

In Their Boots: Poems Inspired by Soldiers and Their Loved Ones - Book One: Soldiers is a powerful, poignant and enlightening look into the heart and soul of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is a unique, marvelous collection.

"In Their Boots: Poems Inspired by Soldiers and Their Loved Ones"
Book One: Soldiers

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In Their Boots:

Poems Inspired by Soldiers and Their Loved Ones

Book One:
The Soldiers

G. Mark LaFrancis

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Little Soldier

His BDUs draped over
His shoes
His cap
Sank above
His brows
He clutched an American flag
In his little hand
He stood
So straight, so strong
That morning
When I shipped out

The night before
I read him "The Giving Tree"
And we shared ice cream
Topped with chocolate goo

On the tarmac
He picked up my hand
My right hand
And kissed it
As his dimpled
Smile offered
Me courage

The bus pulled up
To take us to the plane
And I knelt
To my little soldier
And I pulled him tight
And felt his little
Heart beat against mine
I rubbed my hand through
His curly hair

I strained not to cry
He reached into his pocket
And there in his hand
Was the plastic sheriff's badge
I gave him so long ago

"This'll protect you, Daddy
Show 'em this."

And there it happened
My son saw me cry
My son loves me so
He gave his best badge

I turn and head
For the bus
My heart torn
Whether to look back
Or not

So I do ... so I do

And my little soldier
Gave me
A sweet salute
And a cute smile
So I saluted back
And smiled
To my little soldier
My heart racing
With utmost fear
I might not see
This little guy
Little soldier
Again

The Bus

Gasoline fumes
Seeped into
The bus
As we rumbled
From the
Baghdad Airport

Frozen in a dark
Womb we rode
My buddies
The Two-Charlie
The 11-C
The mortar guys
All aboard
The bus
For a tour of duty
In Iraq ... all aboard

A chilly breeze
Seeped through
The shaded windows
Shaded, lest "they" see us
"They," the same "they"
who
Have hurt and killed many

The bus
So silent
So strange
For twelve guys
Twelve buddies
We've drunk together
Trained together
Sighed heavily together

And here we are
On the bus
Flak vests weighing heavily
Packs clinking
Rifles tightly gripped
Iraqi music blaring
Over the driver's
Radio
Wanting so much
To look
In each other's eyes.
Fearing we'd see
Feelings
We didn't
Want to see

Jason, Paul, James
Jarvis, Freddy,
Brian, Michael,
Stewart, Antonio,
Glen, Ricky ...
Black and white
We're here
On the bus

In the depths
Of my heart
I pray
Dear Lord
Let us be on
The bus
Home
Too

Ten Seconds

Ten seconds
Off the bus
Just ten seconds
A thin wail
Overhead
The shell misses
Explodes
A football field
Away

We run
Grab gear
Helmets, flak vests
Then fly to
Mortar positions
The wail returns
Closer now

We jump
Behind the bunker
The ground shakes
The noise pounds
Our ears
Just ten seconds
Off the bus

That Day

Her kiss was warm
Please let it last
Forever ... please

The smoothness of her
Skin against mine
Was like powder
So fresh, so fine

My wife, my friend
Embraced me
With her love
With her power

Two days ago
We exchanged vows
And now I'm headed back
To Iraq

*My eyes glistened
With tears
I knew he didn't
Want to leave me
He didn't want
To return to Iraq
Yet he did
Because his buddies were
there
His mission was there
Part of his heart was there*

"I love you, Lindsay,"
I whispered
"And when I return
We'll have such a great party
And make such beautiful
babies

I love you, Lindsay,"
I whispered just two days after
our wedding
Just one day before I had to
return
To Iraq

*My heart almost jumped
From me to him
My smile almost melted
But I forced it not to
My arms wrapped
Around Dustin
Tight
Oh, so tight*

And I grabbed my bag

And he grabbed his bag

And I stepped onto the bus

And he stepped onto the bus

And I disappeared

*And he disappeared
And I wanted to run after the
bus
I wanted to stop it in its path
Force him not to leave
Force him to be with me
But I didn't
Instead, I stood and watched
Half my heart on that bus
Half my heart with me
All of my soul*

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*With Dustin
All of it
I saved none for me*

I swallowed hard

I swallowed hard

And the bus pulled out
Sending me to another
fourteen months
In Iraq
I sat frozen wanting so much
To look back
To my beautiful Lindsay
My wife, my friend, my
purpose in life
But I didn't

*I stood frozen wanting him
To look back
My handsome, my strong
Dustin
My husband, my friend, my
purpose in life
But he didn't*

I sat hopeful
I'd be on this bus home

And there it was
A broken thread
Me heading back to Iraq
Her standing in the parking
lot

Me hoping I'll never forget
Her smells; her kisses

*And there it was
A broken thread
Him heading back to Iraq
Him in the bus, moving from
me
Me hoping I'll never forget his
smells
His kisses
His love*

I sat straight
I sat tense
I looked back

*I looked up
To see his eyes
Riveted on mine
And we "talked"
Of strength,
Hope
Love*

And I
felt her
Say to me
You are my love
Now and forever
As I looked back
To see her
One last time
That night

My Journey

I was going to post this on the
web
You know, as a video
For all to see
I was going to call it My
Journey
Maybe it could be a hit
On You Tube
And Good Morning America
And CNN

But here
In Anbar Province
My camera saw too much
Our convoy was hit
And hit hard
By a roadside bomb
Six of us died
Not stuff for You Tube, Good
Morning America, CNN
And later that week
A young Iraqi boy was caught
In a firefight
His arm almost burned off
I shut off my camera
And turned on my emotions

