



Sample Line Edit

“Working with Blue Pen has been one of best, if not the single best, experiences I have had involved with writing so far. I have huge struggles with impostor syndrome. The positive comments from strangers who are professionals in the field were amazing to me. Additionally, it is clear to me that every time I go through the process I will learn things that will help make me just a little bit better with my writing itself.”

— Steven D. Kleckner

ECHO

Over the years, I've realized that you never really stop being a soldier. The way I perceive situations, the way I approach challenges differ from how a lifetime civilian would. It can be frustrating, because one path might seem so clear to me, while those around me are intent on a path that is incomprehensible to me.

And then there are deeper, more troubling burdens that come from having been a soldier. I don't always notice the lurking scars within. Then, one day, I'm at work, focusing on the task in front of me, and without warning, someone will hurl a heavy wooden pallet onto the floor behind me. I feel the impact reverberate through my chest as the pallet rebounds off the concrete

Commented [C1]: Steven,

I loved having the opportunity to work on your short story, especially given the context. It seems Echo has been a true blessing.

For reference, the majority of my edits include:

- Breaking up long paragraphs for easier reading
- Achieving concise but effective sentences
- Utilizing more contractions
- Reducing filter words
- Reducing the use of *is* and *was*, which ensures you're showing rather than telling
- Adding additional clarity when needed and filling in the gaps

Deleted: ha

Commented [C2]: Contractions are typically encouraged for a smoother read.

Deleted: s

Deleted: the right

Deleted: can

Commented [C3]: No comma is needed before **while** when you mean “during the same time.”

A comma *is* needed before **while** when you mean “whereas” or “although,” which is the case here.

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floor. Before I know what's happening, I'm back there, in the dark desert night. Rockets explode all around me. The strain in my chest is nearly unbearable. In some ways, the flashback is almost worse than what happened in the past. The desperate urge to do something consumes me. I want to react. To seek safety or fight. But there's nothing I can do. There's nothing there to hide from or to fight against.

For many years, my wife was my main source of support during this struggle. I now understand that, in a different way, it must have been as painful for her as it's been for me. To watch me fight against things she couldn't see or truly understand—it must have been torture. But she never gave up. It was her idea to look into getting a dog for emotional support.

We'd had dogs before, but it had been several years since the last one, who had been born without eyes. Her problems became more severe, and after only a few years, I had to have her put to sleep. She, like every dog we'd had before, was a family dog. We had these dogs when the kids were still in school and back at home, so they were everybody's responsibility. This time, it would be different. The kids had moved out, and my wife is a paramedic who works nights and irregular shifts. It would be up to me to take the dog for walks—more than once per day—no matter how I was feeling. It would be my responsibility to take the dog to the vet on time for its shots. I would make sure the city dog license was up to date. I would ensure there was always plenty of dog food. For several days, I thought about it, and finally concluded that I was up for it. The dog's health, training, and everything else would be solely my responsibility. My wife's involvement would start and stop with treats and toys.

After deciding to get a dog, we had to determine what we were looking for. A puppy wouldn't have been the ideal choice for us as our schedules would've made it difficult to be there as much as the puppy would need. We agreed that we needed an adult dog. My wife's family

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Deleted: to ...ight. And ...ut there i...s nothing I can do. There' i... nothing there to hide from o. O (... [2])

Commented [C5]: Instead of phrasing this as though she helped you for years and doesn't anymore, let's reframe to suggest she was the main source of support for a long time. I'm making this change because the previous paragraphs are written in present tense, which suggests that you still struggle today, and I'm sure your wife still offers some support.

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Deleted: had been helping me with...thishe...struggle with my past for many years... I now understand now ...hat, in a different way, it must have been as painful for her as it' ha... been for me. To watch me fight against things she coul (... [3])

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Commented [C6]: This addition is to smooth the transition here.

