

# Warrior Dad Stories

## Companion Guide



**For every warrior, parent, and dreamer who has walked the line between sacrifice and love.**

**May these reflections help you see the strength in your own story.**

# How to Use This Guide

Welcome to the heart of Warrior Dad. Thank you for picking up this companion guide to Warrior Dad. This guide is meant to give you something the main book could not: a deeper look at the inspiration, the lessons, and the heart that lives behind the words. Where the book tells the story, this guide pauses to reflect.

I created my company, Warrior Dad Stories, with a simple but profound mission: to craft powerful stories rooted in military life, fatherhood, and personal resilience, stories that inspire and guide the next generation of warriors, parents, and leaders.

Every ode in Warrior Dad carries pieces of that mission, each one growing from moments I lived. In these pages, you'll find the haikus that were set aside along the way — the "lost verses" that helped inspire the odes in Warrior Dad. You'll also find stories behind the odes: small windows into the moments, emotions, and memories that gave them life.

Some reflections are about the grit of combat, others about the grace of being a father, but all are about the humanity we carry through service and beyond.

This companion reflects some of the powerful moments that have shaped my journey, the battles fought in uniform, the quiet lessons of fatherhood, and the tests of resilience that demanded more than I thought I had to give. These are the moments that gave life to Warrior Dad.

As you read, my hope is that you'll not only glimpse the path I walked but also find echoes of your own journey, reminders that resilience, love, and memory live in us all. So, take your time here. Linger on the verses that stir something inside you. Carry the reflections forward.

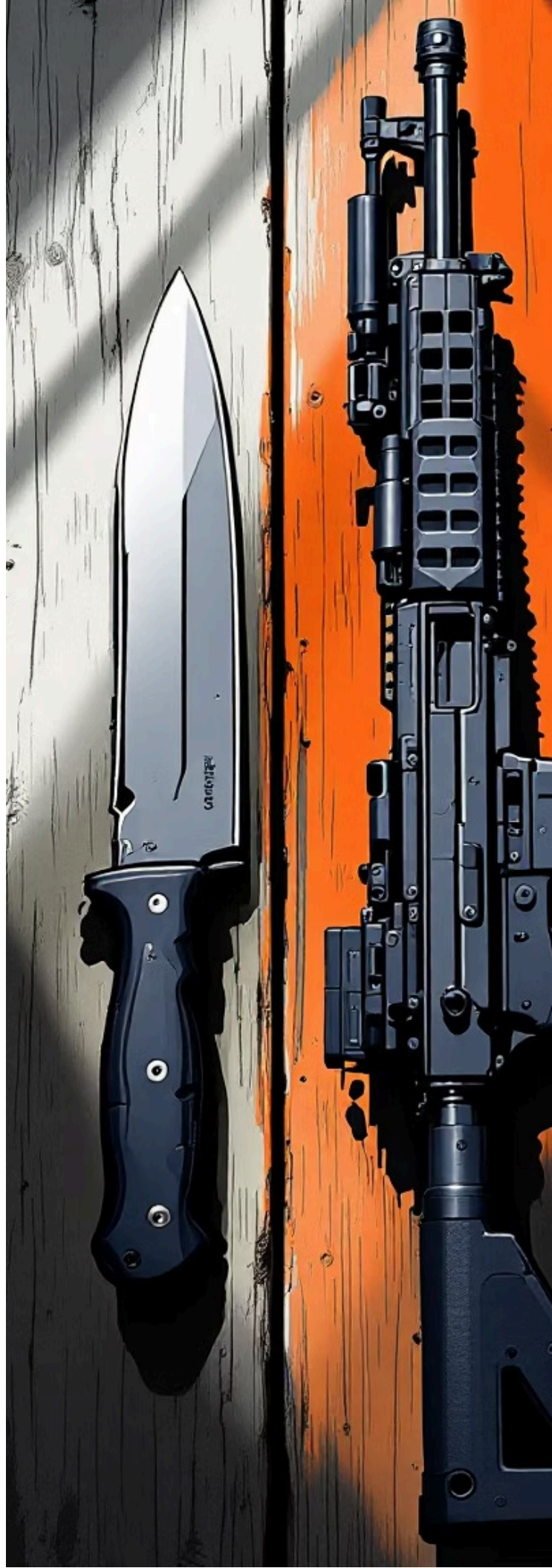
And, above all, know that these stories, though born of my path, are meant to ignite something in yours.

