My Story

I've been making up stories my whole life. (Just ask my mom, who caught me in plenty of "fabrications," bless her heart.) But it never occurred to me that this could be a good thing! (On the contrary, it usually got me in trouble.)

When I was sixteen, I became a born-again Christian without having the foggiest clue what that really entailed or what it would mean for my life. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I grew into Christian adulthood. (Well, I became an adult, anyway. My faith is still maturing, but I don't think that ever stops … at least it shouldn't.)

In 1988, a friend from my church told me she was putting together a writers' conference at Biola University and asked if I could help out. After we'd spent time together stuffing envelopes, making photocopies, and filling three-ring binders, she offered to let me attend the conference for free. I didn't consider myself a writer, but the conference was local and I was available during that time, so I shrugged and said, "Sure, why not?"

Having been an avid reader since grade school, I wondered if this might at least be an interesting experience for me. And boy, was it! That conference opened up a whole new world to me. My jaw dropped as I saw nametags that matched the names on the covers of books I had at home! And they were sitting on the grass eating hot dogs and potato chips, just like normal people.

In the final group session, the presenter asked everyone to stand and shout out, "I am a writer!" I remained quiet, not feeling like a writer, although I had certainly learned a lot and had toyed with the idea of putting together an article and submitting it to one of the magazines I'd picked up writers' guidelines for. The presenter asked everyone to shout louder, "I am a writer!" This time I joined my quiet voice to the enthusiastic ones all around me.

God must have heard my whisper, because I did go home and write that article, and it was accepted by the first publisher I submitted it to (little realizing at the time how unusual that was).

I went back to Biola the following year and learned that the play scripts I'd written for my drama team at church could be submitted to publishers. I followed the appropriate formatting guidelines, researched play publishers, and ended up selling almost every one I'd written—plus several of the scripts our drama team director had written (and given me permission to submit). I was hooked!

I was working as an administrative assistant and graphic designer at the time. But over the next few

years, I wrote magazine articles, devotionals, short stories, and Sunday school curriculum in my "spare time" (before work, during lunch, after work, and occasional weekends) and actually got several accepted and published (along with plenty of rejections as well, of course).

Biola stopped hosting that writers' conference in 1990, but I attended others: American Christian Writers in Fullerton, California, Mount Hermon in Northern California, and a couple in San Diego.

An idea for a novel came to me, and I joined a wonderful fiction writers' critique group. I became very excited about the idea of a book with my name on it. Whenever I went to bookstores, I gazed longingly at where my spot on the shelf in bookstores would be—with "Ide" appearing alphabetically between "Angela Hunt" and "Jerry Jenkins." Wow!

When I ended up getting tendonitis in both thumbs and both wrists from my day job, I was told I had to find work that didn't require using a computer keyboard or any other type of repetitive motion. Not an easy task! I started using a professional-edition voice-recognition software program. But I couldn't find an office job that would allow me to sit around and talk to my computer all day.

After a few months of wondering what God had in mind for me, my husband suggested it might be time for me to try something new. He asked me, "What would you do for a living if you could do anything?" (What a wonderful question!) I answered without a moment's hesitation, "Write." But I knew I couldn't earn anywhere near what I'd been making in my thirty-year career, especially not right away. And we'd just bought a house based on that salary.

My awesome hubby asked what my second choice would be. (I love that he didn't give up after my discouraging first answer!) After a moment's thought, I said, "Well, my writers' critique group likes what I do for them, and I really enjoy it." He encouraged me to see if I could make a career out of that.

When I asked my workers' comp coordinator what she thought of my becoming a book editor, she asked if I had a college degree in English, creative writing, journalism, anything like that. I bit my lip. "Uh … I went to the University of Minnesota for a hockey game once." She was not amused. She practically patted me on the head as she said, "I'm sorry. But that's just impossible."

Impossible!

The minute that word left her mouth, I heard God whisper to my spirit, "You know, *impossible* is my specialty." I sensed immediately that this was something he wanted me to pursue.

As it turned out, my friend from church who'd invited me to my first writers' conference ran a manuscript critique service. I asked her what I needed to do to get into that line of work.

"It's basically the same thing you do in your critique group," she said matter-of-factly.

“Seriously? And I could get paid to do that?”

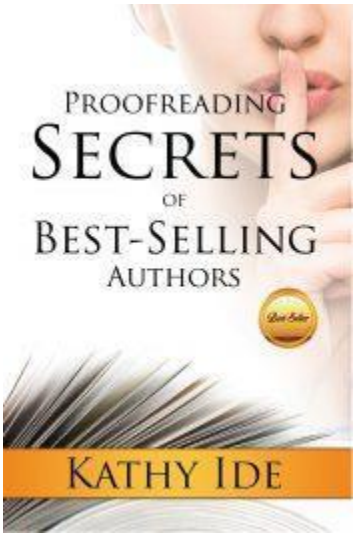
“You sure can.” She handed me a brown envelope.

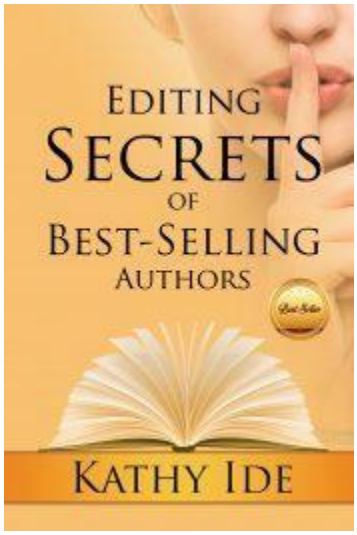
Feeling like a fraud, I did the best I could on that project. When I turned it in to my friend, she accepted it with a smile and handed me a check … and another brown envelope.