Deleted: Then came a day when she had the ...dea to get me (... [4])

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Deleted: . Our previous dog... who had been born without eyes. and h...Her problems became more severe, and a. only a few years, I had to have her put to sleep. She, like every dog we'd had before, was a family dog. We'd...had these dogs when the kids were still in school and back at home, so they were sort of ...verybody's responsibility. This time, I knew ...t would be different. The kids had moved and my wife is a paramedic who works nights and irregular shifts. It would not be workable for her to be out walking the dog when she might get called in to work. I had to think about it for a while. ...It would be up to me to take the dog walks—...ore than once per day—...o matter how I was feeling. It would ge ...e up to me ...y responsibility to take the dog to the vet on time for all ...ts shots. I would take the responsibility to ...ake sure that ...he city dog license was up to date. I would need to i...nsure there was always plenty of dog food for the dog... For several days, I thought about it,...and finally concluded that I was up for it. The dog's health, its ...raining, and everything else,... would be solely my responsibility. My wife's involvement in the needs of the dog ... (... [5])

Commented [C8]: I like this line.

Deleted: So, the decision being made that...ter deciding to get we were getting...a dog:... we had to decide...etermine what we were looking for. A puppy would not be...ouldn't have been the an... ideal choice for us as our schedules would' ha...e made it difficult to be there as much as it ...he puppy would need. We agreed that we needed an adult dog. A medium or larger size dog seemed best (... [6])

Commented [C9]: This is covered below.

raised German shepherds when she was a child. She's often said that her first babysitter was a German shepherd. Apparently, that particular dog had established limits for how far she was allowed to go, and if she tried to crawl too far away, the dog would drag her back by her diaper. Needless to say, my wife prefers larger dogs. I'm a tall, long-legged man, and I thought it would be best if the dog did not have to struggle to keep up with my strides when we walked. So, a large dog it was.

Breed was not important to us. Where the dog came from was. We did not want to buy a dog from some puppy farm. We wanted to adopt a dog with a calm demeanor that needed a good home. It was a given that a calm dog would be the best candidate for an emotional support animal, and so we decided we were looking for a dog with a quiet, attentive nature, who could be a calming presence and provide an alternative point of focus than the emotions warring inside me. That dog, with whom I would build a bond with, would ideally be able to ease my anxiety, support me, and bring me back from a panic attack. It sounded like just what I needed.

We started browsing shelters online, then went to an ASPCA shelter about an hour from home. We selected that one because it was severely overcrowded. Not only would this give us a larger group of dogs to choose from, but this shelter was in desperate need of people to adopt dogs. My wife called in advance and explained what we were looking for to the woman who ran the shelter. In retrospect, I realize it was the first time in my life I'd ever gotten a dog the right way. The shelter behaved as though I were adopting a child. With our criteria in mind, they identified several dogs they thought would suit our needs, with one specific dog they thought was the best choice.

The shelter was located on the southern edge of a small town, the sort that's typical in southwest Iowa. We pulled into a gravel parking lot that bordered a large, open area surrounded

Commented [C10]: When it comes to breed and animal names, only the proper noun portion should be capped (per the Chicago Manual of Style and Merriam-Webster).

Other examples: Alaskan malamute, American pit bull terrier, Rocky Mountain sheep.

Deleted: had ...aised German sS ... [7]

Deleted: ha... often said that her first babysitter was ... [8]

Deleted: the baby...he was allowed to go, and if she tried to crawl too far away, the dog would drag her back by her diaper. So ... [9]

Deleted: red... larger dogs. I a...m a tall, long-legged man, and [10]

Deleted: What was important was that...Ww... did not want to buy a dog from some puppy farm. We wanted to adopt a dog with a calm demeanor that needed somebody... good home. It was a given that alt should be a...calm dog that could become...ould be the best candidate for an emotional support animal, and so w for me. Our thinking was if the... decided we were looking for a dog had ...ith a quiet, attentive nature, who could be a calming presence and provide an alternative point of focus would allow me to focus on that peace ...rather ...han the emotions warring me. That such a ...og, with whom I would build shared...a bond with, would ideally be able to extend that peace to me and...ase my anxiety, support me, and help ... [11]

