



Writers
of the

PURPLE SAGE

Newsletter of the Ridge Writers

East Sierra Branch, California Writers Club

March 2017



Mary Sojourner

Great Opportunities This Month — Celebrated Author To Speak — Twice!

Author Mary Sojourner, columnist, NPR commentator, and devoted fan of the Mojave Desert, will give two Ridge Writers programs on Thursday, March 2.

The first will be a “Read the Book, Meet the Author” afternoon at My Enchanted Cottage, 214 W. Ridgecrest Blvd., at 2 p.m. The second will be at the Ridge Writers meeting that starts 6:30 p.m., Ridgecrest Presbyterian Church, 633 W. Las Flores Ave.

For “Read the Book, Meet the Author,” Sojourner and participants will discuss her acclaimed novel “29” set in Twenty-nine Palms (“at the intersection of a local road to Nowhere and an interstate to Everywhere ... crystalline and lovely, a kind of geode broth, filled with light and piquancy” according to David Kranes, author of *The Legend’s Daughter*). The \$35 ticket, available at Red Rock Books, covers the cost of the book, tea and scones, and entry in a door prize drawing.

The evening presentation, to which the public is invited and admission is free, will address “Breakthrough Writing and

See p. 5

Mark Your Calendar . . .

Denise Hamilton

April 6, 6:30 p.m.
Ridgecrest Presbyterian Church

You’ll want to be there to hear this nationally bestselling, critically acclaimed novelist, often compared with Raymond Chandler. And remember — you can also meet her in the afternoon at My Enchanted Cottage! See p. 4 for details.

Linda O. Johnston

April 6, 6:30 p.m.
Ridgecrest Presbyterian Church

Here’s another in the compelling list of authors to meet afternoons and evenings! This prolific author’s products include 40 romance and mystery novels!

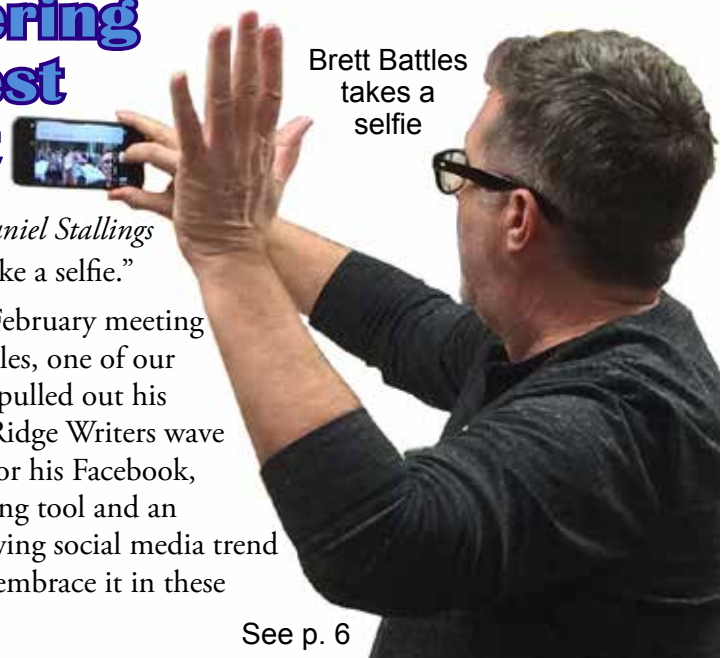
Report on February Speaker

A Recovering Ridgecrest Resident

by Daniel Stallings

“But first, let me take a selfie.”

That was how our February meeting began when Brett Battles, one of our local boys gone good, pulled out his phone and had all of Ridge Writers wave for a selfie with him for his Facebook, acting as both marketing tool and an illustration of the growing social media trend and a writer’s need to embrace it in these



Brett Battles
takes a
selfie

See p. 6

Our Leading Lady of History



Liz Babcock speaks at the Los Angeles Adventurers Club in November 2009 at the invitation of Gary Hareland.

Photo by Donna McCrohan Rosenthal

Ever since I started at Ridge Writers, one person has been a powerful force behind *The Writers of the Purple Sage*. And that's Liz Babcock, editor extraordinaire. She's been responsible for assembling, editing, and sending the newsletter to all of our members for more years than I can count, certainly longer than I have been a member.

But as all historians know, dynasties end, and Liz is officially retiring from the position as newsletter editor. We are so thankful for all that she has done for the organization that I — as President, as a member, and as a friend — want to take this time and dedicate my President's Message to Liz and everything she has done for us.