Welcome to the story behind the story.

— **TJ Baird (Warrior Dad)** Founder, Warrior Dad Stories  
Disabled, Veteran-Owned Business

## Warrior Dad: The Lost Haikus

These haikus inspired the Warrior Dad odes. Each verse reflects the raw edge of preparation, the weight of responsibility, and the quiet resolve of a warrior before the storm.



# The Lost Haikus

## The Blade and the Gun

*Steel blade, rifle near,  
tools of war rest side by  
side,  
silent, sharp, and sure.*

**Reflection:** Tools of war are quiet until a warrior's hand gives them purpose.

Odes Inspired: Twilight Before Battle, Edge and the Barrel, Ritual of Readiness, and A Warrior's Hands

## The Weight of Fire

*Magazines stacked tight,  
each round a whispered  
promise,  
death waits in the dark.*

**Reflection:** The calm before the fight always carries its own weight and responsibility.

Odes Inspired: Edge and Barrel and the Ritual of Readiness

## Armor and Grit

*Plates pressed to his  
chest,  
heavy like the lives they  
save,  
each crack tells a tale.*

**Reflection:** Every crack, every dent, is a memory of survival and lost teammates.

Odes Inspired: The Weight He Bears

## The Eyes of Night

*Lenses pierce the void,  
green-lit ghosts stalk  
through the black,  
shadows fear the hunt.*

**Reflection:** A night movement while deployed- We Own the Night.

Odes Inspired: Moonlight Over Patrol

## A Warrior's Hands

*Gloves worn through the  
years,  
trigger fingers feel like  
steel,  
calloused, quick, and cold.*

**Reflection:** Hands carry the scars of war.

Odes Inspired: A Warrior's Hands

## Strapped for the Fight

*Sling tight on his chest,  
rifle raised without a  
thought,  
muscle knows the weight.*

**Reflection:** Repetition turns survival into instinct- a matter of life or death.

Odes Inspired: Muscle Memory, Triumph in the Face of Adversity

# More Lost Haikus

## The Radio's Pulse

*Static hums to life,  
words cut through the desert wind,  
orders guide the storm.*

**Reflection:** In the silence, the smallest sound can change everything.

Odes Inspired: Voice in the Storm

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## The Final Check

*Packs weighed down with war,  
optic clean, bolt smooth as glass,  
one breath, then he moves.*

**Reflection:** The last check is more ritual than routine.

Odes Inspired: The Final Check

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## The Last Loadout

*One last glance inside,  
maps, letters, and one lone charm,  
hope beneath the steel.*

**Reflection:** Even in war, the smallest tokens carry the heaviest meaning.

Odes Inspired: Ritual of Readiness

## Lethal and Ready

*Loaded, primed, prepared,  
each piece placed with steady hands,  
the hunt soon begins.*

**Reflection:** Readiness is discipline and a burden.

Odes Inspired: Twilight Before Battle, Edge and the Barrel, Ritual of Readiness, Silence Before Fire


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## Eyes of the Hunter

*Steady, cold, and sharp,  
death reflected in his gaze,  
predators don't blink.*

**Reflection:** To hunt is one thing; to be the hunter is another.

Odes Inspired: The Quiet Gaze

 **Closing Note:** Together, these haikus formed the first sparks of Warrior Dad — fragments of memory from deployments etched forever into my story.

# Stories Behind the Odes

Behind every line is a memory. Behind every ode is a story. What follows are the moments that shaped my words, and the reflections that continue to shape my life.



## Ode to the Guardian of Freedom

I joined the Army at the tender age of 17, intending to serve four years before moving on. That plan failed spectacularly; I retired after 32 years, 9 months, and 22 days. Through all those years, two things never changed: the oath I swore to the Constitution and the American flag I served under. The Ode to the Guardian of Freedom is my way of honoring both. It symbolizes not only love of country but also love for the men and women I served beside. I was privileged to serve with the sons and daughters of this Nation, the finest warriors I have ever known. It takes a rare kind of person to volunteer for military life, knowing they may one day have to lay down their life so that others may remain free. To my brothers and sisters-in-arms, you are the best of our Nation. I love you all, and I will remember you...always.



