



*Writers
of the*

PURPLE SAGE

Newsletter of the Ridge Writers

East Sierra Branch, California Writers Club

February 2025

NORMA ASHBY CONFRONTS “SURVIVAL VS. TABOO” FEBRUARY 6



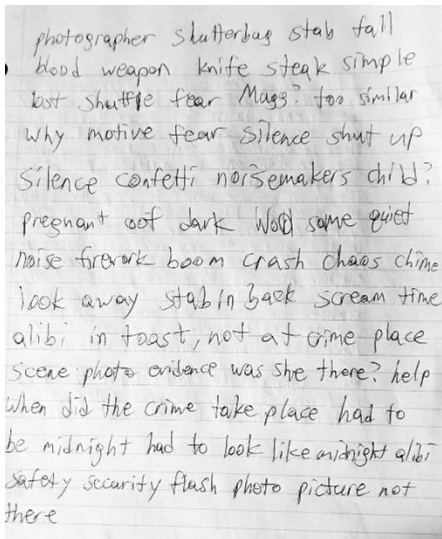
Norma Ashby will talk about her long path confronting “Survival vs. Taboo” at the Ridge Writers meeting on Thursday, February 6 starting 6:30 p.m. in the meeting room of Ridgecrest Presbyterian Church, 633 W. Las Flores. The public is invited and admission is free.

Norma has completed a memoir set in Hollywood in the ‘50s, ‘60s, and ‘70s. Her chronicle begins when her mother threw her out of their house with nothing more than a suitcase at the age of 18. The young girl supported herself with the jobs she could find but eventually ran out of options and became a high-priced “appointments only” call girl. Terrified, she took the first step, learning her trade from a former Owls Saloon madam. In time, she had a child to raise and a new profession. Years later, one of her experiences caught the attention of the ACLU and they took her case. She has appeared on “Oprah” and the “Sally Jessy Raphael Show,” and spoken extensively around the country.

Norma had the idea of putting her story to paper long ago, at one point sharing it with a writing class that reacted in an unexpected way. Since then, she has weighed her approach as to how candid to go, and how to deal with privacy considerations. She remains undecided and for that reason, will open her to presentation to plenty of questions and input from the audience. We hope to see you there, and please bring your friends.

“NEW YEAR, NEW WORK” - CONQUERING THE BLANK PAGE

Report on the January Meeting written by Janis Kunz



Sample of the automatic writing portion of the workshop. Written by Daniel Stallings.

What do 13 blank papers and 13 Ridge Writers members and guests have in common? They were all paired up for an intensive writing workshop devised by branch President Daniel Stallings for our January General Meeting. Participants had come prepared with writing implements - a newly sharpened pencil or a favorite pen. Nine days into the new year of 2025, and these wordsmiths were ready to start writing! Or were they...?

The first step in the workshop was to take your blank page and write ‘New Year’ at the top and then the name of something you want to get written. The next step was to start filling the page with everything that came to mind! No stopping to edit it or to make it make sense, just write random words as they pop into your mind. Let your hand move faster than your brain is thinking. Unsure laughter rippled across the collection of writers as this direction was given. How could this generate anything of value? But sometimes it’s the novelty that inspires.

For a few moments nothing was heard but the soft hissing of pens and pencils gliding across paper - some at super speeds, others more thoughtfully. The pages were getting filled! Words and ideas spread from edge to edge; infant words ready to take their first wobbly steps. Then came the next step, almost more surprising than the last one had been: Trade your paper with a partner. Not for them to read, but for them to add to your already growing array of inspiration.

Mark Your Calendar...

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*

April 3 – Chris Epting, award winning historian and author of 30+ books, including *Teddy Roosevelt in California: The Whistle Stop Tour That Changed America*

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Wake-Up Call

One of the most difficult activities in life is to get out of bed every single day. *Hyperbolic*, you probably think to yourself. But after times of trauma, crisis, upheaval, or change, the act of simply excising yourself from the comfort and warmth and perceived safety of your bed can feel as Herculean as rerouting a river to clean unkempt stables.

