

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

T★A★P★S[®]

FALL 2018 | MAGAZINE



Healing Wisdom from Trees ★ Recipe of Remembrance

Understanding Suicide Risk Factors ★ Peer Support - Stronger Together

A photograph of a forest path lined with trees in autumn. The leaves are yellow and orange, and the path is covered in fallen leaves. The text is overlaid on the image.

“TAPS IS
THERE
FOR THE
EVERLASTING
MOURNING
AND GRIEF,
AND FOR THE
DAYS THAT
TAKE YOU TO
YOUR KNEES.”

~ Surviving Parent

MILITARY SURVIVOR HELPLINE
800-959-TAPS (8277)



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"It is our duty to support the families of our comrades."



On the Cover

From left to right, surviving fathers Wayne Telford, Michael Zinn, and Stan White attended the

Men's Retreat at Parade Rest Ranch in Montana. Photo: TAPS Archive

A Safe Space

To My TAPS Family,

Welcome to our fall issue of *TAPS Magazine*. This is our hug in the mail, written with hope you'll find comfort and strength within these pages.

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a family of all of us who are honoring our loved ones and holding them close in our hearts. Like a strong, caring family, we are always here to offer support, understanding and hope when it's needed most. We are present for each other in times of difficulty and joy; we share our experiences and possess an endless supply of hugs!

We found each other because someone we love has died, but far more important than that, we are bonded forever because someone we love lived a life that included selfless service to our country. We honor and remember them always.

Like family, we are ever-present. The TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline is available for you to call anytime. Whether in the darkness of night, on significant anniversaries or during the holiday season, there is a caring person waiting to listen and help.

Our TAPS Casework Team will advocate for you and have your back when you don't have anywhere else to turn. TAPS holds gatherings at our Retreats, Seminars, Camps, TAPS Togethers and Care Groups. Our Peer Mentor network is our buddy system so you never feel alone. We have a great sports program through teams4taps that takes us out to the ballpark or stadium for family outings.

Consider *TAPS Magazine* your family newsletter, where you can catch up on what everyone is doing, find inspiration, and make plans to share time with some of the most loving, caring, kind people you could ever hope to count as kin. This issue is filled with survivor stories, articles to honor our heroes, and information to help you navigate your grief journey.

Years may pass and seasons may come and go. Wherever you are on your life's journey, you always have a safe space—one that allows you to be where and who you need to be—to nourish and energize your soul.

We are a beautiful family and I am honored to share this journey with you.

With so much love and hope,



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Our Mission
The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors offers compassionate care to all those grieving the death of a military loved one. Our National Military Survivor Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at 800-959-TAPS (8277). For more about the resources we provide, turn to page 26.

TAPS is here
24 HOURS A DAY / 7 DAYS A WEEK

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

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Dear TAPS...

FINDING COMFORT

My healing began when I let TAPS into my life. The comfort and sense of belonging I found in being surrounded by people who have all experienced a similarly profound loss has been invaluable. I went to my third National Military Survivor Seminar in May, and for the first time I was able to think a bit less of myself and reach out to others. Definitely a sign of healing and learning to live again.

Karen Kelley

Philadelphia, PA

Surviving mother of Airman 1st Class
Caleb Justin Kelley, U.S. Air Force

NOT THE ONLY ONE

Would you let those who post in the Saturday Morning Message know that I thank them for their responses, as it reassures me that what I feel is not abnormal. What they feel and how they handle themselves with people who don't understand our grief at that moment is what I would do myself. Sometimes I think I shouldn't be acting a certain way, but I see now I am not the only one who does. Thanks again to Carol Lane for all that you do for us.

Michele Nawrot

Novi, MI

Surviving mother of
Capt. Stephen M. Nawrot, U.S. Army

TO THE TAPS TEAM

It was an awesome pleasure meeting each of you at the TAPS Regional Seminar in Ohio. After getting a peek of the Good Grief Camp and talking to some of the volunteers, I really gained an appreciation for the important work of TAPS in connecting and assisting surviving families who are in an ongoing emotional journey after losing their loved ones in service to our nation. I look forward to seeing what TAPS accomplishes in the future for these surviving families.

**Lt. Col. Renardo M. Brown,
U.S. Air Force**

Wright-Patterson AFB, OH
Deputy Commander,
88 Mission Support Group



THANK YOU FOR CARING

Thank you for keeping in touch with me and caring for my well-being. I have gone to one of the counselors recommended by TAPS and she is very kind. At each session I learn something new about grief, depression, and myself. Susan Carron, I don't know what I would do without the support I've received from you and the other staff at TAPS. I am very blessed to be a part of this extension of my military family. I love being a part of the military family.