We had a cool drink

From a sweet, old woman
Who offered us what little fresh
water she had
We gave her a flashlight, some
MREs and our smiles.
She smiled back

I kept my camera off
She was too sweet and nice
To be part of a video

We rode into a tight-knit
village
We knew insurgents were there
But people were too afraid
I kept my camera off
No reason to compound their
fear

So I turned the camera
On myself
This is my journey
I told the camera
This is where it all begins
And may end
I might not be back
So please remember me
So please don't let my journey
End here

Fear

When I was ten
I feared Bubba Johnson
He had fifteen pounds on me
And was as mean as a rattler
And I stayed awake
Thinking of ways
To avoid him
To attack him
To survive him

Now look where I am
There are hundreds of
Bubba Johnsons
And fear eats at me
Every second
Of every hour
Of every day
And I see death
And I smell death
And I walk by death
And I survive death

And fear eats at me
Every second
Of every hour
Of every day
It's hard to believe

I have a future
Beyond this
Fear

To marry
To have a son
To cut grass
To drive a little too fast
Up Highway 55
To fish for bass
To watch the Saints
On television
To shout "Amen"
In church
To sit quietly
In the huntin' stand
To listen to
The fish jump
In the lake
To not have
A day
Of fear

But here
Fear eats at me
Every second
Of every hour
Of every day

Giraffe

Bring me a giraffe
Daddy
No, not a real giraffe
She giggled.
You know

Sandstorms
Insects
Scorching heat
Emaciated dogs
Sad faces
Weary eyes
No giraffes.

IEDs
Body armor
Patrols
No giraffes.

Hungry children
No schools

No medicine
No toilets
No giraffes.

I wish I could
See with
A five-year-old's eyes
Beyond war
Beyond fear
And see
The giraffes

But Angel
I cannot
Bring you
A giraffe
I pray
I can
Bring you
Your daddy
Back home

Give Me Strength

I'll never know why
The truck we passed
That moment, that hour
That day
Decided
We were to die

That truck
Instead
Slammed into
A truck behind
A truck of clerical
workers
Mostly ladies

*Give me strength, Lord
As I look back*

The explosion
So powerful
So deadly
So sinister

*Give me strength, Lord
As I look back*

You do not want me
To tell you
What I saw
I do not want to tell
Either
And there at that
moment
Lives were gone
Sweet lives

Mothers, sisters,
Granddaughters
Just people
Like me
Like you
You do not want me
To tell you
What I saw

*Give me strength, Lord
As I look back
Give me strength, Lord
As I open my eyes
And see
What a twenty-year-old
Young man
From Mississippi
Was never meant
To see
Give me strength*

So the days
Came and went
As we rode
The same roads
Where our friends
Lost their lives
Constant was our fear
Our vigilance
Our sadness at our loss
Our hope
To go home

*Give me strength
Lord
Dear Lord,
Give me strength*

Sadness

This day	Unnoticed
Sadness	
The most	Here
overwhelming	On the ground
Sadness	Blood
The deepest pain	Runs thick
of	Death
Sadness	Is
The harshest	Here
Sadness	At our feet
Ate us	In our eyes
Consumed us	The old men
Left us	The children
Speechless	The women
	All dead
As we stood	All dead
In the market	
In Baghdad	Tears trickle
I gasped for	Behind my sunglasses
breath	I'm a Marine
So many, so	I'm tough
quickly	I'm solid
Lost their lives	Yet
	I weep
Overhead	For them
Blue skies	For me
And fluffy white	For us
clouds	All
Float	

The Kiss

A dark night
In Fallujah
Fear gripped us
Insurgents
All around
Rifle at ready
Mind focused
Life on the edge
The razor's edge
Cut or be cut

We slip into
A home
Actually a hovel
Two, no three
Squeezed into
A corner

And then I see her
Her dark eyes
Enveloping mine
Her parents
Fearing
She beckons with
A baby finger
She smiles
A baby smile

I smile as I walk
Closer to her
A candle
Illuminates
Her gem-like eyes
Her sparkling eyes

Her eager face
Her finger
Beckons
Me further
And I give in
Silently, eagerly, hopefully

Shots burst outside
But inside
There is
A silence
Of deep dread

I lean to her
But she
Doesn't speak
No
She kisses
Me
On the cheek
And smiles

I force back tears
I'm a soldier

I want to protect
Her and her family
But at that moment
I admit I love her
This little girl
Who kissed me
On the cheek
Amid the terror
Of her life

The Ground Shook

The fourth day
In Iraq
Was normal
So-so chow
Searing heat
Good talk
With buddies

Day five
Changed
Everything
On day five
The ground shook

We stood guard
Just outside
The Green Zone
Rifles ready
Eyes watchful

Then it happened
The ground shook
They said a van
Filled with explosives
Erupted ... exploded

Small pieces
Of debris
Flew everywhere
Piercing my face

Cutting my hand
Yet we stood
Our ground
Ready to shoot
The infidel
Who did this

Iraqis fell
In pain and agony
As the explosion
Ripped through
Their market

I raced to a woman
Oh, God, she was hurt
But she stopped my hand
Pointing to
Another, younger, hurt soul

Children screamed
And old men wept
And darkness crept
Over the marketplace
That day
The ground shook

On day four
I learned I wasn't
In Mississippi anymore
I wasn't in
Reality anymore

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