

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

T★A★P★S[®]

FALL 2017

FOR SUPPORTERS OF TAPS



TABLE OF
Contents

help

- 16 Dare to Share
By Stephanie Frogge, MTS
Choose what you want to share from your story of loss and healing.
- 28 Grade Schoolers and Military Loss
By Gloria Horsley, Ph.D.
Support your child and get help from his or her learning community.
- 30 Beyond the Burst of Support
By Shauna Springer, Ph.D.
Find community long after the cards and casseroles stop coming.

hope

- 6 Choosing Joy
By Carlene Cross
Use these seven principles to find happiness again.
- 10 Showing Up for Yourself
By Emily Muñoz, Nichole Burkowski
Invest in yourself and the grief journey.
- 11 You Deserve to Heal
By Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.
Declare your right to find healing.
- 14 The News that Changes Everything
By Wendy Taylor
Let love and light into the moments of darkness.
- 34 The Fight to Find My Inner Warrior
By Sharon Forbes
Be your best self and part of your loved one's living legacy.

healing

- 8 The Journey Home
By Capt. Nathaniel Lee
Rediscover the power of connection with others who understand.
- 26 Strong Footing Again
By Laurie Copmann
Branch out and find some toehold on the steepest path.
- 32 A Stillness Among the Trees
By Abi Ruth Martin
Share. Respect. Be in the moment. And find your direction.

departments

- 4 From the Founder
- 5 Letters to TAPS
- 23 Share the Journey
Join the TAPS family for events in 2018.
- 24 A Family Gathering
TAPS comes together for the ninth National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar.
- 38 Spotlight on Service
Jarrett Pohle stretches the financial donation by also giving his time.



friends of TAPS

- 12 Sponsor's Corner
Find strength together as a TAPS family.
- 18 Big Help, Big Heart
A little support can make a big impact. Sponsorships are available.
- 19 10th Annual TAPS Honor Guard Gala
Join Us March 6, 2018.
- 20 Donor Roll
Thank you, TAPS donors.
- 22 Join the Mission
Get involved with everyday ways to show support.
- 37 Be a Hero
Hero Miles make a difference for TAPS families.

Contributors



Nichole Burkowski is an experienced athlete, yogi and health and wellness educator, who serves TAPS as the Program Manager for Health and Wellness and an Inner Warrior Program Coach. She uses powerful movement and purposeful release to help survivors identify life skills, find momentum and rediscover their best selves.



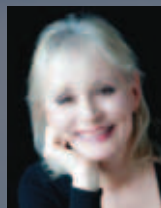
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Laurie Copmann, MS, has degree in Administration and Counseling. As a school principal, she encourages children to be confident individuals and excellent citizens and to strive for high academic achievement. She writes stories to inspire them to reach their potential, with the belief that anything is possible.



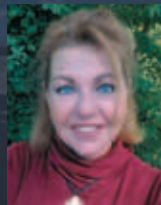
Emily Munoz, Director of TAPS Health and Wellness Initiatives, is living a personal campaign to be the person her late husband Army Capt. Gilbert Muñoz loved - and is using the Inner Warrior program to empower survivors to do the same.



Carlene Cross, MA, is the author of three nonfiction books, including "The Undying West and Fleeing Fundamentalism." Her new book, "The Hero's Journey: A Handbook for Healing," follows her path of forgiveness and acceptance after the death of her son in Afghanistan. Carlene teaches writing classes and gives "Reclaiming Joy" seminars.



Capt. Nathaniel Lee is the son of Theresa Lee and the late Army Capt. Donald Lee, who was killed in an aviation accident in 1997. Nathaniel commissioned into the Air Force in 2013, and is currently stationed in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he lives with his wife, Samantha and their daughter, Victoria.



Sharon Forbes is the surviving fiancée of civilian contractor John McNulty, who died by suicide in 2015. A former nurse, she is now a civilian K9 handler and evaluator and the owner of a working dog training and rehabilitation facility - a dream she and John shared. She is a Peer Mentor and shares the benefits of personal wellness, and canine companions, on the grief journey.



Shauna Springer, PhD, is the Senior Advisor of Suicide Prevention for TAPS. She has particular expertise in attachment processes, trauma recovery, innovative suicide prevention approaches, relationship counseling, peer support program development and Veterans' issues, including post-discharge adjustment and strategies for engaging Veterans in behavioral health care.



Stephanie Frogge, MTS, has more than 30 years' experience in the area of trauma response, victim services administration, victim assistance and activism, writing and speaking extensively on victim assistance and trauma issues. She's played several roles in TAPS since 1996 and is currently a staff associate.



Wendy Taylor is the surviving spouse of Army National Guard Maj. Michael Taylor, who was killed in action in January 2007 when his Black Hawk was shot down by enemy fire. She recently released her book, "Undeclared: A War Widow's Story of Faith and Survival." Find out more at privatesorrow.com.



Gloria Horsley, Ph.D., is founder and president of Open to Hope, past faculty member of the University of Rochester and member of the TAPS speakers bureau and the national advisory council of The Compassionate Friends, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Foundation and Forbes nonprofit council. She blogs for the Huffington Post, MADD and Forbes.



Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and has written many books that help people mourn, including *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (co-authored with TAPS President Bonnie Carroll). Visit centerforloss.com to learn more about grief and to order Dr. Wolfelt's books.

On the Cover

Photo by Angela Powell-Woulfe
TAPS surviving granddaughter Maddie Powell-Woulfe finds joy again in the Autumn.

from the founder

Bonnie Carroll



Dear Friends,

Those who wear the uniform of our nation dedicate themselves to service above self. They find their purpose in defending freedom and fighting oppression around the world.

They stand ready to go when duty calls, often deploying far away from their families. They go where the military takes them, whether into combat or on a peacetime mission.

Some do not return home.

You have played a role in ensuring all those grieving the death of a fallen hero are never alone, never forgotten. You have touched the lives of tens of thousands of precious souls who you will never know but who will forever be grateful to you.

The heart of what we do is give **hope and healing**.

It's finding a way to grow after a traumatic loss. It's not just learning to survive, but to thrive, to become stronger in the broken places.

We know through surveys and research that what we do works. We are connecting survivors with the resources they need. We are transforming helplessness into hope. And we are giving meaning and purpose to the life of someone who richly deserves our care.

Our casework team works miracles every day. With your support we are able to fund emergency financial needs, meet medical expenses not otherwise covered, ensure a free education for all surviving children and facilitate access to benefits and entitlements in complex bureaucracies.

We are creating experiences and making new memories while honoring and remembering our heroes. And we are blessed to have partners who understand just how important this is.

Our mission continues, and the need continues to grow.

Thank you for standing with us, for devoting not only your dollars but also your hearts. Thank you for ensuring all those grieving the loss of a military loved one have a place to call home - a sacred, safe and loving place where they can find hope and healing.

With gratitude,

Bonnie Carroll



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TAPS is here

24 HOURS A DAY / 7 DAYS A WEEK

- ★ The National Military Survivor Helpline
- ★ National Peer Support Network
- ★ Quarterly *TAPS Magazine*
- ★ Connections to Local Grief Support
 - ★ Casework Assistance
 - ★ Education Support Services
 - ★ TAPS Online Community
 - ★ Grief Education Materials
- ★ Survivor Seminars and Retreats
- ★ Good Grief Camps for Children

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Letters *to* TAPS

Finding Hope in the Sadness

I keep all my *TAPS Magazines*. When I get a new edition, I read it slowly because the articles help, but they also remind me that I am in the sad place. Recently, I was listening to a sermon and the minister preached on *liminal*. I started thinking about how I am in a liminal chapter of my life, a place in between. Yesterday, I reread my Winter 2014 *TAPS Magazine* and saw the word *liminal* in Dr. Alan Wolfelt's "Embracing the Sadness of Grief." He says a liminal place of sadness is where we reconstruct our lives. That spoke to where I am right now, and it gave me hope. Thank you, TAPS, for the magazine and articles, the support and the knowledge there's someone (many someones) who care.

Viki Metzger, Virginia
Surviving mother of
Army Reserves
Spc. Bryan Metzger Case

Connecting with Other Men

This was my fourth time attending the Montana Men's Retreat and it turned out to be the best one yet. This was the first time my son RaShawn has attended, although I have been inviting him each year since my first experience there. I was more than overjoyed that he had the time to take off and more importantly agreed to attend. The experience on this retreat was positive and rewarding. This retreat allowed my son and I to not only spend time together, it allowed us to openly talk about our grief journeys and unresolved issues between us.

Jon Ganues, Virginia
Surviving father of
Air Force Airman
1st Class Jon Ganues



Taking Off the Mask

TAPS has been a huge part of my grief journey. When I attend the seminars, I am able to just be myself; I don't feel like I have to wear a mask. Everyone there is going or has gone through what I have and am still facing. I always learn something from the speakers and the groups to help me along my journey. I wouldn't be where I am today without TAPS. Thank you.