Josephine Geiger

Tumwater, WA

Surviving spouse of
Maj. Richard Geiger, U.S. Army Veteran

FEEL THE HUGS

First thing this morning, I read (the anniversary remembrance) email and felt the hugs that came with it. For days, I've thought "TAPS will remember what this day means, and that helps." Thank you for starting this day out with warmth! Much love.

Darla Nykamp

San Antonio, TX

Surviving mother of PO Joshua Quinn
Snodgrass, U.S. Navy Veteran

ETERNAL GRATITUDE

I am at a loss for words for my eternal gratitude for the much-needed assistance with the burial of my dad, Lt. Col. James A. Fife. This help lifted a large burden from my mom. The support in every aspect of the loss of my dad from TAPS, and from Aaron Brodsky, has been amazing. I am forever grateful.

Laura Kovatch

Hurlock, MD

Surviving daughter of Lt. Col. James A.
Fife, U.S. Army Retired

SHINING LIGHT

Right after my husband died, I seriously didn't know which way was up. I felt like I had gotten thrown under a massive waterfall and couldn't come up for air. TAPS was my air for my early days. You called several times a day, just to help me breathe. I cannot even say thank you enough for Sarah Greene's and everyone else's kindness. They were able to calm me down, and shine a light unto my path. I seriously don't have the words to express my thanks to TAPS.

Kellye Bone

Edmonds, WA

Surviving spouse of Tech Sgt.
Thomas Bone, U.S. Air Force Retired

I WANT TO HELP

I lost my little brother in January 2016. Not only was he my brother, he was my best friend. When I lost him TAPS reached out to me and asked me if I wanted a Peer Mentor, and at first I was hesitant. I eventually met Carly Sitko who changed my life. She has been there for me and helped me on some of the hardest days of my life. I am forever thankful for her and for TAPS. I am a TAPS Peer Mentor now because I would like to help a surviving sibling the way she has helped me and been there for me.

Amanda Klager

Hollis, NY
Surviving sibling of
Spc. Adam Jared Klager, U.S. Army

INFORMATIVE WEBINAR

I just listened to Carla Stumpf-Patton's webinar Understanding Why People Die by Suicide and I wanted to say thank you! It was fantastic. The best, most direct information I've learned yet. I've had ASIST training, SafeTalk training and Mental Health First Aid. But I felt in the short, information-packed hour I learned so much more. As a grief counselor, I work with many suicide survivors and this information will help me in my work with them. It's an area that I feel passionate about because of the work I do with survivors and people contemplating. Keep up the good work. I love these webinars because I can watch them from work. Each one has been so great.

Linda Turner, LCPC

Centreville, MD
Grief Counselor
Compass Regional Hospice

FAVORITE MAGAZINE

What a nice surprise to see the new layout of one of my favorite magazines. Thank you, TAPS for the new look. Love the way it flows!

Peggy Carvill-Liguori

Kinnelon, NJ
Surviving sibling of Sgt. Frank Carvill,
U.S. Army National Guard



Connect *with Us!*

WRITE TO US

This is your magazine! We welcome your thoughts about anything you read in our pages or any experience you have with TAPS. Please write to us at editor@taps.org.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Your stories can bring hope and healing to TAPS families. We invite you to share a story about your loved one or your grief journey. All submissions will be considered for TAPS *Magazine*, our blogs at taps.org, and other TAPS publications. We invite you to read our submission policy and submit your story at taps.org/shareyourstory.

JOIN US ONLINE

Find information about our resources, programs, and events on our website taps.org. You'll also find our blog with stories of survivor strength and healing. Our Online Community host chat sessions for connection to others from the comfort of home. Learn more at taps.org/onlinecommunity.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE SATURDAY MORNING MESSAGE

The Saturday Morning Message is a weekly email written by and for survivors to provide support along the grief journey. To subscribe, send a request to online@taps.org.

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For more on TAPS resources and support, turn to page 26.

Grieving vs. *Mourning*

People tend to use the two words interchangeably. But there is a crucial distinction.

By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

I often remind myself that there is no love without loss. And there is no integration of loss without the experience of mourning.

Your capacity to love requires the necessity to mourn. To deny the significance of mourning would be to believe that there is something wrong about loving. Yet I truly believe our greatest gift from God is our capacity to give and receive love. Likewise, it is a great gift that we can openly mourn our life losses.

You may have noticed that people tend to use the words “grieving” and “mourning” interchangeably. There is a critical distinction, however. We as humans move toward integrating loss into our lives not just by grieving but by mourning. You will move toward “reconciliation” not just by grieving but through active and intentional mourning. So what is the distinction?

Grief is the constellation of internal thoughts and feelings we have when someone we love dies. Think of grief as the container. It holds your thoughts, feelings, and images of your experience when someone you love dies. In other words, grief is the internal meaning given to the experience of loss.

