



Writers
of the

PURPLE SAGE

Newsletter of the Ridge Writers

East Sierra Branch, California Writers Club

October 2016

Fill That Empty Nest Write Now

You can earn money writing or at least spare change, preserve family history for future generations, apply your eloquence to champion a cause, and learn how on Thursday evening, October 6, at the next Ridge Writers meeting. The program “Fill That Empty Nest Write Now” begins at 6:30 p.m. in the meeting room of Ridgcrest Presbyterian Church, 633 W. Las Flores Ave.

Although the program is primarily aimed at newly empty-nest households and the recently retired, the informal panel discussion will guide writers and bloggers of all ages who suddenly have well-deserved free time. Topics include putting that time to good use by penning sci-fi/fantasy and romance, gathering family memoirs, writing stories and articles for publication, ensuring that veterans leave a legacy in print, and “unleashing the hidden talent you’ve always had.”

Ridge Writers will present solid suggestions and resources, and members of the public who have already entered into writing as a second career are particularly invited to join in and share their experiences. The public is welcome and admission is free.

We look forward to seeing you there, and by all means, bring your friends.

Report on September Meeting

by Andrew Sound

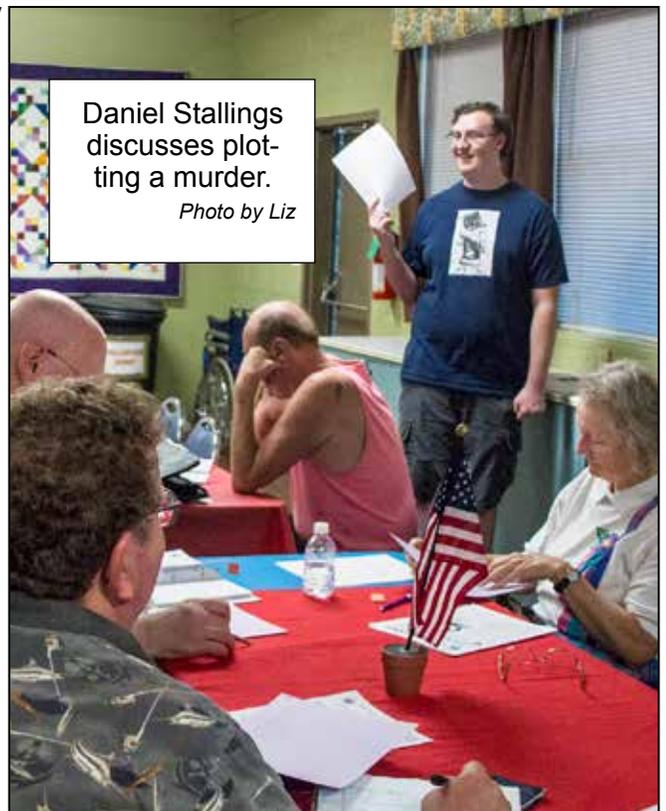
THE MYSTERY OF THE JAPANESE BUS STOP

Ridge Writers who made it to the September meeting were able to participate in a workshop on writing mystery novels by our own President, Daniel Stallings. Daniel has been reading mysteries since he was four years old, and writing them since he was 14. He is also the founder of Master Mystery Productions, which produces interactive mystery experiences.

For the workshop, Daniel led us in developing the basic plot of a murder mystery.

Why a murder, and why are murder mysteries the most popular kind? According to Daniel, a murder is in some ways the easiest mystery to plot – the body provides an instant set of clues as to who

See p. 4



Daniel Stallings discusses plotting a murder.

