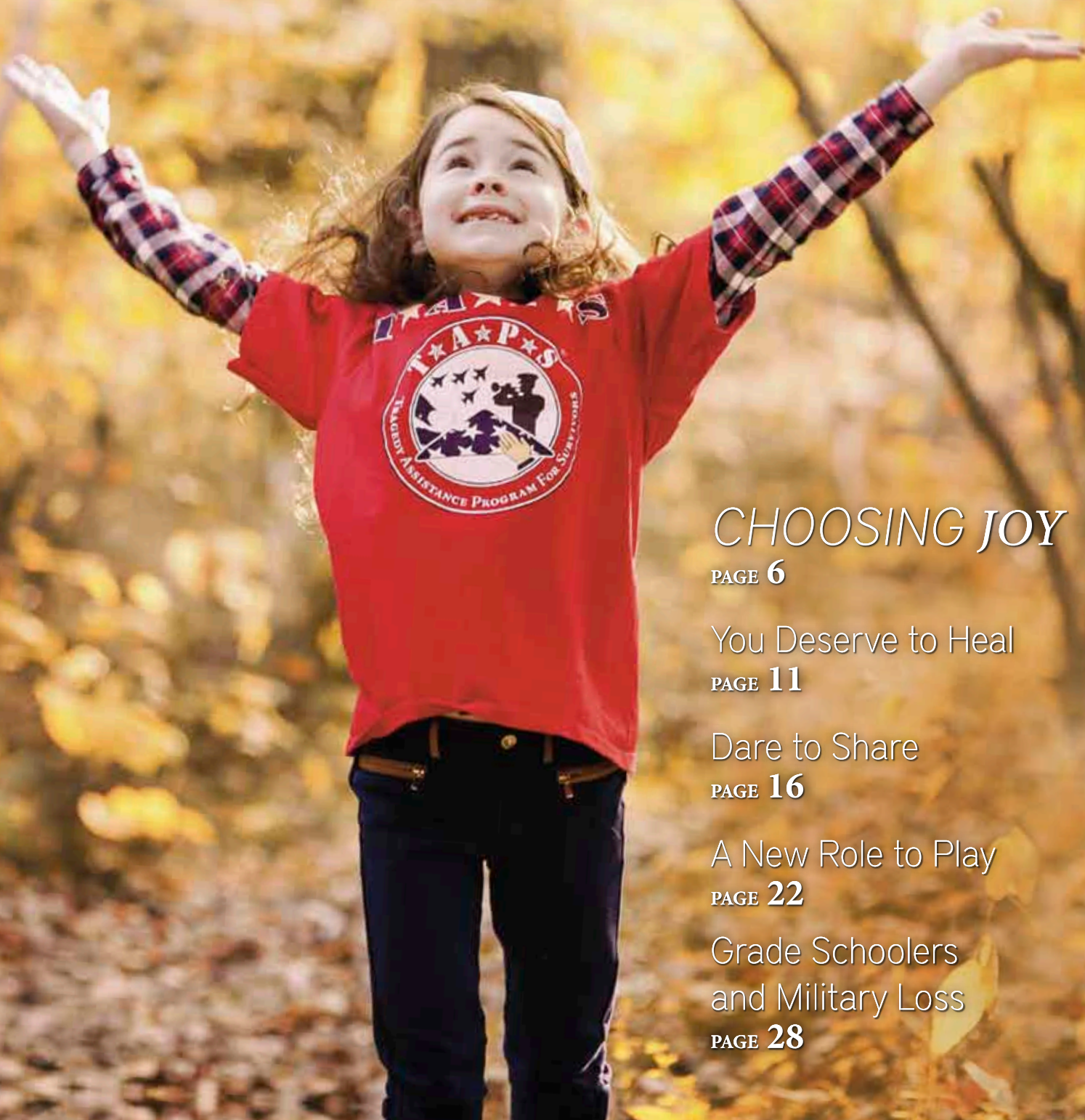


For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served & Died

TAPS®

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MAGAZINE



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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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



Kelly Griffith is the *TAPS Magazine* Editor and Manager of Internal Communications and the surviving sister of Marine Corps Maj. Samuel Griffith. Kelly's background in journalism and the profound impact of Sam's life and service enable her to share the compassion and care of TAPS through writing.



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.



Erin Jacobson is the surviving fiancée of Army Ranger Cpl. Jason Kessler and a grief professional with over a decade of experience in the nonprofit sector. She has been with TAPS since 2011, leading workshops and retreats with an emphasis on

empowerment, peer connection and experiential-based grief work.



Cheryl Kreutter, Ph.D., holds her degree in Reading/Literacy and is on the faculty of SUNY Geneseo in Upstate New York. Through her teaching and research, she advocates journaling and book discussion to gain

insights about oneself and others. She is the surviving parent of Navy Lt. Jason P. Kreutter.



Abi Ruth Martin is a photographer, fashion enthusiast and a big believer in the positive impact of mentoring. She blogs at abiruth.com. Abi is an avid fan of her hometown NBA team, the OKC Thunder. She cherishes her

family, friends and memories of her brother Staff Sgt. Jack Martin.



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.



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.



Ashley Rao, project manager for TAPS Empowerment Weeks of Renewal, has found healing and transformation within TAPS since her husband Army Staff Sgt. Jack Martin died in 2009. Her passion for survivors and experiences working with women who've experienced trauma, as a hospice nurse and as a surviving spouse, provide the foundation for TAPS Empowerment programming.



Shauna Springer, Ph.D., 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.



Jennifer Stratton is the surviving spouse of Air Force Lt. Col. Mark E. Stratton II, who was killed in May of 2009, along with Sr. Airman Aston Goodman and 1st Sgt. Blue Rowe. Jennifer and her three children reside in

Virginia, where they try to live their best lives and help others to fulfill Mark's legacy.



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.



William Wagasy is a decorated Navy SEAL veteran having completed four combat tours from 2002-2012 - three to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and one to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Today, he serves on the TAPS Board of Advisors and is an inspirational and motivational speaker.



