



Writers
of the

PURPLE SAGE

Newsletter of the Ridge Writers

East Sierra Branch, California Writers Club

December 2016

Come to Our Holiday Party!



Thursday, Dec. 1, 6 p.m.
(half an hour earlier than usual)
Heritage Village Clubhouse

Turn east onto Heritage Drive from Norma Street and go past the hotel to the smaller building directly in front of you.

Here's a scene from last year's event.

Photo by Liz

Bring a dinner dish to share and please show up a little before six to aid preparations. Remember, this is for members and their plus-ones only. And do bring a short entertaining piece written by you and no longer than 5-7 minutes. *Please bring Liz a copy of what you read so it can appear in the Purple Sage!*

Nov. Meeting Report: **Taking a Gamble**

by Daniel Stallings

Anyone who knows me probably could make a sure bet that I enjoyed the speaker who came to Ridge Writers' November meeting, David Moss, a new mystery writer recently published by Poisoned Pen Press.

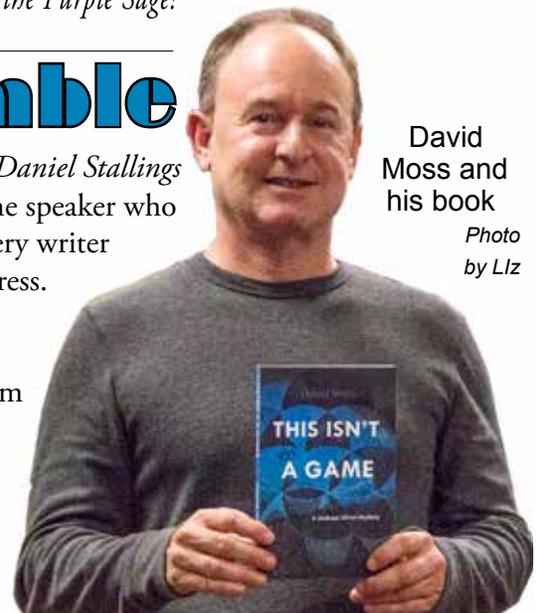
At our meeting, Moss regaled us with tales about his new book, *This Isn't a Game*, and his journey as a writer from advertising to crime.

Moss' journey began as many mystery writers' — such as James Patterson or Dorothy L. Sayers —

See p. 5

David Moss and his book

Photo by Liz



Watch for 2017 Programs

As this issue went to press, Program Manager Donna was still working on the details of a promising lineup for next year. Watch this corner in 2017!

Dear Diary ...



Oscar Wilde wrote that “[m]emory...is the diary we all carry about with us.” Our memories are some of the strongest forces in our creative lives. They can shape plots, characters, scenes, topics, themes, anything we want to produce.

Before I get too heavily in tying memory to writing, I want to tell a little story. Around the holidays, my family goes all out with the Christmas decorations. It's my mother's favorite holiday, and my father, with all his husbandly largesse, allows her to turn our house into a wonderland of holiday glamor. Luxurious trees with hand-painted ornaments. Nutcrackers from Germany. Wreaths made of just ornaments that my mom created by hand. My dad just lets her have her fun.

But this year, my dad came up with his own idea for holiday décor. He told us a story — a memory — from his childhood. My father grew up without much money. You could call them poor. His family didn't have running water until he was eighteen.

They lived in a tiny house on the outskirts of Inyokern. So holiday decorations were in short supply.

Dad told us how his mom brought him and his siblings strips of red and green, and they would spend their time creating paper chains to decorate for the holidays. He and his brothers and sisters would work together to create feet of chain that they would loop around their little house. My grandmother would get crepe-paper bells to hang with the chains to complete the look. It was so simple, so modest, so tied to his family and what they had to do to bring even a scrap of holiday magic to their home.

Ridge Writers Leaders

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Rosenthal
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Stallings
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❖ ❖ ❖

To reach any of these leaders (except Liz), use ridgewriters@yahoo.com
Visit our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/RidgeWriters and our website at CWC-ridgewriters.org

So this year, we got out some strips of paper and started making paper chains to decorate the house. My father was glowing with pride. He wanted it to be something special he did with his wife and kids. I'm even taking some supplies when I visit my sister in Sacramento for Thanksgiving so she has a chance to make some paper chains for our Christmas. Because that's what families do.