## Ode to a Warrior's Hands

A warrior's hands carry the story of a lifetime of service. Look closely and you'll see it all: the callouses, the scars, the memories etched into skin and bone. Our hands do the work — from training, to combat, to saving lives — and they carry the weight of every moment. When I think back, I remember all the ways my hands served: learning to fire a weapon, mastering my craft, providing buddy aid, reaching out to help others, reaching out to be helped, saluting the flag, and consoling comrades in times of loss. It is our hands that make all the difference. They carry not only our strength, but also our humanity.

# More Stories Behind the Odes

## Ode to the One Who Shook Me Awake

This is the longest ode in *Warrior Dad*, and it carries the most weight in my life. It is rooted in a night I almost did not survive. After five operations in five nights, exhaustion claimed me. Mortars rained down on our FOB, but I never woke up. My buddy finally broke through the chaos, shook me hard, and shouted that we were under attack. I opened my eyes to his voice and the sound of another round striking close. We sprinted to the bunker in little more than shorts, flip-flops, and our kits, waiting for hours until the fire finally stopped. When I returned, I found shrapnel had torn through the roof and shredded my cot; the fragments buried deep in the concrete floor. If not for my friend, I would not have lived to write this book. I have been on 22 years of borrowed time, and this ode is my way of remembering that gift.

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## Ode to Silence Before Fire

Every mission carried with it a moment of silence before fire. In that breath, I always felt the same weight: a trepidation that this operation could be my last. In those quiet moments, my thoughts turned to family — especially my daughter, for whom this book is written. She was young, and knew little of the dangers I faced, but she was always with me in spirit. Her image anchored me before I stepped into the unknown. Child of mine, you are my anchor and my shining light. The Dad-man loves you.

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## Odes to the Environment

Scattered throughout *Warrior Dad* are odes to the land itself — deserts, mountains, rivers, and skies. These were born from the long miles I walked across different terrains, often under an unrelenting sun or beneath star-filled skies. The Middle East is harsh, yet beautiful. I will never forget watching the sun rise and fall over its vast deserts and jagged mountains, or lying on my back at night, staring at the Milky Way, wondering if my daughter was also looking up and thinking of me. These odes are not only about the ground beneath my boots, but about the sense of awe and connection that endures, even in combat.

# Stories of Love and Distance



## Ode to My Guiding Star

My daughter has always been the shining light in my life. This ode was one of the hardest to write because I had to stop often to wipe tears from my eyes. Not only does it reflect her guiding presence while I was deployed, but it also speaks to the way her love shaped my recovery. One moment stands out. She was six years old, standing in front of me with tears in her eyes, saying, "Dad, you're too scary. I want to go back home to Texas." In that moment, I felt shock, guilt, and heartbreak all at once. I dropped to my knees, a 6'4, 230-pound man undone by the truth in my daughter's words. That moment has echoed in my mind ever since, and it set me on the path of becoming a better version of myself. She has always been, and will always be, the light that guides me forward.

## Ode to the Distance Between Us

I divorced my first wife when my daughter was very young. For years, distance and time separated us — but love never did. We always found our way back to each other. This ode reflects the ache of separation and the joy of reconnection. I treasured her letters, phone calls, and summer visits. No matter the miles, she remained close in my heart. The distance never defined us — only the love did.

# Closing Reflection

As this companion comes to an end, I want to say thank you — not only for reading these words, but for taking the time to walk through the stories that shaped them. Writing Warrior Dad and this guide has been a journey of reflection, healing, and gratitude. Each haiku, ode, and memory came from real moments that tested and defined me. Some were born in the dust and noise of deployment, others in the quiet weight of fatherhood, but all of them reminded me of what truly matters — **faith, family, service, and love.**

If these reflections have stirred something in you, I hope they've helped you pause and look within your own story. We all carry moments that change us, challenge us, and remind us of who we are meant to be. Thank you for sharing this space with me and for giving these stories a place to live beyond the page.

— **TJ Baird (Warrior Dad)**

Founder, Warrior Dad Stories

Disabled, Veteran-Owned Business



# Call to Connection

If these words spoke to you, I'd love to hear from you. Warrior Dad Stories exists to connect people through lived experience — those who serve, those who support, and those who strive to live with purpose every day.

You can reach me directly at [warriordadstories.com](http://warriordadstories.com), or connect on social media to follow upcoming projects, speaking events, and future releases.

If this companion or Warrior Dad moved you, please share it with someone who might need to hear its message. Stories only grow stronger when they are shared.

**Stories with soul.**

**Leadership with purpose.**

**Legacy without limits.**

— TJ