Liz is an astounding historian who has compiled so much research and information on our sliver of the world. Her "Local Women in History" exhibit at Maturango Museum is, to this date, my absolute favorite, and I always discover new and amazing characters from our past.

She always brings interesting facts and stories from our region's history, which makes me appreciate where I've grown up even more. She's written multiple books on the subject such as *Magnificent Mavericks* and *The Historic USO*.

She's a member of the Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert and Ridge Writers, and she has created the newsletters for both.

She's won the Jack London Award from the California Writers Club for her dedication and hard work.

She helped us create the inaugural Ridge Writers anthology, *Planet Mojave*, in 2011. She also worked at Maturango Museum and *The News Review*. Add to that her years of volunteer service with the Community Light Opera and Theatre Association (CLOTA), which led to her winning the organization's three biggest awards —the Carol Venturi Volunteer of the Year Award, the Florence Green Production Award, and the highest honor, the Jane Bugay Award.

This barely scratches the surface of an amazing woman with a lifetime of great work, a long career on base, and a loving family. She has helped, along with our historian, Maryann Butterfield, to preserve the history of our club, always present at events and meetings with her trusty camera to record the memories of our successes for years to come.

I smile when I recall the more humorous shots when we forget that Liz is there taking pictures and perhaps we aren't looking our most posed and poised.

See p. 4

Ridge Writers Leaders

President — Daniel Stallings

Vice President — Julianne Black

Secretary — Donna McCrohan
Rosenthal

Treasurer — Andrew Sound



Historian — Maryann Butterfield

Member at Large — C. R. Rowenson

Membership — Andrew Sound

Newsletter — Liz Babcock
lizbab@fastmail.com

Programs & Publicity — Donna
McCrohan Rosenthal

State Rep — Donna McCrohan
Rosenthal

Youth Coordinator — Daniel
Stallings

Webmaster — Julianne Black



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*

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:

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- b. The text must be printed in its entirety, without additions or changes.
- c. 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.

Read the Book, Meet the Author — and Spend an Elegant Spring Afternoon



HSUMD life member Gene Schneider at a previous Meet the Author event.

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

Donna McCrohan Rosenthal, our resourceful program manager, has lined up an outstanding array of authors this year for the popular Ridge Writers spring series "Read the Book, Meet the Author" on first Thursday afternoons this March, April, and May.

For each event, participants buy and read the featured title in advance so that they can discuss it with its creator over tea and scones at My Enchanted Cottage, 214 W. Ridgecrest Blvd. The 2017 program presents three highly acclaimed authors – Mary Sojourner and her novel *29* on March 2, Denise Hamilton and *Savage Garden* on April 6, and Linda O. Johnson and *Bite the Biscuit* on May 4. Each program starts at 2 p.m.

Sojourner's *29*, set in Twentynine Palms, tells of huge and volatile minds, impossible longing, sacred trails, wildlife, and solar and wind power farms.

Hamilton's *Savage Garden* stars reporter/sleuth Eve Diamond and L.A.'s theater community. The *Chicago Sun Times* says the novel "rises above the level of an ordinary detective novel to become a vibrant, powerful and relevant story."

Johnson's *Bite the Biscuit*, a "Barkery & Biscuit Mystery," combine, intrigue, romance, and puppy treats.

Each afternoon program includes the book, tea, scones, conversation with the author, autograph, and entry in a door prize drawing. Get your tickets at \$35 each at Red Rock Books, 206 W. Ridgecrest Blvd., 760-375-3454.

Each author will also speak at our meeting at 6:30 p.m. the same day as her afternoon program. The evening event is free to everyone.

Leading Lady of History

From p. 1

There's so much humanity in those images. I look at the newsletter, and I am reminded of happy times, sad times, and meaningful times.

The work and care she gave to each issue — both images and text — made our little slice of the CWC feel so special and wonderful. I still get tingles when I know my words are going into print in our newsletter.

And the loving care she gives to stories we or our contest winners write is beyond compare. To be published in the *Purple Sage* has always been an honor.

Our late Ridge Writers President, Gary Hareland, would always say that Liz published "one of the best newsletters in the CWC." Allowing for our natural bias, I think there's some truth in that.

The level of detail and care in each issue was spectacular. I have seen people moved to tears and cheers when they learn their beloved story will be printed in the *Purple Sage*.