Photo by Liz

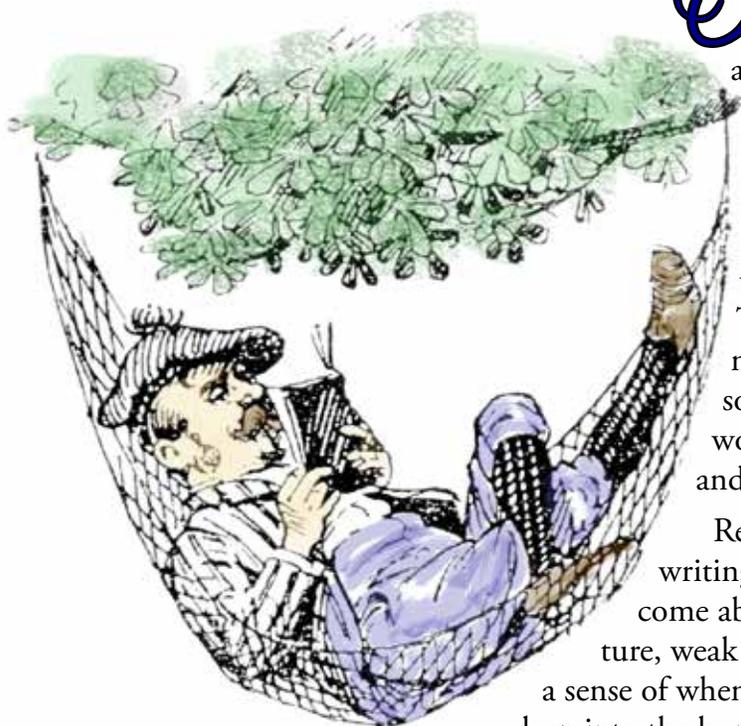
October Program

David Moss

Oct. 6, 6:30 p.m.
Ridgcrest Presbyterian Church

Come learn from the author of the hot-off-the-press *This Isn't a Game*, a Jackson Oliver Mystery about online gambling, celebrity obsession, and murder.

Just One More Chapter, Please



One of the most consistent pieces of writing advice I see and hear — from blogs to conferences to writing manuals to podcasts — is read, read, read. It's a tip I fully endorse. To be a strong writer, you should become a strong reader.

Why? Writing is like music. We take sounds and tune them into notes we call words. We string our notes to form a sentence. Then a paragraph. Then a chapter. Then a whole magnum opus, an opera of prose, a symphony of literature. But you need to know what good music sounds like, need that basic understanding of how the notes work together in the first place. That comes from reading and practice.

Reading helps writers gain an instinct for the music of good writing. The more you read, the sharper your observations become about details such as awkward syntax, lopsided story structure, weak impact, and so on. However, reading also helps you gain a sense of when a story is working on all levels, when the plot reaches deep into the human heart, when the tone and tension rises and falls, when the characters truly sing.

As writers, we should read much and often. Generally, I think you should read much more than you actually write. Read what you love most in the world. Read something that challenges you. Read a genre you've never tried before. Read across genres and time periods. Read classics. Read the latest things. Read novels. Read short stories. Read poetry. Read drama.

Read. Read. Read.

In our rampantly digital world, our reading options are varied from print media to literature on the screen. Across thousands of years of human history, there are probably billions of stories. So it's never a problem of finding something to read and enjoy, but a problem figuring out what to read next.

That and finding the time to stop digesting whole new worlds and characters and plots and actually write some of my own work for a change.

Just one more chapter, please?

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:

- 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.

THE PROMISE OF TOMORROW

by Lola Di Giulio De Maci



My husband and I had been married 47 years when I got “the call” from the hospital.

“I’m sorry,” someone said in a steady, even voice. “He didn’t make it.” I sat at the other end of the line, feeling my heart begin to break. “He didn’t make it,” a voice inside me kept repeating.

On the day of the funeral, I waited in the car at the veterans’ cemetery for the Navy to tell us where to go for the burial. I stared beyond the miles of manicured green lawns at thousands of white markers, summarizing entire lifetimes in a single name and two dates. I couldn’t help but wonder where my life would take me now. My thoughts were interrupted when the car door swung open, and my niece placed her six-week-old baby son into my arms.

“He wants to make you smile,” she said, shielding his eyes from the bright morning sun. I looked down at this brand-new baby, who never once stopped smiling, and felt his presence warming the lonely corners of my heart. As I held him in my arms, I couldn’t help but sense a smile come to my face...along with the promise of new life and the many gifts it has to offer no matter where we are on our journey – at the beginning, the middle or the end.

And suddenly I smiled for all that was...and for all that is meant to be.

From the Sept 2016 issue of sasee.com



Lola De Maci, Ridge Writers’ treasured Fontana member, gave *Purple Sage* her permission to run this inspiring reminiscence.