Deborah Clevenger, Kansas
Surviving mother of
Navy MM2 Timothy Clevenger

Knowing We're Not Alone

I feel like TAPS is honestly the best thing to happen to me after losing Chris. My mentor Jennifer has been amazing. She called me on the first anniversary of Chris's death just to tell me she's thinking about me. She calls and texts all the time, checking in on my daughters and me. TAPS has made me feel like I'm not alone, and I want to help other families get through this difficult time.

Jillian Hirsch, Maryland
Surviving spouse of
Marine Sgt. Christopher Hirsch

Experiencing TAPS Together

On behalf of my family and I, thank you for a wonderful evening at the Flying Squirrels baseball game in Richmond. We appreciate being able to fellowship with other Gold Star families and to know that folks like Mr. Cotton, owner of the Good Feet Store and Ryan Baker, owner of Old Glory 27 Flag Company, value the sacrifice of our loved ones. We thank them for their generous support of this event. It is amazing that despite the loss of our son, we can feel so blessed. TAPS is responsible for facilitating an environment for citizens to come forward and say, "We will never forget."

Kathryn McConnell, Virginia
Surviving mother of
Army Sgt. Andrew McConnell

Please email your Letter to
TAPS to editor@taps.org.

hope

CHOOSING JOY

By Carlene Cross
Surviving mother of Cpl. Jason Bogar

“I regret to inform you...” the chaplain began.

In an instant, my life fell apart on July 13, 2008. I was sucked into blackness. Panic engulfed me in waves, blinding me and destroying all logical thinking. I ran to a picture of Jason holding an Afghan child and hugged it to my chest. A world without my son could never be real. It was unimaginable.

For months, my face was bloodless; shadows formed beneath my eyes like bruised fruit. I was taking medication and sleeping longer hours, but I was still weary to the bone.

I couldn't concentrate on what anyone was saying. But it didn't matter. Everyone seemed so uninteresting, and every conversation felt pointless.

One night, as I studied the ghoul in the mirror, I heard Jason's voice.

“Come on, Mom, this is not the woman who raised me. Get your butt up and start living again.”

Suddenly, I realized I needed to honor my son's life. He was part of a historic elite – men and women who embody sacrifice, loyalty and service to country. The most respectful thing I could do was to find joy again.

LEARNING TO BE JOYFUL AGAIN

I began to study the latest research and found that academia, medicine, spirituality and literature all agreed that seven basic principles invigorate joy: practicing gratitude, living in the moment, letting go, loving yourself, connecting to others, forgiving and having compassion.

I adopted these qualities into my own life as non-negotiable habits, like brushing my teeth.

PRACTICING GRATITUDE

Setting out to discover what makes people joyful, researcher and psychology professor Dr. Fred Luskin found living with gratefulness to be one of the most important attributes of a happy life. As he puts it, “Become religiously, relentlessly grateful, constantly reminding yourself of what you have.”

Besides the emotional boost, research also reveals that these “gratefulness moments” reboot our physical health. Our heart rates go down and our nervous system takes a rest.

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

Be aware of what is happening now. Luskin tells students of his Stanford Forgiveness Project to slow down and enjoy each moment. Connect to their breath. Inhale and exhale slowly. Eat food with delight and intention instead of devouring it. Live in the present, with purpose.

LETTING GO

How can we be happy in a world where everything changes and nothing lasts? We must find peace with the fact that all will pass away. Researchers claim that releasing the fantasy that life will always be controllable, is an important step to happiness.

LOVING OURSELVES

Research has found that those obsessed with their looks are rarely happy. However, people who work at staying healthy and are satisfied with their appearance are more joyful. Doing some form of physical movement, like yoga, dance or walking, a few times a week releases hormones, increases metabolism and helps people feel more energized and joyful.

I began to send messages of kindness to myself: "I am grateful my body is a strong vehicle through this life. It is a miracle and I honor it." I began to jog again, practice yoga and garden. As I became active, I could feel the physical sadness lodged in my chest start to loosen.

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

Happy people tend to trust others and define the world in a non-adversarial way. If we give love without expectations, as much as we reasonably can, we will thrive. And those who find a community to share this camaraderie nurture even more joyfulness.

I began to reach out. I attended the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar in Washington, D.C., and met other surviving military families. Today, I still call and speak with them often. They are people who, even without words, understand and encourage my inner peace.

FORGIVING

Authorities on forgiveness claim that healthy forgiveness is making a choice to release grievances for your own health, exercising your personal power and choosing to reclaim your life and your energy.

Studies found that forgiveness can lead to less anxiety, stress and hostility, lower blood pressure, fewer symptoms of depression, a stronger immune system, improved heart health, higher self-esteem, healthier relationships and greater spiritual and psychological well-being.

Forgiveness is not the approval of wrongdoing or forcing yourself to reconcile with the person who hurt you. It's not forgetting or minimizing what happened or skipping the process of grief.

HAVING COMPASSION

Researchers claim that developing a kind, loving heart may be one of the most important things to our happiness. The Dalai Lama says, "My religion is kindness." One of Jesus' main admonitions was to "love one another," and to "love your neighbor as yourself."

Studies found that people who are kind are much happier. The kindness of saying hello to people, volunteering and giving back can cultivate kindness.

HAPPINESS REGAINED

I realized I possess the power to choose joy. I will always miss my son, but I am no longer paralyzed by his death. Several weeks ago, while rummaging through the closet, I caught sight of an old video taken in the 1980s of him and his sisters growing up. Years ago, I would have panicked at such a gust of memory. But this time, as images of my children lit up the darkened room, infinite love rose in my chest. As I watched Jason at ages 2, 5, and 8, grief was replaced with joy for the 25 years his boundless spirit filled my life. I felt his love surround me.

Exercising these principles helped me regain happiness and live with purpose again. They opened my heart to other exciting possibilities. Last year I met an incredible man, fell in love and, after 25 years of being single, I remarried.

In many ways, I have returned to the woman who raised my son – for my own sake, but also to honor his memory. It's what he would expect of me. ★



the journey HOME

By Capt. Nathaniel Lee | Surviving son of Capt. Donald Lee



In 1996, my father Capt. Donald Lee was the Army's Outstanding Aviator. A year later, he and his co-pilot were killed in a training accident when their helicopter crashed. My mother Theresa, my then 5-year-old brother Sam and I, age 7, had our lives thrown into turmoil as our family and the Fort Hood community dealt with this loss. By the end of that school year, we were moving to Northern California where my mother's family lived, saying goodbye to not only our friends and neighbors, but the broader military family in which we had lived for many years.

Not long after our move to California, we learned about TAPS and found we could connect with other families experiencing my loss of a loved one that served. The three of us left for Washington, D.C., and the experience of our first TAPS National

Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. This would impact all of us in our own way for years to come.

I learned there were other kids dealing with similar challenges of losing a parent in service. In California, we had a loving family and a supportive community, but nobody truly understood. For a long time after my father's death, I tried to minimize any attention on the subject or avoid bringing it up altogether. I had gone so far in my personal reaction to grief that I told my teachers my dad didn't live with us because my parents were divorced. The TAPS Good Grief Camp was the first real opportunity I had to feel comfortable talking about my father – sharing his story, honoring his memory and expressing how his loss impacted me.

From that first camp, my grief journey has taken many turns. Today, I am a Captain in the Air Force, and I have a child of my own. And yet, almost 20 years later, I still grieve the loss of my father in my own way. I keep his flight suit patch in my office, and his monogrammed pen in my pocket as constant reminders of not only his service and our family's sacrifice, but the incredible responsibility of service members everywhere.

Most recently, that journey has brought me home to my TAPS family where I've had the incredible opportunity to contribute another form of service to families of fallen service members – families just like my own. Nearly 20 years after my first Good Grief Camp, I now get to pay back some small piece of the incredible benefits I received from

As a kid, Good Grief Camp was a safe place to share my story, honor my father and join a community of kids who shared some of my same fears and struggles. Today, Good Grief Camp is a place to bond with these kids, listen to their stories, help them honor their loved ones.

TAPS by mentoring kids who now stand where I once stood. They honor their lost family members who served while trying to find their new place in the world. While my roles as a father, husband and military officer give my life tremendous purpose, there still is nothing comparable to the feeling of bonding with these amazing kids. I am honored to be a TAPS Military Mentor, having experienced the pain of my own loss and the privilege of mentoring the campers experiencing theirs.

As a kid, Good Grief Camp was a safe place to share my story, honor my father and join a community of kids who shared some of my same fears and struggles. Today, Good Grief Camp is a place to bond with these kids, listen to their stories, help them honor their loved ones and show them that even big kids like me still feel sad, and it's okay to miss that person forever.

Anyone who has one of these kids in their lives – as a parent, guardian or mentor – knows how resilient, caring and emotionally intelligent they can be. As a TAPS Military Mentor, my job is easy.

I listen, I share, I play and, most of all, I am present for the child so that whatever he or she needs from me, I can try my best to provide. The interactions I have with my mentees are incredibly rewarding. I watch them grow over the course of the camp in ways I never thought possible. I watch as they support and take care of one another. These kids have been through so much, but their tenacity and spirit inspire me every day, as they do for the hundreds of other mentors who return to TAPS year after year.

