

## Proud to Be: Writing by American Warriors, Volume Two

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*The wide variety of personal accounts creates a gritty, deeply emotional collection of war stories.*

*Proud to Be: Writing by American Warriors, Volume Two* is an inspiring anthology of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and photographs offering a unique glimpse into the harsh realities of war from writers with a rare perspective. Particularly inspiring are the pieces written by veterans or by those still on active duty.

The writers' experiences span multiple conflicts, including World War II, the Korean War, and conflicts in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bosnia, and they convey the emotions involved with serving in the military, appealing to all senses as they describe the way war sounds (a balloon popping at a child's birthday party that triggers PTSD), smells (the rancid stench of spoiled food and dog corpses), feels (the unbearable December chill in Germany), tastes (the dusty air), and looks ("It's true that my eyes have seen things in combat that my brain is incapable of forgetting").

Though there are no formal divisions in the text that might create more organization overall (by content or war era), the result creates interesting contrasts when the stories are offered side by side, thus emphasizing how war experiences vary. For example, a firsthand account is given by Nancy Lacore, a Navy Reserves captain in Afghanistan, who talks about "The Softer Side of War." Her job involved preparing events, such as a dinner hosted by General Allen that included presentations of night operation strategies, followed by a discussion and question-and-answer period—a format that will be familiar to many American business people. Yet, she also describes the pain of being away from her three young children. This is followed by a poem in which Jonathan Travelstead, a former member of the Air Force National Guard, describes the "Mercedes and Isuzus bulldozed off the shoulder of the six-lane highway, hunkered like black abscesses in rising sand," that he saw during his deployment in '91, when he volunteered for a tour in the Middle East to escape the pain of watching his mother die of lung cancer. In another piece, Michele A. Boyle writes about her husband, Michael, who has suffered from PTSD since his service in Vietnam. Her story appears following an "as told to" piece where Michele shares her husband's own reflections. Reading these pieces alongside each other also highlights how the warriors take their home lives with them to the war, and then bring the war home with them when their tours of duty are over.

The eighty-seven essays, poems, photographs, and short stories depict war through the eyes of people with firsthand knowledge, and the result is a gritty, personal, and deeply emotional account of why they are proud to be American warriors.

MARIA SIANO (Spring 2014)

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