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

◆◆◆ Announcements ◆◆◆

CWC SF/Peninsula invites you to submit pieces for its latest anthology. **Fault Zone: Uplift.** For consideration, enter the branch’s short story contest before the **Oct. 31** deadline. The \$250 first prize also includes *Fault Zone* publication; prizes of \$100 and \$50 are also offered. All winning entries will receive editorial notes and one-on-one consults. In this, *Fault Zone*’s seventh edition, the editors seek “morally or spiritually elevating experiences, rising above surroundings ... We invite you to look at the different meanings of ‘uplift’ and create works that carry readers to unexpected places.”

The fee is \$15 per entry, with no limit to the number of entries you may submit. For guidelines and to submit your entry, see cwc-peninsula.submittable.com.



Do consider taking a reasonable drive to participate in **CWC High Desert’s Howl at the Moon Conference, Oct. 29.** During this full-day event in Apple Valley, nationally known author and writing teacher **Gabriela Pereira** will share her “secret sauce” outline formula and show participants other skills to help them improve their writing skills and effectiveness in using online media.

The conference will run from **9 a.m.**

to 4 p.m. at the **James Woody Community Center, 13467 Navajo Rd., Apple Valley.**

The price is a reasonable \$50. For more information and to register, go to www.hdcwc.com/conference-6---howl-at-the-moon-2016.html.



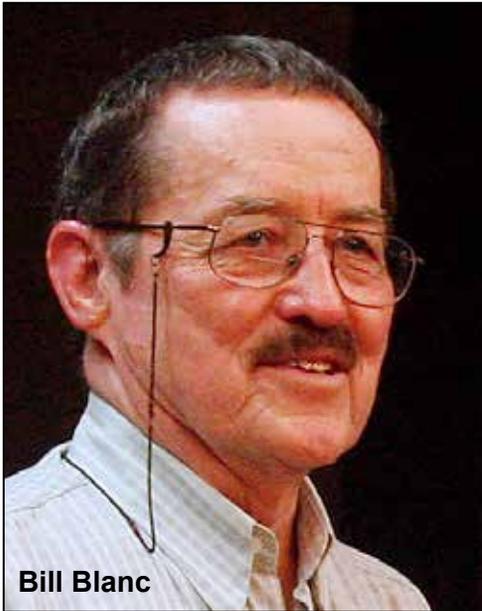
Nimrod, a biannual literary journal published at the University of Tulsa, seeks poetry, short stories, and creative nonfiction for its Spring/Summer 2017 thematic issue, **“Leaving Home, Finding Home.”** The editors are “open to all explorations of this theme.”

Entries must be previously unpublished stories and nonfiction up to 7,500 words, poetry up to eight pages. Each contributor receives two copies of the issue in which his/her work appears.

Postal submissions (*Nimrod Journal*, University of Tulsa, 800 S. Tucker Dr., Tulsa, OK 74104) are free with an SASE; online submissions charge a \$3 fee: nimrodjournal.submittable.com/submit. **Postmark deadline is Nov. 5**, with the publication date set for April 2017.



The **Ridgecrest Branch Library** continues to offer enjoyable reading-related activities for all ages. Great place to follow Daniel’s advice on reading!



Bill Blanc

As I was working on this newsletter, I was devastated to learn that my friend Bill Blanc had died in the early morning of Sept. 27.

Bill was an important part of our community's cultural life. Not only was he an accomplished filmmaker and manager at China Lake, but he also was a crucial part of the Ridgecrest Musical Enrichment Society, the Community Light Opera and Theatre Association, Big Band XPress (where he played the piano) — and Ridge Writers.

Bill directed many CLOTA plays, notably "Dames at Sea," the inaugural production on the organization's Center Stage. Did you know that he also wrote a musical? His "The Bungling Ballerinas" was a big hit for CLOTA in March 1990.

Although Bill focused his writing skills on film scripts and the musical theater (not specialties for our current members), he gave Ridge Writers a good try. He was a member for nearly a decade — 2001 through 2009 — and gave us a wonderful program in June 2008 on "Writing for the Musical Theater."