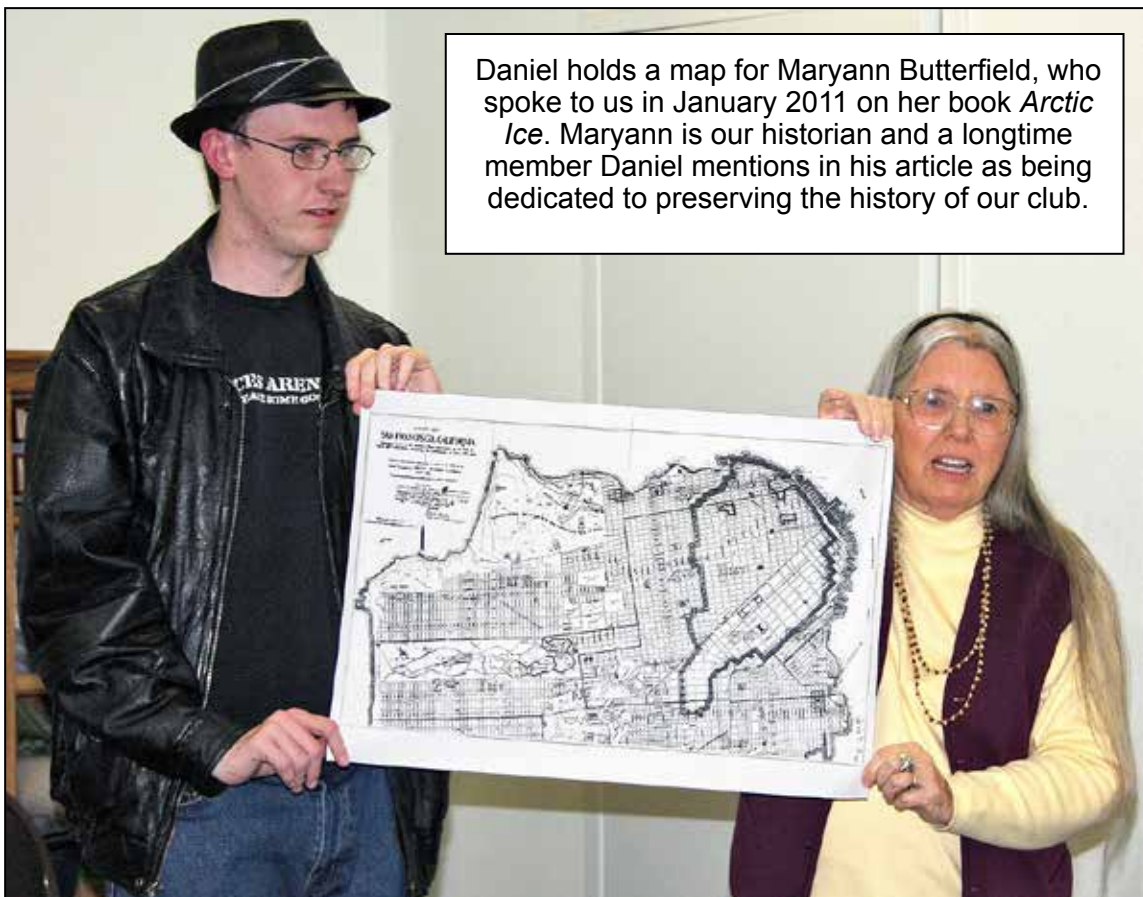
Our newsletter pulsed with the thriving heart of our organization, and it was fueled by the passion and dedication of our outstanding members.

Thank you, Liz, for channeling that passion, for celebrating each of our successes no matter the size. Thank you for being your amazing self.

I hope whoever takes the reins now as newsletter editor remembers the heart of our club and helps us continue our dedication to celebrating our members. Because Ridge Writers are family.



Your editor can't resist running the famous polar bear photo one more time! Gary Hareland, Donna McCrohan Rosenthal, and Liz Babcock pose with the Los Angeles Adventurers Club mascot in November 2009.



Daniel holds a map for Maryann Butterfield, who spoke to us in January 2011 on her book *Arctic Ice*. Maryann is our historian and a longtime member Daniel mentions in his article as being dedicated to preserving the history of our club.

the Importance of Craft” and Sojourner’s just-released Southwest-themed story collection, *The Talker*.