We are in transition now as one year turns to the next, one page in life flipping to the next one. I know several people who have talked about the difficulty of stepping out of those post-holiday doldrums. Motivation in hibernation. How can you summon the energy to create anything when your winter instincts are to burrow into blankets? And burrow deep.

It's time we shake off that winter malaise, stretch out our sleepy fingers, put pen to paper, and write again. Write something new. Write something different. Write something challenging.

It's easy to get lost in the chaos of everyday life. Creativity can get sidelined by the needs of survival. Wake up, wash, eat, pay bills, sleep, repeat. The routine becomes ingrained. We are creatures of habit. And at the holidays, it can be so easy to slide into a comfortably indolent existence. No one's working. Everyone's taking it easy and trying to relax. Or the madness of holiday shopping and prep infects every waking moment of a household for the next two months.

As we are wont to say, "Life gets in the way." For me, and perhaps for other writers too, this gray, dark, evocative time of year incites an urge to write something new. From scratch. I have dozens of projects in various stages of development. I spend all year bringing projects to fruition. Yet, sometimes, all I crave, especially when the days are short and nights are long, is to start and finish a brand-new piece in one go. Just something for myself.

If you attended the January general meeting, you got a taste at ways you can shake up your routine to generate something new. Humans like patterns and routines. It provides a backbone of stability. However, a little planned chaos can generate inspiration. It can shake off that lingering wintertime ennui because you've forced yourself to break from the pattern. Everyone got something started at the meeting. Even I found the seeds of a new mystery short story, which I recently finished. It has led to two more stories, reinvigorating my need to create. So this is your wake-up call. Get out of hibernation. Shake up your writing routine. Attempt new genres or working styles. Goodbye, Old Year. Bring on the New!

Planet Mojave: New Horizons Update

Our sincerest apologies on the delays for *Planet Mojave: New Horizons*. We had a sudden, unexpected change in our layout designer, so we're having to shift to a different one. Rest assured. We are committed to finishing the anthology with a new goal of getting out in time for Weird Weekend in fall this year. We will continue to update you as we get closer to print. Thank you everyone for your patience on this project.

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.

The group did this and when writers got their pages back, they were now to begin their previously-chosen topic/story/poem/memoir/essay/etc. over again and incorporate anything from their partner's free association that leapt out at them. And the results were unexpected and wonderful!

A phrase inspired a poem on legacy. A wry thought altered the path of the beginnings of a sci-fi story. The topic of shoes spread to a memoir. A word gave birth to a mystery story idea. All from what seemed like odd workshop directions. Amazing! Some members read aloud their story beginnings and poems to the delight of all. Others had little nuggets to flesh out at a later date. All of it was something that wouldn't have otherwise gotten written and started.

As a result of Daniel's well-crafted workshop filled with a dash of novel techniques and a pinch of unanticipated collaborative ideas, the assembled members and guests, as he so aptly put it: "Broke that blank page fear." Thanks to all who attended and to Daniel for helming it. We look forward to more unique and fruitful workshops in the future!

"Five, Four, Three, Two, One..."
My flash exploded like a fireworks, blinding
Everyone in an instant, But no one cared. "ONE!" they shouted.
More explosions. Two confetti poppers burst over our heads,
raining paper streamers over everything. Lights from the still
erect Christmas tree glinted off ~~shades~~ cocktail glasses.
As my camera continued to flash, I swear I heard "Auld
Lang Syne" blare in the nooks and crannies of my brain.
The power of suggestion eh? Champagne ^{Rebuckles} sloshed drunkenly into
other glasses. "Happy New Year!"
Thomas staggered toward me. "Matty! Quit shooting,
and give me a kiss!" And he bent over.
I laughed and knocked him on his drunk butt with a
nudge of my foot. "Tommy, get some coffee. She/By would
be mortified."
Tommy snorted. "She'll be fitter. S'Happy New Year, Matty."
He wasn't the only one trying to sneak kisses. You'd think
the ceiling was carpeted in nuzzle-foe. I didn't realize how
frisky my friends got at New Year's. Or did they really
crave good fortune for the following year?
But sure, I heard the first bangs of fireworks. The neighbors
were lighting up the sky. Craig shouted at the group that we
should watch. The group stampeded to the door. Tommy crawled out.

