for summer. It had two corner windows with only narrow blinds. They opened in summer to catch the cross breeze, serving as picture frames for the trees as they turned from aching green to fall foliage and a home for the chattering squirrels and the songs of a multitude of birds. In the winter, of course, was the snow and the other houses’ holiday lights.



Our Jack London Award Winners

We’re proud of the Ridge Writers who have won the Jack London Award, the highest recognition each branch of CWC can give outstanding members.

The award was presented annually until 2005, and subsequently only once every two years.

Maryann Butterfield 1997
Casey Wilson 1998
Rlee Peters 1999
Judy Dutcher 2000
Curt Danhauser 2001
Judy Martin 2002
Donna McCrohan Rosenthal 2003
Holly Dworken Cooley 2004
Liz Babcock 2005
Allison Aubin 2007
Steve Wersan 2009*
Margaret Luebs 2013
Daniel Stallings 2015
Julianne DiBlasi Black 2017
John Anderson 2019
Andrew Sound 2021
Janis Kunz 2023

*With a special Charmian London Award to Fran Wersan

The best part, I think, was waking up in the morning and looking around at the walls and furnishings. My friends were world travelers, and there was a notice for a Vincent van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam; there, a poster for a Monet exhibit in Holland at the Rijksmuseum; there, over an apothecary’s desk, a print by Felix Vallotton from the Musée d’Orsay, Paris of a little girl chasing a ball. And on another wall, a parson’s bench and a white dresser. Last but not least was the mirror. My friend had used one of the side wings of an antique dresser. It was a whimsical fantasy in a beautifully appointed room. I finally asked her what was in the very plain cabinet in the room—a sewing machine!

Waking up was a dreamy pleasure, where one could daydream about going to all of the faraway places depicted, take a soak in the huge clawfoot tub, take a shower where there heated towel racks, or better yet show up in the dining room with the wavy, antique windows for a continental breakfast or on occasion, a full English breakfast. The clue for the full EB was the smell of cooking bacon.

This is a bittersweet mini-memoir as my friends are gone—my love, too. But I know where the mirror and the rug are today. And further, I know I would be welcome to visit them.

* * *

WHERE’S WALDO PARTY AT RED ROCK BOOKS

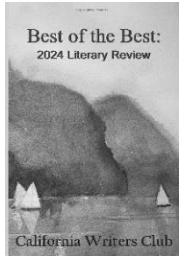


Daniel and Donna mind the Ridge Writers table at the Where’s Waldo Party.

Amidst red and white balloons and dozens of variations on a famous sweater, the month-long celebration of the *Where’s Waldo?* books by Martin Hanford at our local bookstore culminated in a big party on July 27th. Ridge Writers had a table at the event with three special offerings. We offered stuffed animals for free to any child who bought a book that day. Donna created a Where’s Waldo crossword puzzle challenge where the lucky winner got a raffle basket of travel-themed items. And Daniel designed a scavenger hunt that searched for special places and asked for more information about them inside the store itself. The winner of the scavenger hunt received a gift certificate from Red Rock Books. Red Rock Books offered cookies, a selfie station, a costume contest, a drawing and coloring contest, their grand prize giveaway, and even a chance to meet Waldo himself. The party was a massive hit, and Ridge Writers’ contributions were some of the most popular. We had a wonderful time. Thank you to Ann Rizzardini and Red Rock Books for creating the event and to our wonderful members who shared their work and volunteered their time with this celebration of all things Waldo.

2024 LITERARY REVIEW

From the CWC President, Roger C. Lubeck:



Best of the Best:
2024 Literary Review
Original watercolor
cover art: "Morro Bay"
by Richard Zone, High
Desert Branch

"The Best of the Best: 2024 Literary Review by the CWC members is now available on Amazon. The club is very excited about this new publication. This book is dedicated to the memory of our dear friend, Bob Isbill. Our thanks go to Mike Apodaca, Jenny Margotta, Elisabeth Tuck, Joyce Krieg, Richard Zone, and all the others in our branches who made this 2024 Literary Review possible. We know you will enjoy reading this wonderful new book. A PDF version of the book will be available on the CWC website on July 15."

Ridge Writers does not endorse any contest, conference or publishing opportunity that appears in our newsletter. We merely collect and share news of opportunities for our membership. Member discretion advised.

The East Sierra Branch (Ridge Writers) is the California Writers Club branch serving the eastern part of Kern County. Over the mountains on the west side of the county is our Bakersfield-based sister branch, Writers of Kern.



Inside ...

Page 1:

September Program:
"The Anatomy of Suspense"
"Mic Drop": Report on August Meeting by Daniel Stallings
Upcoming Speakers

Page 2:

President's Message by Daniel Stallings: "Focal Point"
Ridge Writers Leaders
Membership Dues

Page 3:

"My Room" by Gerry Wisdom
Where's Waldo Party
Jack London Awards

Vision & Verse: A Fusion of Art, Photography, Prose and Poetry



Cover painting: "Welcome"
by Briahn Kelly-Brennan

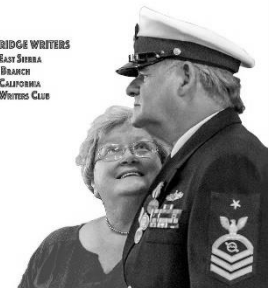
Vision and Verse, CWC's ekphrastic anthology edited by Les Bernstein, was officially published and available on Amazon on July 11, 2024. Be sure to check it out!

Description on Amazon: "Welcome to the inaugural issue of Vision and Verse, a Fusion of Art, Photography, Prose and Poetry. The multi-talented artists and writers featured within these pages have come together to create a dialogue between their respective mediums. This collection showcases the beauty of visual art married with the magic of the written word. In this celebration of imagination my wish for you is to immerse yourself in these pages and join in a journey where the boundaries of art and writing are blurred. The images and words are like rooms of memories, evoking anecdotes to be remembered, maybe even a treasure trove of inspiration for your own very unique expression. We sincerely hope you enjoy the collaborative work in Vision and Verse from the gifted members of California Writers Club."

Two of our East Sierra members are published in this brand new anthology!

SCENES FROM LIVES OF SERVICE HIGH DESERT VETERANS OF WWI THROUGH DESERT STORM

By RIDGE WRITERS
EAST SIERRA
BRANCH
CALIFORNIA
WRITERS CLUB



Cover Photo by Laura Austin

Our book featuring stories of High Desert veterans, *Scenes from Lives of Service*, is on sale at Red Rock Books and through mail order. To order through mail, send a letter and check to Ridge Writers, PO Box 484, Ridgecrest, CA, 93556; buyer should state name, mailing address, number of copies wanted, and enclose a check for \$32.50 each. Ridge Writers members can buy the book for \$25 each.

**The Ridge Writers
East Sierra Branch
California Writers Club
P.O. Box 484
Ridgecrest, CA 93556**

The East Sierra Branch of the California Writers Club (Ridge Writers) meets the first Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at Ridgecrest Presbyterian Church (633 W. Las Flores Ave.).