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.

from the founder

Bonnie Carroll



Dear TAPS Family,

As a member of the TAPS family, you are part of a community of strength. We are walking the path of grief and coming together with love, compassion and a yearning to find purpose, to overcome the darkness and honor our heroes.

We navigate this life together; we grow, gain strength and learn to thrive. We learn to take the pain and turn it into purpose. Those first steps are arduous and a hopeful future can seem like an impossible dream. Yet through the love of this family, we open our hearts to possibilities.

TAPS offers a way to stay connected and create a purposeful future.

You can offer your comforting presence to a new survivor as a TAPS Peer Mentor. The gift of your understanding is an immeasurable blessing to another. You can volunteer to help at our many events. And for those who like to stay active, our Health and Wellness initiatives give you options from endurance running events, climbing and exploring your "Inner Warrior." Our teams4taps and stars4taps events create moments of joy and honor with your favorite sports teams and celebrities.

Examine your journey; challenge yourself to continue striving toward a positive future and embracing this life you never expected for all the potential it may hold.

Give yourself permission to smile, to look for brightness and joy. Cultivate friendships and activities that offer you hope for the future, comfort for your soul and strength for your heart.

We have time now, time they do not have, to live life and honor their legacy. Our heroes filled each day they were given with selfless service and they were an inspiration. They experienced life, they loved us and, while it wasn't long enough, we are so very grateful for the time they were in our lives. Feel the warmth of their love when you think of them, and let the joy and laughter they brought into the world continue to be a light of hope.

Our heroes will always be in our hearts. Our love is eternal, and so are they.

With love,

Bonnie Carroll



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- ★ National Peer Support Network
- ★ Quarterly *TAPS Magazine*
- ★ Connections to Local Grief Support
 - ★ Casework Assistance
 - ★ Education Support Services
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 - ★ 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.

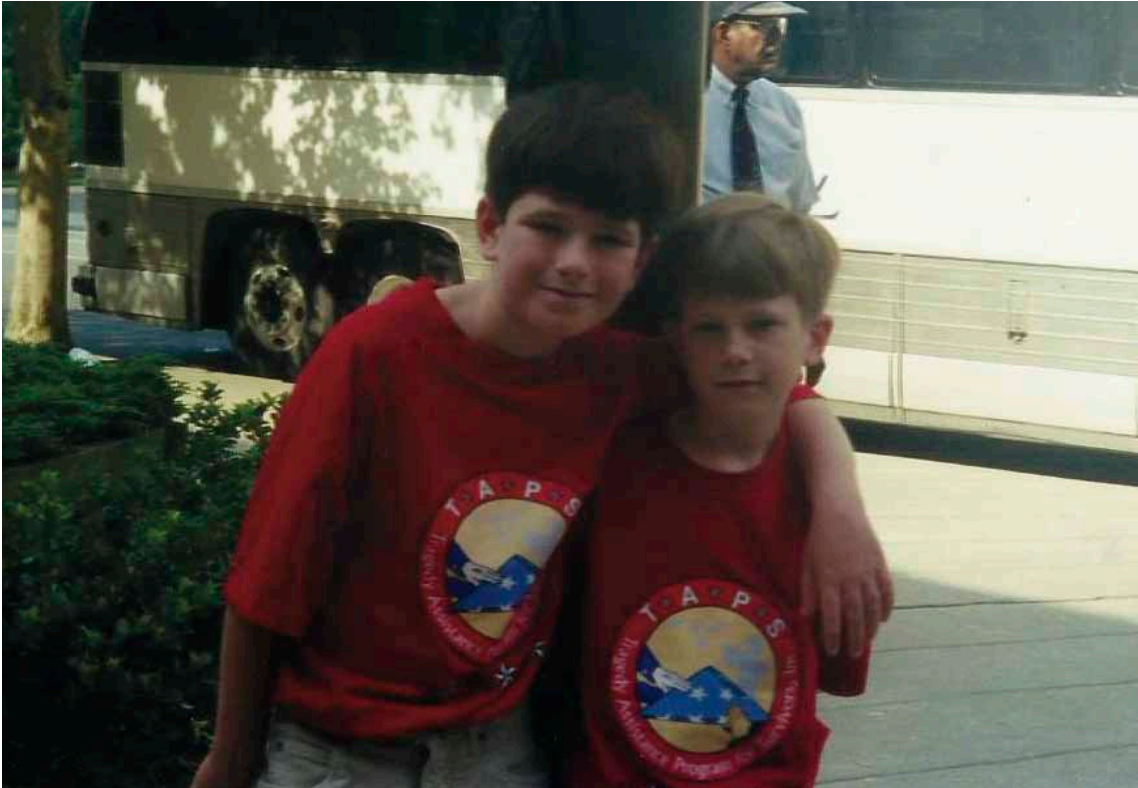
Exercising these principles helped me regain happiness and live with purpose again. They opened my heart to other exciting possibilities. Last year I met an incredible man, fell in love and, after 25 years of being single, I remarried.

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. *

Peace and Purpose

By Kelly Griffith | Surviving sister of Maj. Samuel Griffith

I love running in the evenings, especially during the fall when the sun starts to set just a little bit earlier. After a long day I relish in the opportunity to disconnect from my phone and get outside. As the colors dance across the sky in the last rays of sunlight, I feel more connected to nature, my faith and myself. This golden hour reminds me of the peace I experienced in knowing I wasn't alone on this journey.

There is this moment when you realize someone else understands – your knees buckle a little. You let out a breath you

didn't even know you were holding. You allow yourself just to be held up by another survivor of loss.

Coming to TAPS, I was able to be comforted, knowing we all have experienced a loss so uniquely our own. And that's what helped me find purpose. We can, indeed, find purpose in just allowing ourselves to be held. In that moment the hurt doesn't go away, but we recognize that someone else has walked this path and we can survive the pain. Knowing we are part of a family – albeit one we never wanted to join, but one we are so glad exists – is the foundation of our ability to find purpose.

I found purpose in becoming a peer mentor. It had been more than a year and a half since my brother Sam died, and I felt like I was able to stand up a little on my own feet.

I had started to hold myself up and stay connected to other surviving loved ones in other ways. I didn't need to talk only about my own loss; I wanted to hear about others' as well.