Sojourner’s publications include her novels *29, Sisters of the Dream*, and *Going Through Ghosts*; essay collection *Bonelight: Ruin and Grace in the New Southwest*; and memoirs *Solace: Rituals of Loss and Desire* and *She Bets Her Life*.

Her credits also include include Distinguished Writer in Residence for the Virginia Piper Creative Writing Program at Arizona State University and her monthly writing contest in the *Arizona Daily Sun*.

Sojourner has mentored writers one-on-one for over 25 years in fiction, nonfiction, creative nonfiction and memoir. She teaches at universities and colleges, conferences, book festivals and in private workshops.

For more information about this remarkable talent, visit breakthroughwriting.net.

For more about Ridge Writers, the East Sierra Branch of the California Writers Club, go to cwc-ridgewriters.com and facebook.com/RidgeWriters.

We hope to see you at the meeting; please bring guests!

Musings on My Way Out . . .

by Liz Babcock

Since there’s a bit of unfilled space left in this, my last, issue, I’ve decided to muse on some of the high and low points of my long tenure as your newsletter editor.

Back in the branch’s early days when Maryann Butterfield, the previous editor, played on my sense of guilt to get me to sign on as editor of Purple Sage, I had a lot of trepidation about how I would be able to fill four pages each month (yes, it was just four pages back then).

It wasn’t hard at all. Back in those days Rlee Peters (a prolific member who died in 2001) sent in a 300-word book review nearly every month. In addition, Henry Rodriguez (another early member, since expired) each month sent in a crossword puzzle he made up. Between those two things and the President’s Corner (yes, Daniel, the origin of that term is buried in the mists of Ridge Writers history).

At first my newsletters were rather plain, but soon I discovered how much fun it was to add photos and illustrations. That led to a high point:

• **Dover Clip Art.** As you all probably know, I’ve been obsessive about documenting my world with photography, so I often had appro-

appropriate pictures to use. But sometimes I needed to illustrate a concept that none of my visuals could convey.

The Web has lots of clip art, but much of that is either licensed or copyrighted. So that’s when I started ordering clip art from Dover.

One of my current favorite Dover clip art books illustrates the concept of grunge and has very, very strange visuals. Other books show famous people, historic valentines, holiday cartoons . . . you name it. There’s even a book on writers and writing.

Now here’s a possible bribe for the next editor. My entire clip art collection was saved from my recent house fire, but it’s in a box somewhere. Once it surfaces, I would be happy to pass along many, if not most, of my clip art books to the next editor.

And here are some more milestones of my newsletter career:

• **Most Embarrassing Mistake.** This mistake was made sometime back in the 1990s. (Notice how I skirted responsibility by using the passive voice?) Someone had written a delightful poem and had given it to me for publication. I thought the author was Bob DeVere, but after publi-

cation, both Bob and the true author, Steve Wersan, let me know that I had the wrong attribution. I don’t seem to have a copy of the offending newsletter (again, it’s in a box somewhere after my house fire), but I remember

See p. 8



Sometimes I’ve combined two pieces of clip art, as with this impossible combination of a snail on a keyboard, a challenge I had with a piece by San Fernando Valley’s Ray Malus, who was talking about a keyboard that would respond to the weight of a garden snail. I’m going to miss Ray, who was a frequent — and imaginative — contributor to these pages. A prominent contributor to CWC, Ray was the creator of the state’s computerized membership system. He died on Sunday, Feb. 5. Next to Gary Hareland, Ray was my newsletter’s biggest fan.

Recovering Ridgecrest Resident

digital days. Battles describes himself as “a recovering Ridgecrest resident,” but he never fails to entertain us and draw a large crowd when he returns to Ridge Writers to talk about his mostly up, sometimes-down life as a full-time author for the past 8 ½ years.

Battles began his hero’s journey to the Land of Full-Time Writers in childhood, citing his fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Thurm (now Bernhardt), and the reading segment they did as a key trigger. From there, a love for the written word blossomed.

In high school he became involved in the drama program, which he describes as “the perfect training ground for writing.” He talked about how working on improv or shows teaches us about getting into characters and understanding their motivations, which are hugely important factors in good writing. As a fellow thespian, I have to agree with him.

Battles went on to talk about how these experiences helped shaped him as a writer and how we all must find our own tools to develop our craft. These tools may change over time, which is all part of the fun.

He traveled often after graduating, expanding his world view and learning about new perspectives. He got his degree in television and film, but wasn’t sure he wanted to be a television writer. His dream was to be a novelist. A short story and novel writing gave him the kick in the pants he needed to start writing books.