Why did I tell you this story? Because it's a beautiful and special memory. Because it sticks out as a memory with life behind it. Because the story possibilities blossom from it. Can't you see how a detail like that, plucked from your own past, can make a story, a character, a scene glow that much brighter? It's honest and pure. Even my wildest, most epic, most fantastical flights of fancy in my work can't hold up to the simple power of that memory.

Finding ways to weave details from your past, however small, into your writing just makes it so much stronger. It creates realism. It makes your work far more personal and uniquely you.

At this memory-making time of year, look about your family and friends and listen to their stories, their memories. Listen to the ones that touch your heart and spark your imagination the most. And pay attention to the memories you'll be making. You never know what may end up in your story one day.

Dickens Tea To Be Served at My Enchanted Cottage Dec. 7

In this scene from our inaugural Dickens Tea in December 2014, Judy Martin selects a Christmas cracker prepared and offered by our genial host, Daniel Stallings.

Photo by Liz



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 the year's most outstanding member. Here are their names and the years they won:

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

*With a special Charmian London Award to Fran Wersan

Ridge Writers are preparing for our third annual Dickens Tea to start the holiday season in Victorian style.

Over delicious holiday tea and plum bread pudding provided by My Enchanted Cottage, the Dickens Tea celebrates the author of noted Christmas tales and the period that brought many of our modern holiday traditions to life.

This year's festivities will include a book swap of advance reader copies and holiday craft books, a performance of a work by Dickens, and a traditional Christmas craft commemorating St. Nicholas Day.

The third annual Dickens Tea is on Tuesday, Dec. 6, at 2 p.m. at My Enchanted Cottage and Tea Room (214 W. Ridgecrest Blvd.). Tickets at \$20 each are available at Red Rock Books.

Please participate — you'll love it!

This month the **Ridgecrest Branch Library** staff will have a couple of well-deserved holiday breaks: the library will be closed Fridays and Saturdays, Dec. 23–24 and Dec. 30–31.

But a lot will be available at our library during the run-up to the holidays — including a display celebrating the **50th Anniversary of Star Trek** and co-curated by CWC's East Sierra Branch.

That's a great reason for visiting your library this month. And maybe while you're there, you'll want to borrow a book on Charles Dickens or the Victorian era.

The *Writers of the Purple Sage* is the monthly newsletter of the Ridge Writers, the East Sierra Branch of the California Writers 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 e-mail at lizbab@fastmail.fm.

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.

Elevator Pitch, Part Two

by C. R. Rowenson

Previously I lectured you on the importance of learning to Pitch an Elevator ... wait ... to Elevate your Pitch.

One second. Let me check the title again.

Writing Your Elevator Pitch

That's right. Last time I ranted about the importance of having an Elevator Pitch. Now I want to take the time to walk you through crafting your own. So let's get started, shall we?

At minimum, your pitch should do the following.

- 1) Summarize your story
- 2) Indicate your genre.
- 3) Hook listeners and potential readers

It might not look like much, but that's quite a lot to jam into a few precious sentences. Still, it's not as scary as you think, so stop pulling your hair out. Before we actually go into crafting your pitch, there is another concept I want to introduce.

The 3/9/27 Method

No it's not a historical date or the combination to my luggage, at least not any more. 3/9/27 is a method used for communicating effectively in high-stress situations. Let's face it, exposing your tender writer-belly is a very stressful scenario.

Here's the short version: cover no more than 3 subjects in no more than 9 seconds with a maximum of 27 words. Confused? Clarity is coming.

Three Subjects

A straightforward concept, but difficult to implement. Let's face it, nobody wants to take the novel/screenplay they have spent months or years crafting and break it down to just three points.

Well, too bad. Right now this isn't about you, it's about your audience.

There is lots of research out there about human memory and delivering information effectively. Most people can only remember up to five facts at a time without some means of aid. There are lots of reports and studies to back this up; you can find them if you care to look.

I know, I know. Right now you're swearing up and down that you are the exception to this rule. You very well might be, but your audience is not.

It's not an insult, just statistics. You want them to remember your pitch? Well, make it easy for them and keep

it simple.

You have three topics. The easiest to combination remember is one plot thread (preferably the main one), one character (seriously, just one), and one setting (I mean it).

