



2026 Faculty Bios

Lisa Betz

Lisa E. Betz is an engineer-turned-mystery-writer, entertaining speaker, and speaking coach. She inspires others to become their best selves, living with authenticity, and purpose. She infuses her novels with quirky characters who thrive on solving tricky problems. Her Livia Aemilia Mysteries, set in first-century Rome, have won multiple awards.

Ellen Byham

Author Ellen Byham teaches creative writing, devotional writing, journaling, and beginner's poetry. She is the CEO of Beautiful Balance Inspirations, a nonprofit, and Elly Press, LLC. Her latest release, *Thistle, Bee, & Finch* (Elly Press, LLC) is a project dear to her heart. She created a children's book that is a work of art, portraying her fondness for poetry, science, and nature. She has written and published several devotional studies.

Don Catlett

As an educator, designer, and marketer, Don knew from the beginning that he loved sharing new ideas and tools to help others. Today, he uses that same drive to help people navigate the world of artificial intelligence without the fear, confusion, or jargon. By focusing on practical, real-world applications, Don shows how AI can be a partner in saving time, sparking creativity, and bringing clarity to complex projects.

In his presentations, Don replaces intimidating tech-speak with live examples and a bit of humor. While demonstrating how AI streamlines tasks like research and brainstorming, he also tackles the essential "human" side—clearly addressing the risks and ethical concerns that come with these tools. Audiences walk away not just with a list of apps, but with the discernment needed to navigate this new landscape.

Whether he is speaking to business owners, writers, or community groups, Don's goal is to make technology feel useful for today. He equips people to use AI confidently and responsibly—not to replace human thinking, but to strengthen it.

Michele Chynoweth

Michele Chynoweth is the bestselling author of several award-winning contemporary suspense novels that re-imagine Old Testament stories from the Bible in an edgy, modern-day way. They include *The Jealous Son*, a modern murder mystery based on Cain and Abel which is being made into a major motion picture! Michele loves helping writers become authors and is a sought-after conference speaker, professional editor, book coach, and founder of "Your Book Done Right" Master Class and Elite Coaching. A former news reporter, ad agency owner and marketing director, she lives with her husband in North East, Maryland.

Sue Fairchild

Sue A. Fairchild has been helping new and established authors perfect their stories for over ten years and has spoken at numerous conferences on a variety of writing and publishing topics. In addition to helping independent authors publish their books, Sue is an editor for Elk Lake Publishing Inc. and is the faculty coordinator for the St. Davids Christian Writers' Conference. Sue also writes and has published six books. Learn more about Sue on her website.

Pam Halter/Kim Sponaugle

Pam Halter is a former home-schooling mom, has been a children's book author since 1995, a freelance children's book editor since 2006, and was the children's book editor for Fruitbearer Publishing until January 2023. She's the award-winning author of *Fairyeater*, a YA fantasy novel, and *Willoughby and Friends*, a picture book series about friendship featuring a dragon named Willoughby. Pam has short stories in several anthologies, and the very first short story she ever wrote won Readers' Choice in *Realmscapes*. Pam lives in Southern New Jersey with her husband, special needs adult daughter, and three cats. When she's not writing, she enjoys spending time with her grands, reading, quilting, gardening, cooking, playing the piano, Bible study, and walking long country roads where she discovers fairy homes, emerging dragons, and trees eating wood gnomes.

Rollin Howard

Rollin is a disciple of Jesus Christ. For 36 years he has filled the role of pastor in five New York State churches. His wife Susan and he have raised four children who are now raising their 14 grandchildren! Rollin has advanced degrees in Bible and theology, with emphasis on biblical languages. He finds great delight in word-smithing, so he reads widely and constantly translates Hebrew and Greek into English. This will be his first participation in this writer's conference, and he can't wait to gain fresh insights into writing and living well from all of you. By the way, his favorite authors, of course, are two of his children who are published writers: Greg Howard and Janelle Leonard!

Marsha Hubler

Marsha Hubler has had twenty-three books published since she started writing to publish in 1998. Her bestselling eight-book series, *The Keystone Stables*, has sold over 250,000 copies. Besides her writing ventures, she speaks at conferences and club meetings, and enjoys editing and helping new writers with their projects. She had also been the director of the Montrose Writers Conference from 2015 to 2025.

Janeen Ippolito

Janeen Ippolito does all the things! She's an award-winning, bestselling author of over twenty-five books in the genres of urban fantasy, fairy tale retellings, superheroes, and steampunk. She's also an experienced editor and marketing strategist and ran a publishing house for seven years. She hosts the *Author Culture* podcast and is an in-demand speaker who helps sci-fi and fantasy authors achieve success in the chaotic publishing world. In her spare time, she helps her husband with his youth swordfighting programs, cooks fun food, reads whatever she feels like, and plays the ukulele. Connect with her at jiauthor.com.

Michelle Lazurek

Michelle S. Lazurek is a multi-genre award-winning author, speaker, pastor's wife, and mother. She is a regular contributor for ibelieve.com and crosswalk.com and is a movie reviewer for Movieguide Magazine. She also is a literary agent for Wordwise Media Services. When not working, she enjoys sipping a Starbucks latte, collecting 80s memorabilia, and spending time with her family and her crazy dog. For more info, please visit her website www.michellelazurek.com.