I knew I wanted the ability to turn around and offer a helping hand to others who had their whole world change in an instant like mine did. But what I got was completely unexpected. I've seen other surviving family members move mountains on their own grief journey. They constantly inspire me with their stories of hope and their memories of the most amazing people.

Despite being in a helping role myself, I have received so much from peer mentoring that has helped my own path. I've grown in my compassion for others. I've become a better listener. I've learned that no matter the circumstances of the death, our loved ones were and always will be incredible people; they've made a tremendous impact on our lives and our hearts, and we are forever changed.

If you would like to be part of this vital, caring outreach, consider becoming a TAPS Peer Mentor. To learn more visit taps.org/peermentors.

Are you looking to make that connection and have someone walk beside you on your journey? Find out how to request a peer mentor at taps.org/peermentors.

The caring family of surviving military loved ones at TAPS is here for you.



Rich in Love & Food

Submitted by

Gabriela Chavez in honor of
Airman 1st Class Christian Teston

Christian grew up surrounded by a family rich in both love and food. His grandfather learned to prepare traditional dishes, and Pozole became a family tradition. Christian's love for cooking came from his grandparents. While he had a habit of surprising others with their favorite dishes, this was his personal favorite to prepare and enjoy with family and friends.

Pozole Verde

PREP TIME: 30-45 MINUTES | COOK TIME: 45 MINUTES

Ingredients

- 1 pack of 8 chicken breast
- Garlic and Salt
- 1 large can of white corn
- 1 lb, green tomatillos
- 2 cups of fresh spinach
- 1 handful of cilantro
- 3-5 green Chiles Pasilla
- 1 red or white onion, chopped
- 2-3 avocados, pitted and chunked
- Juice from 1 lime or lemon
- 1/2 head of lettuce, chopped
- Tostadas or tortilla chips (optional)

Method

- Boil the chicken for about 30 minutes. Add salt and garlic, and then add the corn. Continue to cook at a simmer until the chicken is tender.
- Meanwhile, peel the green tomatillos and once washed, put them in the blender with spinach, cilantro, salt and some garlic and the green Chiles Pasilla (make



sure seeds are removed from the chiles). Add 1 cup of the the chicken broth and blend together.

- Once blended, add the mixture to the chicken and corn, and let it boil for about 10 minutes or until the chicken is tender.
- Pour the Pozole into a deep bowl with the juice and add the chopped onion, lettuce, avocados and some salt.
- This dish goes great with tostadas or tortilla chips.

Submit your story and recipe by email at
editor@taps.org.

The news that changes

Everything

By Wendy Taylor

Surviving spouse of Maj. Michael Taylor

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.

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.



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.

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.” *

Extraordinary Lives, *Many Thanks*

By Jennifer Stratton | Surviving spouse of Lt. Col. Mark E. Stratton II

In the years since my husband's death in Afghanistan, I have often wondered what is happening in their country and how the people are doing. A friend reminded me not to connect Mark's death with Afghanistan's successes or failures, and he's right. Another buddy reminded me that the soldier's first and foremost call is to protect and serve the Constitution of the United States; second, to protect and serve the men and women in uniform; third, to help the people of Afghanistan. While I knew my friend was right, questions kept surfacing.

On the eighth anniversary of Mark's death, my questions were answered. Afghan Ambassador to the United States Dr. Hamdullah Mohib extended an invitation through TAPS to surviving families who lost loved ones in Afghanistan to attend a special dinner at the embassy, and I jumped at the opportunity.

As I entered the Embassy grounds, I stood face to face with people from the foreign land where my husband died. I moved forward, hopeful and with purpose. Ambassador's wife Lael and staff welcomed us into their home. Apologizing for the ambassador's absence, his wife shared that his mother died, and he flew home to be with

family. No one understands loss like our TAPS family.

Formal speakers representing the Afghan people expressed their gratitude to our men and women in uniform and spoke of the progress made in their country.

Perhaps the most heartfelt moment was when 7-year-old Yusra said our loved ones *"saved her country's tomorrow."*

While there is a long road ahead, the Afghan people continue to fight evil. Since the United States entered Afghanistan in 2001, the life expectancy has extended 20 years (from age 43 to 63). They've had 13 years with their new democratic constitution. Where once women were not allowed to leave their homes without a male family member, women are now running their own television shows. Their country has more

women in Parliament than ours has in Congress. The literacy rate jumped from 9 percent to 39 percent. In 2024, they expect 60 percent of the population to have the ability to read. Wheat production has increased from 1.5 million tons to 3.1 million because of advances in irrigation.

The Afghan people wanted us to know, "We will stand for the values [your lost loved ones] fought for. We will defend the values they fought for." Perhaps the most heartfelt moment was when 7-year-old Yusra said our loved ones "saved her country's tomorrow." Hearing this, I quickly blinked back tears that were close to falling. My heart felt fuller at the end of the evening as I absorbed these words.

Does Afghanistan have a struggle in front of them? Undoubtedly so. Will I, my children and the TAPS family continue to miss our loved ones? Unequivocally, yes.

Yet I hold on to a ray of hope that good triumphs over evil. I am thankful my husband and the loved ones of others heard that call and answered it. They lived extraordinary lives and went to extraordinary measures for us. They've impacted countless lives for good, and for this, their service sees no end. ★



On Behalf of Afghan Children

My name is Yusra and I am 7 years old. I have come From Afghanistan and on behalf of the children of my country; I want to say a Few words.

My mom and dad have told me that you have helped us For a long time. Your daughters, sons, wives, husbands, brothers and sisters have travelled thousands of miles to go to my country and help my people. Your Families, loved ones, have been away From their homes For weeks, months or even years. They have missed you and you have missed them. Most of them have returned home. But some have not. It is very sad and difficult.

I am sorry For your loss. And I do not have words to say how thankFul I am For your support. But I want you to know that your loss has not been For nothing. You have saved my country's tomorrow. You have saved me, and thousands like me.

You have stood with us on our worst days and we will never Forget that. our traditions teach us to honor and appreciate every act of kindness and yours have been many.

I stand here, honored to be together with you and thank you For your support.

Thank you again!

