



*Writers
of the*

PURPLE SAGE

Newsletter of the Ridge Writers

East Sierra Branch, California Writers Club

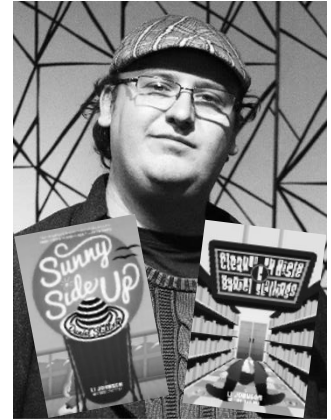
January 2025

NEW YEAR, NEW WORK: WRITING WORKSHOP FOR CONQUERING THE BLANK PAGE AT JANUARY 9 GENERAL MEETING

Ridge Writers President Daniel Stallings will conduct a writing workshop titled “New Year, New Work: Conquering the Blank Page” for the general meeting on January 9 at 6:30 p.m. at Ridgecrest Presbyterian Church (633 W. Las Flores Ave.). The public is invited to attend, and admission is free.

“When a new year rolls around,” says Stallings, “we make plans to turn over a new leaf. To pull out a bright, clean sheet of paper to start a fresh story. How will you begin yours? For writers, confronting a blank page on a new work can be as daunting as sticking to a New Year’s Resolution. With this workshop and a few tips and tricks, we’ll start our own ‘writers resolutions’ and take you from a blank page to a finished piece in one night.”

Stallings has served as the East Sierra Branch President of the California Writers Club for the past ten years. He currently works as a playwright, director, and producer in the valley and across the state, providing interactive mystery theatre through Master Mystery Productions. He has also published two mystery novels, *Sunny Side Up* and *Cleanup on Aisle Six*.



Ready to bust some writer’s block? Enjoy an informative, productive workshop on January 9 that’ll help get those writing gears spinning. Bring your friends!

WHAT THE DICKENS: DECEMBER’S FESTIVE EVENTS **Report on the December Holiday Party and Dickens Tea**



Guests enjoying the expansive, decorated refreshment buffet.

Every December, Ridge Writers finds special opportunities to gather together, a theme exalted this time of year, especially in the holiday works of authors like Charles Dickens. That is the meaning of the season: to gather. To come together and share. Whether you share food, drinks, gifts, entertainment, or even your time, it’s all precious. December 2024 gave us two wonderful chances for gathering and sharing—the annual member holiday party on the 5th and the Decade of Dickens Tea, a tenth anniversary celebration of our popular Dickens Tea, on the 7th.

First, we want to thank everyone who attended and provided refreshments for the holiday party. The buffet this year was full and expansive with savory and sweet options. It was a tantalizing display. We even had a return of what we lovingly call the Gary Hareland Bucket of Chicken, so named after the

immediate past president of Ridge Writers who always brought a bucket of KFC chicken to the holiday party potluck every year. Thank you, Andrew Sound. After eating and visiting, Donna McCrohan Rosenthal shared a writing exercise titled “Three Memories” she shared at the November meeting. The prompt was: Think back to when you were five-years old. What’s something from back then that five-year-olds today would not recognize? This exercise was a great tool for memoir pieces, one of which you’ll read from Liz Babcock (see page 2).

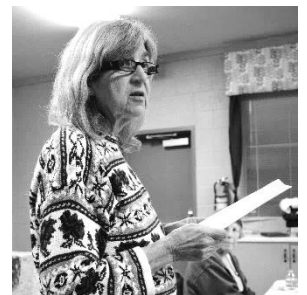
Members who shares delightful excursions into their work included Liz’s memories, Janis Kunz’ memories of playing early computer games, Kathryn Killinger’s memories with photographic accompaniment...

Mark Your Calendar...

January 9 – “New Year, New Work” Writing Workshop, hosted by President Daniel Stallings

February 6 – Norma Ashby, founder and director of Catharsis discusses her memoir

March 6 – Brian Sonia-Wallace, “Rent-A-Poet” author of *The Poetry of Strangers: What I Learned Traveling America with a Typewriter*



Donna reads from her essay, "Writing Makes Us Immortal."

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Three Memories



President's Note: "The holiday season is about sharing. Sharing space, sharing memories, sharing new moments of wonder, and sharing stories. I thought, to close this calendar year of President's Messages, I would share the recent work of our Newsletter Editor Emeritus, Liz Babcock, and her childhood memories. Let them spark your imaginations and share your own stories with family and friends this time of year."