Mourning is when you take the grief you have on the inside and express it outside yourself. Another way of defining mourning is “grief gone public” or “the outward expression of grief.” There is no one right or only way to mourn. Talking about the person who died, crying, expressing your thoughts and feelings through art or music, journaling, praying, and celebrating special anniversary dates that held meaning for the person who died are just a few examples of mourning. Making the choice to not just grieve but authentically mourn provides you with the courage and confidence to integrate the death of someone loved into your life.

I have come to believe that to heal your grief, you must mourn it. To go on to ultimately “live well,” you must “mourn well.” By mourning well, I mean openly and honestly expressing your thoughts and feelings from the inside to the outside—no pretense, no repression, no inhibitions. Somewhere in the collision between the heart, which searches for permanency and connection, and the brain, which acknowledges separation and loss, there is a need for all of us to authentically mourn.

Authentic mourning means being consciously aware of the painful emotions of grief and feeling safe to express them.

Herein lies the paradox—a wide range of instinctive responses occur, but you get to decide as your grief unfolds into mourning if you will truly experience these responses or instead inhibit, suppress, or deny them. Actually, befriending such emotions is what makes it possible to experience, eventually, a sense of renewed meaning and purpose in your life. Yet the emotions you sometimes most want to avoid are the ones you most need to attend to.

Being consciously aware of your need to mourn does not mean you are “feeling sorry for yourself” or wallowing in your pain. However, authentic mourning is allowing yourself to accept and to experience the natural rhythms that accompany the journey. Authentic mourning is anchored in making the conscious choice to allow yourself to mourn, to recognize that darkness sometimes precedes light, and to seek healing, repair, and transformation of your very being.



Of course, there are many reasons you might choose to grieve and not mourn. Your pain may seem intolerable. Since mourning won't bring back your lost love, you may rationally try to "put it behind you." After all, you tell yourself, mourning won't bring the person back.

People around you often think they are helping when they say things like "carry on," "keep your chin up," and "keep busy." Or you may feel that if you don't "overcome" the loss, you are not living up to your testimony of faith that you have tried to live by.

No doubt, some people—or maybe you yourself—may suggest that sufficient time has passed and that you should be "done" or "finished" with your grief and mourning. Perhaps as a child or teen you were taught in your family not to express grief in front of others. Some people have shared with me that they fear they will "go crazy" if they allow themselves to encounter their grief. Or perhaps you have decided to deny or repress your grief because you feel it interferes with your ability to function at work and/or home.

All of these potential reasons and many more are often rooted in a reluctance to feel the pain of loss and a general attitude toward grief that is present in our "mourning-avoidant" culture. There is a widespread lack of understanding about how to befriend painful grief energies and use those energies for healing and transformation.

The opposite of befriending pain and allowing ourselves to mourn is control. Underneath the controlling impulse is fear: the fear that we will experience feelings that are painful.

As grief enters our lives, many of us have been taught that giving these feelings too much attention is a sign of weakness or breakdown. In fact, many people try to head off losses in the first place by controlling. After all, you don't have to grieve and mourn if everything comes out your way.

I believe we control because we are afraid of the emotions that grief brings our way. We don't like being overcome by the waves of grief and sorrow. We don't like "losing control." And until we come to realize there is a natural, normal mourning experience that can result in meaningful transformation, we have little awareness of the need to experience the pain we call grief. In addition, the emotions of grief are often referred to as "negative," as if they are inherently bad feelings. This judgment feeds our culture's attitude that these emotions should be denied or overcome.

Married to this observed truth is the reality that society gives us little permission to openly mourn. We realize that the better we appear to be coping, the easier it is for people to be around us.

So, unfortunately, there are multiple forces working against your organic instinct to mourn in the face of loss. The choice to

experience and express your grief to its fullest can indeed be difficult in our mourning-avoidant culture. Yet no matter how difficult, if you do make the choice to authentically mourn in the ways that are unique to your being, you will have begun to return to life, to living, and to loving! If you come to embrace the truth that mourning is a natural extension of loving, you will come to see mourning as part of the natural order of life.

So, each day, ask yourself this critical question: "Will I grieve this loss, or will I mourn this loss?" Having the courage to mourn can breathe life back into your divine spark. Choosing to authentically mourn can and will help you experience a time of release and renewal.

Of course, this does not mean your journey is over and done, but it does mean you are empowering yourself. To empower means to give or add power, to propel. When you empower yourself through mourning, you will begin to feel a gentle strength that runs through your body and your soul. Yes, asking and answering this critical question can help empower you. ★

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., is the founder and director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and a member of the TAPS Advisory Board. This article is excerpted from his book, *Eight Critical Questions for Mourners: And the Answers That Will Help You Heal*, published by Companion Press and available at centerforloss.com.