Yusra



“This is a very sacred site. It is a shrine for the prophet Yunus,” one of the guides told the group.

“What was his name again?” I asked, wanting to imprint the new name to my mind.

“Yunus. He is very important in our faith. This place is called Nabi Yunus.”

I looked down at the elegant archways standing amidst tangled rebar and rubble – so much rubble. “Yunus,” I repeated under my breath. I didn’t know who this holy man was, but my heart hurt looking at what had been done to this sacred site.

I never expected to travel to Iraq. Growing up, I learned about the Holy Lands. Names like Nineveh, Assyria and Babylon were all part of the fabric of my Biblical teaching. And I vaguely knew that these ancient cities were part of

modern day countries, but it all seemed so far away. How could I know that one day this land would define some of the most profound experiences of my life? How could I know that the man I loved, Army Ranger Cpl. Jason Kessler, would take his last breaths in ancient Nineveh? And 10 years later I would stand on its historic foundation?

I went to Mosul with TAPS as part of a larger delegation with the International Welfare Foundation and the Mosul Reconstruction Group. Hoping to provide support to refugees who had been displaced by the horrific destruction of ISIS, I personally wanted to tell the stories back home of those affected in the world where Jason died.

Coming to Mosul, I knew a few things. Along with supporting refugee families and witnessing the devastation first hand, I knew I wanted to make a private memorial somewhere for Jason. And I

knew I wanted to take home earth from this place. At the time, I didn’t think too deeply about why I wanted those things. It simply welled up in me as a need. Looking back now, I realize that it was a declarative act. To say, “You were here. I am here. I remember. Your life matters.” To leave something and take something from that place was another connection to the life we had lived together. Taking pieces and making them into something else was an act demonstrating that the story doesn’t end with brokenness. It continues with rebuilding connections.

When I stepped out onto the sacred site of Nabi Yunus, it was clear that was where I would be able to memorialize him. I thought Jason would like that I was doing it there. Along with being an adventurer and warrior, he was a scholar, theologian and philosopher. He loved reading, and he loved history. I wondered if he ever saw this place when he was stationed here. It would have been beautiful then.

FINDING MY *whole self* IN THE BROKENNESS

By Erin Jacobson | Surviving fiancée of Cpl. Jason Kessler

I see new beauty rebuilt out of ruins.
I see despair turn into laughter.
I see connection through new friendships.
I see the ways family members continue
the living legacy of their loved one.



As I wandered through the ruins, I picked up a few pieces of stone and fragments of the building. I stopped at a remaining doorframe and sat within an archway. I began to stack the rocks into a cairn - a symbol that something important had occurred here. I had built cairns before, most memorably in the red rocks of Sedona with a group of surviving women on a TAPS Empowerment Retreat. I knew what a powerful symbol they could be. I took a red rose with me that morning to place on the memorial and laid it next to the cairn. From these fragments, I had built something new. It was small, but meaningful. And I scooped up a portion of earth to put in my container to take home.

I looked at what I'd built and I smiled as I realized it reminded me of something else. A few years after Jason was killed, I made a clay sculpture out of broken glass. I formed a broken woman reaching high to the sky. I shattered a glass bottle and put its fragmented pieces into a plaster mold. The high intensity of the kiln's heat melted the pieces down to create something new. Nothing was lost; it was repurposed. The lines of the broken

pieces were still evident, but they became pieces of a new whole.

In the days that followed, we visited various refugee camps and sites destroyed by ISIS militants, where we met men, women and children impacted by the devastation. The image of Nabi Yunus kept coming back to me. In it was a profound symbolism for the mission of rebuilding not only in Mosul, but the rebuilding of a life after the destruction of grief. Yes, something sacred was attacked and destroyed. A profound tragedy occurred, that is true. However, the story doesn't end there.

I later learned that Nabi Yunus has a complicated history dating back thousands of years. Yunus is another name for the prophet Jonah and this shrine was his burial place. Until 2014, it had become a central place of worship for local Muslims and place of pilgrimage for Jews and Christians throughout the world, until later that year when the revered holy site was reduced to rubble by ISIS. But, amongst the destruction and intended division by ISIS, I realized that these three seemingly very different

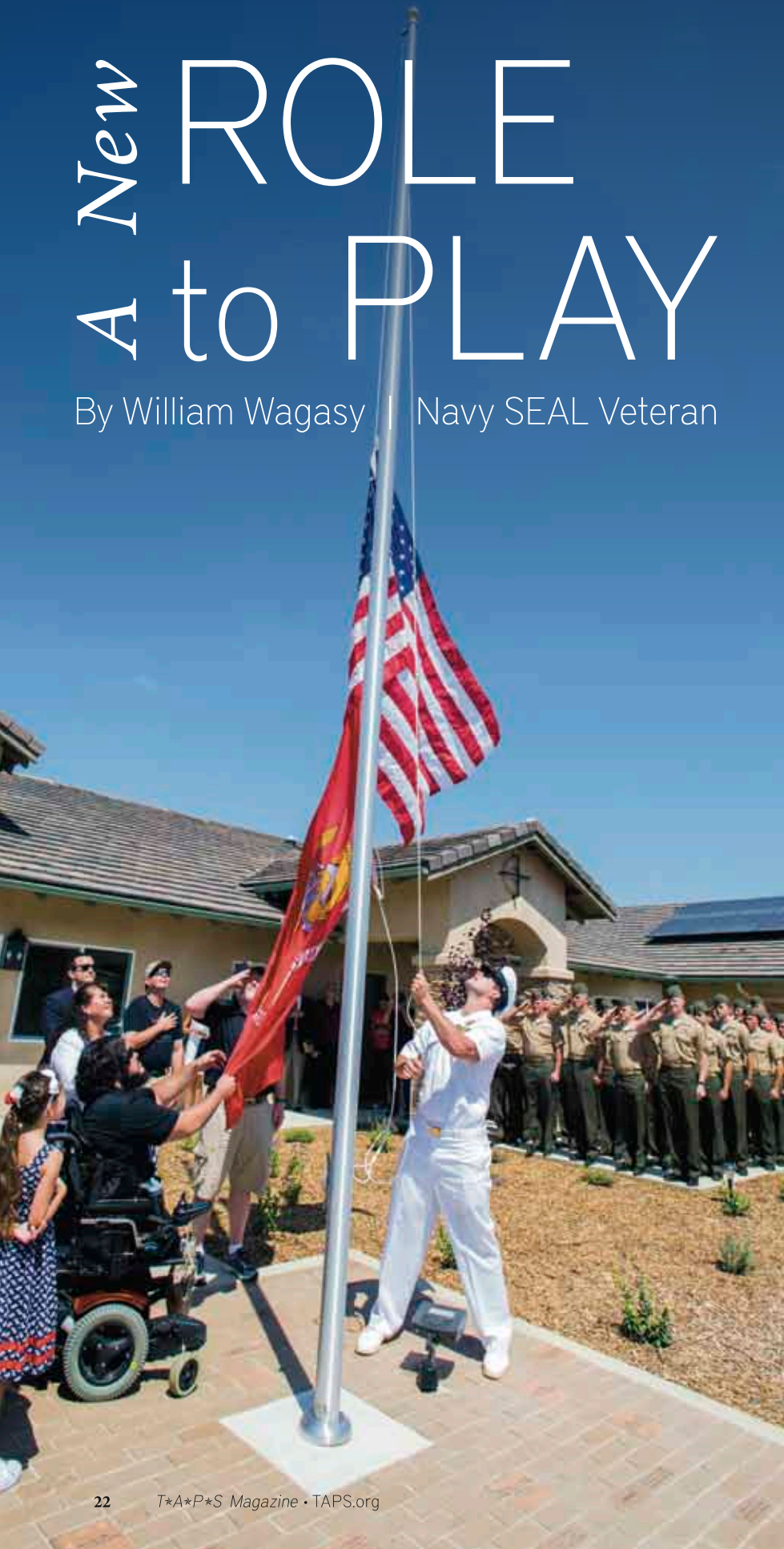
faiths were united for a common cause: rebuilding Mosul.