Most of my memories from age 5 are hazy at best, but one vivid memory involves a lie where a second, even a third, fib became necessary to cover up the first. I found it impossible to keep track of those twists and turns, so my lie was soon evident. My parents confined me to a dark closet and told me to contemplate my sins for half an hour. I remember thinking, "I'm not smart enough to lie, so I'm just not going to do it anymore." That was a resolution that I have attempted to keep ever since. I must add that truth-telling doesn't seem to be valued nowadays, especially by politicians and voters.

A second, more physical, aspect of my memories from age 5 involves the family toaster, a plug-in contraption whose wire coils were designed to toast the slices of bread that would be propped against wires on either side of the central coils. But if you forgot to watch the toaster and take the toast out at the proper moment, the bread would soon burn. I remember spending time at breakfast scraping off burned crumbs. That was in the middle of World War II, and food was rationed. No such thing as throwing the toast out!

And speaking of rationing, I remember my mother making Herculean efforts to save enough food stamps to serve our favorite foods when our birthdays rolled around. Luckily for her, I developed a taste for Spam, so preparing that in the oven studded with cloves was a welcome solution for her. I can't resist adding (even though this memory is from a couple of years later) that on VE Day in May 1945, our family celebrated by eating sugar sandwiches. When VJ Day rolled around a few months later, we celebrated that by going for an unnecessary ride in the car. We were so happy that the war ended! I must say that wars since then have been much more endless and inconclusive.

2025 Young Writers Events for Ridge Writers

"Ridge Writers' youth events have been popular, with participants excitedly asking us when our next ones will be! For 2025, we have some fun stuff coming up. We will have a Spring event in partnership with Ridgecrest Library (theme to be announced). Our annual Allison Aubin Scholarship for Young Writers continues with contest in March, judging in April, and awarded in May. Later in the year, we'll have a Summer event also with the Ridgecrest Library, and a scary stories writers haunt for Halloween time. Get your pencils sharpened and keep an eye out for further details to come!" — Janis Kunz, East Sierra Youth Coordinator

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.

... Don Goodson’s memories of his teenaged years when he first appreciated (and redefined) the vastness of time and how long humans have been here on Earth (the difference between 350 years and 4000 years can be staggering to a young mind), and Charlotte Goodson’s memories of her brother.

Rounding out these voyages into memoir were Donna’s essay from *The CWC Bulletin* titled “Writing Makes Us Immortal,” a reflection on CWC members we’ve lost but the way their words live forever, an excerpt from a science fiction story by Davis Kunz about a very unique “message in a bottle” from an explorer in peril, and Daniel Stallings’ short tale “24 Miles to Earth,” a fictional reimagining of the thoughts of a skydiver jumping down from the edge of the stratosphere, first written in 2012 and published the CWC’s 2024 *Literary Review*. Every piece gave us further insight into our members, their imaginations, and their experiences. Bravo to everyone who shared their writing with us. Thank you!

On December 7th, Ridge hosted the tenth iteration of the popular Dickens Tea — our homage to a Dickensian and Victorian Christmas filled with tea, catered treats, book and gift exchange, DIY Yuletide craft, and a theatrical reading from a Dickens story. Because this was the tenth anniversary, we wanted to go even bigger than before, reviving beloved readings and treats from past teas.

For this year, we had our most expansive menu yet, including a buffet of gluten-free options, a special birthday surprise for a guest, an amazing collection of books and gifts for the exchange, the return of the Dickensian-themed Christmas cracker jokes from the very first Dickens Tea in 2014, party favors, and the largest theatrical reading yet.



Table decor for the 2024 Dickens Tea.

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



Branch President Daniel Stallings wrote a script for four actors to unite some of the best readings of past teas (featuring characters from Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*) into one story. Charles Dickens himself (played by eight-time Diamond Mask Award-winning actor Calvin Johnson, pictured left) is summoned to the palace of Queen Victoria (two-time Diamond Mask winner Devanne Fredette, pictured right). Prince Albert, her husband and dearest love, is sick this year. She wishes to hear a story to forget her troubles. Through the power of Dickens’ storytelling, the characters of Marley’s Ghost (Daniel Stallings) and Mrs. Cratchit (Janis Kunz) come to life to play out their scenes. But stories can be strong medicine, and after some sharp insight into the Queen’s heart, Dickens convinces her to share a lost Christmas memory of her



A guest with her crafted paper tree.

own—an excerpt from her childhood diary. A story about how memory can be healing, the actors really nailed the performance and made it a special experience for all of our guests. Bravo! After the exchange, we closed the tea with our craft: paper Christmas trees! These adorable mini-trees were made of colored paper and vintage book and sheet music pages. As a final treat, all the guests were given handmade crocheted teacups by a local artist as a gift.

