

*Writers
of the*

PURPLE SAGE

Newsletter of the Ridge Writers

East Sierra Branch, California Writers Club

December 2024



ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY FOR RIDGE WRITERS MEMBERS ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5

We'll gather in the meeting room at Ridgecrest Presbyterian Church, starting a little earlier than usual so that we can set up, 6 p.m. Location: 633 West Las Flores. We invite members and their significant others but not the general public.

We'll aim for a "modified potluck" which means that we'll provide plastic cutlery, paper napkins, plates, cups, and so on. For food, we'll have wrapped

sandwiches and treats on hand. If you'd like to bring goodies, thanks very much, but do try to stick to individual serving-size items rather than roasted turkey on a platter.

We'll hear members' readings 5-7 minutes long. Come prepared to share your golden words with us. Serious. Humorous. Educational. Uplifting. Pick your favorite category (in good taste) and know you'll have an appreciative audience.

Along this, we'll do a fun exercise about memories prepared by Donna McCrohan Rosenthal at the November meeting and socialize with our Ridge Writers colleagues and friends. Have a happy holiday season, everyone! We look forward to seeing you and hearing your work at the holiday party this year. See you soon!



Readers from the 2023 Holiday Party.

NOVEMBER SPEAKER SHARES INSIGHTS **Report on the November Meeting written by Liz Babcock**



S. Kay Murphy with a copy of one of her memoirs.

Our November meeting marked the sixth time creative Southern California writer S. Kay Murphy has come to the desert to share with Ridge Writers, always bringing us valuable insights from her writing experience.

Kay is perhaps best known for her book *Tainted Legacy*, a vivid description of her search for the truth about her own great-grandmother, Bertha Gifford, an accused serial killer. A prolific author, Kay has also written a middle-school fantasy series based on Irish folklore, plus a wonderful memoir, *Lessons I Learned From the Dogs Who Saved Me*, research for which was so profound that she donated all royalties to animal rescue.

The story of every dog she featured gave her insights into herself. "I would write until I was crying so hard I couldn't see the page."

Research into the life of her great-grandmother also led to deep insights, not just for Kay, but also for her mother, whose childhood heartbreak came as she saw her beloved grandmother taken away to jail. Kay's mother was under a stricture from her own mother — "We will never speak of this again." And she didn't — until Kay began pressing her for her memories.

Sometimes fraught relations between Kay and her mother were ultimately resolved — much to Kay's relief.

Mark Your Calendar...

December 5 – Member Holiday Party, members read from their own works, 5-7 minute limit, light refreshments.

January 9 – "New Year, New Work" Writing Workshop, hosted by Daniel Stallings

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Does an Author Lose His Flavor in a Bookstore Overnight?

In lieu of a traditional President's Message from me, I want to take this time for a little unusual diversion. A dose of levity. I want to share a thrilling tale (one I am certain will grow amusing in time) into my life as a working playwright and director. In this business, anything can happen. It is the *only* time in my entire life where I desperately wanted to escape from a bookstore.



I had been working on *Shelf Life*, a new mystery play starting local homeschool students about fictional characters coming to life on their "off hours." We performed at Red Rock Books, my favorite place in the world. Naturally, theatre involves lots of rehearsal, including dress rehearsals, to finesse the production. At these dress rehearsals, I'm left in charge of the locked store during the practice and the owner returns at the end to lock everything up and close the store when we are finished. It was the last dress before we opened. So far, everything was working according to schedule. At 8:15 p.m., I texted the owner that we were finished rehearsing. Just a courtesy message. She had her own alarm set on her phone.

At 8:30 p.m., there was no sign of the owner. All my actors had left. My assistant director and I lingered behind to make sure someone was there to lock up. I didn't have a key. I called the owner directly. No answer. Straight to voicemail. I sent her a message on Facebook. No reply.

8:45 p.m. Still no sign. No response. I called again. Nothing. I searched the front desk trying to find relevant phone numbers. I don't have contact information for any of the other employees. I struck out. I asked neighboring businesses still open if they have any emergency numbers. Another strike out. I phoned the owner again. Still no answer. I texted again. At this point, I wondered if I needed to summon the police. Something might have gone wrong. An emergency we didn't know about. I called my family for a second opinion. We looked at old business cards (which only had the store number on them) for employee surnames, searched in phone books and Facebook profiles. Numbers had been disconnected. People were invisible online. And still not a peep from the owner. What was going on? Was everyone okay?

9 p.m. Nothing. Now my mother had come to the store. We were making a plan in case the authorities had to be summoned. It had been forty-five minutes since rehearsal ended. We were going to attempt a search of the back office when my phone rang. It was the owner. In a panicked voice, she asked if we were still at the store. I replied yes. She apologized profusely. She had the day off, set the phone down, and the alarm passed unnoticed. She was washing her face and realizing she hadn't checked her phone in a long time. Then realized the time. Then saw my long stream of messages and missed calls. Within two minutes of that last call, she was at the store and all was well.

As a bookish child, I dreamed of living in a bookstore. But this proved the adage of having "too much of a good thing."

Ridge Writers Leaders

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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.
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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.

The first version of the book was in the true-crime genre; our author later wrote it as a memoir.

