



*Writers
of the*

PURPLE SAGE

Newsletter of the Ridge Writers

East Sierra Branch, California Writers Club

March 2025

MEET RENT-A-POET BRIAN SONIA-WALLACE ON MARCH 6

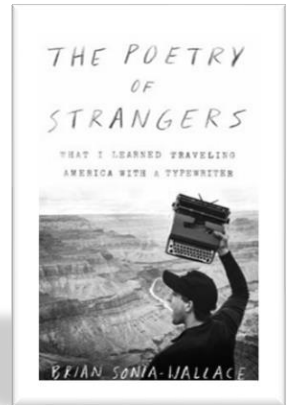
The City of West Hollywood's Poet Laureate 2020-2022, Brian Sonia-Wallace will present our March 6th program in the meeting room of Ridgecrest Presbyterian Church, 633 W. Las Flores. The general meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. Public invited. No charge for admission.



Photos courtesy of Brian's website, rentpoet.com

Before he became an award-winning writer and poet, Brian set up a typewriter on the street with a sign that read "Poetry Store." He'd ask countless strangers, "What do you want a poem about?" Passersby opened up to him to share their deepest yearnings, loves, and heartbreaks. Hundreds of them. Then thousands.

He has held residencies from Amtrak, Dollar Shave Club, and the Mall of America. In his *The Poetry of Strangers*, Brian tells the story of his cross-country journey. He has contributed to *The Guardian*, *Rolling Stone*, and more, and LA's Department of Cultural Affairs has called him "a creative genius." NPR featured his company RENT Poet on *How I Built This*.



Brian Sonia-Wallace's book, The Poetry of Strangers

Earlier in the day on March 6, Brian will also do a "Read the Book, Meet the Author" at 2 p.m. in the party room of the Pizza Factory. For this, participants sign up and buy a ticket in advance at Red Rock Books. The ticket price of \$35 includes *The Poetry of Strangers*, tea and scones, an informal chat with Brian, and entry in a goody-basket raffle. We hope you can join us Thursday evening or better still, at both events. We look forward to seeing you. Please bring your friends.

FEBRUARY MEETING FEATURES "TAMMY POUNDS AND HER DOG SOPHIE" **Report on the February Meeting written by Andrew Sound**

Tammy Pounds stepped in as a last minute substitute at our February meeting for the scheduled speaker, Norma Ashby. As Norma was going to update us on her upcoming memoir as a Hollywood madame, Tammy opened with a joke about running a Bed and Breakfast, not a Brothel.



Then she got down to business. Tammy revealed that she grew up in Ridgecrest and is the fourth generation of her family to live here. In fact, she said, her grandfather James Blackwell was a Ridge Writers member back in the 1990's. It was from him that she got a philosophy of "Put your ass where your heart wants to be!"

Our heroine opened her Airbnb in 2019. Her dog Sophie helps run it, and Tammy noticed that Sophie got a lot of mentions in the guest reviews, which gave her an idea: "There must be a book in there!" Turns out there was; it's called *Sophie the Super Host*, and it appeared in 2023. Written from Sophie's point of view, it's a book for children that explains how a bed and breakfast works, as well as telling about things to see around Ridgecrest, like Death Valley, Sequoia National Park, and Mount Whitney. Since a lot of Sophie's guests are European, it also explains doggy doors, which are apparently not very well-known in Europe! Tammy read to us from the book and showed us the illustrations by her young friend Feather Branson.

Mark Your Calendar...

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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Follow Through

If there's one piece of advice I could give to any aspiring writer, it's finish something. As creative people, our heads will be constantly filled with unfinished projects, scraps of inspiration, little raggedy bits of ideas we glean from life. That's how we create in the first place. But, and I hate to play the "bad guy" here, it doesn't mean anything unless you can put them out into the world. A finished story is always stronger than a great idea.



How come? Because a finished product teaches you so much more than brainstorming, outlining, storyboarding, etc. ever could. It can reveal things about your working style and work ethic. It can show you how well you plan an arc or overall storyline. It teaches you about the big picture. It's easy to get caught up in details, in the swirling pile of minutiae that seem to affect all artists. Should this character have this detail or this one? Should I change the battle scene from day to night? Should I include another character in this scene? Should I reverse these scenes? Stop. Back up. Breathe. And finish.

Because only when you finish it will you be able to see the completed picture. You will be able to assess how it flows, transitions, builds, and resolves. You can't do that in pieces. You have to plow through and put it all together first. Details come later. Details should enhance the story; They are NOT the story.

My sister once described me as a weird hybrid of a dreamer and a doer. Most people seem divided into one of those two packs. I was the weirdo who could dream up a big show idea...and then several months later you'd see the show being advertised. That's what you need to be as a writer. Dream up your world...and then make them. Don't stop. Follow through. Finish. You will be all the more richer when you cross that threshold.

New Member

Ridge Writers wants to welcome our newest member, Tammy Pounds, to the branch during the February general meeting, where she also gave a delightful program about her work as a children's author. Welcome to the East Sierra Branch of the California Writers Club, Tammy! We are excited to see what she contributes to our branch.

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 to their website: <https://www.sjvalleywriters.org/2025-anthology-submission>

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 socialwritersshowcase.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.
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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.