We want to thank the vast team of volunteers involved in making this Decade of Dickens Tea truly magical. Thank you to Beth Sparks-Jacques for catering, Angie Sonia-Pritchard for decorating the tables and serving, Donna McCrohan Rosenthal for collecting the books and gifts, Gerry Wisdom for sponsoring us at Heritage, Olivia Holm for crocheting the teacups, Margit Stallings for designing the craft project, Calvin Johnson, Devanne Fredette, and Janis Kunz for acting in the performance, Red Rock Books for donating the pages for the craft and selling tickets, Kathryn, Steve, and Lois for helping clean up, and Daniel Stallings for organizing the entire event. Without all of you, this celebration wouldn’t have been possible. In our estimation, this was the best Dickens Tea yet!



HEARTBEAT / HEARTBREAK CONTEST

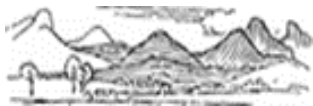
"Are you ready to unleash the magic of your heart? Whether it's a tale of first love that made your heart skip a beat, a love-at-first-sight moment that swept you off your feet, or a humorous yet heartbreaking saga that had you saying, "Oh, my heart!"—we want to hear all about it! Dive into your memories and spin a story, fact or fiction, that captures your heart-centered experiences in up to 1500 words.

Remember, *only one story per writer*, so make it count and let us laugh, cry, or both! **We are looking for fresh work. Unpublished stories are eligible.**

The excitement doesn't stop there—our top three storytellers will be recognized at the February 15 meeting of Redwood Writers, with fabulous prizes of \$100 for first place, \$75 for second, and \$50 for third! Plus, the winning tale will be published online and in our newsletter for all to see. Stories are due by 9:00 p.m., January 18, 2025. Mark your calendars! Please contact our contest chair, Judy M. Baker, at editor@redwoodwriters.org if you have questions. More information at redwoodwriters.org under the Contests tab."

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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"New Year, New Work
Writing Workshop"

"What the Dickens":
Report on December Holiday Party
and Dickens Tea

Upcoming Speakers

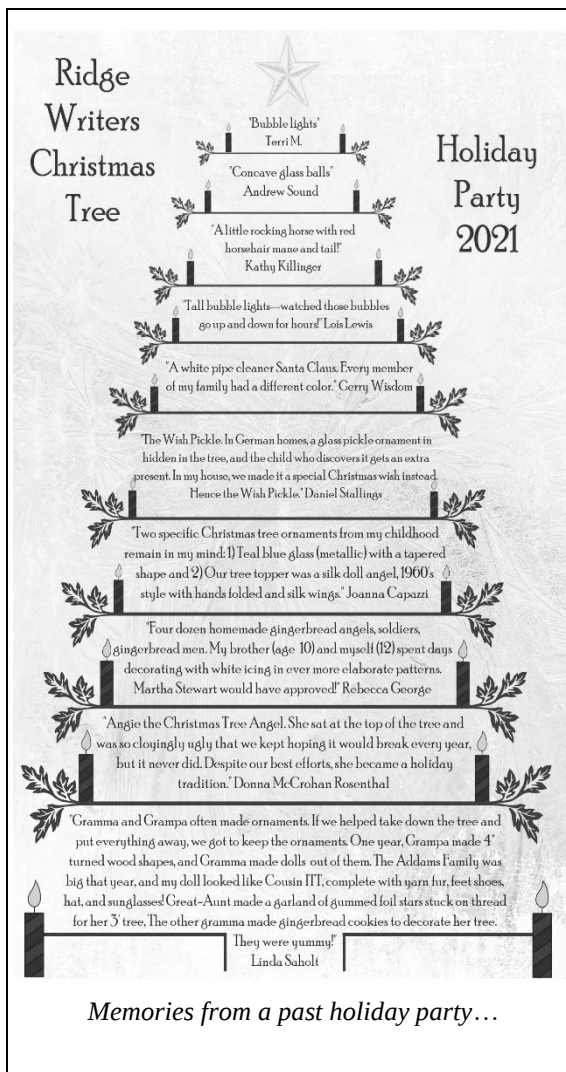
Page 2:

Holiday Party Reading by Liz
Babcock: "Three Memories"

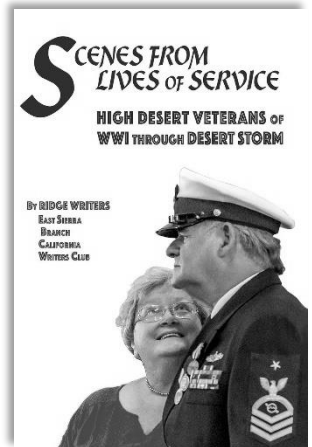
2025 Young Writers Events
Ridge Writers Leaders

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"What the Dickens" continued
Jack London Awards



Memories from a past holiday party...



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.).