

Introduction: Creative Prose

The Power of Story

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When I came home from the war, when once again being a part of the civilian world confused and frustrated me, I wrote. I used it to tell others where I had been and what I had been doing, and what this very small minority of Americans had been doing on their behalf. But mostly I did it for myself. Writing helped me make sense of who I had been and who I had become. Putting words to paper gave purchase to the fragments and shards of emotions and ideas scattered in my mind. And writing about these experiences—both my own and others'—has kept me connected to fellow members of this tribe.

In these pages we see the breadth of the military experience, from the chaos, fear, and euphoria of basic training to the quiet, private struggles with memories revisited in flashbacks and nightmares. This is a collection of fine, powerful and provocative writing, spanning forty years of peace and combat, humor, and horror. You'll find a young man sweating out the draft with a young woman caught up in the military's "witch hunts" for homosexuals; a soldier dreaming of the bicycle that will bring her relief from the stress and monotony of war with a Marine pulling singed family photos from shredded uniforms of the dead. These stories are important—for those who have worn the uniform and those who haven't—and I am honored to have played a small role in helping these veterans tell them.

In deciding which piece should begin this section, the choice was clear: Jonathon Travis Rape served two tours in Iraq as an Army military policeman with the 101st Airborne and was awarded a Bronze Star with Valor. Here he tells about a hard-fought football game between two groups of American soldiers, a

brief break from the viciousness just beyond the cement walls and razor wire, the war to which they would all return within hours. Rape came home, separated from the Army and wrote this story. He went to Afghanistan as a civilian contractor in 2009 and was killed by a roadside bomb. In reading his words we are reminded of the great power our stories have to reach others, even after death.