Kathryn: Podcasting from Dallas Texas, you're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent women about finding work and getting paid. I'm your host Kathryn Hunter and you're listening to episode 6 with Amy Scott, editor. Today we're talking about coming full circle, making and milking connections, and figuring out who exactly you're talking to. Amy, welcome to the show.

Amy: Thanks for having me, Kathryn.

Kathryn: I like to start with your early life to see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Amy: I feel like I went through so many different things throughout my childhood. Around that age, I either wanted to be a dancer or a writer. I don't remember for sure. There was definitely a period where I was full on like writing poetry and like thought it was going to be a famous writer. So that's definitely the more relevant one. The ballerina never really came to fruition.

Kathryn: So it was primarily poetry as far as writing?

Amy: At that point, yeah.

Kathryn: And, how had that changed by the time you left high school?

Amy: When I left high school, I went to college thinking that I wanted to be a music critic or a DJ or like something in journalism. So there was still some similarities. There was still some writing stuff in there. But I was looking at like communications majors or some things like that, which ended up shifting. I ended up majoring in literature, so it kind of came full circle.

Kathryn: And was there anything from your literature degree that you use now?

Amy: Yeah, absolutely. I mean everything I learned about writing, critiquing and editing, you know... I didn't take any classes specifically on like copy editing skills, but everything I learned about what makes for good writing and all of that, I'm probably using it all the time and don't even realize how much I'm using it.

Kathryn: And what kind of editing do you do?

Amy: These days I work primarily on books and primarily nonfiction. And I do developmental editing, copy editing and proofreading.

Kathryn: Okay. So developmental editing is early in the process and then copy editing is later on?

Amy: Yes, exactly. Developmental editing is more helping somebody kind of flush out their ideas, make sure that the organization makes sense, make sure that the structure is logical. So it's kind of earlier stage, more macro level feedback before getting into the nitty gritty of like commas and typos.

Kathryn: Okay. So you work with them through the entire process then?

Amy: Yeah, I mean it depends on the client. Sometimes I come in later, sometimes we do all of those phases together. It's kind of depends when they show up and what they need help with.

Kathryn: What was your first foray into being location independent?

Amy: I quit my job, my job as an editor at a publishing company in 2004 to take an around the world trip and I've pretty much been location independent ever since that. The first almost year I was living off of savings and you know, traveling full time and then I started working for myself as an editor and that's what I've been doing ever since.

Kathryn: How do you find your clients?

Amy: It's been a real mix over the years. In the early days I, you know, really milked all of my existing contacts and networks. I ended up, I think my very first project came from my previous employer and I did quite a bit of work for them for a few years. Then at some point I started kind of transitioning to working more directly with writers, independent self publishing authors instead of working with the publishing companies. Since then I've been primarily getting clients through word of mouth, you know, just being part of lots of online communities and networks and making sure as many people as possible know what I do. So when the moment comes that they're writing a book or they know somebody who is that they think of me.

Kathryn: Is there anything specific you do to make sure that that stays out there?

Amy: No, not really. Well, let's see. I mean, I have a newsletter. I send out a quarterly newsletter. I do occasionally... I'm not as good at this as I should be... you know, check in with former clients or former prospects and kind of see how they're doing, see if they know anyone who they might be able to refer to me at the end of a project. When I ask someone for a testimonial, I also ask them for referrals. So yeah, some things like that, but I'm not, I don't really do a lot of hardcore marketing.

Kathryn: What would you say your first major struggle was?

Amy: As an editor or as the location independent person?

Kathryn: Let's go with as an editor first and then we'll see.

Amy: I think my first struggle was in that transition from working with publishing companies to working with authors directly. It took me a while to realize that I was going to need to change the way I talk about my work and the way I present myself. You know, in the early days I hand-coded an html website for myself that was super basic and was basically, I think what they call a portfolio site. Like it was basically just my resume and a list of projects that I'd worked on and for publishing companies that was sufficient. But I slowly realized that, many authors, they might know that they need an editor, but they

don't really know what an editor does or they don't understand the different types of editing. They don't understand what it's like to work with an editor, how I can help, etc. And so I really had to make a shift in my website and kind of that online presentation in terms of educating people about what I do. And yeah, just making it more clear, you know, what I could do for them.

Kathryn: What was your first major success?

Amy: I feel like my first success was really the first day. I remember very clearly that I had come back from my trip and I was kind of getting settled down. I had bought a laptop, I was, you know, I decided I was going to put out my shingle as a freelance editor. And I had decided the August 1st was my first day of work and that morning I was like all excited, sat down at my desk and got an email from my old boss offering me a sizable project. And so it just felt like I was off and running right from the beginning, which I think really, you know, gave me the confidence to continue.

Kathryn: That's really cool. Like that the way it all just came together. If you could start today, would you do it differently?