In my own life and in the lives of the families that I have met through TAPS, I see a similar thing. I see new beauty rebuilt out of ruins. I see despair turn into laughter. I see connection through new friendships. I see the ways family members continue the living legacy of their loved one. Death and destruction are not the end of the story. They are only part of the story.

We honor the lives our loved ones by the choices we make. Bringing awareness and support for rebuilding Mosul is one of the ways I can continue Jason's legacy of service. What has happened to Mosul is woven into the fabric of all our stories. Day after day, we hear of terrorist attacks throughout the world and even within our borders. But it's not the only story. Just as many people are coming together to rebuild Nabi Yunus, so too can we as surviving military loved ones here and overseas, come together to help rebuild hearts and lives. *

A New ROLE to PLAY

By William Wagasy | Navy SEAL Veteran



A Navy SEAL from 2002 to 2012, I had three deployments to Iraq under my belt and had just finished a year-long deployment to Afghanistan when I returned to the United States. I served another six months in the military and transitioned to civilian life, and I was totally lost as to what to do next with my life.

I wanted to unplug for a while. I didn't want to answer to anyone. So, I moved from my duty station in San Diego to upstate New York where I began boxing out of a small gym. After eight months of boxing, I moved in with one of my best friends from college and his family who lived on the outside of New York City. His family invited me to stay with them while I contemplated my next step in life.

I am godfather to my best friend's oldest daughter who was 8 years old at the time. Daily she came home from school with different books she was supposed to read and discuss with her family. Sometimes, I read to her at night and we discussed the stories. It was "Charlotte's Web" that made me think about my purpose after military life, deployments and losing fellow service members.

I was reading her the story and in chapter 21, "The Last Day," E.B. White writes of the last conversation between Charlotte the spider and Wilbur the pig, before Charlotte dies.

Wilbur, feeling like he has never done anything to deserve the grace Charlotte has shown him by spinning her webs, questions Charlotte as to why she would go to such lengths for him.

Charlotte has a simple but profound answer. She says, "You have been my friend, that in itself is a tremendous thing. I wove my webs for you because I like you. After all what's a life anyway. We are born, we live a little while, we die. A spider's life can't help being something of a mess, with all this trapping and eating flies. By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that."

After reading this passage to my god-daughter, I paused and started to reflect. I told her I needed to take a break, and I went outside. It was a cool autumn night in the mostly rural neighborhood, and the wind blew through the trees as I walked down the empty street alone.

I thought of the past 10 years of my life - the many fire fights I had been in from street to street and house to house in Baghdad, Mosul, Ramadi and through the mountains of southeastern Afghanistan. I thought about, E.B. White's words. Much like Charlotte, a military service member's life can't help but be somewhat of a mess with long deployments away from home, the taking of life and the destruction you bring to the world when you are fighting your nation's enemies.

So what is my purpose? My purpose is to work, to fight, to defend and, through both empathy and tough love, to help others reach their full potential as human beings. But I also am called to reach my full potential as an individual and as part of the collective nation.

I believe we stand on the shoulders of the great men and women who went before us, but also we are only as good as our next generation. This is my purpose - to wake each day, to work, to help others, to make my life and that of my friends a little brighter, to be a battle buddy to those going through their darkest moments, to fight for the things I believe in and, when I find a moment, to rest and share a meal, a story or a laugh.

This is my purpose. I have a new role to play.