Deleted: looking at...rowsing shelters online, then. Looking at their websites and calling several shelters, we...went to an ASPCA shelter about an hour from home. We selected that one because it was severely overcrowded. NWe thought that n...t only would this give us a larger group of dogs to choose from, but that ...his shelter was particularly ... [12]

Commented [C12]: I'm making this change for clarity, considering you guys don't "arrive" at the shelter in the text until after this paragraph. This suggests your wife prepared the staff before you went in to see the dogs in person.

Deleted: talked to...explained what we were looking for to the lady...oman who that...ran the shelter and told her what we were looking for... In retrospect, I realize it was the first time in my life I'd ever gotten a dog the right way. The shelter behaved as though I was ... [13]

Commented [C13]: Use *were* instead of *was* when referring to a hypothetical scenario.

Deleted: -sized...town, t. T ... [14]

Deleted: i... typical to ...n southwest Iowa. When w... pulled into the... gravel parking lot, we saw ... [15]

Commented [C14]: When you can, avoid using filter words, such as *saw*, *heard*, *knew*, etc.

Because this is a first-person narrative, your reader will understand that everything conveyed is something you experienced. There's no need to tell them *that* you saw, only *what* you saw. This is a great way to declutter the text for a smoother read.

by a chain-link fence. Just inside the gate at the front was a modest cinder-block building. A few rows of outdoor kennels were situated between the south side of the building and the fence.

Commented [C15]: Any hyphens added or removed are in accordance with Merriam-Webster.

Inside the fence, dogs ran loose, barking with excitement at the approach of visitors.

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Deleted: of this area ...as a modest sized ...inder ...block building. There were a... few rows of outdoor kennels were situated between the south side of the building and the fence. Inside the fence, dogs ran loose, playing and ...arking with excitement at the approach of visitors. We waited for the lady that ran the shelter to come to the gate to let us in ... [16]

The head of the shelter showed us around, and we looked at more dogs and cats than I

can remember. We were surrounded by dogs vying for attention, but soon, it was time to get

Deleted: She ...he head of the shelter showed us around, and we looked at more dogs—, ...nd cats as well...., ...han I can remember. The entire time w...e were surrounded by dogs all ...ying for attention, but s...on, it was time to get down to business. One by one, I took each of ...he candidates— three lab mixes, a shepherd mix, and a redbone coonhound mix ...out on a leash, just the two of us. We would ...alked across the rocks of ...he gravel parking lot to a grassy area shaded bywith...a few trees. On one side was the road and the other side the parking lot. There were three lab mixes, a shepherd mix, and a redbone coonhound mix. ... [17]

down to business. One by one, I took the candidates—three lab mixes, a shepherd mix, and a

redbone coonhound mix—out on a leash, just the two of us. We walked across the gravel parking

lot to a grassy area shaded by a few trees.

Most of the dogs ignored me. They focused on birds or passing cars. Even when I

kneeled to talk to them, their attention was always elsewhere. This happened with all three labs

Deleted: Their attention was always elsewhere ...ven when I would ...neeed to talk to them, their attention was always elsewhere. This happened with all three of the ...abs and the shepherd as well... But the coonhound was different. When I squatted to talk with ...o her, she sat up on her haunches and put a paw on each of my shoulders to look right into...my eyes. We bonded immediately. It may seem like I was expecting too much from the dogs... but I don't think I was,... What ... was looking for was ... connection, and I found it. I've experienced nothing else like it in my life. In that moment, I knew she was the one, and i. I ... [18]

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Commented [C18]: So beautiful!

that moment, I knew she was the one, and it turned out she knew I was the one as well.