Bear in mind that you don't have to stick to this. You can do three characters, three plots, or three settings.

No matter what you do, you only get three.

Nine Seconds

This is much easier. If you follow the three points and the 27 words, the pitch should be easy to deliver in nine seconds. Of course, that assumes you have retained your ability to speak.

You do need to practice. Once you write the pitch, start delivering. Tell your family. Tell your friends. Tell your sentient coffee-maker.

Tell whoever you want, but you have to practice. When the pressure is on you need to deliver this as smoothly as... as. Okay, any analogy I can think of right now is really gross, so let's just move ahead.

Twenty-Seven Words

Another simple rule. You have a twenty-seven word cap to your pitch. You can split this into several sentence or just one long, complicated one. It really doesn't matter. The important part is that it sounds good, that you remember it, and that you obey the limit.

OBEY AND ALL WILL BE WELL!



See p. 8

Taking a Gamble

From p. 1

did: as an advertising copywriter. He worked on everything from TV commercials to radio to menu tray liners.

His shift to crime writing started with a single concept: betting websites putting up the stakes on our high-stakes reality face-offs like election outcomes, murder trials, and who will win the heart of *The Bachelor*.

Pairing that with a celebrity murder trial sweeping the nation and a suspicious bet that may have murderous implications, Moss had his concept. But it was a concept in search of a form.

He told us how his novel began life as a screenplay, but the increasing amount of internal monologue showed him that his story would work better as a detective novel.

He actually wrote two versions of the same story — a traditional “whodunit” and a crime thriller that follows the killer through his crime. Why? Moss’ only goal with his story was to crack the code on completing a

novel and solving the problem of the crime he created in his brain.

The learning process of transitioning from 60-second

commercial writing to creating a full-length novel turned into Moss’ greatest challenge and biggest highlight.

Once he found the version he liked, he took a gamble and submitted his manuscript to Poisoned Pen Press, and *This Isn’t a Game*, a Jackson Oliver Mystery, was born.

Throughout his program, Moss shared interesting insight into why mystery and crime writing appeals to advertising writers.

Mysteries and advertising usually begin with conceptual twists, reconfigurings of reality.

Many successful mysteries are about presenting a version of “reality” (often a fantasy concocted by the villain to hide a crime) and selling it to the characters.

And Ad writers often work with actors and design scripts to help create more nuance in dialogue.

Moss revealed huge mystery knowledge that surprised even a crazy mystery fan like me, dropping big names like Agatha Christie (whom both Moss and I consider unsurpassed in mystery plotting), Dorothy L. Sayers, Rex Stout, Elmore Leonard, Ngaio Marsh, etc.

He continued to discuss advertising in writing with advice on audio books and his disinclination for authors to create their own book trailers.