Today and every day, I honor and remember those who have gone before me and help those who will come after me. I strive to be a friend to myself and others. I search for new passions - those things put on my heart - and pursue them. By doing so, I lift up my life and that of others just "a trifle" each day. And heaven knows, all of us can stand a little of that. *

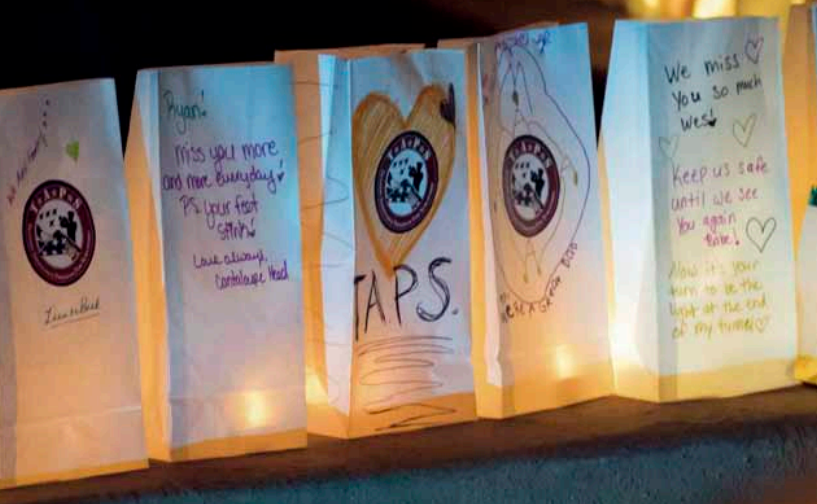


share the journey

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/expressiveart inspirations, 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. ☆



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.



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

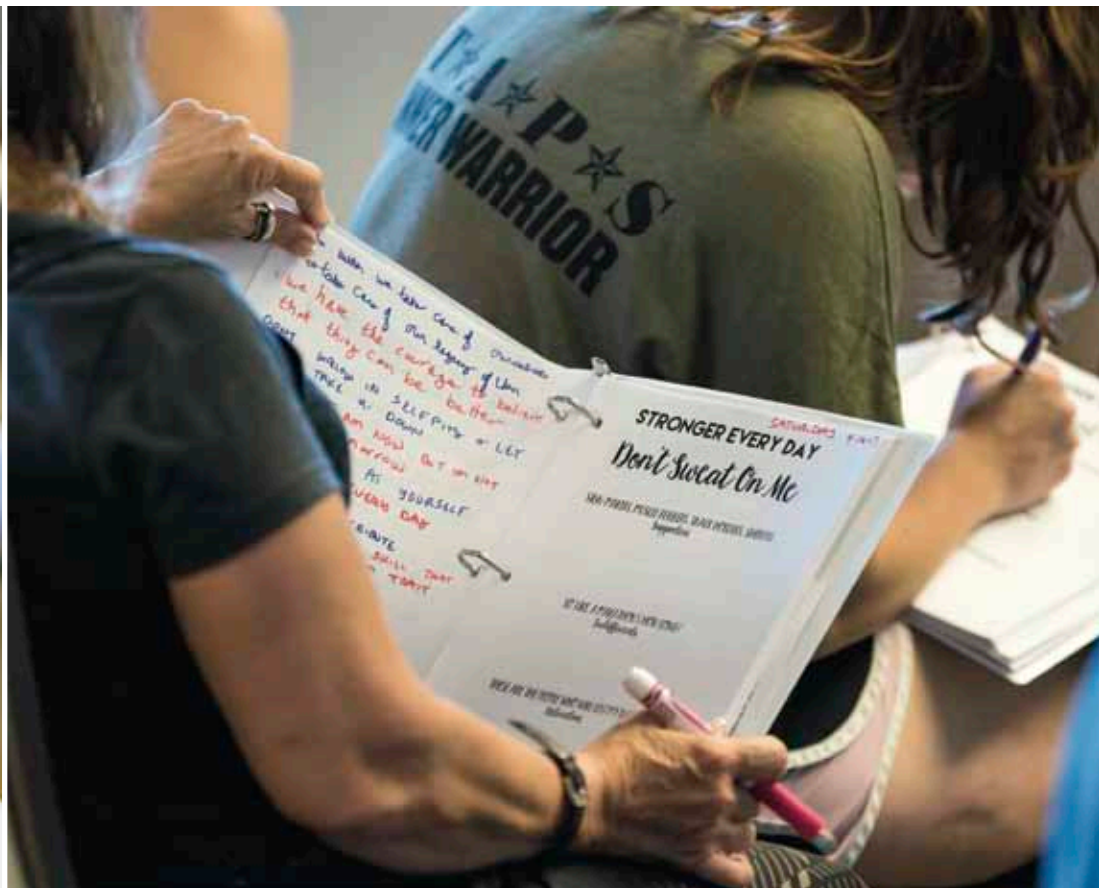
opportunity to say John's name, and I found myself not wanting to talk about my loss, for fear of having to explain the manner of his death.

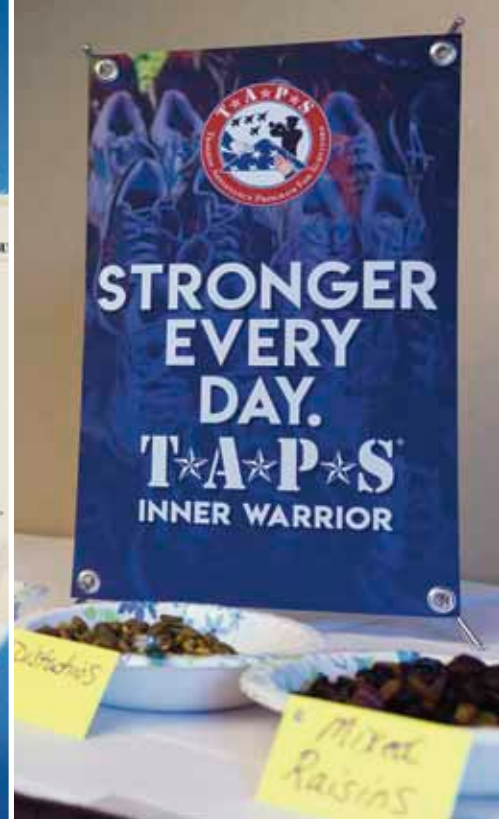
John was a wonderful man, who had a strong affinity for the dogs he trained. He lived a life of honor and service. And cared deeply for those closest to him and the job he was doing. He was my best friend. I wanted people to remember him for that.

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. *

The Four *Agreements*

By Miguel Ruiz | Reviewed by Ashley Rao

Spiritual teacher Miguel Ruiz promotes healing and transformation through ancient wisdom of the Toltec culture, a people native to Central America. In his book, “The Four Agreements,” Ruiz outlines “A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom.”

