

He wasn't much to look at the first time they saw him with spindly legs and oversized paws. Curled on a blanket in the back of a concrete cage, brown eyes stared uncertainly until soft words lured him out, and took him home. Their hands were warm and gentle as they patiently helped him feel safe. Eager to please, he obeyed the silent hand signals with ease, and responded to each new whistled command. A constant shadow at their heels, he guarded them well. Loved and cherished as a family member, his absence left a gaping wound in their hearts.



This year, I want to improve my somewhat lacking short story skills. Expressing my thoughts precisely and recreating the vivid imagery in my mind can pose a challenge when I have to restrict myself to a limited word count.

My husband has often challenged me to try my hand at the [Reader's Digest one hundred word story competition](#), but I've always dreaded the idea. One hundred words? That's all I have to convey an entire story in? It sounded painful, but I admit over time the idea has grown on me.

The toughest part of the assignment was coming up with a topic that could be written about in a few sentences. I landed on *Man's Best Friend*. The idea was to convey adopting a dog, and the issues that come with it, depending on the previous owners.

Is it contest worthy? Not a clue, but I was delighted to finish my first attempt and have one word to spare. The ending was terrible and required rewriting. Several times. I was over by two words. Pulled out the thesaurus, reworked a couple of sentences, and then decided I wanted to convey the entire life of the dog.

As I continued to play, I found more words I could eliminate and was stunned to come in at a meager eighty-seven words, leaving me space to enhance the story. It was challenging, but

in a good way.

If you're curious what the first version looked like, you can check it out below:

*He wasn't much to look at the first time they saw him with spindly legs and oversized paws. Curled on a blanket in the back of a concrete cage, brown eyes stared uncertainly until soft words lured him out, and took him home. Eager to please, he understood the silent hand signals with ease, and responded to each new whistled command. Learned to run in stride, undistracted, on the beach for miles, lean body stretched out urging his humans forward. No longer scared, he guarded them. A loyal companion, loved and cherished as a family member, he was finally home.*

*First Version*

If you'd like to submit an idea for a short story, drop a comment or [email](#). I can't promise when I'll tackle it, but I enjoy being given topics to work with.

*The Reluctant Author*