Describing his publishing journey, he said he didn’t sell a single book to a publisher until after he wrote four



Brett Battles shares good advice and humor with a crowd including friends from his high school days, even his Burroughs math teacher, Janice Lindgren, who must have been encouraged by his example — she subsequently became a member of Ridge Writers!

Photo by Liz

worried agent, if he was going to “go indie,” he would commit to it fully.

And his success has grown. A prolific author, he now publishes three to four books a year just because he can.

“The beauty of being independent is I can write what I want,” he said.

of them. After he sent a hundred or so queries, the third book he wrote finally found a publisher and became his first Quinn novel, *The Cleaner*.

He told us how nothing really goes smoothly for a writer, but how the key is persistence, to never stop writing or trying. Even before he finishes a book, he starts the next one.

His journey was fraught with highs and lows. Publisher bankruptcy, amazing book deals, a troubled economy, major houses wanting his work, award nominations, award losses, and award wins were just part of the whole experience.

When he finally got an offer that would allow him to quit his job for three years to pursue his dream of full-time writerhood, Battles approached it with a mix of excitement and trepidation. “You have to be confident to be a full-time writer,” he said.

Troubled economic times and shifts in power within his publishing company led to Battles without a publisher in 2010. Did he even think of stopping? Not once. Instead, he dove into the emerging world of independent publishing in 2011. As he told his

His 11th Quinn thriller is coming soon. February marks the publication of his 30th book. Traditional houses are sniffing around his work again. And he is living his dream of being that full-time author. Bravo, Brett Battles!

He left us with important notes to consider in our own careers as writers. He emphasized how these days there are hundreds of new options, opportunities, and tools to use to share or develop your work. He stressed the importance of marketing yourself and taking charge of your own promotion.

He advised us to “think like a reader” when creating our work and promotions and to always maintain quality work.

He cautioned us that, if we choose indie publishing, we need to invest in it as we would a business. Hire editors and cover artists and create the best possible product to sell.

Most of all, Battles encouraged us to find our own paths to success.

These days, there are so many ways to publish, print, and share the written word that each of us can find happiness in our own individual ways, even if we’re recovering Ridgecrest residents.

Forsake length and focus on thoughts

"Create a sound that pleases the readers' ear. Don't just write words. Write music."

— Gary Provost, "100 Ways to Improve Your Writing"

How long should a sentence be? Like so many questions related to writing and speaking, "It depends."

Some writing authorities will suggest an average sentence length, but their averages vary — usually from 17 to 24 words.

They also warn that anyone trying to hew strictly to an average number, whatever that number may be, is moving in the wrong direction. That's excellent advice.

In "Effective Writing for Engineers, Managers and Scientists," H.J. Tichy tells us how challenging it is to come up with a meaningful average number for everything we write. She writes, "An intelligent person's concept of sentence length changes with age, education and reading experience."

William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, in their "Elements of Style," provide an alternative path to effective writing: "Variety in sentence length is what's needed. All short will sound stupid. All long will sound stuffy."

But some "word counters" may persist in all their letters, articles or speeches. If they "succeed," chances are those pieces would be the most boring that you could imagine. Abandoning word counts makes it easier to employ well-placed short or long sentences with a purpose.

Before I offer examples, please recall this previous suggestion: Don't try restructuring or supplanting first-draft sentences until you have finished a first rough draft. A first draft is for amassing as many ideas as possible — as quickly as possible.

Guidelines follow for using long, short and medium-length sentences.

The long sentence

Do not try to jam into a single sentence three or more main clauses (i.e., avoid a sentence with several subjects and objects). Why? Because multiple subjects and objects are inevitably accompanied by more words: subordinate clauses and phrases.

Observe: "Our volunteers come from the ranks of teachers, busi-



Ernie Mazzatenta

Speaking of Words

nesspeople, engineers, social service workers and many other fields, meaning that they have had prior exposure to — or at least awareness of — the kinds of problems that our clients face daily, and therefore they are capable of assisting our clients in resolving those problems."

This 53-word opus fatigues both the eye and the mind. It would be far easier to grasp if it were divided into two or three sentences. Do you, the reader, see where that could be done — and in fewer words?

If you find you have drafted a sentence bulging with multiple major ideas, separate them.

The preceding paragraphs don't mean to suggest that you should never write a long sentence. If the expressed ideas are tightly connected (form a cohesive package) you need not be concerned about splitting.