Coming back to Good Grief Camp as a mentor is never easy. I still struggle to feel comfortable sharing my father's story, and I am constantly challenged in new ways by discussing my grief, but the meaning I have found as a mentor makes it all worth it. Whatever nervous anticipation I feel before camp disappears as I am greeted by friends, old and new, and welcomed back once again into the open arms of my TAPS family. Mentoring other children who wear the red shirt I once wore and who fill the places I once filled is one of the greatest honors I have ever experienced, and it adds an extraordinary sense of purpose to my life. ★



SHOWING UP *for yourself*



| By Emily Muñoz, Nichole Burkowski

The grief journey requires us to do a lot of things we'd rather not: face uncertain futures, grieve deeply, learn to ache. And regardless of how little we want to face the tasks of mourning, at some point we have no choice. However, the energy required to face grief's demands can draw on our willpower to make decisions, especially those that take advantage of life's opportunities.

Just as the demands of grief call us to "show up" when we'd rather not, the tasks of life call us in a similar way. But, showing up requires resolve; it requires purpose when we may feel our least purposeful. So, why push ourselves? Why not take the path of least resistance?

Because showing up - for ourselves, for others, for our TAPS family - is a pathway to healing. It's the equivalent to sending

ourselves a love note saying, "I still believe in you. You matter. You are worth this investment. You deserve to heal."

Showing up requires investment, vulnerability and courage. Yet, it can challenge us in many ways and what is challenging is also rewarding. Showing up, opens possibilities to build connections, resilience, grit, strength, self-compassion and self-acceptance.

So, what does it mean to show up when you'd rather bow out?

When you have to choose whether or not to show up, base your choice on where the healing, or the possibility of healing, lies. Even if your expectations aren't fully met, you bring your hidden strength forward a little each time you show up.

It takes effort, part of which means harnessing our fighting spirit, our "inner warrior." It's also about kicking out the "squatter emotions" - those uninvited thoughts that want attention, batter away at our reserves and take up space that could be used for building strength instead.

Each time we force out a squatter emotion, even if it's just for a moment, we build confidence for survival and renewal. We learn, little by little, to move through the emotions that bring about challenge and pain, and orient around the ones that offer fulfillment and joy. We begin to recognize doubt and fear as visitors, not permanent fixtures.

We've all had a moment when we've mentally or physically paused - phone in hand, ready to call and cancel. What are some of the emotions that led us to

YOU DESERVE TO *heal*

| By Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.

When you have to choose whether or not to show up, base your choice on where the healing, or the possibility of healing, lies. Even if your expectations aren't fully met, you bring your hidden strength forward a little each time you show up.

"Wounds don't heal the way you want them to; they heal the way they need to. It takes time for wounds to fade into scars. It takes time for the process of healing to take place. Give yourself that time. Give yourself that grace. Be gentle with your wounds. Be gentle with your heart. You deserve to heal." – DELE OLANUBI

Yes, it takes time and, most important, the process of active mourning for healing to unfold. You must be patient and give yourself that time. You must give yourself the grace of reaching out for and accepting the support of others. Along the way, you must be gentle with yourself and your wounded heart.

But you must also and always hold onto this thought: I deserve to heal. This is a statement of your intention to heal. It is a declaration of hope.

You deserve to heal. You deserve to live and love fully again. You deserve to experience meaning for the rest of your days. As a singular soul, as a child of God, as a person entrusted to carry on the precious legacy of the person who died, it is your right and your destiny and your purpose to shine again.

that point? Hopelessness? Fear? Self-doubt or shame? When we come to a moment of detachment – a temptation to bow out of something that may help us heal or feed our soul – it could be pulling us away from possibility, investment, camaraderie or hope, things that bring us joy, just because we don't feel perfect, prepared or proud.

When we acknowledge real feelings and face the deep-down fears, we confront uncertainty and learn to recognize the squatter emotions for what they are. We become less rattled each time one tries to keep us from reconciling grief, life or our own truths. We know that moments of hiding and isolation appear to be the best choices, but in actuality debilitate us.

But, showing up doesn't always mean doing, attending or completing. There

are no definitive finish lines in grief; and unfortunately, the cure for the pain is the pain. So sometimes, showing up is about just being present in your own grief and in your own life, and facing it the best way you can.

When we show up – whether it's coming to an event or arriving at our truths – we take our place in a community of others who have opened themselves to the same kind of challenge. When this happens, you feel the support of friends, community and your TAPS family. Maybe it's the cheer of a stranger as you walk your first 5K, or maybe it's the welcoming hug of a peer mentor at a community care group.

Showing up means turning toward others, as Desmond Tutu writes in "The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World," "You show your humanity by how

you see yourself not as apart from others but from your connection to others."

As you show up and connect, you're able to tap into the resources of your community. You'll require less to go onward, as the energy of others will pull you forward.

Trust those who help you trust yourself and your own ability. If you don't know who they are yet, turn toward connection and you will find them. They will tell you that being present is better than being perfect. Listen to the people who want you to show up messy, sweaty and tear-stained, feeling like you're not ready – the people who know you've shown up scared.

Doing constructive, emotionally challenging things when you'd rather not, shows your ability to persevere is alive. And soon, you'll start to believe it too. *

WE FIND OUR STRENGTH, *together*

FROM A GOOD GRIEF CAMP MILITARY MENTOR

"Absolutely love everything that TAPS stands for and the amount of true love and support they provide to our Gold Star families. I've never been more honored to volunteer with with an organization. The privilege of being a GGC Military Mentor—nothing in the world compares."

FROM A SURVIVING DAUGHTER

Happy 23rd Birthday, TAPS! I became a Gold Star daughter many years before you were born and I am so happy that you are here doing the great work that you do for all the families who came after me. Love you all!

FROM A SURVIVING MOTHER

TAPS is such a blessing to so many, including me. I found Bonnie Carroll 20 years ago when I was so alone, in shock, in pain; well so many of you know what I mean. I can never praise TAPS enough and I tell everyone about their good works. Thank you!

FROM A SURVIVING SPOUSE

Thank you TAPS for creating amazing supportive and connecting bonds throughout our extensive military families in need. Seeing TAPS flourish steadily from the onset has been a true sense of healing and connection in my life forward. Bless you all!

FROM A SURVIVING MOTHER

I thank God everyday for TAPS.





The news that changes *Everything*

As reports of a U.S. Military KC-130 plane crash began inundating my news feed, tv screen and radio earlier this year, I felt the crushing weight of my grief once again. Pictures of the aircraft were catastrophic; I understood what they meant for those families who were just opening their doors to devastating words. My own memories of painful moments resurfaced and a flood of emotions smothered my spirit.

Everything

By Wendy Taylor

Surviving spouse of Maj. Michael Taylor

On Jan. 20, 2007, I became a soldier's widow. My husband, Maj. Michael Taylor, was killed when his Black Hawk was shot down in Iraq. All 12 passengers died that day.

When your husband dies, no one can truly prepare you for the obstacles ahead. Even as I fought to survive and to move through my grief, there were always hurdles to confront. I barely made it over one hurdle before another presented itself. Things I never considered before became a source of pain and despair. Everyday events now opened new wounds, like not having Michael accompany our daughter Meredith to school father-daughter events; she would never dance with her dad again. Or knowing

Michael would never be in the stands to watch our son Justin play baseball. He would never coach one of Justin's teams. I found ways to avoid the pain of those events and learned ways to get through them with as little hurt as possible. I didn't shy away from checking out the kids early from school to keep them from the sadness.

Still, there are times when the hurt envelops me. The media can still trigger unwanted flashbacks of the casualty notification officer coming to my door to give me the news, the wailing of my children as I relayed the horrific news to them and all the effects

Michael's death has had on us since. News coverage of a tragedy resembling Michael's death can cause me to stumble backwards in my grief. My mind, body and soul falters under the agonizing weight of the suffering.

On one Monday afternoon, sitting in front of my computer and seeing other families' worlds fall apart so suddenly in the news, I could only let the waves of my own grief come. As they overtook me, I had to re-acknowledge my own loss. This is, in fact, real for me. And in the moments when this fact makes me once again pause and sit in my grief, I have to lean on my support system.



*It's difficult to acknowledge that I will always feel my loss,
that this pain will stay with me for the rest of my life.*

As difficult as the reminders of Michael's death are, there are also reminders of the love he left behind. My husband planted seeds of compassion, true friendship and leadership while he was here, and those seeds have bloomed. The harvest of his good deeds now comfort our children and me. Michael's Army brothers would drop by on their lunch breaks to check on us and to see if we needed anything. They did house repairs and yard work on a daily basis. Many left gifts on the front porch: baskets of food, handmade trinkets, gift certificates and even Christmas presents. The kids and I received blessings like that for a solid year, and we continue to feel the love of so many.