The shelter staff called her Sid. Because they needed to wait for the results of her last test

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to make sure she was free of tapeworms, I couldn't take her home that day. I'd only just met her,

Deleted: they were...calling...d her Sid. Because they needed to wait for the results of her last test to make sure she was free of tapeworms, I could ...o...t bring...ake her home that day. They needed to wait for the results of her last test to make sure she was free of tapeworms... The results were due back the next morning. ...'d only just met her, but il... was very hard for me to walk away and leave her there, even though her test results were due back the next morning. I needed to take her with me. ... [19]

but it was very hard for me to walk away and leave her there, even though her test results were

due back the next morning. Many dogs were loose inside the chain-link fence, but only one

Commented [C19]: This sentiment is covered by the previous sentence.

followed along as my wife and I walked down the sidewalk to our van—Sid. When we reached

the van, I turned to the fence to assure her I was coming back the next day to take her home. She

Deleted: the enclosure of ...he chain-link fence, but only o. O...e followed along as my wife and I walked along...own the sidewalk towards...our van—...id. She followed me to where I had to turn to get in. Instead,...hen we reached the van, I turned to the fence to talk to her. To ...ssure her I was coming back tomorrow ...he next day to bring ...ake her home. She jumped up with both paws on the fence and looked at me with the biggest smile, and ... [20]

jumped up with both paws on the fence and looked at me with the biggest smile, her tail wagging

happily. She knew I was the one and wanted to go with me. Leaving her there, even for just twenty-four hours, broke my heart.

Deleted: My heart was breaking to l...eave...ng her there, even for just twenty-four hours, broke my heart. She knew I was the one, and she needed to go with me. (... [21])

The next day, I was excited beyond belief when I went back to get her. She was ecstatic to see me, hopped into the van without hesitation, and settled on the giant dog bed I'd brought along. My wife had made it by folding an old comforter over, sewing the sides together, and stuffing it with batting. It was an immense, puffy affair that Sid immediately claimed as her own with obvious and adorable satisfaction.

Deleted: the next day ...hen I went back to get her. She was ecstatic to see me, back and ...opped up ...nto the van and settled ... (... [22])

Deleted: large... old comforter over, and...sewing the sides together, and stuffing it with batting. It was an immense, puffy affair that Sid immediately claimed as her own with obvious,...and adorable,...self (... [23])

Commented [C20]: So cute. (... [23])

Having her at my side felt right. Her name, however, was something I felt needed to change. She just wasn't a Sid, I thought it over, considering all the things the shelter had told me about her personality and what I had observed in my short time with her. One thing kept coming back to me: the shelter staff had told me she just wanted to be loved and always wanted to be with people. It made me think of Echo, the nymph, of Greek mythology, who fell in love with the beautiful human Narcissus. But Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection and lay by a pool, staring at it until he wasted away. Echo pined away for Narcissus until all that remained of her was her voice, but she could only repeat the words that someone else had already spoken. All Echo wanted, just like this dog, was love. That was her name. She wasn't Sid. She was Echo, who just wanted love, to give it and receive it.

Commented [C21]: Adding for transition. (... [23])

Deleted: '...id.'...I thought it over for about a day... c. C...nsidering all the things the shelter had told me about her personality and what I had observed in my short time with her,... Oo...e thing kept coming back to me: the shelter staff had told me. It was a comment they made at the shelter:...she just wanted to be loved and always wanted to be with people. It made me think of the Greek myth of the nymph, ...cho, the nymph, of Greek mythology, who fell in love with the beautiful human Narcissus. But Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection and lay by a pool, staring at it until he wasted away. Echo for her part, ...ined away for love of ...arcissus until all that remained of her was her voice. But... but she could only repeat the words that else had already spoken. All she ...cho wanted, just like this dog, was love. That was her name. She wasn't Sid. She was Echo, who just wanted,...love, it (... [24])