Ruiz contends that a wall of fog distorts our perception of who we are: “It is as if we live in the middle of a fog that doesn’t let us see any further than our own nose.” This fog, he explains, is formed by unexamined agreements we’ve established with ourselves and others – beliefs about who we are and who we should be and masks we’ve put on to hide our perceived imperfections.

Those of us who are grieving understand this sentiment all too well – grief can feel like a heavy fog, clouding our minds, numbing our senses, obscuring our identity and the direction we feel we should take. We know the weight of others’ expectations. We’ve grown accustomed to donning our “I’m okay” masks even when our hearts are broken into a thousand tender pieces.

Regardless of where we land on the spiritual spectrum - from skeptic to believer and across religious creeds – the application of Ruiz’s tenets offers opportunities for transformation within our journey through grief.

1. Be Impeccable with Your Word

The first agreement addresses the power of the language we use – in spoken word as well as thought. “The word is a force; it is the power you have to express and

communicate, to think and thereby to create the events in your life.” Ruiz warns us to be careful to use this force for good, rather than to destroy.

2. Don’t Take Anything Personally

Ruiz’s second agreement helps to guide us in our interactions with others: “Whatever people do, feel, think or say, don’t take it personally.” Ruiz explains that the way others speak and act are projections of their own reality rather than truly being about us. He invites us to let go of the pain, anger and envy we attach to others’ actions and reminds us that we can only be responsible for ourselves – not the choices or actions of others.

3. Don’t Make Assumptions

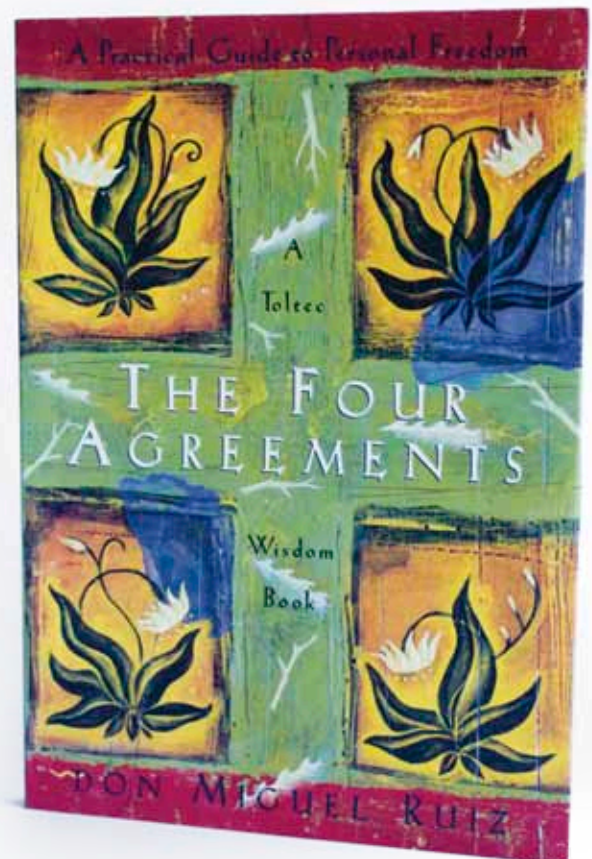
The third agreement calls us to examine the negative ways our assumptions affect our relationships. “We make the assumption that everyone sees life the way we do. We assume that others think the way we think, feel the way we feel, judge the way we judge,” but in reality our perspectives are as unique as our fingerprints. Ruiz proposes that accepting that our assumptions about others as truth creates misunderstandings, conflict and unnecessary drama in our lives. He encourages us to change this by having courage to ask ques-

tions and to communicate clearly.

4. Always Do Your Best

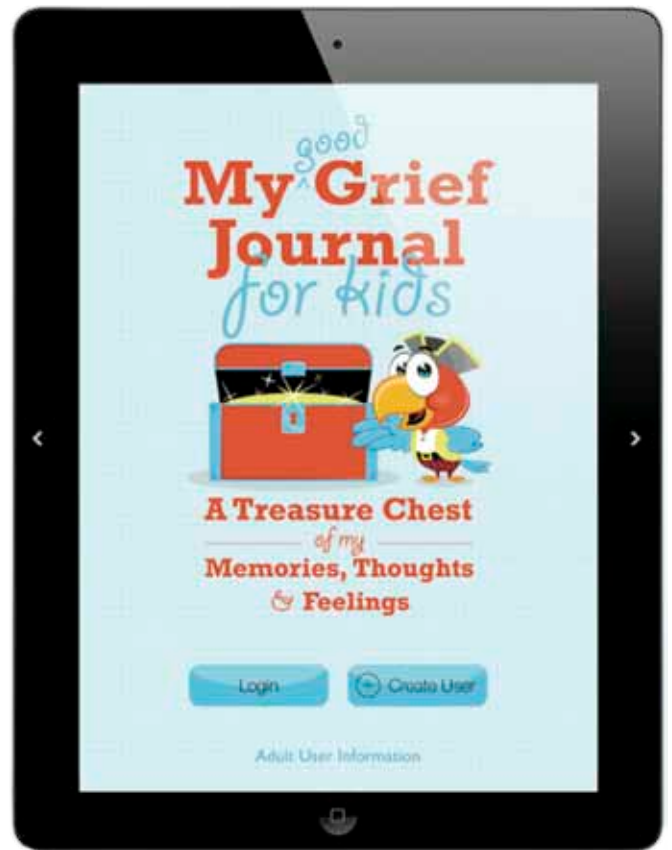
Ruiz’s final agreement calls us to put forth our very best effort into our language and relationships - into whatever it is that we do. Our best effort will vary from one day to the next; stepping into responsibility for our best (no more and no less) challenges us to live life intensely, offers us freedom from unrealistic standards and creates a step-by-step map towards healing in our journey. “If you do your best always, over and over again, you will become a master of transformation. Practice makes the master. By doing your best you become a master.”

He invites us to let go of the pain, anger and envy we attach to others’ actions and reminds us that we can only be responsible for ourselves – not the choices or actions of others.



My Good Grief Journal for Kids

| Reviewed by Cheryl Kreutter, Ph.D.