Amy: Hmm, good question. You know, if anything, I might have started sooner. I remember that for a few years before I quit to take that trip. I had been thinking like, Oh yeah, I'd love to work for myself. I'd love to work at home, you know, have my own schedule, all of those things. But it's so hard and the income is unpredictable and you know, just kind of let those typical excuses get in the way. And then for some reason, saving money and quitting my job to travel, it didn't seem like nearly such a big deal. So I just did that instead. And then after that I realized, you know, kind of during that trip I realized, well, I mean at this point I don't have anything to lose. I already don't have a job, you know, and I still have a little bit of money in the bank. I'm going to try this out and see how it goes. Um, but yeah, it would have been interesting. I'm curious how things would have gone if I had kind of reversed that trajectory and had made the decision to go out on my own with the work first.

Kathryn: I like the hindsight on this one because we get to review the things that maybe weren't even mistakes, but we're just choices that... I don't know. I hear from a lot of people that they, they feel like they started out too reserved and had they been given the chance to start over again, that introductory time period would have been one 20th of what they ended up doing. Odds are there's not really a typical day for you. Do you want to give us a random day?

Amy: Yeah, you're right about that. Let's see. I am not much of a morning person so I don't get up super early. In fact, this is something it has taken me, it's surprising how long it's taken me to kind of get this into my head that I don't have to be at my desk at nine to five, you know, or actually the ending time or like the rest of the day was not so bad. But I think I, for a long time I had this hang up that like if I wasn't at my desk at nine o'clock that I was, you know, a slacker or whatever and I'm totally, I'm over that now. You know, I prefer not to get up super early and then I like to exercise or um, just do some other stuff in the morning and have some breakfast. So I'm often not at my desk until like 10:30 or 11:00 these days. And I feel really good about that. I usually work for a few

hours, take a lunch break. I'll often, well depending on whether I worked out in the morning, I might take a walk at lunchtime or go to the grocery store and take kind of a break. And then work for another handful of hours in the afternoon because editing is not my only work. I often have the days kind of broken up into different kinds of activities. So my ideal scenario is to have about three hours in the morning, blocked for editing, and then I have that done. And then after lunch I can focus on other things. I have my own podcast and I also do coaching for people who want to be location independent as well as run an online community. So there's obvious a lot of other stuff there. So that's often what I'm doing in the afternoon or you know, doing podcasts, interviews, or what have you.

Kathryn: And as far as your editing work, what does that look like on any given day?

Amy: Usually I'm working on one project at a time and so that three hours is really just full on concentration mode on that manuscript. So depending on what level of editing we're doing at the time, you know, I might be doing that higher level manuscript feedback or I might be into the really nitty, nitty gritty of copy editing or proofreading. And,I found for me three hours is kind of the sweet spot. I find that less than an hour and I can't really get into it, you know, like I'm just getting in the groove and then it's time to stop. So that's why I like to create these longer blocks. And then I also make sure to take a break in the middle. I try to remember to get up and stretch my legs and so on. But yeah, once I get in the groove that three hours can go pretty fast. So it's really just, yeah, full on with whatever I'm working on at the moment.

Kathryn: Do you keep up with any kind of continuing education?

Amy: Not so much these days. I have taken some online courses and things over the years. It's probably been a year or two since I've done any. Mostly I just, I'm part of a couple listservs, and believe it or not those still exist and, Facebook groups and stuff for editors and... You know, it's interesting just to see what kinds of questions people are asking. And there's a lot of people who, you know, there's, there's a surprising amount of gray area or maybe it's not surprising, you know, like sometimes it's really clear like this word is spelled wrong. But sometimes you know, whether a word should be hyphenated or whether you should put a comma after something. There's a lot of judgment calls to be made. And so it's cool to be in community with people who are asking those same kinds of questions and you know, chime in where I feel like I can and then also see how other people are thinking about stuff. So I guess that's kind of my version of, of the continuing ed at this point.

Kathryn: Obviously language changes over time. I think it's changing more quickly now than it used to. Does grammar have that same flow?

Amy: Yeah, there are definitely some things that, well it's interesting, for a long time there have been people who talk about, oh shoot, I'm trying to remember what the other one is. There's the prescriptionists, the people who are very clear about, you know, this is the way it is and like there is no gray area. Like you must always put a comma here or whatever and I can't remember, I can't remember what the other group of people are called. But basically for a long time there has been the grammarians who are very, very

attached to the rules and the people who recognize like, well, you know, there is room for interpretation with a lot of this stuff and that continues to be true. And there are things that I used to change that I don't change anymore. And it kinda depends on the project also. But for example, changing "that" to "which", or vice versa, you know. There's situations where technically one is more correct, but they're used so interchangeably these days that if it's a pretty casual style of book, I might just let it slide. So yeah, it's, I've noticed even in my own editing that my approach to certain things have definitely changed over time. And it's, and that's the kind of stuff that we talk about in these groups too right? Like, how is, you know, some people are freelance and some people are working for companies. And so, to see how different organizations are approaching this stuff, how some of the style guides are actually changing their rules over time. So that's definitely something to, I have to keep up on.

Kathryn: I'm guessing you have some grammar related pet peeves. Do those affect your work?