It did not take long for Echo to become a part of our household. Naturally, she had some anxiety while acclimating to her new home. During that period, she chewed up anything she could get a hold of, but that didn't last long. Our house is fairly large. She has a dog bed in the computer room near the front entry, and there is another dog bed in the living room that adjoins it. But she doesn't always sleep in the dog beds. Sometimes, she can be found on the couch, especially if someone is sitting there and she wants company. Sometimes, she's in the bed in the

Deleted: her ...cho to become a part of the ...ur household. Naturally, she had someHer...anxiety while acclimating at moving ...o a...er new home. caused a...During that period, during which...she would...chewed up anything she could a hold of, but that did ...o (... [25])

Deleted: where ...ear the front entry is. T... and there is another dog bed in the living room that adjoins it. But she doesn't always sleep in the dog beds. Sometimes, she is...can be found on the couch, especially if someone is sitting there and she wants company. Sometimes, she' i... in the human ... (... [26])

bedroom just off the living room. At night, she likes to sleep in bed with me, but if she isn't ready to go to sleep, she still comes in and sniffs around my face after I lie down. Then, after checking on me and putting me to bed, she goes back to the living room or to eat her food.

Deleted: S...t night, she likes to sleep in the ...ed with me, b. B...t even ...f she isn't ready to go to sleep, when it is for me to go to bed ...he still comes in and sniffs around my face after I lie down. Then, after checking on me and putting me to bed, she goes back to the living room or to eat her food. She just needs to check on me and put me to be (... [27])

Every time I come home, she's sitting there waiting, always just as excited as the time before. Even though she sits properly as she's learned to do, her excitement still shows in her front feet, which dance up and down as she wiggles in place. She knows that as soon as I'm home, we're going for a walk. The outdoors and walks are Echo's favorite things.

Deleted: in the door of the hous...omec... she i...s sitting there waiting, always just as excited as the time before. She is so excited that, e...ven though she is ...itting... properly she ha...s learned to do, her excitement still shows in her feet show her excitement... which dancing... up and down as she wiggles in place. She knows that as soon as I a...m home, we wi...ll be ...e going for a walk. The outdoors and going for (... [28])

It's been five and a half years since I adopted Echo. She is as much a part of me as my own arm. When I'm struggling, she knows, and she tries her best to make me feel better. Just witnessing her concern as she sniffs at me, trying to determine what's wrong, is enough to pull my attention away from my inner turmoil. When my chest feels tight and my heart tries to pound its way to the surface, Echo soothes me. With my palms flat against her ribs, I focus on her strong, steady heartbeat. It's like her heart pulls mine into a slower, calmer rhythm. Her long ears are velvet-soft, and it's soothing just to touch them. Her red-brown eyes that match her soft coat are intelligent and aware. She stares at me as if can see inside of me. Echo gets it. She knows I struggle, and she makes me stronger.

Deleted: a... struggling, she knows, and she tries her best to make me feel better. I can see how concerned she is for me. Seeing her (... [29])

Deleted: ing... at me, and ...rying to find ...etermine what i...s wrong, is enough to start ...ulling...my attention away from my internal ...nner turmoil. When my chest feels tight and my heart is trying...ries to pound its way to the surface, Echo... soothes me. With my palms flat against her ribs, I focus on can feel ...er strong, steady heartbeat through my palms on her ribs... It i...s like her heart is ...ulling (... [30])

Moved (insertion) [1]

Deleted: ...oft, and it i...s soothing just to touch them. Her red-brown eyes that match her soft coat are so ...ntelligent and aware. She stares at me as if can see's looking (... [31])

There is no question—I did not save Echo. Echo saved me. She keeps saving me every day.

Moved up [1]: Her long ears are velvet soft and it is soothing just to touch them.

Deleted: Without a doubt...here is no question—, ... did not save Echo. She (... [32])

Commented [C22]: Your relationship with Echo is really touching. So glad you found each other.