For both children and adults, writing and drawing are useful tools for unpacking grief. The “My Good Grief Journal for Kids” app for iPad, a digital grief journal created specifically for children, provides children both space and structure to record memories, thoughts and feelings about a loved one who has died. While an adult is required to provide guidance on the app, it is the colorful pirate-costumed parrot who prompts a number of “remembering activities” to which children may respond through writing, drawing, typing, video and audio recording as well as importing photographs and music.

One page asks the child to type what the loved one “liked doing best” and import a photo showing “the one thing he would rather do than anything else in the whole world.” The child is encouraged to type responses to the prompts “What I like most about this picture...” and “When I look at this picture...”

On another page, the parrot observes, “The day someone dies becomes an important part of our life story. That day marks the end of our time with them. Because we love them so much, the day is filled with many memories, thoughts and feelings.” In response, the child is prompted to record a short video of one memory, thought or feeling. Throughout the journal, the child might even choose to respond through emoticons.

Beyond the first two pages where the child identifies the loved one and his or her relationship (mother, father, grandmother, etc), the child is not required to respond to a particular prompt nor does he or she have to respond in a particular order. Having choices such as these makes

the journaling more appealing for the user.

The journal may be saved on the iPad at any point in its creation, allowing multiple opportunities for adding and editing content. The content is entirely self-contained on the iPad, and deleting the app will result in all journals being erased.

Before using with a child, the adult should be able to navigate the app with ease. To build this expertise, adults might create their own journal. Not only will adults build confidence through hands-on experience with the app, but also they will have entries to share with their children. Through their guidance and sharing, adults can open conversations about grief with children. On the Welcome page, app creator, grief specialist and pastor John Lemasters notes, “Adults often don’t know what to say to their kids and fear saying the wrong thing. Whether from fear or inability, children can also find it difficult to give expression to their grief.”

My Good Grief Journal for Kids provides opportunities for expressing grief and opening these difficult conversations between children and adults.



“Adults often don’t know what to say to their kids and fear saying the wrong thing. Whether from fear or inability, children can also find it difficult to give expression to their grief.”

Find My Good Grief Journal for Kids on the App Store for iPad or visit mygoodgriefjournalforkids.com.

FROM KABUL *with Care*



These are extraordinary pieces of jewelry, which we hope you will wear with pride and give with love. Together we will change the world and bring hope to Afghanistan.

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taps.org/afghan.



A Joint Program of Afghan and American War Widows

It's about life and love, service and sacrifice. Behind the headlines, away from the politics, military widows in America and in Afghanistan are quietly changing the world. These women, grieving the death of their military loved ones, are coming together through TAPS to build a bridge of compassion and action.

Karguzaar, our sister program in Afghanistan, is an initiative to establish employment opportunities and stability for the families of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. The name Karguzaar translates to "Creating Jobs." Together, TAPS and Karguzaar are bringing resources to Afghanistan for training, professional development, education and economic development with the goal of providing emotional support and assistance to widows and children. For the first year after their loss, a monthly stipend is given to the widows while they gain vital knowledge, skills and support to help them care for their families and each other as they move forward.

We want you to be part of this movement toward stability and security. The women of TAPS and Karguzaar have joined forces to create a magnificent bracelet. The beads are precious Lapis Lazuli, the "stone of heaven," mined in Badakhshan, and they are strung with nylon cord carefully tied into an artistic slip knot by Afghan widows. The bracelets are then sent to TAPS in the United States, and packaged lovingly by American widows who honor the power of each piece.

Purpose in Connection

| *Lori Branch* |

TAPS welcomes new volunteers.

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



Lori Branch's commitment to volunteerism runs about as deep as her Georgia roots. Whether she is giving her time and talent to her children's schools, her neighborhood or her husband's Army unit, Lori understands volunteering brings purpose and makes a critical contribution to a stronger society.

Lori has volunteered with numerous organizations throughout her life. Having completed training to serve as a Good Grief Camp Mentor, her husband David continued to receive email notifications about volunteer opportunities with TAPS programs. It was his recommendation that thankfully brought Lori to volunteer with TAPS in 2015.

After multiple moves between Ft. Meade and Ft. Gordon, Lori and her family transferred once again to the Washington, D.C., area. With her husband away on a year-long deployment, and the task of planting roots once again at a new duty station, Lori knew she had to get connected to something that gave her purpose.

Lori first volunteered with Team TAPS during a thank you note service project. Lori, her

daughter and six others completed handwritten notes of thanks to participants in the Army Ten-Miler and the Marine Corps Marathon. Through her volunteer service, Lori gained a better understanding of the connection and inclusivity TAPS provides.

Like many TAPS volunteers, supporting our survivors became a family affair for the Branches. Lori assembled care packages for newly grieving families with her daughter Emma, placing a TAPS quick series guide on suicide loss in each package. "We probably filled over 100 care packages that day. It was eye opening." Lori was reminded of the great diversity of those affected by military loss, and how TAPS programs reach across the chasm of grief to offer survivors hope and healing.

Volunteering with a neighbor, Lori made paddle fans with photos of fallen service members for the Inaugural Parade this past January. She was struck by the number of loved ones being represented. With each photo, she put a face to a name.

Lori's commitment to volunteering continued as she worked the Good Grief Camp

Field Day USA and TAPS store at the 2017 National Military Survivor Seminar. Seeing the TAPS families, she remembers thinking, "These are the recipients of the cards. These are the recipients of the grief packages. These are the people we are doing this for." Lori enjoys meeting the surviving families, hearing their stories and making connections.

Lori's connection to TAPS deepened while speaking to a friend whose brother died in Afghanistan in 2011. Her friend shared how TAPS had been instrumental in helping her work through her grief. Her friend received anniversary cards, just like the ones Lori helped mail during another service project. Through her volunteer service, Lori built bridges between TAPS and surviving families and her friend all at the same time.

Lori's volunteer work is part of who she is. By serving others, she finds purpose and connection to her community. While Washington, D.C., may not be quite like her home in Georgia, TAPS is glad Lori is growing deep roots with us. *



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"Through my personal experience with TAPS I have found hope, healing and a much needed sense of love, comfort, knowledge and an inner strength that is invaluable to me." ~ Joann Sottnik, Surviving Mother