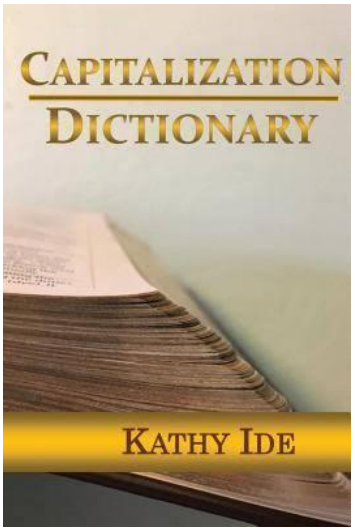
Over the years, I learned there’s a lot more to professional freelance editing than what I’d been doing in my critique group! But doing work for that critique service got me started, and it gave me the confidence to keep going … and to learn what I didn’t know.

After working with her for a while, I started getting my own editing clients. And when technology developed that replaced pen-on-paper editing with Track Changes in Word, I found that I could type for hours—using a split keyboard, a scrolling mouse, and an ergonomic setup—without any tendon issues!

I attended more writers’ conferences and then served on faculty at some. I taught online classes. And I wrote books for writers: *Proofreading Secrets of Best-Selling Authors* and *Editing Secrets of Best-Selling Authors* and the *Capitalization Dictionary*.







I also edited and compiled a series of Fiction Lover’s Devotionals.

On my drive home from the Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference in 2004, the Lord gave me the idea of starting a support organization for Christian editors, as there were so many of for Christian writers. I wanted to share with aspiring editors what I'd learned the hard way through trial and error so they wouldn't have to make the same mistakes I did and feel like a fraud for the first few years. And I loved the idea of having a way for editorial freelancers at all levels to connect with one another for networking, brainstorming, and encouragement.

I founded The Christian PEN: Proofreaders and Editors Network and invited the five or so people I knew who did freelance editing. They told their editor friends, who told more people, and the organization grew.

The Christian PEN:
Proofreaders and Editors Network

Three years later, at the request of several PEN members, I founded Christian Editor Connection, where established, professional editors could connect with the authors and publishers who needed them. And editors who were asked to work on manuscripts that weren't right for them would have a place where they could refer those authors to find editors who were a better fit.

In 2014, I held a conference for editors called PENCON, which has continued every year since. It ran as an in-person event the first few years. When we switched to virtual in 2020, many more people were able to attend, so we've kept it that way.

In 2016, the online courses that had been offered as part of The Christian PEN became a separate organization, called The PEN Institute. I created Christian Editor Network to be the parent organization over all of those divisions. Also in 2016, Christian Editor Connection sponsored the first Excellence in Editing Award to honor the authors, editors, and publishers of recently published books that are beautifully written and meticulously edited.

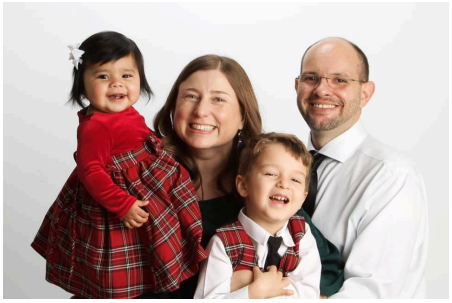
In August of 2022, Christian Editor Network was renamed Christian Editors Association (since the parent organization doesn't actually offer networking). And the Excellence in Editing Award was renamed the Editors' Choice Award, sponsored by Christian Editors Association.

After several years of teaching and speaking at six to eight Christian writers' conferences a year, I directed three: Orange County, SoCal, and Mount Hermon. I invited professional screenwriters to teach at my conferences and learned that craft from them. Under their mentoring, I wrote my first screenplay. I then proofread some scripts for a top producer at Sony's Pinnacle Peak Pictures (the rebrand of Pure Flix), which I greatly enjoyed (and for which I received high praise).

When Mount Hermon decided in 2020 to stop sponsoring writers' conferences (after 50 years), I deeply mourned that loss–as did many others. A lot of Christian writers' conferences had sprung up all across the country by then. But Mount Hermon was special because of its beautiful, prayer-soaked, Spirit-infused setting. It had offered tremendous opportunities for networking and education, but I always encouraged attendees to skip at least one workshop session to spend time strolling through the redwoods and meeting with God.

After a great deal of prayer for direction, I felt led to put together a Christian writers *retreat* at Mount Hermon as a guest group. The first retreat in November of 2021 was so awesome, I did two in 2022 and 2023: one in Southern California and one at Mount Hermon.

While directing writers' conferences and retreats was a wonderful experience, the Lord moved me on from that season to focus more on my family, my editing, and my Christian Editors Association. And get back into speaking and teaching at writers' conferences.



I also had to get back to my writing! When *The Chicago Manual of Style* came out with their 18th edition in 2025, with *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style* doing the same shortly after, I needed to put out a second edition of my *Proofreading Secrets of Best-Selling Authors* and my *Capitalization Dictionary*, incorporating those changes.

About that time, I sensed God nudging me to get back to that novel I started writing all those years ago. I've been so busy helping writers and editors with their work, I haven't had much time to focus on my own fiction story. But I still believe that novel will get published someday. With the loss of so many

brick-and-mortar bookstores, most readers won't find it on a shelf between Angela Hunt and Jerry Jenkins. But I am confident it will happen—in God's way and in His perfect timing.

When I look back on how this long, circuitous, and wonderful journey started, I am absolutely amazed. You just never know what God might do with a little act of kindness for a friend.