Once I decided to survive, I eased my way back into life. I told myself every morning to put my feet on the ground, get my children ready for school and drive them there. If the grief hit me hard one day, I learned to allow it to take its course, and I waited for it to pass. I had to remind myself to eat and keep my strength so I could care for my children. I opened the blinds, even just a little, to let the sunshine in. And I realized the importance of never, ever giving up. I found purpose in so much of my grief. I found that we're capable of so much more than we ever realized. The world can and will seem pretty again, and instead of crawling through life, I believe we will walk and eventually run. I know it seems impossible, but it can happen in our own time – no one else's. Our grief is ours alone. We move through it in our own way and at our own pace. The sun will shine again one day when we least expect it.

In the throes of what feels like eternal darkness, it can feel so lonely. And it's difficult to acknowledge that I will always feel my loss, that this pain will stay with me for the rest of my life. But it's comforting to know the love will remain too. Michael was my soul mate, my best friend and my first love. I will try to live as well and as graciously as I can until he takes my hand again. *

*But it's comforting to know
the love will remain too.*



dare to Share

| By Stephanie Frogge, MTS

Life with grief is challenging enough, but it can become even more challenging when we are called to share our story. While we know talking about our loss, our loved one, the experience of grief, healing and recovery, and the details of the death, such as how we learned of it, are necessary and therapeutic elements of coping with loss and creating our new normal, navigating these fine lines can leave us vulnerable to hurtful responses.

Beware of the Overshare

It's hard to know when sharing becomes oversharing. That line shifts depending on a myriad of factors, such as the context, listener and your needs. Be gentle with yourself as you look back and identify times when you may have overshared.

You're not "guilty" of oversharing; it's not a crime. It's simply the experience of telling your story in a way that turned out to be less helpful than you expected.

We live in a culture of oversharing. Mainstream media has packaged oversharing in the guise of entertainment, and the anonymity of social media shields us from social cues that help us navigate interactions.

Brené Brown, a Texas professor, popular speaker and author, has written much about the subject of transparency, vulnerability and how sharing serves to deepen our relationships. But even as she promotes self-revelation as part of living authentically, she also urges awareness and discernment. In her book, "Daring Greatly," Brown offers insights to help guide us.

First, there should be an element of mutuality – meaning vulnerability should be reciprocated between those who share their grief with one another. Second, sharing should be with those who have earned the right to bear witness to your pain. That right is earned through non-judgmental support and sincere inquiry. Those who tell you to "get over it," that you're "grieving wrong" or what you "should" do instead, have not earned the privilege of your self-disclosure.

Often, friends and family surprise us when they are reluctant to provide a listening ear. Someone's past relationship with us doesn't always translate to an ability to embrace sharing in a way that's helpful now. Perhaps this is one reason why we find comfort in our TAPS family.



Fellowship with those who have experienced a similar loss more often than not engenders a fundamental awareness that at the right time, everyone will share their loss and recovery. That similar, but never identical, experience knits a web strong enough to hold each of our stories.



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The Canary Test

Before the advent of modern ventilation systems, canaries were used to detect noxious gases in coal mines. A canary would stop singing if a dangerous gas were present – leaving enough time for miners to evacuate without harm.

Today, computer coders use the term “canary test” to describe the testing of a new code on a small group of unaware users, so in case a problem arises with it, changes can be implemented with minimal impact on end users.

Telling our story, whether to educate, vent or simply recall the memory of our loved one, can make us vulnerable. We run the risk of being misunderstood, diminished or even deeply hurt. For that reason, you may want to implement your own “canary test” to determine the readiness and willingness of those around you as would-be supportive listeners.

One technique is what I call the “Headline Test.” It’s a brief statement, factual in nature, that describes the loss. A headline might be, “I was widowed in 2007 when my Army husband was killed in Iraq.” Another example is, “Toby was our surprise baby and we were very proud when he decided to join the Marines. He died in a training accident when he was just 25.” Headlines give the listener information without much emotional detail. Depending on the listener’s reaction, you may or may not choose to reveal more about the impact of the loss.

According to Joan Hitchens, a writer about grief, there are two kinds of grief stories that need to be shared. The grief story speaks to the circumstances of the death, the notification and the subsequent suffering and pain. The life story is about the relationship with the deceased and memories of that person and the unique role they had in your life. Grief stories and life stories are about impact. They’re profound narratives of how your life has been torn asunder and forever changed as the result of your loved one’s death.

Finally, there’s what I call the rest of the story. For most surviving loved ones, the narrative eventually, after a long period of mourning, takes on a coda. The story no longer ends with the death of our loved one

but now encompasses elements of healing, of transformation, of moving forward. While the coda in no way diminishes the impact of this loss – that always remains the central story – it’s no longer the final chapter.

Dare to Share

In spite of the risk, sharing our stories is central to coping and healing. And it may be that you’re in, or were in, a phase of your grief journey where the value is simply in the telling, regardless of the response. That’s perfectly normal too. And if there are people out there still talking about the time a random stranger walked up to them (that would be you) and began sharing...and sharing...and sharing, well, perhaps you were an instrument in their own personal growth.

Telling your story matters both to the speaker and to the listener. In “Grief and Grieving,” Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler write, “Telling the story helps dissipate the pain. Telling your story often and in detail is primal to the grieving process. You must get it out. Grief must be witnessed to be healed. Grief shared is grief abated.” ★

A Little SUPPORT, *BIG*

The stories behind our supporters are often just as inspiring as the stories of the families for whom we care. These two examples are a perfect reminder that you don't have to be big to help, you just need a big heart. Whether you sponsor a lemonade stand, host a local restaurant fundraiser or use AmazonSmile to give to TAPS, you have the opportunity on a daily basis to support families of the fallen.

IMPACT



“On May 6, 2017 we had a local Lemonade Day in Bryan, Texas. We've always participated each year. It was just something we did with the kids as a family. This year was very different as we are missing a big piece of our puzzle. My husband and father of five, Sgt. Matthew J. Douglas, U.S. Army, lost his battle with PTSD on August 16, 2016. We connected with TAPS very shortly after and this year my kids wanted to do a patriotic lemonade stand to not only honor their father, but also to give back to TAPS and other families. We made \$240 that day and we decided to donate 100% of the profits to TAPS. We teamed up with my best friend and her family. They love us like family and have been there through the hard times. DJ and Shannon Aultman, along with their kids, helped us create Lemonade for TAPS. The stand was all designed, hand painted and constructed by DJ Aultman, which was a tremendous gift to our family. We see this becoming a new tradition for us and a way to honor Matthew. We truly love our TAPS family.”
~ Brittany Douglas

Aurora is a 5-year-old who lives in Pace, Florida. She really wanted to participate in the runDisney Kids Race during the Disney Princess Half Marathon. Her parents wanted Aurora to do a home-school service project, and they realized this race served as a great way to help her run the race and complete her project.

For her service project, Aurora wanted to do something that would help military members, since her great-grandfather and grandfather both served in the military. While browsing the Disney Princess Half Marathon website, Aurora and her mom ran across Team TAPS. She decided that she would run the Disney race and raise money for TAPS.

To raise funds, Aurora elected to sell pizza and lemonade. Aurora's great-grandfather built her a lemonade stand, and she set it up at a local private school near her home. The high school kids loved the lemonade stand and gave Aurora a lot of business, giving more money than her suggested donation price. Through the lemonade stand, she was able to raise \$125 for TAPS, and ran the runDisney Kids Race in honor of her great-grandfather, who recently passed away.



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

Please Join Us 10th Annual T*A*P*S Honor Guard Gala TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2018

NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM ★ 440 G STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C.

6:00 P.M. RECEPTION / 7:00 P.M. DINNER AND PROGRAM



"At the end of the day, when I think about TAPS, I think that it's people like Bonnie Carroll and the people in this room here tonight that actually are the strength behind our force. They are the reason why our men and women do what they do. They go out every day and focus on the mission. They don't look over their shoulder and do what we call "check their six o'clock," because they know that if something happens to them, somebody is there. And ladies and gentlemen, that somebody is you. That somebody is TAPS."

*~ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
General Joseph Dunford, Jr., USMC*

"We are not here tonight because they died – we are here because they lived. And, that's what this is all about. Honoring a life lived in selfless service to our military mission."

~ Bonnie Carroll, TAPS Founder and President

"My husband was just an awesome, awesome person. A wonderful husband, father, leader. And to have other people who understand that kind of loss, it's very special."

~ Kathy McEvoy, Surviving spouse of Colonel Richard McEvoy, USA



★ **MASTERS OF CEREMONY** ★ KYRA PHILLIPS, CNN, AND JOHN ROBERTS, FOX NEWS

★ **HONORING** ★ GENERAL DAVID GOLDFEIN, USAF • CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE AIR FORCE
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★ **ENTERTAINMENT** ★ KENI THOMAS, USA (RET) SURVIVOR OF BLACKHAWK DOWN MISSION IN SOMALIA

The evening will be attended by Friends of TAPS who share a demonstrated commitment to honoring our nation's fallen heroes. Guests will include senior military officials, corporate and association executives, military survivor families, political leaders and administration officials. Seating is limited.