We are Stronger

A TAPS Peer Mentor and mentee count on each other for love and support.

was dealing with her own pain, she supported others around her who were struggling, too.

WHEN YOU KNEW YOU NEEDED HER:

SHERRY: I knew I needed her when I woke up one night from a dream and was so saddened by it. I texted her and she quickly assured me: “You can’t change your dream. But now that you are awake you can change how you think, and know you’re safe.” That was a huge revelation for me—to know I could text at anytime and help would be there.

KAREN: When we began encouraging each other through Facebook and texts. It is thrilling to know that someone thinks about you during the day and sends a quick note or tags you on Facebook. People can get too busy with their own lives sometimes but Sherry is very thoughtful to let friends and family know that she cares.

HOW SHE’S HELPED YOU:

SHERRY: Karen has helped me to become more practical in my thinking and not be so hard on myself. She has showed me how to navigate my emotional journey in ways I didn’t know how.

KAREN: Sherry has helped me realize that the grief journey is always better when it is shared by someone who understands

the incredible loss and darkness you feel during the early days. It is important to look back and see that you are stronger than you ever thought you could be and to share this with others so they believe they will make it in this world too.

HOW SHE’S CHANGED YOU:

SHERRY: She allowed me to see that grief is different for everyone—it’s not one-size-fits-all. We all grieve differently and deal with it differently.

KAREN: She has reminded me of the importance of staying connected with others who need the support of a caring community. I want to be connected and to focus on what really matters in this life. People matter!

ONE THING YOU’D LIKE HER

TO REMEMBER:

SHERRY: I think I would like Karen to remember what a giving person she is. She is always good to me and talks to me not just about navigating my grief. We also talk about everything, like movies or the colors of our clothes—just fun girl things.

KAREN: I would like Sherry to always remember that she is stronger than she knows, that the world is a better place because she is here, and that Julian would be so proud to see all that she has handled in her first year. Sherry Jennings-Kevianne is amazing! ★

Peer Mentor Karen Hilliard, surviving spouse of Lt. Cmdr. Jeffrey A. Hilliard, and Sherry Jennings-Kevianne, surviving spouse of Sgt. Julian Kevianne, are decidedly two very different women. Karen, left, describes Sherry as artistic and creative, while Sherry, right, says Karen is logical and business-like. But their differences matter little when they lean on each other’s strengths for ongoing support in their journey through grief.

FIRST CONTACT:

SHERRY: I’m not much of a phone-talking person, so we decided (communicating) on social media or text message was best.

KAREN: My first contact with Sherry was in September 2017 via email. We learned quickly that we did not like email conversations so we switched to texting. I sent her information about Wreaths Across America and soon after we were making plans to place wreaths on our husbands’ graves at Arlington National Cemetery last December.

WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO MEET IN PERSON:

SHERRY: We met at Wreaths Across America. It was the first time I saw my husband’s marker and it was extremely emotional for me. But meeting Karen and the other wives there really helped a lot. My first impression of Karen was her physical attributes. She is very tall and has a very sweet and warm smile.

KAREN: I went to look for Sherry and found her in Section 60. It was wonderful to be with her as she honored the memory of Julian with his squadron mates. I was immediately impressed at what a giving person she is because even though she

Be Part of the Peer Mentor Program >

The TAPS Peer Mentor Program equips survivors 18 months past their loss to serve as a companion to fellow survivors looking for someone who truly understands. Our Peer Mentors are survivors who are trained by peer professionals to accompany others in their grief.

If you are an adult survivor and would like to be connected with a Peer Mentor, please call our National Military Survivor Helpline at 800-959-TAPS (8277) and ask to speak with a member of our Survivor Care Team, who will walk you through the process.

Taste *the* Love

Grandma's beef roast and brown noodles brought the family together

By Chris Shank | Surviving brother of Cpl. Jeremy Shank, U.S. Army

I've heard it said that smell is the sense most closely tied to memory. That is understandable as one of my fondest memories is going to my grandmother's house and smelling the roast that had been cooking for hours. The meal she would make for us is something I can remember since I was old enough to understand what food was and is now a staple in our adult households. It should come as no surprise this was my brother Jeremy's favorite food too.

When we were kids, the three of us Shank boys were all close. It was easy when we were young and lived in the same house. As we got older, life happened. As I gained freedom with a driver's license and developed a social circle distinct from my family, we started growing apart. A few years later, Jeremy got his license and experienced his version of freedom. My youngest brother followed shortly after.

As much as we grew apart, we would all drop our plans if the call came to go to grandma's house. Any squabbles or quarreling would quickly settle down with one taste of grandma's famous beef roast with brown noodles. The only fighting we would do would be the challenge to see who could eat the most of it. The noodles were the favorite, but the whole meal of roast with the noodles and gravy was the thing of family legend.