I will miss him terribly. If you'd like to make a contribution in his memory, Bill's grieving widow, Annie, suggests donations to RMES.



Daniel fills a whiteboard with Ridge Writers' ideas about the murder at the bus stop.

Photos
by Liz

the victim was and how they died.

With that guidance, we started to design our mystery. The first step was to decide on a crime scene. After much discussion, we focused on Tokyo — a bus stop in Tokyo!

The means came next, and we settled on poisoning. With what? Daniel wanted us to decide — and someone suggested the a face mask — the kind you sometimes (and more often in Japan) see sick people wear to avoid spreading germs.

With the where and the how determined, Daniel had us focus on the victim. He quoted Agatha Christie as saying, "Murder springs, nine times out of 10, out of the character and circumstances of the murdered person." So we developed our victim — a young and struggling photographer, small of stature, and a perfectionist in her work but financially disorganized (Daniel wanted us to define positive and negative traits).

Suspects came next, and we had to come up with a list of Core Suspects (close friends and family) and Outliers — more distant acquaintances. Daniel warned us against creating too extensive a list of suspects, which makes it difficult for the reader to keep them all in mind. Of course, someone brought up Ten Little Indians, but we can't all be Christie (and besides, most of them were victims as much as suspects!).

Then we discussed motives (per Daniel — Good motives are drawn from the victim's circumstances, but great motives are drawn from the victim's character), clues, and the all-important Sleuth.

Daniel had too much to share to squeeze it into a Ridge Writers meeting, but I came away with a greater appreciation of the complexity of crafting a great mystery novel. But now that we have the means, perhaps one of the attendees will find the motive and opportunity to write the "Mystery of the Japanese Bus Stop!"

Those who were not well acquainted with him came away with an understanding of just what a fantastic gem Ridgecrest has in Bill Blanc, and those who knew him well gained a renewed appreciation of his great talent and large heart.

— From Curt Danhauser's review of Bill Blanc's June '08 presentation

Elevator Pitch? What's That?

by C. R. Rowenson

Depending on the circles you travel, you may have heard this called a “Tagline,” a “Storyline,” or even a “Quick Pitch.”

Stop flapping your arms and calm down, they're all the same thing, and it's actually quite simple.

An Elevator Pitch is nothing more than a one- or two-sentence summary of your story.

From miles away and weeks in the past I can still hear you screaming your protest.

“One sentence!” you cry. “You expect me to condense all the wonder and majesty of my novel and/or screenplay into one sentence.”

Well ... yes.

Here's the “why”

The first thing to remember is that everyone is busy. You're busy reading, we're both busy writing, and we're all dying. Whoops. Got a little dark there. The point is, everyone's schedule is full and you are lucky if you can catch another human being's attention long enough to hear your Elevator Pitch in its full, unbridled glory.

Let's say you strike it big. You're in your hotel at the National Filking Contest when who steps into the elevator with you? Why it's only your favorite editor, G. Ticket!!!

You're already struggling not to wet yourself when Ticket turns and asks, “So, what do you do?”

Now you have a real dilemma. You have only a handful of seconds to pitch your darling to this individual with the ability to make your career.

What do you say? Should you start with a joke? How much time do you have? How much do adult diapers

cost?

Too high stress for you? Let's back it down to a more benign meeting.

You're at the supermarket when Mary Queen of Scots steps up beside you in the frozen yogurt section. (No, wait. She's dead.)

You're getting gas when Nathan Fillion comes up and says you're his new best friend.

Gahhh!!!
That's not any better.

Hang on.