Tammy also read us her second book, which also features Sophie’s perspective. It’s a guidebook for visiting Death Valley. Titled *Sophie Goes to Death Valley*, it starts out by explaining why Death Valley is so special. Then, as all good guide books should, it goes into listing the preparations for exploring remote desert areas (water, good shoes, hats, layered clothing, full gas tank, etc. – you know the drill!). Uniquely, I think, this guide book lists the sights to see along the way from Ridgecrest to the National Park, including the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Corral, Fish Rocks, the Trona Pinnacles, and more. Inside the park, Sophie and “her person” hit all the familiar hot spots (no pun intended) and always give a little explanation of what you will see, just right for the curious child or to intrigue an adult. The pictures, by Katie Merrill, are truly wonderful. They even visit Ash Meadows and the China Date Farm (and of course the Pup Fish!)

One of the interesting aspects of the book that Tammy was able to get in at the last minute was the font. It’s a special font for dyslexics called Open Dyslexic that has heavier baselines and heavier edges (on reversed letters like “b” and “d” or “p” and “q”). It helps ground letters and make it easier for dyslexic people to read.

Finally, Tammy told us about the book she’s currently working on. To be called *Lost on the Mojave*, it relates the story of her grandmother being lost in the local desert for five days in 1947. She had just bought a gun, and she and her boyfriend decided to go out in the desert to try it out. The gun turned out to be a disappointing purchase, so, as people do, they decided to go out exploring the desert instead.



Tammy shows us the illustration of Dante's Peak, created by Katie Merrill, in her newest Sophie adventure, *Sophie Goes to Death Valley*.

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

Not having the benefit of having read *Sophie Goes to Death Valley*, they had neglected to bring water or good shoes, and when their car got stuck in a wash, found themselves having to find their way out. Tammy is writing up her grandmother’s story for eventual publication, and from what she told us, it sounds like it will make a fine adventure story!

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Community Scholarship Fair

February 20th was a field day for young scholars at The Rotary Club and Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce’s first ever ‘Community Scholarship Fair’ in Ridgecrest. Held at the Springhill Suites conference room, the event consisted of tables for community organizations and businesses offering scholarships. At 5pm, a flood of prepared and optimistic students and their families came in, on the hunt for scholastic and funding opportunities. Ridge Writers had a table to promote our annual Allison Aubin Scholarship for Young Writers. And boy did we! We handed out dozens and dozens of submission forms to the eager students. It was heartening to hear how many of them were interested in writing, and some even spoke of what their current writing projects were. The event was quite successful, with representatives from schools, churches, homeschool groups, and Cerro Coso College collecting information and submission forms for students who were not able to make it. Organizers from the fair also took videos, flyers, and contact info to continue to promote the scholarships online. The fair is planned to be held again next year, and Ridge Writers will be happy to attend and continue to get the word out about our scholarship to help support young writers in their journey to discover why they like to write and what they want to do with writing in their career. The power of the written word can do amazing things in the hands of fresh new minds with ideas and aspirations of their very own! We’d like to thank Stephanie Hudson of the Rotary Club for all the hard work she put into organizing the event and coordinating with us, and also Donna Rosenthal, Daniel Stallings, and Janis Kunz for organizing our presence at the fair and volunteering at the table to greet and support the potential applicants.

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Allison Aubin Scholarship for Young Writers

This year, Ridge Writers plans to award the annual Allison Aubin Scholarship for Young Writers to local students. 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.**

The 2025 Hudson Prize

“The Hudson Prize is now open for submissions!

Each year Black Lawrence Press will award The Hudson Prize for an unpublished collection of poems or prose. The prize is open to new, emerging, and established writers. The winner of this contest will receive book publication, a \$1,000 cash award, and ten copies of the book. Prizes are awarded on publication.

The annual deadline is March 31.”

Submissions are through this link:
blacklawrencepress.submittable.com/submit

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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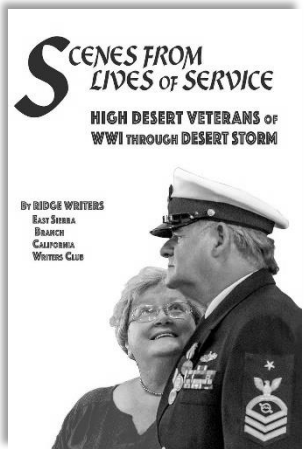
-- Open to all CWC Members --

“The California Writers Club is proud to announce a members-only Art and Photography contest beginning on February 15, 2025 and ending on March 15, 2025. The winning art/photography will appear as visual inspiration for our second ekphrastic book. We invite you to submit a digital image of your work to the CWC Art Contest. The chosen winners’ work will be featured prominently throughout Vision & Verse II and combined with poetry and prose that is selected from the members submissions. The *Vision and Verse II* submission guideline will be announced after the winning images are published in March. The announcement will be e-mailed to all members.

Submission Guidelines can be found here:
<https://calwriters.org/vision-and-verse-ii/>

It is expected there will be up to 15 pieces selected for the book. A first prize winner will receive \$100.00 and his/her art and it will appear on the cover. The second and third place winners will receive \$50.00 each and their art will be prominently featured in the book. The other contest winners featured in the book will receive a free copy. All the winners’ art will appear in an issue of the CWC Bulletin and will be on the CWC website.

We look forward to seeing your talent shine in the *CWC’s 2025 Vision & Verse II.*”



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.).