Even now, almost a dozen years after Jeremy died and after the deaths of my mom and grandmother, that meal is something my family still talks about. My wife was kind enough (when she was just my girlfriend), to cozy up to my grandma and learn how to cook this famous meal. Despite the fact that almost half of my family is gone and we are all spread out geographically, the memory that means "family" to us and

reminds of the times we were all together is tied to the smell and taste of this recipe. ★



Beef Roast and Brown Noodles

Prep time: 10 minutes | Cook time: 6 hours | Serves: 4-6

Ingredients:

4-5 pound boneless beef rump roast
6 cloves garlic, whole
1 cup water (more, as needed)
16 ounces elbow macaroni
12 ounces Heinz Homestyle Savory Beef Gravy (or any prepared gravy)
salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Prepare roast by letting it come to room temperature before cooking.
2. Separate garlic head into 6 cloves.
3. Make 6 1-inch deep cuts into meat; place 1 garlic clove in each cut.

4. Place large heavy pot or Dutch oven on stovetop over high heat.
5. Once pot has reached high heat (pan is hot when you can drop water in pot and it sizzles and evaporates), sear each side of roast until a caramelized crust forms.
6. Once seared, turn heat to low. Cover and cook six hours.
7. Check on roast every hour. Juices should cook out and keep meat moist, but if pan is dry, add ½ cup water as needed to keep meat moist but not saturated.
8. After six hours, meat should be cooked through but tender. Remove from pot and set aside.

Share Your Recipe

If you have a favorite recipe please send it to editor@taps.org along with a brief story about why it means so much to you.

9. Add box of elbow noodles into pot, add enough water to cover noodles and bring to boil.
10. Cook according to noodles' package directions, adding water as needed.
11. While noodles are cooking, heat up beef gravy in separate pot according to product directions.
12. Once noodles are done, salt and pepper noodles to taste.
13. Cut and serve the roast with the noodles.

Back to School *Traditions*

A surviving spouse shares the lessons she learned about helping her children through the start of new beginnings.

By August Cabrera | Surviving spouse of Lt. Col. David Cabrera, U.S. Army



Dave Cabrera, with Roanin and Maxwell, right, are ready for the start of first grade and kindergarten.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUGUST CABRERA

A Mother Remembers

I have a picture of my boys from seven years ago: One is wearing a new striped polo, the other a Niagara Falls T-shirt from our summer vacation. Their hair is actually combed, their faces are freshly washed, and they are standing on the path from our house to the school. It is our youngest boy's first day of kindergarten and his brother's entry into first grade. They are each holding up a finger to show the number 1, in excitement over the first day of school. Joyful anticipation of this great adventure fills their young faces.

Standing behind them, one arm lovingly draped across each boy's shoulder, and also with a single finger in each hand showing the number 1, is their soldier dad. Dressed in his uniform (and definitely late for work), Dad looks invincible as he stands with his two youngest children on their way to school. There is a look of pride and contentment on his face as now all four of his kids are off and running toward their futures.

A few years earlier Dave had done the same with his two older kids from his first marriage. We scrounged up the money for a round-trip plane ticket to Texas, and he flew down to walk his oldest to his first day of kindergarten. The next year he walked his daughter to hers. He wouldn't have missed the first day of school for anything.

A few weeks after that fresh-faced photograph of our boys was taken, as they were settling into their school year, Dave took a trip to the desert and didn't come home.

Life forever changed

It's now been almost seven years and this fall our youngest son will enter seventh grade and his brother will start his first year of high school classes. Dave's daughter will be a sophomore in college and his oldest a junior, both at their dad's alma mater.

Seven first days without him. Seven years of new teachers and new schools. Seven years of report cards, awards, and lunch detentions. Dave was a child therapist by training, and he would have known how to manage the drama of middle school, the chaos of freshman year, the heartache of a daughter without a father to escort her on the homecoming court. Instead, we are left trying to figure it out as we go along—without a dad to fill in the gaps.

Each first is a time for tears, but as the years go by the grief changes—it is never easy, but it does get easier. Along our path I've learned a few things that have made our back-to-school days a bit less sad.

Let the kids find their own way to process the day.

The kids all deal differently with each first day: one makes sardonic jokes, another simply remembers, one is vocal about the sadness, and one keeps to himself. After Dave first died I tried to force emotional processing at each milestone, questioning my boys about how it made them feel to not have Dad around on days like these. It took more time than I would like to admit for me to realize this was not helpful to my kids. That isn't true for everyone, but for mine it was a disruption to their own internal process and I was getting in their way. They know what they need, and I needed to learn to trust them. Give them resources (like they get at TAPS Good Grief camps), but know they know what they need in the moment. I'm here for a hug, a fist bump, or even a good cry. Their choice. As for me, when I make them stand on the front porch for the requisite photo, I try not to notice there is someone missing from the picture. I cry after they get on the bus. It seems easier for us all.