For more information on sponsorships, TAPS.ORG/GALA or email to GALA@TAPS.ORG.

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GET INVOLVED

Support TAPS in our mission to provide healing and hope to families who have lost a hero in our Armed Forces.

There are many meaningful ways to make a significant impact on the children, spouses, parents, siblings and loved ones who will forever mourn their loss.

Our team will guide you through the process of creating a successful partnership. Contact us at (202) 588-8277 (TAPS) or Sponsor@TAPS.org.

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Matching Gift Program
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Volunteer at a TAPS Program
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Cause Marketing

Harness the brand equity of TAPS by creating a special promotion that is mutually beneficial, promotes your company's brand, products and services and simultaneously supports a cause close to the hearts of your customers and employees.

Host an Event for TAPS

Raise awareness for our critical cause by organizing a fundraising event or activity on behalf of TAPS.

Team TAPS Race Sponsorship

Through running and other endurance sports events, Team TAPS honors our fallen heroes while raising money for TAPS. You can support Team TAPS by sponsoring a Team TAPS race or runner.
teamtaps@taps.org

WAYS to SUPPORT

TAPS.org/donate

Sponsorships – Events

Gifts with Meaning that Serve our Military Families

The TAPS mission to provide hope and healing to survivors of military loss is central to the programs and services we offer around the country. Programs can range from 2,500 attendees at the National Military Survivor Seminar over Memorial Day to a 20-person retreat exclusively for surviving mothers grieving a son or daughter who served in the military. Sponsorships can be coupled with employee volunteer opportunities, social media support, corporate branding on signage and marketing materials used to promote the program, and recognition in the printed program and speaker remarks.

Partnerships - Programs

Many of our supporters wish to direct their sponsorship to a specific TAPS program that directly meets their corporate goals. These partnerships also provide for employee engagement opportunities, bringing the connection to TAPS full circle.

In-Kind Support

Contribute tangible goods, products, services, tickets or raffle and auction items to support our many fundraising initiatives and our event-based programs around the country.

JOIN *our* TAPS FAMILY | 2018 |

FEBRUARY

Central Texas Regional Seminar
February 23–25 • Fort Hood, TX

MARCH

TAPS Honor Guard Gala
March 6 • Washington, DC

APRIL

Georgia Regional Seminar (TBD)
April 20–22 • Atlanta, GA

MAY

National Military Survivor Seminar
May 24–28 • Arlington, VA

JUNE

California Regional Seminar
June 29–July 1 • City of Industry, CA

AUGUST

Ohio Regional Seminar (TBD)
August 3–5 • Wright-Patterson AFB, OH

SEPTEMBER

Colorado Regional Seminar
September 7–9 • Denver, CO

OCTOBER

**National Military
Suicide Survivor Seminar**
October 5–8 • Tampa, FL

NOVEMBER

Northeast Regional Seminar
November 2–4 • New Brunswick, NJ

**For a complete list of upcoming TAPS
events, visit taps.org/events.**



share the journey

A Family *Gathering*

9th National
Military Suicide
Survivor Seminar
& Good Grief Camp





Life's encounters, both positive or painful, can affect our outlook, challenge our strength and shape how we respond to subsequent events. We pray to find hope in times of sadness. We may have to dig deep within ourselves to find light in so much darkness. Determination kicks in, and helps us keep trudging forward, so we can carry our emotional burdens.

When we are overcome with sadness or grief, it can be difficult to continue the daily climb. There are moments when it feels as if all hope is gone. How then, do we move through the grief? Losing a loved one or a friend, facing a debilitating disease, experiencing a divorce or even an unexpected job change can tax even the strongest hearts and minds. The path sometimes can feel too steep and difficult to travel. We can feel as if we're losing our footing.

Almost 20 years ago, I lost my own footing. Being a strong person, I always believed I could handle whatever was thrown my way. I have learned to never assume. I was brought to my knees, facing a trial of loss that was numbing. The rains came and turned my path to mud, making it difficult to keep going. I felt lost and alone.

I knew something had to change when I was asked to sing in the church choir one Sunday. While singing, I began to cry, tears streaming down my face uncontrollably. I felt bad for the singers around me; they witnessed my lack of self-control. I had no tissues and no idea what the congregation thought of the one lone chorister having an emotional meltdown. I kept hoping they thought it was the moving melody that brought me to tears.

That Sunday was a turning point for me. I knew I had to find hope; I'd likely have to search hard, but I just had to find it. I couldn't go on like I was any longer.

A family's foundation of love and support helps its members to feel secure and find strong footing to take on life's twists and turns. When we lose someone we love, that security can crumble right beneath us. We can be left feeling lost and vulnerable.

I questioned whether I would ever find my footing and be able to build a new foundation for my family after my loss. It surely would never look or feel the same as it had previously. My family did build that new foundation, and as we did, it oftentimes felt like I was wearing concrete shoes while climbing a steep mountain path.

STRONG *footing again*

By Laurie Copmann | Author of "The Family Tree"





Even on our steepest paths, there is hope.

Our future can have purpose again.

During that time of great pain, I felt inspired to put pencil to paper and write. I poured my heart out in the lines of a story that resembled my loss. I wrote a children's book about a family tree that loses a branch in a terrible storm. When the wind and rain have subsided, the family visits their tree. They are saddened to find the broken branch lying beneath it. Together, they decide to build a swing out of the branch as a way to keep it as part of the family tree and their story.

Writing the book helped my heart find healing. The concrete shoes came off, and it became a little easier to travel the steep path of grief. I no longer cried all the time. The grief didn't go away, but I found it easier to manage.

I realized that people and life don't stay the same forever. Change and loss are inevitable. I also realized that my life had a new purpose. Sharing the simple story about a family tree offered others hope and inspiration, making it a little easier to travel their own path.

So, when life takes new twists and turns, I find the swing made from my own lost branch. Sitting on the swing, I think of those I still love who have left a lasting legacy, or I make future plans when my life needs direction.

Even on our steepest paths, there is hope and healing to be had. Our future can have purpose again. I pray each of you finds hope and promise in your daily lives and can, in time, build a swing from your own lost branch. *

Grade Schoolers *and Military Loss*

| By Gloria Horsley, Ph.D.

Military families know resilience. Moves from base to base and long deployments can weigh on the family unit. But, for grade schoolers, constantly leaving friends and starting new schools where they don't know anyone is an additional pressure. On top of that, when a family member or loved one is lost in the military, there is an incredible amount of trauma.

Maybe your child has to change schools after you've moved off base. Maybe a loved one died while your child was not in school yet, and you have to navigate the waters of the first day of school alone.

Maybe your child was no longer comfortable in his or her school and requested a change. There are many ways parents and guardians can support their grade schoolers as they head into the school year and adjust to their new normal.

Work with the School

Many schools have significant resources to help students achieve success, both academically and personally. Besides just the academic tools available, many schools have counselors and therapists on site who work with children at the elementary

school level to provide support and assist with emotional issues. Sometimes, schools even bring in grief specialists to speak about what it means to lose a loved one. Most school systems have specialists that travel between campuses, and parents can request this support through the school guidance counseling office.

Since the school might not know your child yet, it helps to schedule a meeting with administrators and teachers to explain the recent death in the family and the impact it is having on your son, daughter, grandchild, niece or nephew.



You can explain his or her usual personality and how it has changed since losing your loved one. This can help teachers and administrative staff to better understand the child and respond accordingly. Since your child could exhibit behavior of anger or withdrawal, knowing where it comes from can help school personnel know how best to react.

Together you can create a plan to help your child while leveraging available counseling on campus if necessary. Most teachers and school administrators, especially near military bases, have been trained on the various differences of what military families experience with stress, deployment and loss.

TAPS has resources too. "Grief Support for Military Children: A Guide for School Personnel" is a pamphlet to help educators improve school care for grieving military children and youth. You can request a copy by email at info@taps.org. Please include your name and most current address.

Recognize Developmental Delays

Your young child's grief can delay his or her learning and cognitive development. On an emotional level, children can also regress as a reaction to this type of loss. They may require more attention and affection – as will you. Organizations such as Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Big Brother and Big Sister programs can be a good source of support as can one's religious community. Also talk to friends and family; just discussing your concerns can be helpful.

You can explore possible developmental delays with your child's teacher and/or counselor to see how to help at home. The teacher or counselor may recommend engaging in learning or healing games using a tablet or smartphone (*see page 37 for one possible app to help with children's grief*). Other activities you can do together include reading grief-related children's books. Barharris.com is a great place to find age-appropriate books to support grieving children. Books offer an opportunity for discussion and can give children the attention and emotional support they seek while helping with developmental delays. Again, don't be afraid to turn to friends and family.



When it's time to read that goodnight story, give others the opportunity to be of service to you. Of course not everyone will respond to your needs, but you might be surprised by who turns up to help.

Listen, Share and Play

At this age, your child may have trouble expressing his or her feelings with words. You can listen to what he or she tries to tell you, but you can also come to his or her level.