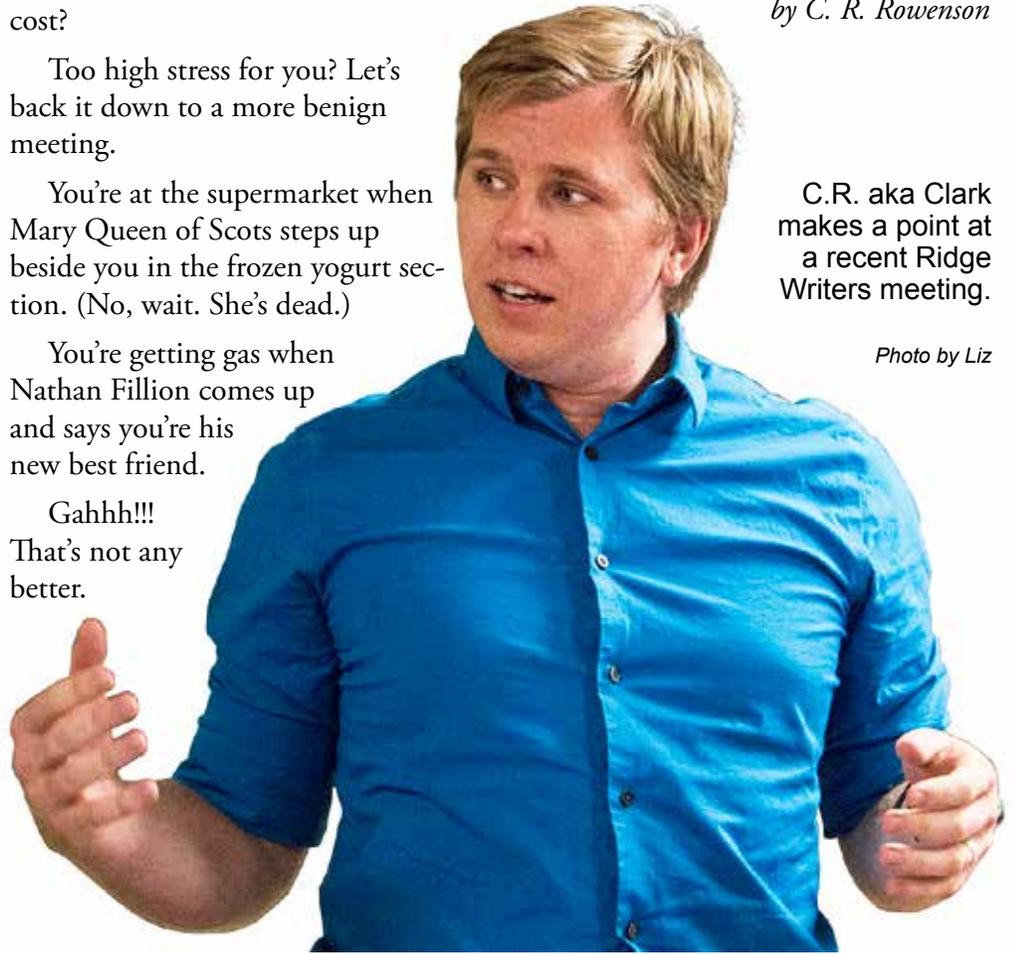
A much more realistic scenario

Okay. You came to the monthly meeting of your local writing group and are chatting it up with a group of your fellow writers. (Yeah, nailed it.) One turns to you and asks the age-old question.

“What is your book about?”

Now, we're all writers. We get it. You have spent months or maybe even years on this thing and you love it more than any of us. (Can't say I blame you for that.) Heck, you love your novel more than ice cream, skydiving, or adult diapers combined. (Or, as I like to call it: the best weekend of my life.) To make things better, we actually want to hear about it!

Be warned, there is a catch. Re-



C.R. aka Clark makes a point at a recent Ridge Writers meeting.

Photo by Liz

member the “everybody is busy” thing. Yeah. We want to hear about your story, but we can't wait forever to hear about it.

We're dying to know what you wrote. Don't let us actually die while you explain the inner mechanics of your main character's, brother's, hamster's, fusion-powered alarm clock.

And you need to remember, this is two. All of us want a chance to share, we want to go get writing, and we want to plan another skydiving trip with less squeamish instructors.

Still not convinced?

So far I have discussed the Elevator Pitch as a method of concentrating your story into a weapon you use to bludgeon potential readers into compliance. But it can help you in less

See p. 6

Elevator Pitch

From p. 5

obvious ways as well.

A good pitch might get you an editor or an agent, but it can also become a mobile advertisement. If you give me a snappy pitch that catches my attention, then I have something powerful to word-vomit over everyone else I come across.