Let traditions morph.

We all have ways of celebrating momentous occasions, but changes in the family makeup combined with the kids getting older will inevitably lead to different ways of marking those days. I've found that the best thing to do is follow the kids' example. I don't walk my boys to the bus stop anymore (too embarrassing for them) and I try not to intervene as I see my boys pick out casual, but not obvious, outfits for the first day of school (they are far too old and too cool for Mom to pick out their clothes). Now they choose their first day of school special breakfast, lunch, and dinner, all their school clothes, and decide if I am driving them to school or simply waving to them quietly as they walk out of the house in the morning. Every year changes, and that's a good thing, as they continue to discover who they are becoming as young adult survivors.

Let the sadness be tempered with joy.

Yes, it is terrible we have lost someone we love.



Roanin, left, and Maxwell, pose for their traditional first day of school photo last year.

But we have these little hearts and souls that need our support and strength. Do I cry every year? Absolutely. Do I sometimes get angry at the fact that I am the one sending them off to school without support? Yup. But do I also look at the smiles on their faces and find gratitude in my heart that I get to send them off to a new challenge? Of course. I would do anything—wouldn't we all—to protect my kids from the pain and brokenness they've learned to live with. But I would be failing as a parent to let them dwell on the loss and not look to the goodness around them.

No matter how hard, first days are good things. It is the beginning of a new year—a new chance—and I want my kids to embrace that opportunity. It is hard not to have Dave here as the kids keep walking toward their futures. There are bits of sadness that Dad isn't around, but in between those painful moments there are glimpses of joyful anticipation for the next adventure on each of their faces. And that is exactly what he would have wanted for his kids.★

August Cabrera lives outside Washington, D.C., with her two boys, fiancé, and dog. She recently completed her Master of Fine Arts in creative nonfiction from Goucher College and is working on a memoir about her experiences with grief.

Walking in Dad's Footsteps

“I just know based on his art and what I know of him that he would've loved to see me enjoy art myself.”

By Weston Haycock | Surviving son of Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey Haycock, U.S. Army and Sr. Airman Nichole Haycock, U.S. Air Force Veteran

When I was born, my father wanted to name me after one of his favorite artists. He and my mother argued whether I would be named Leonardo, Fletcher, or Harold Richard before they agreed to name me Weston — a compromise because it was not a common name and also not the name of a Renaissance painter. My father attended art school as a young man before enlisting in the Army. He was truly a man of the arts; he loved cooking, painting, sculpting, gardening, all of it. It's somewhat ironic that his children were

all born without any of his artistic talent. One look at my handwriting shows all you need to know about my lack of skill with a pen. Despite my inability to create art, I still have a profound love for everything artistic. I always make a point to stop and look at street art wherever I am. It's important to take in each opportunity to enjoy art here in Montana as there isn't as much to enjoy as I would like. This summer however, I was given the opportunity to spend a few months in Washington, D. C. with a summer internship on Capitol Hill.

It was amazing to live in an area with so much art. The Hart Senate Office building where I worked had more art in its halls than I have ready access to in Montana. When I arrived, I made it my goal to visit every Smithsonian museum in the area. This sounds like an easy goal, but there are 21 museums to see. I only made it to 18 of them, but it was quite an experience at each one.

I felt very close to my father while I was exploring the arts of so many different cultures. I spent hours going through the National Museum of African Art and thinking about how much he would've enjoyed taking in such breathtaking patterns and colors. His paintings were always very bright and vibrant, and I knew in my heart he would enjoy the works of the foreign cultures. When I was at the Hirshhorn Museum I saw a lot of works that reminded me of my father's paintings. He was a bizarre man and his art is very surreal. Some of his paintings scared me as a child, as they were often seemingly misshapen and full of energy. But I have a painting of his that hangs above my bed that really comforts me. It is a painting of a man in a box staring out at the light, and its calming colors and poignant message really speak to me. I feel closer to him, like I know him a little bit more because it gives me a glimpse of how he felt as a young man possessed by the need to express himself on canvas.

My favorite museum was the Freer Gallery of Art, where the sculptures were breathtaking and I knew my father would be happy to know that I was being impressed by art from centuries ago. I have no memories of my dad so I can't say first hand why he would've



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WESTON HAYCOCK



The Haycock family, in 2001. Jeffrey and Nichole are shown with their children Weston, in his mother's lap, Ashlynn and Colton, standing.

I feel closer to him, like I know him a little bit more because it gives me a glimpse of how he felt as a young man possessed by the need to express himself on canvas.

liked it, I just know based on his art and what I know of him that he would've loved to see me enjoy art myself.