Grab some paper and crayons, and create pictures together. Shelly Klammer's site, intuitivecreativity.typepad.com/expressiveartinspirations, is a great place to go for inspiration. There, Shelly gives 100 excellent art therapy exercises. Grade school children often feel comfortable using this type of creative outlet to express their feelings. Do this regularly to help your child work through feelings, provide reassurance and let them know they're going to be okay. Making pictures yourself can help with your own challenges in expressing grief. The trend toward adult coloring books in recent years revealed the therapeutic benefits of making art. Spending time with kids and doing what they enjoy can be one of the best ways to help them and you through these tough times.

Listen to your child talk about what other kids may ask at school. Other children may

knowingly or unknowingly say something cruel to your child, and your child may want to share with you. It's important to acknowledge this hurt or confusion and work through how your child can ignore or address these comments should they happen again.

Build a Local Support Network

You can also help your grade schooler with his or her grief by seeking support for yourself. In this way, you can assist them by getting advice and counseling that can create individual and family strategies to help you shape your future. Like your child, a move or change may have limited your access to family and friends. Look for local groups that offer grief support, like TAPS Care Groups. You may meet other surviving military and civilian families struggling with the same emotions. From here, you can build a support network for your child and yourself to help as your family finds its new normal.

Be Patient

Remember that your grade schooler is handling a lot at his or her young age. There will be many emotions he or she doesn't understand. The best thing you can do is ride it out with your child, be there and give as much love as possible. *

Beyond the Burst of Support

| By Shauna Springer, Ph.D.

The period just after traumatic loss is incredibly painful, overwhelming and tumultuous. In the wake of a tragedy, many survivors experience the secondary impact of loss when those they thought would always stand at their side are not as supportive as they'd hoped, or not supportive at all. So often, we've heard that grief "changes our address book," but the warning doesn't necessarily make it easy to face.

It's common for friends and family to reach out in a burst of support in a time of crisis. But then, things go back to "normal" for them. As one survivor described it, "I think it was about three month point when the cards stopped coming." Others go back to focusing on themselves or something or someone else. Unfortunately, attention spans don't usually last much longer than news cycles.

In fact, this "burst of support effect" is almost universally seen across life-changing events. When there's a health crisis, like a cancer diagnosis, a debilitating car accident or even a happy event like the birth of a baby or a wedding, friends and neigh-

bors' support usually is limited to a period of a few weeks or months. In this way, we can see that the burst of support effect is a typical and socially-normed way to respond to the needs of others. It's, therefore, important to realize that what may feel like a withdrawal of support isn't personal and doesn't mean we are loved any less within our social circles.

If a close friend has the wisdom to say, "I can't imagine what you are going through," take that person at his or her word. Those who haven't walked this path generally will have great difficulty understanding what it feels like to be thrust into grief. They don't really understand what to say or how to support because the grief journey is outside the limits of their own lived experience.

While we can do our best to remember we're loved, the burst of support effect is still problematic when the most urgent needs of survivors come well after the loss. Immediately following a loss, surviving loved ones may be in a state of shock – experiencing feelings of disorientation and

numbness. Once the initial shock wears off, waves of grief may hit, inflicting sharp and sudden pain. Just as the burst of support effect is nearly universal, the delayed impact of trauma is common.

Fortunately, when our address book changes, we also can find support from unexpected places. There is a group that doesn't conform to the burst of support effect, one made up of peers who have traveled the same journey. Other survivors of loss understand at a deep level that grief support is an ongoing, lifelong need. Surviving loved ones know that new loss survivors don't need just limited-time grief therapy, but also the transformation of identity and relationship structures that come from gaining a new set of safe, stable and supportive attachments. In order to heal our hearts, we can choose to grow our address book. And at TAPS, our address book is overflowing with the love and support of others to companion us on the grief journey.

Grief won't always feel as acutely painful as it does initially, but whenever you need



our support, we are here to walk with you throughout your journey. We send cards on anniversaries, invite you to join us for a wide array of events and social gatherings throughout the country every year and offer access to 24/7 support through our TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline. TAPS also organizes ongoing support groups at locations all across the country to provide consistent, locally-available emotional support networks for survivors. We provide casework assistance immediately and years after a loss, when services and benefits may be relevant. This magazine, which is full of stories of hope and recovery and information about resources, is also published every quarter as another way that we offer continuous contact and support for the ongoing journey of grief.

Survivors are the heart of the TAPS family. Our lived experience has directly informed our best practice approach to supporting all those who have suffered a loss in the military. Being able to walk with others on their grief journey allows for reciprocal healing. TAPS Peer Mentors and dedicated TAPS staff are able to find purpose and make meaning in their own loss by helping others find healing.

So, if your community has stopped showing up for you, know that there is a community that will always offer support, and we can find purpose and comfort in being able to walk with you. ☆



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There is a group that doesn't conform to the burst of support effect, one made up of peers who have traveled the same journey.



A Stillness Among the Trees



By Abi Ruth Martin
Surviving sister of Staff Sgt. Jack Martin

Arriving to Bainbridge Island, Wash., for my first TAPS Empowerment Week of Renewal, I was nervous and apprehensive. Usually, I am surrounded by friends and family when reflecting on my brother's death and its impact on me. But this week, I would be sharing and talking about this intimate part of my life with people I had never met before.

Breathing in the salty sea air, I was reminded of Jack's life in the Seattle area with his wife Ashley. In this moment, I could already feel my heart stirring and memories resurfacing as I stood so close to where I had last seen him alive.

It has been eight years since my wildly talented, smart, witty, cool, younger brother Jack was taken from this world. He was just 26 years old, serving as a Green Beret – doing what he loved – when my life was forever changed that early fall day in 2009.

I lost one of my best friends, and my world was rocked to its core. And for that, I'll never be the same. But eight years out, I can say time really does help. The loss of Jack, and the life he lived, has shaped who I am today, and it continues to shape who I will be. And *that* is beautiful.

As I joined the other TAPS family members at the ferry station and looked up at the stunning Seattle skyline, my nerves began to subside. The other women attending the event wandered around the ferry and took in the sights on the way to Bainbridge Island as we broke off into smaller groups and pairs. I found myself talking with a surviving mom. We instantly connected over our shared interests, and by the time I arrived at the island, I felt I had a new friend.

Yes, these women were strangers, but they knew me – not personally, but they knew my grief and the treacherous path that we must walk. Immediately, I felt community and connection with this group of amazing women.

The lovely oasis of Islandwood spoke to me. The trees welcomed me and the shores eased my spirit – inviting an intentional, calm week ahead.

Our first morning session together, we discussed and wrote out our group's expectations for the week:



“Share. Respect. Be in the moment. Honor the unspoken. Honor the differences; share and celebrate the things we have in common.”

This list set the tone for an outstanding week of connection and growth, one where we acquired tools to truly move forward in life. Through scheduled solo time and journal prompts, I reflected on gratitude, mindfulness, meditation and self-assessment.

One thing that resonated with me was the concept of gratitude. Simply choosing to recognize the blessings we have to be grateful for is so powerful in getting us through each day. And I’ve spent time practicing gratitude in order to make it a habit.

I have noticed the positive impact on my life of intentional gratitude. It might seem like a small feat, but it makes a big difference. And it’s easy to incorporate into your daily life. It could be as simple as thinking of three things you have to be grateful for each morning before you get out of bed, or using the time at a stoplight to reflect on blessings and give thanks.

The group shared our heroes – those loved ones we remember although they are no longer here with us. There were tears, but they were matched by laughter and pride and the understanding you feel when sharing with others who have experienced loss. I spent time reflecting on the good memories of my brother. Before the week, I often pushed away

those thoughts of Jack because of the hurt that came with them. But, I’m learning I can allow myself to sit for a moment and think of him and just be grateful.

While we spent time looking at where we are now, I was reminded of the quote, “How can you know where you are going if you don’t know where you are?” So often, we are too busy in life to stop and sit in self-reflection. I am a person of Christian faith, so I spent part of each solo session communicating with God. Since coming home, I have listened to scriptures and meditated on the words as they are read. This practice has created times of peace and clarity for me in the busyness of my normal daily life.

I'm learning I can allow myself to sit for a moment and think of [my brother] and just be grateful.

As we wrote, reflected, took in nature and moved through morning yoga poses, I tuned into myself. I listened to who I am and identified my core values. Aside from compassion, spirituality, love and loyalty, I learned one of my core values is delight. I find it so important to experience delight in life, and that is something I want to strive for going forward. While on the trip, I journaled about how to live out those all-important values. And since coming home, I have continued to journal. I write about the ways I choose to experience delight;

it’s a helpful reminder of the life I want to live. Even though there is pain, there is still plenty of space for delight.

We also focused on where we want to go. The most exciting and eye opening part for me was when I put into words: what my future looks like, which included mapping out the road ahead with concrete goals and accountability partners. I focused on finances and health, wanting to pay off debt and get more physically active. I may have been a little ambitious, but I have already achieved more than I ever expected.

