



# TulipMail *newsletter*

May 2019

## Jen's Notes

We each have our own journey in life, with our unique paths and experiences, our own roles in this ultimately universal experience. A key feature that keeps popping up in mine is newsletters. In various past “real jobs” I was constantly finding excuses to start newsletters. So, when I joined a writers’ group and the director was looking for volunteers to help with the newsletter, naturally I piped up.

Running that newsletter led to creating the first writing contests I ever coordinated, and then to publishing my first anthology, and ultimately to founding TulipTree, which is really no surprise when I think about it: following my weird little bliss led to my larger path, even though I couldn’t have known it would at the time. I was already a freelance editor, and I had gotten my first taste of making books in the university press where I worked as a student just over two decades ago. Starting TulipTree was a natural evolution of my interests and passions.

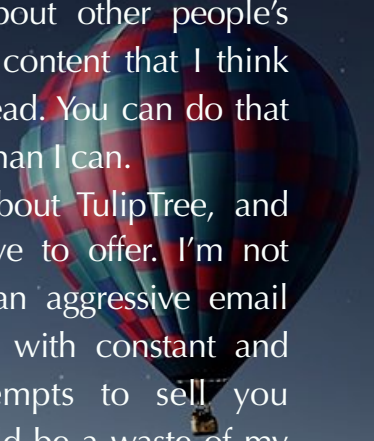
All the newsletters I put together before were, of course, geared toward the organization I was working for at the time; this is the first one I’ve done that’s for my own company. I started out enthusiastically looking for “content” that I thought other writers and readers would find helpful or interesting, which led me to perhaps the quickest dead end I’ve yet to encounter as a

business owner. The engine sounded great when I fired it up, but I ran out of gas two blocks away from home.

While I do believe that building a platform is a strong move for a writer, and I admire those who do so by consistently posting good blogs and building a following, providing opportunities for other writers to guest-post at the same time, I don’t have any direct experience doing that myself. It took me a minute to realize that this newsletter isn’t about other people’s blogs or trying to find content that I think others might want to read. You can do that much more efficiently than I can.

This newsletter is about TulipTree, and me, and what we have to offer. I’m not interested in running an aggressive email newsletter “campaign” with constant and barely disguised attempts to sell you something. And it would be a waste of my time and yours to put out a collection of regurgitated content just for the sake of publishing one every month. Instead, I want it to be a genuine expression of what TulipTree is—a place to tell our own story.

In that spirit, and in light of the New Writers contest closing this month, I share some insights below on submissions and stories in general. It’s geared toward new writers but could apply to anyone. And while the tips could apply to any venue, I also share some insights specific to TulipTree. Happy submitting!



# Story Writing and Submission Tips for New Writers

by Jennifer Top

Since I started coordinating writing contests in 2011 I've read thousands of stories. Because of that, naturally, there are some things that consistently make me crazy, and others that give me straight-up warm fuzzies. Every editor/reader/screener/judge is different, but a few things are pretty universal when it comes to submitting your work. Here are the big ones that apply to any venue, plus some insights into submitting to TulipTree.

Okay, really there's one big universal: Read the guidelines.

That might seem obvious, but years of experience suggest it is *not* a given. Each publisher/editor works within their specific system, and their guidelines are there for a reason. If you want your work to be read and taken seriously, then it will only help your chances to understand and comply with how they prefer to receive submissions.

As an example, when I'm narrowing down my notoriously long "shortlists" into my final list of contributors for an anthology, that process often involves actually beginning work on the book or journal issue. There are always so many stories I want to include that I have to start putting the book together as a reality check—how many pages am I up to, and how many more can I include? When it comes down to final decisions, then, something as simple as having a story in PDF format can make the difference. For some reason, when I copy and paste from a PDF into my working document, every line break becomes a paragraph break. That's perfectly fine with poetry, but not with a 20-page story when I'm under pressure on a deadline and I'm looking for reasons to cut. Thus, the stipulation in the guidelines that prose entries should be in a word-processing document is there to give everyone the best possible chance of winning. Nobody wants to get cut on a technical violation.

We (as in editors and publishers everywhere) understand that not everyone is going to read all of our books and past issues before submitting to get an understanding of what we tend to print (as awesome as that would be), so in lieu of that, the guidelines are a minimum substitute. If you don't follow them, your submission may also get tossed out on principle—i.e., you disregard the guidelines, they disregard your work. And if you're paying to enter your work without reading the guidelines and directions, there's a good chance you're throwing away your money.

I'm often nicer than I should be—for example, unlike my fifth-grade teacher, I spend considerable time adding names and addresses to works that come in with no identifying information, as I match up entries with entry fees. However, when it comes to items like word





count, I can't be that nice. When entries come in at 9,999 words, I know that someone has taken the guidelines to heart and cut their story down to fit. Therefore, when another comes in at 11k, it's just not fair to the ones who complied to let the ones who go over stay in the running.

Two other general pieces of advice are, in my opinion, likely to apply to other venues, but I'm sharing them because they address habits that never fail to rankle me personally: being preachy and being too polite. That sounds a little like I'm impossible to please, but here's what I mean. I'm all for learning from life experiences. That's kind of the point, I'm pretty sure. But when the narrative turns from "I learned this" to "You should do this," I tend to shut down as a reader. (This may also be why I have a hard time with traditional employment, but that's another story.)