The experience of working for the Senate this summer was something I'll never forget, but the time I spent outside of work was just as important to me. It was so fulfilling to get to take a walk in my father's shoes as an artist through our nation's capital. I know he would've loved to just stop and stare up at all

the beautiful paintings and architecture that adorn those halls the way I did every day. I may not have picked up my father's talents as an artist, but I certainly inherited his love for art and I can feel in my soul that at least I have that to enjoy with him. I'm no Picasso, but I am certainly capable of opening my heart and soul to the healing powers of the arts. And I can tell you this much—my heart is full and I felt closer to my father during my artistic excursions than I had in years. ★

Weston Haycock is a senior at Montana State University majoring in writing. He spent the summer as an intern on Capitol Hill, working on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. He worked to support and enhance the same education benefits that allow him to attend college.



Working it Out, Two surviving mothers join forces to advocate and

By Julia Wilson | Surviving mother of Lance Cpl. Tyler Lee Wilson, U.S. Marine Corps

I've been wanting to write for some time to share about a wonderful thing that has taken place in my life and our community. Our son, Tyler Lee Wilson, lost his battle with PTSD on June 8, 2016. We held his visitation and funeral at our local American Legion. There were many veterans involved in his services through the local American Legion, American Legion Riders, Patriot Guard Riders, Honor Guard, and Marine Corps League. The American Legion Riders presented us a plaque, the flag that was flying over the Legion that day, and another American Legion Rider Gold Star Mother presented me with a special pin. Several months later that mother, Jenny Lou Merrell, and I were asked to do a TV interview about PTSD for Veteran's Day. We happily agreed to do it even though we knew it would be very hard.

The following January, Jenny Lou asked us to partner with her in a foundation she was starting, called Working Out PTSD, to help local vets by giving them free gym memberships. We didn't want any more families to suffer the loss we both had. We held a fundraiser at the American Legion and it was a huge success—we raised over \$10,000 to support our local veterans. Since that time we have been interviewed on TV and newspapers many times about Working Out PTSD.

The local gyms partner with Working Out PTSD and give us a great deal for memberships for the vets. We are so thankful for this because it helps our funds stretch further and in turn we can help more veterans. We are happy to be able to support our locally owned gyms too. I have never stepped foot in a gym! That is not for me! I am a yogi, and I walk everyday. Tyler was passionate about working out and he was a beast in the gym. He even got his little brother into working out, which he still does. A huge sign that



Right: Julia Wilson, left, and Jenny Lou Merrell, have done radio interviews to tell their community about their sons' experiences with PTSD.

we missed with Tyler was that he had quit working out, which he previously did every day. We all know that with suicides there are a lot of 'woulda, shoulda, couldas'—it's a much more complicated grief.

Jenny Lou and I have formed a friendship and love for one another out of heart-wrenching circumstances. We had the honor of attending the TAPS Suicide Survivor Seminar in Phoenix last fall. We met some wonderful people and have formed new lasting friendships. Phoenix was the perfect location. It was from there, the Suicide Survivor Seminar, that we rose from the ashes of our broken lives. Jenny Lou and I are dedicated to helping our local veterans any way we can. It's how we honor and remember the sons we lost to a battle we couldn't help them overcome.

We think they would be so proud of the work we do, just like the pride we have in them for selflessly serving our country



Right Middle: Julia Wilson, left, and Jenny Lou Merrell, received a check after a fundraiser in their community.

Right Bottom: A veteran recently received free membership at a local gym, courtesy of the foundation Working Out PTSD.

as U.S. Marines. This has been part of the healing process for us. ★

Julia Wilson lives in Danville, IL, with her husband, David. They joined Jenny Lou Merrell in Working Out PTSD, to help veterans in their community maintain physical fitness. Julia also facilitates Angel Moms, a local support group for grieving mothers who have lost a child at any age, regardless of circumstance.

Together

support physical fitness for veterans in their community.

By Jenny Lou Merrell | Surviving mother of Sgt. Aaron James Merrell, U.S. Marine Corps Veteran



When my son, Aaron Merrell, returned from serving with the Marines, he was excited and had a very positive outlook on his new civilian life. He was working out when he returned. When life started to set in—difficulty finding a job, difficulty finding his friends and doing the things they used to do, etc., he started to navigate away from the gym. Partially because he was becoming depressed, partially because he couldn't afford it anymore from lack of finding decent employment.

When he no longer felt good about himself and how he looked, it compounded the depression. When he couldn't connect with the friends who worked out, or his friends from school because they had families and different lives, he felt lost. All that depression, coupled with the PTSD knocking on his back door, turned into destructive behaviors. It was a downward spiral. When he started to lose himself, it went quick. Very quick. Like going from thinking, "Hey, I look and feel good" to "I'm out of shape and a loser" kind of thing.