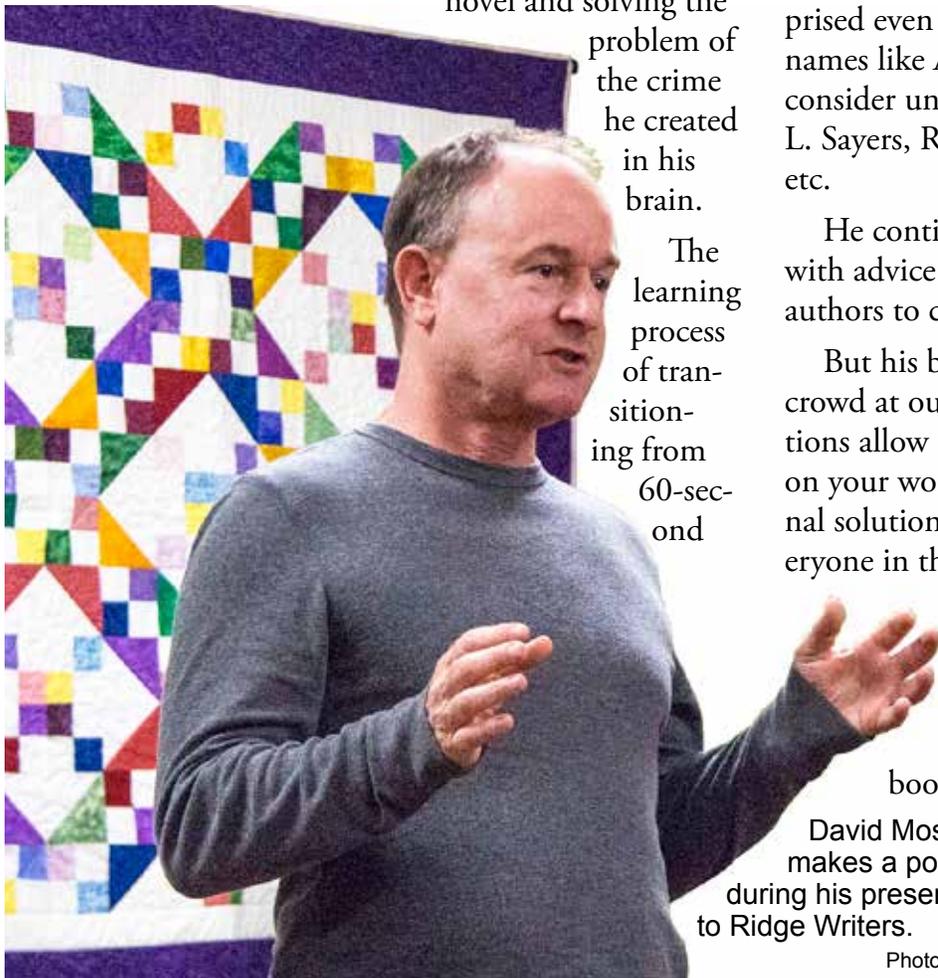
But his biggest idea that resonated through the crowd at our meeting was the realization that restrictions allow for innovation, that placing boundaries on your work can allow you to create new and original solutions to meet your end goal. It was a fact everyone in the room could understand and celebrate.

Thank you, David Moss, for taking a gamble on coming to Ridgecrest to see us. I hope it paid back in spades.

And be sure to check out Moss’ first book, *This Isn’t a Game*, from Poisoned Pen Press!

David Moss makes a point during his presentation to Ridge Writers.

Photo by Liz



Forward Momentum for 2017

by Julianne Black

My favorite quote is to “do something today your future self will thank you for.” It’s not just a favorite saying, it’s a favorite mantra, and a favorite way of life.

To continually feed the machine of forward momentum, one needs to play the long game. Creating a book, an article, a short story is absolutely an accomplishment. But then what?

The image I see in my mind when I’m at this day in and day out is an old-fashioned engine car in a big coal train. I know I have miles to go but I also know I’ve successfully covered some. If I stop shoveling the fuel into the fire, I may coast for a while, but inevitably the weight of the train will drag me to a stop. Getting started again will take much more energy from a full stop. Better to just to keep going, leaning on the momentum I’ve already gained.

As we get lost in the upcoming holiday season, here are a few goodies to keep you inspired and working!



WONDER WOMAN — Juli shares one of her many recent accomplishments. With all she’s been doing lately, the name of her illustration could also apply to the artist herself!

Photo by Liz

There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed. — Ernest Hemingway

Writing competitions, submissions and press opportunities:

<http://thewritelife.com/19-websites-magazines-want-publish-personal-essays/>

www.chickensoup.com/story-submissions/possible-book-topics

www.pw.org/toolsforwriters

<https://niume.com>

And for artists and illustrators:

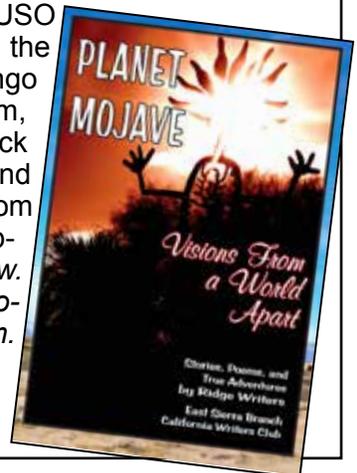
www.callforentries.com

The bad news is time flies. The good news is you’re the pilot. —

Michael Altshuler

Author • Designer • Artist • JulianneBlack.com | twitter.com/4jblack

Our book *Planet Mojave: Visions From a World Apart* is available at Jawbone Canyon Station, the Historic USO Building, the Maturango Museum, Red Rock Books and online from our website, www.planetmojave.com.