I walked away from the week, refreshed with a new perspective, feeling challenged and equipped to instigate change and growth in the real world. Knowing my accountability partners will be checking in has helped motivate me. I ask about the other women’s progress, and I’m reminded that I’m neither alone in my loss nor in choosing to move forward in life.

The vision board I made that week now hangs in my home. It is bright and colorful and optimistic with words like “love” and “family,” “serve” and “health.” Next to it is the remembrance flag I made for Jack with the words, “Jack truly lived life to the fullest.”

My brother has always been such an inspiration for me, and it’s amazing to see how he is still teaching me. The past does shape who we have been and who we are now, and it shapes our future. I’m so glad Jack’s legacy is helping to shape me. ★

The Fight to Find MY INNER WARRIOR

By Sharon Forbes | Surviving fiancée of John McNulty

Grief is one of the most difficult things we can endure. And if we allow it, grief can become all-consuming and even self-destructive. When my fiancé John McNulty, a civilian contractor and K-9 handler, died by suicide, the ground beneath me disappeared. I was disoriented and collapsed internally – questioning: Was it my fault? Was it something I did or didn't do? The life I knew was eclipsed by darkness and inconsolable sadness. I faced the seemingly impossible: learning to live and function in a new reality that confronted me.

This was accompanied by overwhelming uncertainty, shame and isolation. I blamed myself for not knowing John needed help. I blamed John for not saying goodbye. I blamed the world for seeming empty and purposeless now. Stigma tarnished the

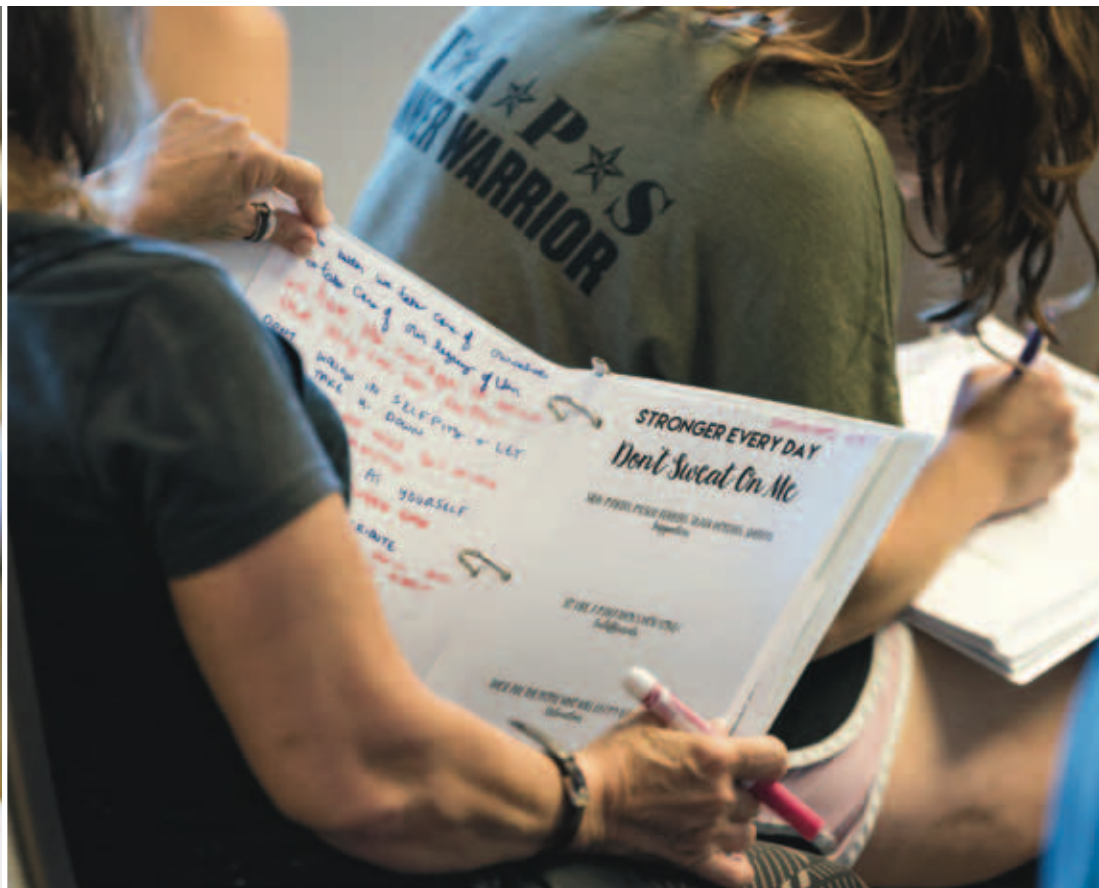
opportunity to say John's name, and I found myself not wanting to talk about my loss, for fear of having to explain the manner of his death.

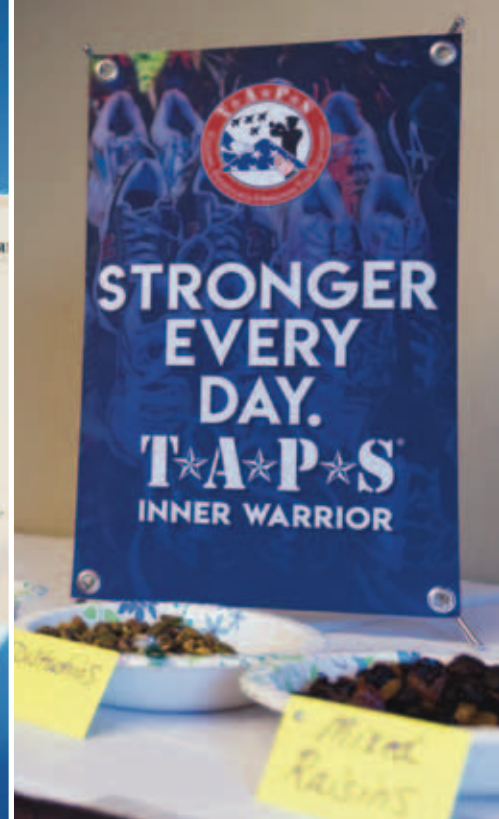
John was a wonderful man, who had a strong affinity for the dogs he trained. He lived a life of honor and service. And cared deeply for those closest to him and the job he was doing. He was my best friend. I wanted people to remember him for that.

I thought the word "suicide" dishonored his memory and negatively defined him. But, the pain of being unable to express my loss ultimately shut down my ability to communicate. My world fell silent, as I couldn't face what happened. I spent my days doing absolutely nothing – avoiding everyone and every responsibility, except caring for my dogs.

I sought solace in food. I started leaving my house, but only to buy junk food or take-out. There was no one to hold me accountable or show me how I was hurting myself. I pushed everyone away; I was alone. Eventually, I was almost 100 pounds heavier – perpetuating feelings of self-doubt and shame for not being stronger. Grieving, eating poorly, weight gain and isolation, became cyclical; it was like a black hole.

But when I heard, "morbidly obese," after a routine checkup, I had a new reason to grieve: I'd lost myself. How had I allowed my grief over John's death to envelop my entirety? How had I stopped loving myself? The new grief of losing myself compounded my grief for John.





It is sobering when you realize you've created the exact opposite of what you need. I realized I needed to know if I was still in there somewhere. I had to find myself again.

I decided to attend a TAPS Inner Warrior Wellness Weekend. The new phrase, "Inner Warrior" sparked the belief that just maybe, I had an inner warrior too. But not without trepidation. I don't know how many times I almost cancelled.

But, the day came and, grateful for the opportunity, I pointed my car in the right direction.

During the wellness weekend, I listened to other surviving family members' stories. And after so much harsh self-talk for so long, I was finally in a group of people who weren't judging me. They understood. Suddenly, I had fellowship, physical challenges and a workbook to guide me. Most of all, I felt like I had resources. And those resources became hope. I confronted the truth I had spent the previous year evading. I realized the circumstance of John's death did not dishonor him; the dishonor I felt came from temporarily giving up on life and losing my old self.

As the weekend progressed, my pattern of negative self-talk lifted, and my inner warrior began to shine through. On the

last day, my perspective shifted during a darkly lit yoga session. As the instructors distributed candles, I realized the small flame surrounded by darkness was my resolution; I needed to go through grief and not evade it.

After the wellness weekend, I followed the workbook and did some soul searching. I realized I needed formal grief counseling and sought help. It became one appointment I had to keep every week. Then, I started making appointments with myself for activity. I got my hands on every nutrition book I could find. I didn't want a diet; I wanted to be healthy. I felt I needed to apologize to my body for all the junk food.

I no longer eat processed foods, and now, I keep my fats healthy and incorporate lots of veggies. It's amazing to see how much food affects mood and mental clarity. Just giving up junk has helped me gain more focus and intent with self-care. The road to recovery was not easy, and old habits are difficult ignore. In spite of this adversity, I have lost 85 pounds and surrounded myself with new hobbies, like obstacle-course running.

I credit the TAPS Inner Warrior Program for my health and wellness today. It equipped me with the tools to take on challenges and rediscover the beauty of life. Most importantly, it supported the journey to find my inner warrior.