Amy: I think sometimes, yes. But I also think I've been doing this long enough that I've been able to let a lot of that go. And really my main goal is to focus on what's best for the work and what's best for the reader. And so, I think some of my pet peeves come from things that as a reader I find make something unclear. And so I really, I'm pretty attached to wanting to make sure that the reader doesn't have to work too hard to figure out what you're trying to say, you know? And so if there are things that I feel adamant about because it's about clarity, I will definitely sometimes push back with a client on certain things. But at the end of the day, you know, most of these people are self publishing and it's their book. And there have been times that a client has a really specific opinion about something. And I'll say, okay, you know, I've shared my opinion, but if you feel really clearly that it needs to be different then we'll go your way.

Kathryn: Right. And now it's time to get into the numbers. Would you say your salary range is and how long have you been doing this now?

Amy: So, I had been working for myself since 2005 and over that time there has been a huge range. I've been trying to think back. I think over the years it's been anywhere probably from about $20,000 to $50,000 a year. So yeah, it depends a lot on what kinds of clients I'm working for and just also how much work I'm getting.

Kathryn: Okay. So is that kind of a linear trajectory, like you started out around $20,000 and it's getting closer to $50,000 or is it really dependent on the year?

Amy: I would say if you were to look at like a line graph, it's definitely going up. But still with some ups and downs, you know, from year to year. It's not like every single year is better than the year before, unfortunately.

Kathryn: So would you say the beginning salary range is around $20,000?

Amy: No, not necessarily because you know, that was a long time ago and it really depends on the type of clients you're working for. I mean, I've made anything from $20 an hour to almost $200 an hour. So it really depends on the project, on your experience. Just, you

know, working for a publishing company or something is going to pay differently than working for like a tech company. You know, they also need editors, or working for an online website or publication versus working for independent authors the way I do, there's just so much variation in what the market will bear really. So, and it depends on how many hours you're willing to work. You know, if you do the math, if I say I'm committed to three hours a day, that's only 15 hours a week. And I don't even always do that many a week. So in the grand scheme of things, there's a lot of different variables, you know, depending on how much you're willing to work and how much you are willing to get paid. So, yeah, I don't know... I don't know what I would say is kind of the average starting salary. I think it really depends on those factors I just mentioned.

Kathryn: And where, where would you say at tops out?

Amy: That's a good question too. I think my answer might be the same. I think probably it tops out at whatever someone's average hourly rate is and how many hours they can work in a week, you know, and that too is going to vary a lot depending on the person. I personally, even when I have, you know, like say an urgent, big project, I don't think I could do 40 hours a week of editing. Like it's just too much brain power, you know, it's not like you do 40 hours in an office, you're not thinking and concentrating really intently that entire time. But 40 hours of editing for me is very intense. But who knows, there might be people who are perfectly happy with that and that works for them. So I think it tops out really on, you know, where you feel like you can, how much you can do in a week and a year or whatever. And then also what your hourly rate is.

Kathryn: And how do you decide what to charge?

Amy: That's a good question. It's definitely been a work in progress and an evolution over the years. I still continue to tweak both my rates and also, kind of the way I charge. Most of the time I am actually charging by the word and that has come about partly because that is kind of a standard in the industry, at least for freelancers. And then also I don't remember where I came up with the numbers and when this was exactly, but in the last maybe five years I kind of settled on like I would be happy with $100 an hour and that sounds and feels kind of arbitrary. I don't remember honestly if I did any math around that or if I just kind of settled on it. And so my per word rates are calculated based on trying to get close to that hourly rate and there are also people who charge by the hour. There is some work for which I charge by the hour directly. But it's interesting, I find it a lot of cases, it's interesting to charge, one of the arguments that editors make, especially as they gain more experience is that working by the hour doesn't make as much sense. The better you get because you get faster, you get faster and you get better. And so you're actually getting charged or paid less because you could get more done in an hour. So that's something I've also taken into account,hen structuring my rates and stuff. I think they've been the same for a year or two now. And I am feeling pretty good about where they're at for now. But I think it's important to continue to tweak that stuff, you know, if it seems like it's not working or as you gain more information, you know, the more projects you work on, the more you see, okay, this type of work actually takes me a lot longer than I thought or, you know, whatever you're discovering in the process.

Kathryn: What are your next steps?

Amy: So my goal is really to increase my income on my, with my other work, the Nomadtopia side of things, and to get to a point where I maybe don't do any editing or am doing, you know, just kind of projects that really catch my attention or that I'm really interested in. Uh, that has been a long time transition. And so that transition is still in progress, so in the meantime, I keep doing all the things that we've talked about and you know, continue to work on word of mouth to bring in new clients. And actually the funny thing is that I've had some people find me through Nomadtopia and hire me as an editor. So that's kind of accidental marketing for the other side of things, which I didn't anticipate. So for now I guess I'm kind of continuing to do both with my eye on reducing the amount of time I spend on editing.

Kathryn: And where can listeners find you?

Amy: For my editing work? I'm at nomadeditorial.com and, if anyone's interest was piqued by the other stuff, that's at nomadtopia.com.

Kathryn: Thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Amy: Thank you.

Kathryn: Thank you for listening to Compass. You'll find today's show notes at compasspod.com/006. If you enjoyed this show, please share it with a friend, by visiting compasspod.com/006 and clicking the share buttons at the top of the page. Next week we'll be talking to Alana Zivanovic, events director.