Further Questioning

by C. R. Rowenson



I leaned over the table, hands flat on the smooth steel surface. “Where were you on the evening of the 21st, Mr. Stantion?”

“Would you believe me if I told you?” The ragged rat of a man said, a smug look on his face.

“Not likely, since you’ve only spoken in questions since we nabbed you.” I loomed over him as best I could, but he didn’t seem impressed. “Do you want to know what I think, Mr Stantion?”

“What do you think, detective?”

Damn that man and his grin. “I think you wanted us to find you. I think you left those prints on purpose. What I can’t figure out is why.”

Have you got any messages?”

My phone buzzed in my pocket just as I opened my mouth to respond. Sweat began coating my palms.

“What are you playing at, Stantion?”

“Aren’t you going to check it?” Meeting his gaze was like staring into the emptiness of space.

My hands trembled as I thumbed in my password. Pictures began flashing across the screen. My house pictured from across the street, an open door, the living room with our ugly couch ... my wife cutting vegetables. The final image settled before me: specks of blood on a clean counter.

Words caught in my throat as I stared at the monster chained and bound before me. The question finally slithered from my chest.

“What have you done with my wife?”

“Would you believe me if I told you?”

Critique Group Report

by Daniel Stallings

At our last Critique Group meeting, we discussed plot twists and how to meld them into a storyline without disrupting the flow. There seems to be a common worry among writers about employing a plot twist successfully in their work without having readers feel cheated. The method I employed in our workshop was one I learned at writer’s conference several years ago.

I started by giving them a basic starting point: a couple having the argument of their lives one dark night. I asked them to write a sentence or two that would be the twist ending of that setup. I then told them to think about laying a series of clues to the plot twist in threes. A hint. A taste. A payoff. Each clue grows in importance and emphasis.

Here’s a simple example that’ll better illustrate what I mean: Suppose I want to have a plot twist where a cup of coffee has been drugged. What kind of clues would I use? For a hint — just a tiny reference — I could use a character making a joke about drugging someone’s coffee to get that person out of her hair for a while. Small, but effective. Later on, I might have my sleuth wonder why the victim would order a stimulant such as coffee when she had taken a sedative. A taste of what the twist is. Then I would reveal the twist, the payoff of all this foreshadowing — in this case, the drugged coffee. This trail of breadcrumbs, however integrated, will keep the plot twist from becoming too jarring within your manuscript.

Our next Critique Group will be Friday, Jan. 6, 2017, at 6:30 p.m. at Beanster’s Lounge. We’ll be doing a workshop on inner monologues and narrative structure. We’ll be introducing a new system for critiquing works by email. If you are interested in being part of Critique Group under the new system, email Daniel Stallings at beinmyhaus@hotmail.com for more information.

Elevator Pitch, Part Two

From p. 4

Example Time!

Now for the really useful portion of this article: the examples.

Mistborn. The Final Empire by Brandon Sanderson:

Ash falls from the sky, as a team of thieves, and mythical Mistborn plot to rob the Lord Ruler of his wealth and his title.

Note: this is the elevator pitch I would write for the book. I don't have Sanderson's actual pitch.

Small Changes, Bloody Choices by C. R. Rowenson:

Monica is struggling to get by when her dormant power erupts, leaving her on the run from the law and wanted for murder.

Sound interesting? If not I didn't do my job right.

Let's look a little closer at the pitch for *Small Changes, Bloody Choices*.

I want the listener to be intrigued, but I don't want to attract the wrong type. Take the bit about the powers. Not everyone likes magic in their books. I can't begin to imagine why, but these mythical readers do exist. I don't want them picking up my manuscript and being disappointed.

With that in mind, I struggled a long time to weave this element into the pitch.

Eventually I got it to work, but why go to all the trouble?

I needed to make it clear from the very beginning that my story takes place in a fictional world. This helps

establish the fantasy element of the story while hooking people like me even harder. From these nine seconds people will know it has a female protagonist, it involves crime, it is probably a thriller, and it involves fantastical elements.

I won't lie to you. It isn't easy. In fact, this pitch might take a long time to perfect. Some changes will seem very small but make all the difference. I hope that I have made the entire process make a little less scary and easier to swallow.

Go forth and hone your pitch. Leave people reeling from the condensed awesomeness of your story.

Good luck.

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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