
MIZZOU

The magazine of
the Mizzou Alumni Association

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Around the Columns

Valor and verses

"They said you are a spear. So I was a spear.

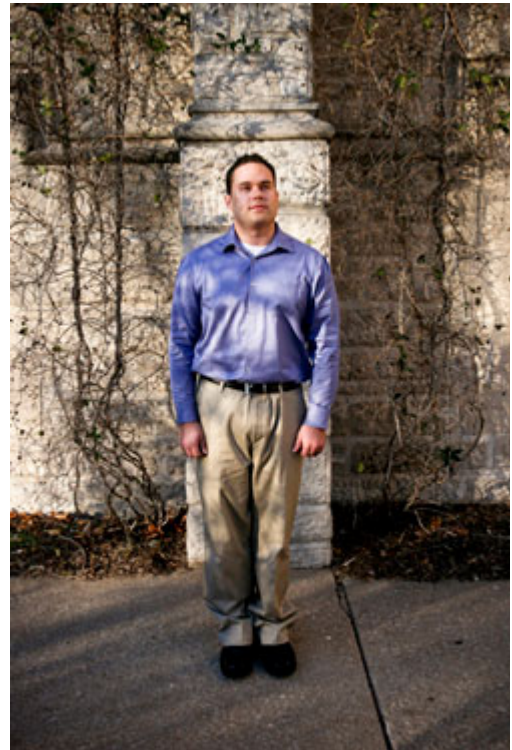
I walked around Iraq upright and tall, but the wind blew and I began to lean.

I leaned into a man, who leaned into a child, who leaned into a city."

Thus begins Gerardo "Tony" Mena's poem "So I was a coffin," an emotional account of his experience as a highly decorated Navy medical corpsman serving with the Marines in Iraq. The piece, which includes heartrending lyrics about witnessing a friend's death, won first prize in the 2010 war poetry contest hosted by the literary website, Winning Writers. It also landed him in Best New Poets 2011 by the University of Virginia's Meridian.

"When I first came back [from Iraq], everything was emotionally buried," says Mena of writing as therapy. "I saw a lot of bad stuff, and I found it would come out in different avenues of my life. Writing helped me address those issues in different lights."

Mena, a senior secondary education major from Kansas City, Mo., says he had never known another war poet until he returned stateside and met the famed Iraq lyricist Brian Turner. Now Mena has branched out into writing songs and essays. His work has appeared in the Raleigh Review, Spillway



Gerardo Mena writes poems about his time in Iraq. Photo by Nicholas Benner

Magazine and Diagram.

“In the end, my goal is to inspire,” Mena says. “Like Brian Turner did for me, I want to do for other vets.”

More: Click on the image below to hear Mena's poem, or visit gerardomena.com.

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Last updated: Feb. 15, 2013