Sample of the start of a new story by Daniel Stallings.

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

2025 Community Scholarship Fair & Allison Aubin Scholarship

COMMUNITY SCHOLARSHIP FAIR

High school senior? Current college student?
Considering college later in life?

This is your one-stop shop for scholarship opportunities!

- ✓ Meet local businesses and organizations offering scholarships for trade schools, vocational schools, community colleges, and 4-year universities.
- ✓ On-site applications & submissions – grab forms and apply on the spot!
- ✓ Representatives from Cerro Coso Community College and Sierra Sands available for questions.
- ✓ Spanish bilingual translation provided for accessibility.
- ✓ Parents encouraged to attend and learn how to support your student's journey.

Don't miss out on funding your future!



When?
Thursday, February 20
5:00pm to 8:00pm

Where?
SpringHill Suites, 113 E. Sydnor

Questions?
Visit ridgecrestchamber.com/scholarship or
Contact Rotarian Stephanie Hudson at (760) 977-0378
(Bilingual assistance will be onsite for the duration of this event)



Ridge Writers will be at the Community Scholarship Fair, hosted by China Lake Rotary Club and Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce, with a booth about our annual Allison Aubin Scholarship for Young Writers. The fair is an opportunity for local students to gather in one place to find information on scholarships.

This year, the Eastern Sierra Branch of the statewide California Writers Club, locally known as Ridge Writers, plans to award the annual Allison Aubin Scholarship for Young Writers to local students preparing to enter college to study writing. The winner will earn a \$500 cash prize on behalf of the club. Students will write a 500-

word essay on the topic "Why do I write, and what do I want to do with my writing career?" **We started accepting entries on March 1st and all entries are due on March 30th. Judging will occur in April with the winner informed in May.** At the fair, representatives of Ridge Writers—including Scholarship Chair Janis Kunz—will provide handouts about the scholarship as well as sheets to write an essay longhand if needed. Let any students you think may be interested know!

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS: For 2025, the San Joaquin Valley Branch of the California Writers Club is publishing called *Beginnings and Endings*. They are inviting CWC members to submit their work. Deadline is March 1st. Information and submission guidelines can be found through this link: <https://www.sjvalleywriters.org/2025-anthology-submission>

Short Story Challenge

“The 19th annual Short Story Challenge kicks off on January 24th, 2025, and will challenge writers worldwide to create short stories based on genre, subject, and character assignments in as little as 24 hours. Feedback from the judges is provided for every submission, writers keep all the rights to the stories they create, and there are thousands in cash and prizes for the winners. Learn more, register, and read previous winning stories at <https://www.nycmidnight.com/ssc>. Good luck, writers!”

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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Hopefully, A Poem

Written by Janis Kunz

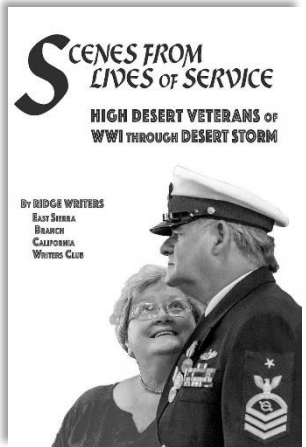
Editor’s Note: Taking inspiration from our January workshop—“New Year, New Work”—and finding a muse (and a title) in contributions from fellow Ridge Writer Rebecca Parker, Janis Kunz created this poem that night. Thank you for submitting to the Purple Sage!

Have I lived a life of meaning?
Are my memories exciting seeming?
Should I seek out more to do?
If I told my story, would I be boring you?

My thoughts and dreams are precious to me,
But in the Grand Scheme of Things - are they something to see?

I’ve gathered each chapter of my story so carefully,
But am I destined to go down in history?

As long as I have something I want to tell,
I will know that I lived my life well.
I hope I’ve created a meaningful collection of comings and goings...
Or at least enough for, hopefully, a poem.



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.).