More than that. This single sentence can help narrow your focus and remind you about the important parts of your story. If you like world building as much as I do, it is easy to get lost in the horde of cool ideas that come storming over the hill. With your Elevator Pitch in hand, you can brush back the countless ideas threatening to turn your story into an amorphous blob and get to the point you want to make.

Well, I've beat you over the head with this long enough. I hope I have convinced you this might be something worth looking into. Next time I will approach the topic of crafting your pitch, but with more actual information and less hysteria.

Until then, Read on.

Watch our November newsletter for the other half of C.R.'s highly entertaining, useful — and I can even say "elevated" — advice.

In the meantime, why not submit something of your own to Purple Sage? How about giving me a few well-chosen paragraphs on what your favorite book is? Or maybe you have a poem you've written recently that you'd like other Ridge Writers to read?

Or maybe you'd like to practice your Elevator Pitch by submitting it for publication. I'd love to have a writing backlog, as I do this month, thanks to C. R. — ed.

CWC PR Column

Announcements From Donna

J have some exciting information to share — CWC news as well as notices that have crossed the desk. Please keep in mind that my mention of outside events does not constitute formal endorsement by the CWC.

1. **California Writers Week:** In 2003, the California State Assembly officially declared the third week in October each year as California Writers Week in response to a campaign launched by CWC leadership. For more about it, see our website under the About tab. We hope every branch has plans to help celebrate this event. If you do, please take photos and send us a brief write-up.

2. **Writer's Digest Novel Writing Conference, Los Angeles, Oct 28-30, 2016:** Hear from celebrated writers such as Garth Stein, Jane Smiley, and Christopher Rice. CWC members can take \$25 off registration when they use the code CWC16. Note that the cost of registration goes up as the date gets closer, so even though the discount would apply right along, anyone interested might think about signing up ASAP. For further details: novel.writersdigestconference.com.

3. **Round Table's Joke Writing Competition #4, "Election Time":** This competition awards prizes for best jokes about the process: "Any part of it you like — the conventions, the polls, campaigning, the commercials, our elected officials, etc. There is one restriction, though. Your lines cannot contain any reference — directly or implied — to the current Presidential Election and its candidates." Prizes: The top eight jokes will win \$25 each. Enter up to eight times. Conceivably, you could win all \$200. There is a \$5 fee for up to eight jokes if submitted in the same entry and at the same time. Fees are nonrefundable. Deadline for submission: October 1, 2016. Winners will be announced on Election Day! For complete rules visit The Contest Page at <http://bit.ly/1ObjSeB>.

4. **"1888":** This nonprofit serves as a regional catalyst for the preservation, presentation, and promotion of cultural heritage and literary arts in California and beyond, and will soon have details on a writing residency in Big Bear. Once we learn more, we'll share it. In the meanwhile, visit 1888.center/vision for a better sense of what they do.

5. **The Los Gatos-Listowel Writers Festival 6-9 October, 2016:** Readings, workshops and discussions by Irish and American writers. Some free events. <http://writersweekklosgatos.com/>.

— Donna McCrohan Rosenthal,
CWC PR chair, pr@calwriters.org

To contribute your poem, essay, story, or other writing to the Southern California Writers Showcase, www.socalwritersshowcase.com, send your content to submissions@socalwritersshowcase.com. All contributors must be CWC South members (and you're a member if your Ridge Writers dues are up to date).

Shadows in the Churchyard: What Happened at Pauper's Grave'

by Daniel Stallings



Our 'Pauper's Grave' creator, Daniel Stallings presents a special award to Julie Bradford for all the help she gave in creating the milieu (and the goodies) for the production. Julie must be considered the queen of this year's Weird Weekend, since she was also the winner of the afternoon's Wierd Storytelling Competition. Watch the November issue for more photos and information on the weekend's special events.

Photo by Liz

Weird Weekend 2016 provided the backdrop for the ninth Master Mystery Production, "Pauper's Grave," a Gothic adventure set in the haunted English village of Crow's Killing.

Written and designed by Daniel Stallings and C. R. Rowenson, the show transformed a humble church meeting room one September night into a Gothic landscape with tombstone-lined walls, gorgeous black-and-white decor, a Gibbet Tree offering chocolates, and four powerful families vying for power in the village.