For example, a sports reporter might write the following: "A first baseman ideally is a lanky ballplayer with a powerful swing who routinely sends a baseball into home run territory, often making the difference between losing or winning a ballgame and, in some cases, between staying with the club or being sent down to the minors."

Splitting this long sentence into several shorter ones would serve no useful purpose. In fact, three sentences containing the same information could make for tedious reading and would interrupt the flow of the message.

The short sentence

Why are short sentences — those of, say, five to 1- words — useful? They are brisk and to the point; thus, they automatically appeal to readers. They bring variety — a relief to the reader — especially if they appear at the end of a paragraph

filled with many long sentences in a row.

Because such taut sentences are easy to assimilate, they also are the right vehicle for an idea that needs emphasis. They can be persuasive end-sentences in a summary statement or a conclusion section of a report.

For example: "In summary, we would like to reiterate the two main reasons for advancing this proposal for a new assembly line. In the long run, this proposal would be more cost-effective. At the same time, the improved quality resulting from the new line would quickly attract more customers. We strongly recommend approval."

Short sentences also often effectively convey strong emotion — from happiness and humor to shock and bitterness.

Here is a disappointed mother of the bride writing to a faraway friend: "The wedding party looked elegant with one exception. Five of the six bridesmaids wore off-white. Beatrice wore navy blue." (Can you sense the emotion bubbling up from that final four-word sentence?)

The medium-length sentence

Medium-length sentences (say, 15-25 words) are the workhorses of the English language. They are frequently used (1) to express necessary ideas that aren't complex or in need of emphasis, and (2) to establish and maintain continuity from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph.

An example that maintains continuity: "In the beginning, purchases of electronic cigarettes were sparse. Since then, purchases (notice the repetition of this key word) gradually improved yearly. Today, purchases are accelerating by the month."

I close with this cogent observation from Dr. Tichy: "Sufficient variety in (sentence) type, construction and length is more important than the average number of words."

Future columns will address some of those useful sentence types and constructions.

Ernie Mazzatenta, a Hendersonville resident, teaches managerial communication and public speaking at Montreat College. He also serves as a community mediator at The Mediation Center in Hendersonville. Reach him at joern8@morrisbb.net.

At right is an article a professional friend wrote and sent me in ... well, 2013. I've had it in my Purple Sage file ever since then, planning on using it some-time when I had the room.

So it's now or never.

Ernie and I are both former presidents of the Society for Technical Communication, both now retired.

Both of us had backgrounds as technical writers, but I think Ernie's advice on sentence length is good for any writer.

— ed.

"Is sloppiness in speech caused by ignorance or apathy? I don't know and I don't care."

— William Safire

that both gentlemen were very gracious about it. If I remember correctly, Steve even wrote a poem about it!

• **Best Writers.** You don't think I'm actually going to name the best writers in our branch, do you? I do hope the many unmentioned talented writers we've had in our branch will forgive me, though, if I mention just two I've been impressed with recently.

First, our president, Daniel, is a marvel! I remember him showing up as a young teen with a thick notebook in which he was always scribbling. His progress since then has been just phenomenal, and his output is phenomenal as well. How does he do it?

The other person I want to men-

tion, Julie Bradford, has only recently joined our branch but she has already proved she has the "right stuff" as a writer. And one of my favorite things about her is that she actually turns her works in for publication in the newsletter! The next editor will have a great time if more members will go and do likewise.

• **Serendipitous Attendance.** As your newsletter editor, I dragged myself out to a lot of meetings because I wanted to be sure to get pictures of the speakers.

Our program manager, Donna McCrohan Rosenthal, is another superbly talented person we should all be grateful to have in our branch. Donna has brought us wonderful programs, and

some I had to force myself to attend have been among my favorites. For example, who'd have thought a writing policeman, Adam Plantinga, would be so fascinating?

To conclude, I'm grateful to have been your newsletter editor, and I've learned a lot. And so could you!

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.



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.

Inside...

Page 1:

March Program: Mary Sojourner
Report on Feb. Speaker by
Daniel Stallings

Page 2:

President's Column by Daniel
Stallings
Ridge Writers Leaders

Page 3:

Read the Book, Meet the Author
Jack London Award Winners

Page 5:

Musings on My Way Out by
Liz Babcock

Page 7:

"Forsake length and
focus on thoughts" by
Ernie Mazzatenta (reprint)

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