My life now is a stark contrast to the deepest, darkest parts of my grief from losing John and myself. That woman is still there, she just looks and feels different and stronger; as if the calluses on my feet mirror the ones on my heart. I fully embrace every opportunity in life now and know you can still have true gratitude, even in grief.

Finding healing and understanding after the trauma of losing a loved one doesn't happen overnight. The process of healing can't be rushed. Grief will always ebb and flow in my life, but it no longer defines me. Despite the almost intolerable anguish I endured, my inner warrior led my fight back into the world and forever shifted my perspective.

Moving forward, I hope to help others with their battles in grief. There is life after the death of someone you cherish. Both lives don't end in that moment. Just doing your best every day and looking for goodness in it, makes a difference. I believed I had failed John for a long time. But now, I understand that his decision had nothing to do with me. I could never have changed his mind. I will never understand it, but I can move forward in a way that will make him proud. And the biggest part of that is being a resource, a listener and an example that there is an inner warrior in each of us. *

HERO MILES

SUN DEVIL STADIUM

BE A HERO TO A HERO,
donate your miles

Fisher House Foundation's Hero Miles program provides flights to the families of our fallen service members so they can attend the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp over Memorial Day in Washington, D.C., and the TAPS National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp in October. You can see the wonderful photos from our 2017 National Seminar at www.taps.org/photos/2017/nationals.

Over time, the need has grown and the availability of these Hero Miles has not been able to keep up. We are asking our partners to help "refill the bank" with unused frequent flier miles so the cost of a plane ticket is not a barrier to military survivors being able to connect with the resources and care TAPS can provide to all those mourning the loss of a loved one while in military service to our country.



Transferring your unused airline miles is easy.
Go to www.fisherhouse.org/heromiles
We encourage you to share this special request with
your employees, friends and family.



The Value of Giving Back

Long before surviving military families walk through the doors at the Crystal Gateway Marriott, staff and volunteers start transforming the hotel into a welcoming space for the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. It takes more than 750 volunteers to set up and help staff at the annual event in Arlington, Virginia. From packing backpacks for Good Grief campers and mentors to folding nearly 3,000 red TAPS t-shirts for check-in, and a million hugs in between, these dedicated and selfless volunteers spend a combined 17,142 hours over Memorial Day weekend, ensuring our families receive the healing support they need.

TAPS relies on a mix of individual volunteers, corporate volunteer groups and military mentors to fill all the volunteer needs during the seminar. TAPS engages corporate sponsors by encouraging them to provide employee volunteers throughout the week-

end. This not only helps TAPS meet vital staffing needs, but also helps bring financial donations to life by providing an opportunity for donors to see the impact of their service and support from an intimate vantage point.

During the weekend, Area Finance Officer for Aimco Jarrett Pohle worked the Good Grief Camp Zone, Field Day USA and the Sunday TAPS Good Grief Camp luncheon. He also volunteered along with his wife, Michelle, and his 5-year-old son, Gregory, to set up for the TAPS Family Banquet.

The Pohle family has a rich history of military service. Michelle's brother was a combat medic in Iraq, and her dad served 30 years as a Naval officer. It was important for Jarrett to show his son the value of giving back to others and highlighting their commitment to supporting service members and their families.

As a first time TAPS volunteer, Jarrett was committed to helping make Aimco's monetary donation go further. He believes, "Money goes a long way, but willing hands really help make an even bigger impact

from an original donation." He watched as staff and volunteers turned around a new plan on Sunday for the Good Grief Camp luncheon. "Having volunteers on site made the response seamless so that kids and military mentors at the luncheon never even noticed the last-minute changes."

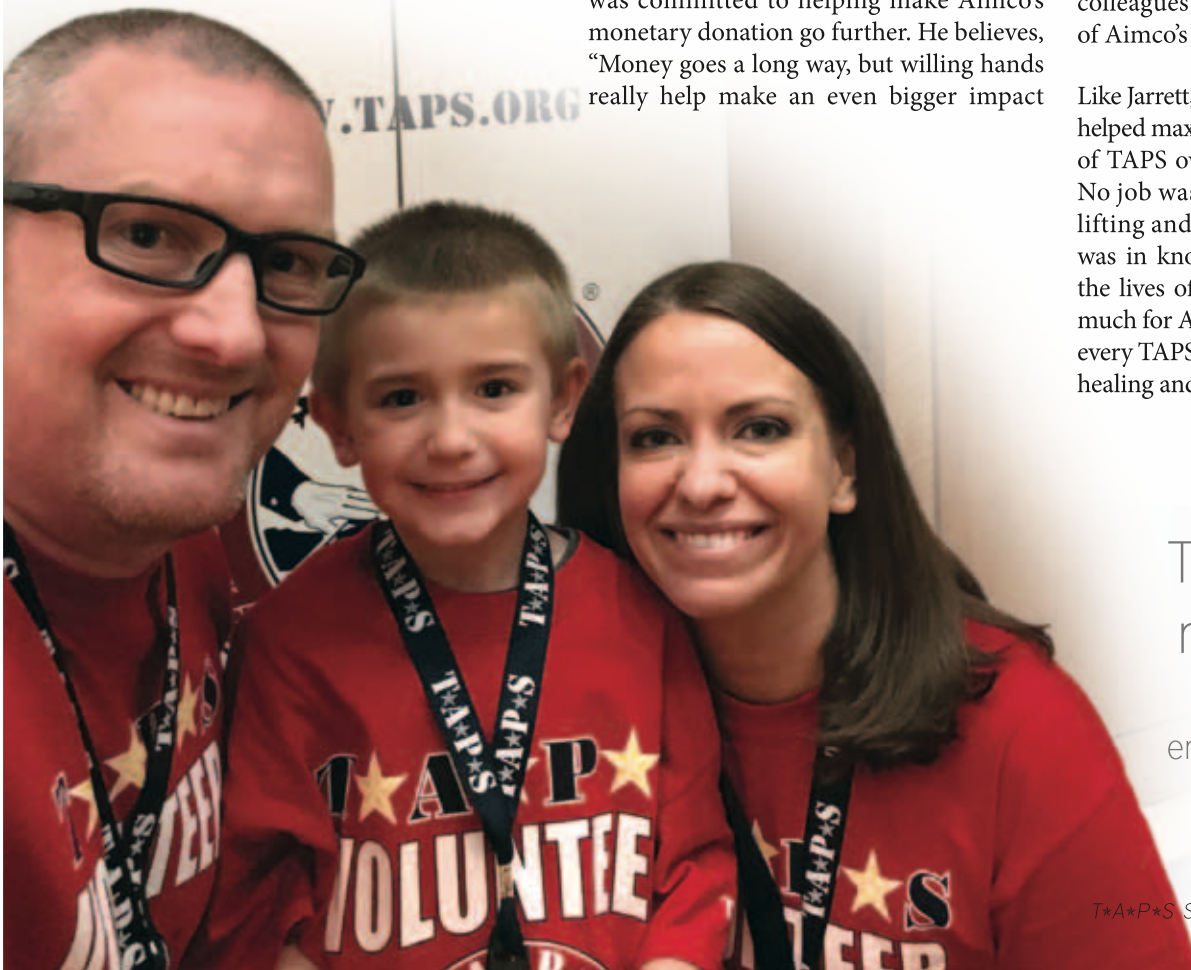
Instead of seeing only the general mission of TAPS, Jarrett and his family witnessed the eye opening transformation and resilience of children who lost a parent in military service. As a parent, it was hard for Jarrett to fathom his son suffering that kind of loss. Personally seeing the impact TAPS makes on grieving children was humbling and the TAPS mission is real in a new way for the Pohle family.

Now, when Jarrett heads back to the office, he can share his personal understanding with co-workers and executives to measure the benefit of Aimco's support for TAPS. He hopes to increase awareness of TAPS volunteer opportunities to encourage his colleagues to continue stretching the value of Aimco's corporate donation.

Like Jarrett, hundreds of corporate volunteers helped maximize their organization's support of TAPS over the Memorial Day weekend. No job was too small. Many did the heavy lifting and unglamorous jobs. The reward was in knowing they made a difference in the lives of families who have sacrificed so much for America. And in the hugs, because every TAPS event begins and ends with hope, healing and plenty of hugs.

TAPS welcomes
new volunteers.

Visit us at taps.org or
email volunteer@taps.org.





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The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors offers comfort, care and resources to all those grieving a military loved one.

Connect with us:



@TAPSorg



★ Honor Their Sacrifice ★

Thousands of military families receive a life-changing knock on their door every year after the tragic loss of a service member and more than 5,500 will find their way to us in 2017. TAPS is there for these families as well as an additional 70,000 surviving loved ones of our fallen military heroes who reached out for hope and healing since TAPS was founded in 1994.

15 new survivors come to TAPS every day. Your generous gift makes possible the TAPS mission to support the families and loved ones who will forever mourn their loss.

TAPS receives no government funding and we rely on supporters like you to fund programs that make the biggest difference for our military families.

Donate now by visiting TAPS.org/donate or call 1-202-588-TAPS (8277).