The other item, being too polite, I should note only applies to characters. I am quite put off by people who aren't polite, honestly, but within a story, niceties between characters are often a waste of word count. (Hi, how are you? I'm fine, how are you? Great! Thank you! You're welcome.) A rule of thumb that I go by here is, if it's a conversation you could easily overhear between any two people on the planet, don't bother putting it in the story. There are always exceptions, of course, if mundane politeness is perhaps ironic or sarcastic, for example. But if it doesn't move the story forward or reveal something interesting about a character, then it probably doesn't need to be there.

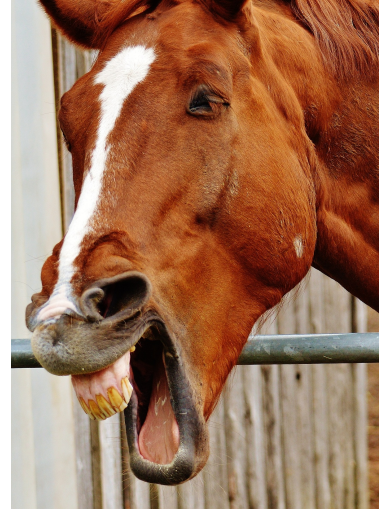
I'm often asked if typos are an automatic deal-breaker for me when it comes to screening submissions. This is one item that may peeve some editors/judges more than others. I'm a freelance editor and proofreader—if there were no typos in this world, I'd still be processing mortgages. Therefore, no, they are not automatic deal-breakers for me. However, like my fifth-grade teacher, I do believe neatness counts, so if the typos are relentless, it certainly won't help.

Our mantra, stories that need to be told, is one I take seriously. My goal with every issue and anthology is to put together a collection of unique stories from diverse voices, even voices that otherwise non-diverse people make up. I'm not looking for shock value or the worst thing that could possibly happen to a human being. Likewise, I would never prescribe that all stories must have a happy ending. But, as a reader, I need some sort of resolution for at least the main question of the story. This can be interpreted in a lot of ways, obviously, but perhaps the most frustrating thing—even worse than preaching and politeness—is to be fully invested in a story that's really well written that ends abruptly with *no* resolution.

I was tempted to end the article right there just to make a point, but I can't close without talking about those warm fuzzies I mentioned earlier. First, never underestimate the power of humor, even if you don't consider yourself a humorist or you don't consider your story a work of humor. Life is heavy, man. That's why I have so much gratitude for humor in stories, even the serious ones, and that's why I want to share the humor in whatever I publish. Witty, sassy, subtle, dry—bring it!

Second, great stories wear their hearts on their sleeves, in my opinion. I've been accused recently of being a softie, but one clear sign to me that a story is a winner is that it makes me cry. Sometimes it doesn't take much. But I should clarify: having heart and being sentimental are two very different things. Sentimentality is an indication of biased writing—the imposition of how the author feels about something—and the reader may or may not be into it. A story with heart puts it out there in its raw form, vulnerable and open to interpretation. A truth is revealed and the reader is free to react. To me, that's a powerful skill to have as a writer.

I hope this sheds some useful light on the practice of submitting your work, especially if you are submitting to TulipTree in the near future. So, go ahead—make me cry. But in a good way, not because you didn't read the guidelines.



## Contributor News

Congratulations to TulipTree guest editor **Lynn Carlson** for her recent Honorable Mention win in the Frank Nelson Doubleday Memorial Writing Award competition. The writing competition is hosted by the Wyoming Arts Council and aims to promote outstanding women writers.

### ***Contributors and Future Contributors:***

*If you have been published in a TulipTree collection or on the website, please send your news to [jennifer@tuliptreepub.com](mailto:jennifer@tuliptreepub.com).*

*To be a future contributor, check out [www.tuliptreepub.com](http://www.tuliptreepub.com) for currently open calls for submissions!*

## Writerly Events

### Books in Bloom Literary Festival

Eureka Springs, Arkansas ~ May 19

**Books in Bloom Literary Festival: A Celebration for Writers and Readers** was established in 2005 to promote the value of books and reading. The Festival provides an opportunity for the public to meet accomplished authors, and to hear them read from or speak about their work. Aspiring writers learn about various aspects of writing and publishing, and avid readers are introduced to authors working in a wide variety of genres. It all takes place amid the colorful flower gardens of the historic 1886 Crescent Hotel and Spa. The 14th Annual Books in Bloom Festival is delighted to be included in the Festival of the Arts schedule, a month-long celebration of the arts, held in Eureka Springs and now in its 30th year.

### BookExpo

New York City ~ May 29–31

Join us at the publishing industry's leading trade event, where booksellers, librarians, publishers, and tastemakers gather to discover the latest titles, authors, distribution channels, technology, and trends. At **BookExpo** you can get an edge in your business by attending cutting-edge education sessions, and making new connections to help you grow your business.

### BookCon

New York City ~ June 1–2

**BookCon** is the event where storytelling and pop culture collide. Experience the origin of the story in all its forms by interacting with the authors, publishers, celebrities, and creators of content that influence everything we read, hear, and see. BookCon is an immersive experience that features interactive, forward-thinking content including Q&As with the hottest talent, autographing sessions, storytelling podcasts, special screenings, literary quiz shows, and so much more. BookCon is the ultimate celebration of books, where your favorite stories come to life.

### Printers Row Lit Fest

Chicago ~ June 8–9

The 2019 **Printers Row Lit Fest** returns to its roots to bring you the 35th annual book fair, with a bigger footprint along South Dearborn Street from Polk Street to the newly named Ida B. Wells Drive (Congress Parkway). This year's fair includes more book dealers, all-free programs, a kids' favorite book character costume parade, and much more. Valerie Jarrett and Alex Kotlowitz, 2019 Winner of the Harold Washington Literary Award, will be featured in this year's festival programming, with many more to be announced soon.