But a murdered gravedigger, a missing corpse, and a defiled pauper's grave turned this power struggle into a fight for survival.

What a night! What a blast! In a beautifully designed space both Gothic and glamorous, guests became members of these four families — the Masons, the Smiths, the Fletchers, and the Carpenters.

Working within their families, they had to shield their secrets while attempting to ferret out the secrets of the other families to try and dig up the truth of the mystery.

We wanted a bit of improvisation as the families embraced their identities and closed ranks while choosing carefully what information to barter with the others.

Secrets were currency. All information came with a price. Quid pro quo.

We wanted our audience to embrace their family identities and work to add to the drama and excitement by keeping secrets at bay, forging alliances, and crafting deals with other families. We wanted accusations, rebuttals, defenses, etc. Did we accomplish this?

It was better than we could have dreamed. Our audience fully embraced the show. Within moments, they lived up to their family identities — Masons lording over the proceedings, Smiths (their right-hand family)

Report on Our Critique Group

by Daniel Stallings

At our Sept. 9 Critique Group meeting, it was I, Daniel Stallings, who was on the chopping block to get my story, "To Kill Two Birds with One Stone," critiqued. It was a great experience to be able to knock around ideas on how to improve the story's structure, word choice, emphasis of ideas, and characterization. No writer is perfect, and getting the opportunity to improve myself and my work is priceless. Thank you to our amazing Critique Group members for helping me out!

Our workshop this time was all about genre blending, or as I liked to subtitle it, "How to Put a Romance in Your Horror Story." The key to blending genres seamlessly is to read those genres and understand what makes the genres what they are.

A genre, simply put, is the category where your book is placed in a bookstore. A genre is a marketing tool. So if you want to mix genres, first determine the key genre that your story fits.

Say you want to write a story about a ghost who solves a crime. That would be a paranormal mystery. So it goes under Mystery, because that's what the

See p. 8

Critique Group

From p. 7

main plot is about.

Then understand the elements to build up the genres you're playing with. For instance, mystery is about an unknown question or puzzle that is resolved in the end. Horror is about instilling feelings of dread, fear, or terror in the reader. Fantasy is about epic tales involving otherworldly realms or characters. Science Fiction discusses the impact of science and technology on the universe.

So our workshop was more of a brainstorming session, where each of us drew two different genres at random. As a group, we brainstormed ways to blend the genres together, citing ways that they did fit together and ways they didn't. We came up with examples of media that we thought fit these hybrid genres, like how the 2004 film, "I, Robot," could be classed as a science fiction mystery.

Our next Critique Group will meet on Friday, Nov. 4, at 6:30 p.m. in Beanster's Lounge inside Pizza Factory. It will be our two-year anniversary!

We'll be reading a member story and doing a workshop on plot twists and how to integrate them in stories without interrupting the flow. We'll also be instituting a new system for Critique Group where members can sign up to receive works to critique through e-mail, allowing for us to critique longer and more works from our writers. So come to the November Critique Group if you want to find out more!

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.

'Pauper's Grave'

From p. 7

forging an alliance, Carpenters at odds with the Masons, Fletchers pursuing their own unique path.

They traded accusations and suspicions and conspiracies, but all with a twinkle in the eye and a sense of humor. No one got hurt and no one went too far. They had fun with their roles, and the room was filled with fervent conversation.

Our book *Planet Mojave: Visions From a World Apart* is available at Jawbone

Canyon Station, the Historic USO, the Maturango Museum, Red Rock Books and online from our website, www.planetmojave.com.



Inside...

Page 1:

Oct. Program: Workshop
Report on Sept. Meeting by
Andrew Sound

Page 2:

President's Notes by Daniel
Stallings
Ridge Writers Leaders

Page 3:

"Promise of Tomorrow" by Lola
De Maci
Announcements

Page 4:

Farewell to Bill Blanc

Page 5:

"Elevator Pitch? What's That?" by
C.R. Rowenson

Page 6:

CWC PR Corner by Donna
McCrohan Rosenthal

Page 7:

Reports on "Pauper's Grave" and
Critique Group by Daniel Stallings

**The Ridge Writers
East Sierra Branch
California Writers Club
P.O. Box 484
Ridgecrest, CA 93556**