Kay came to Ridgecrest this time to help us think about exploring legacies of our own. She challenged each of us to think of a memory from childhood, a time when our heart was broken (often something we found too upsetting or embarrassing to share), then to write a word reminiscent of that trauma, to circle the word, and to let that percolate as the program proceeded, adding words as we thought of them.

She recalled that when she told her broken-hearted memory to her therapist, both of them dissolved in tears. “It’s a good day when you can make your therapist cry. ... I think it’s important to share your experiences with someone.” Such brainstorming isn’t easy, with results often the mental equivalent of lightning, flashes of thunder, rainstorms — learning experiences all.

Kay advised aspiring writers, “If you want to get paid, don’t write books.” Very, very few authors can actually make a living that way. Magazines will sometimes pay a great deal for short, meaningful memoirs, as will newspapers. Many, many other markets exist for short memoirs, she said.

One promising place to practice writing short pieces is *The Sun*, a prestigious North Carolina journal publishing short stories, poems, and literary pieces. The publication has a section called “Readers Write,” which each month features subscribers’ short pieces inspired by the previous month’s one-word prompt. The “pay” is a free one-year subscription, but the experience of sharing with peers makes it worthwhile. Information is available at www.thesunmagazine.org.

Every time Kay appears here, she offers a unique creative twist (including singing and accompanying herself on the guitar).

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

This time she brought a big box of candy — a reward for our brainstorming. She also invited us to send her the results of that brainstorming exercise. “If you learn from the experience or changed somehow, write your insights and send them to me.” She will then post them on her blog, skaymurphy.blogspot.com, a wonderful place for sharing and learning.

As Donna, our program manager, introduced Kay, she mentioned one more gift. Our speaker has joined Ridge Writers! Welcome!

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2024 Ridgecrest Petroglyph Festival



well as books on writing for \$1 donation to the club, information on the upcoming meetings and Dickens Tea, and talked about the new edition of *Planet Mojave*. We had a strong outreach and even made good money from donations to the club. A gentleman named Bruce Treholm even donated \$20 outright to Ridge Writers. While combating the winds, we also made a friendly “Last Canopy Standing” certificate for the Literacy Council of Indian Wells Valley for being the last booth to take down their canopy on the gusty opening day (pictured at right). Thank you to Donna, Janis, and Daniel for volunteering at the booth this year. And an extra thank you to Calvin Johnson and Elise Bechtel, guests who helped us dismantle the booth in the wind on closing day. We truly appreciate the help!

From November 2 to November 3, 2024, the City of Ridgecrest held its annual Petroglyph Festival and Intertribal Pow-Wow at a blustery LeRoy Jackson Park. Ridge Writers had its own booth among other cultural institutions at the festival. We provided handouts on Native American writers and quotations, books on Native American themes as



The Smalls Poetry Collection

Sent to CWC Presidents:

"We hope this email finds you well and thriving. The Big Contest for Small Poems and Prose is complete and the three winners have been announced. With so many excellent entries received (377) we have decided to make a book of some of the best writings submitted. The book will be titled *The Smalls: California Writers Club 2024 Big Contest for Small Poems and Prose*. The book will include a selection of the pieces submitted. If your poem or prose is selected to appear in the book, Les Bernstein will notify you as soon as it is possible.

To remind you, Robin Gabbert, Steve Trenam and Les Bernstein named these three contest winners. The winning poems will be posted on the CWC website and in the next CWC bulletin.

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.



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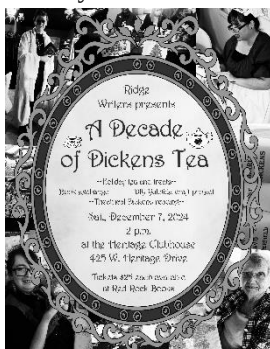
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A Decade of Dickens Tea

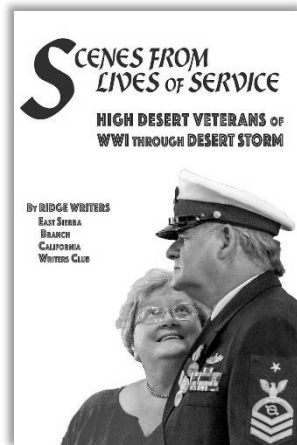
Ridge Writers is bringing back the Dickens Tea for 2024, celebrating the tenth year of this popular holiday event. Over delicious tea and treats, the



event will feature festive and interactive activities with a literary or Dickensian twist. The festivities will include our annual book exchange, a Yuletide craft of Christmas trees made from book pages for all the

guests to create, and a holiday finery costume contest. Books and prizes will be given at the event, and all materials for the craft and book exchange are provided. The whole tea will conclude with a visit from Charles Dickens himself, whose magical readings will revive performances from Mrs. Cratchit, Jacob Marley, and even Queen Victoria. Guests are welcome to dress in their holiday or Victorian best in their desire, join us for a hot cup of tea, and ring in the holiday season in true Dickensian style.

Ridge Writers' **Dickens Tea is on Saturday, December 7, 2024 at 2 p.m. at the Heritage Clubhouse (425 W. Ridgecrest Blvd.).** Tickets are \$25 each, which buys the tea, the food, the books, and the craft supplies, and are available now at Red Rock Books.



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.).