Janelle Leonard

Janelle Leonard reads for fun, edits for joy, and writes because her brain refuses to shut off the “what if” machine. A Carol Award-winning editor, ambivert, coffee enthusiast, and proud Jane Austen fangirl, she manages words (and deadlines) at WhiteFire Publishing and Quill & Flame Publishing. She’s the author of *Northargyle Abbie* and, during the school year, can be found in an elementary library—her natural habitat for brewing story ideas and caffeine in equal measure. Connect with her at janelleleonardauthor.com.

Robin Luftig

"Be grateful in everything, even the bumpy rides" is Robin Luftig's mantra while either writing or speaking to audiences on writing. Her first book, *God's Best During Your Worst* brought her the 2020 Golden Scroll for Nonfiction and the 2021 Blue Ridge Mountain Christian Writers Conference Director's Choice award. Her first novel, *Ladies of the Fire*, was nominated for the 2021 Selah Award in the First Novel category. Her second book of the Ladies series, *Ladies Uncover a Secret*, released in 2022, and third of the trilogy, *Ladies on a Mission*, is with the publisher, ready for release. Luftig has taught writing classes at Blue Ridge Mountain Christian Writers Conference and Florida Christian Writers Conference. She's also a leader and mentor for Word Weavers International. She's a wife, mother, grandmother, and hooked on chocolate. She's also looking for a Netflix series to replace her favorite series, “Sweet Magnolias.”

Julie Manwarren

Julie Manwarren is an author, Bible study teacher, genealogist, and historical researcher. She has worked as a copywriter, journalist, and content creator. An alumna of Clarks Summit University, Julie makes her home in South Abington Township, Pennsylvania, where she lives with her husband and two college-age children. She is a conference speaker and presenter. Julie writes and teaches Bible studies and has led women's ministries at her church. When she's not teaching or writing, Julie conducts historical and genealogical research for clients across the country.

Cathy Mayfield

Cathy Mayfield has taught writing to young writers for many years, through homeschool avenues, library programs, and writers conferences. Many former students have won awards and/or had publications in various forms, including books. She is the author/creator of the *In His Name Creative Writing Curriculum*, a one-year writing curriculum for home and private schools. When not teaching, Cathy enjoys writing animal devotions and more for Guidepost publications: *All God's Creatures* (yearly 365-day devotional), *Strength & Grace* (caregivers devotional), and *Pray a Word a Day, Volume 2*

(365-day devotional). She also has written for Focus on the Family Magazine and online publications (www.inspireafire.com).

Edwina Perkins

Edwina Perkins is the co-director of Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference. She is the managing editor for Harambee Press, an imprint of End Game Press. She served as the Emerging Leader Coordinator with ECPA (Evangelical Christian Publishing Association). Edwina is an award-winning writer, speaker, freelance editor, writing mentor, and has been published in numerous compilations.

Zach and Leah Peterson

Marti Pieper

Marti Pieper was writing almost as soon as she could read, and her publishing career includes ghostwriting a young adult memoir that made the Christian bestseller list, traveling to six Latin American countries to share stories of teen mission trips, and an award-winning missionary memoir. She has written eight traditionally published nonfiction books and edited many more, written and edited for both print and digital publications, and taught at multiple writers conferences. Marti also serves as editorial director for the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida. She was married to Tom, a pastor, professional musician, and worship pastor, for forty-one years before his death this past August. She has five wonderful adult children and five even more wonderful grandchildren.

Sarah Scranta

Sarah Scranta is an accomplished English, writing, and public speaking teacher with twenty-three years of teaching experience spanning elementary through higher education. She is a former associate professor and Chair of the Department of English and Communications at Clarks Summit University. From 2017 to 2022, she operated her own freelance editing business as an academic writing coach and encourager for professionals seeking to attain advanced degrees. She loves to help others achieve excellence in their writing and speaking pursuits and has been nationally recognized as both a speech and debate coach and a student literary magazine editor/adviser. In 2025, she was commissioned as a Colson Fellow through the Colson Center for Christian Worldview. She currently homeschools her two children and shares her love of God's Word, writing, language, and digital design with her community.

Craig von Buseck

From webcasts to television and radio, and from conferences and churches to boardrooms, Dr. Craig von Buseck has been in the public eye for more than thirty-five years. As a sought-after keynote speaker, he has spoken across America and overseas. Craig is an award-winning, multi-published author. He has also been a contributing writer for FocusontheFamily.com, CBN.com, The Write Conversation Blog, MTL Magazine, and Charisma Magazine. He holds a Doctor of Ministry and an MA in Journalism from Regent University. Craig's biography, *Victor! The Final Battle of Ulysses S. Grant*, won the Christian Market Book Award as the Nonfiction Book of the Year. Craig's book, *I Am Cyrus: Harry S. Truman and the Rebirth of Israel*, won the prestigious Selah award for nonfiction, was a

finalist for The Truman Award from the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, and was a finalist for the Serious Writer Book of the Decade Award. Craig's other books include *Telling the Truth: How to Write Narrative Nonfiction and Memoir*, *Forward! The Leadership Principles of Ulysses S. Grant*, *Walking in Faith: The Peter, Paul, and Mary Principle*, *Nobody Knows: The Harry T. Burleigh Story*, *Praying the News*, co-written by 700 Club co-host Wendy Griffith, and *Seven Keys to Hearing God's Voice*. Craig has extensive speaking experience and travels often to conferences, professional events, churches, and writer training meetings. Learn more at vonbuseck.com.