I lost my son on July 4, 2015. Julia Wilson lost her son, Tyler Lee Wilson, about a year later, on June 8, 2016. I met Julia at Tyler's funeral. There was a service at our American Legion where I presented her with a small Gold Star to represent her loss and sacrifice, as another mother had done for me.

When Julia told me how Tyler suddenly stopped working out and then lost his battle with PTSD shortly after, we realized that this could be a very clear sign of "loss of hope." One day I was at Kinney's Gym and I told the owner to let me know if he knew of a veteran that needed a membership and couldn't pay for it.

The following week I received a call from the VA: "So we understand that you needed a few names of veterans that could use a gym membership, and you would like to pay for them." I responded, "Well, yes, I asked for one, but I could do maybe three. I think it could help."

Then I started thinking...well, if I reach out to a few other business owners I know, ask them to match me on gym memberships, maybe this could go someplace. That's when I shared my idea with Julia and she pushed and supported me in putting it all together.

From the start, Julia was a part of this. She has been my backbone when I needed support, my mouth when I couldn't speak, my partner through it all. Together we have been a team, looking for that one lost man or woman that is losing hope. We are working to keep them working—working to stay alive and continue to fight with the same ambition and fearless efforts for themselves as they did for our country and for us. It's payback time—and for what may seem a minor fee, it's a huge step in the right direction. It's a very small check compared to the blank ones that every single one of them wrote. ★

Jenny Lou Merrell lives in Bismarck, IL. She started Working Out PTSD, a foundation that offers free gym memberships to local veterans. The group's aim is to ease PTSD symptoms and provide camaraderie among veterans in the community. She is a Navy veteran.



Selecting a Grief Counselor

Finding a mental health professional takes some work. This guide may help.

By Stephanie Frogge, MTS



Finding a good mental health professional in the midst of a trauma is somewhat akin to trying to find a good plumber in the middle of the night when water is pouring out of a hole in your wall. Your intentions may be clear but summoning the necessary energy, focus, and discernment to be a wise consumer of mental health services may be just too much—especially when you’ve got your finger in the dike and know it won’t take much to bring the whole thing crashing down around your ears.

Intellectually most of us understand that we wouldn’t give a decorator free rein in our home or drop off our children at a daycare center without checking qualifications and making sure that we have a shared vision of services to be performed. Yet for many of us finding a counselor—and giving him or

her access to our most tender places during perhaps the most difficult time in our lives—is achieved by searching online or going with a recommendation made by a friend.

Finding a counselor takes work, and then deciding if it’s a good match takes even more. However, with a little bit of information about the types of counselors available, you may be able to narrow your initial search and increase the likelihood of finding a good match right away.

Keep in mind that the mental health professionals who are licensed through their state may be called something a little bit different or may have slightly different requirements from one state to the next, but generally they are similar to the descriptions provided below.

PSYCHIATRIST

A psychiatrist is a physician who completes medical school and then, like the other doctors who want to specialize, takes additional training in the field of mental health, in the same way a cardiologist learns more about the heart and a dermatologist learns more about the skin. Many psychiatrists don’t do traditional counseling. They typically assess and diagnose, then work with a psychologist or other type of counselor who provides the counseling service. One advantage to seeking the services of a psychiatrist is that he or she can prescribe medications. Survivors who may be helped through the short-term use of medications may find the services of a psychiatrist to be more efficient than going to another type of counselor who then has to work through a doctor to get

Giving some thought to what you envision the counseling process achieving may help you narrow down your search.

a prescription. Survivors who are already dealing with mental health challenges may find the expertise of a psychiatrist to be helpful in terms of coordinating mental health interventions. On the other hand, some survivors find the traditional medical model—something's wrong with the body that needs to be fixed—to be an unsatisfactory characterization of bereavement and trauma.

PSYCHOLOGIST

A psychologist is a mental health professional who has earned a doctor of philosophy degree in the mental health field. Their title is that of doctor although their training is not in medicine, so they are not physicians. In addition to their Ph.D., they have had a period of practice under the supervision of a more experienced psychologist and have passed a licensing test. Psychologists are trained to assess and diagnose problems and to intervene using techniques and methods that result in behavior change and improved quality of life. Because of their expertise in testing and diagnosis, survivors who may be dealing with issues besides those related to the recent death of a loved one may find the long-range view of a psychologist to be especially useful. Psychologists can help their clients better understand how past issues are influencing present issues and, with those insights, how behaviors can be adapted. However, for those who only want to focus on a specific issue and don't want or don't need a broader contextual analysis, a licensed counselor or social worker may be a good choice.

LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR

A licensed professional counselor, or LPC, has at least a master's degree in counseling



or a related field, has passed a state licensing exam, and has had several hundred hours of clinical experience under another LPC. The licensed professional counselor's primary focus is on the individual and the issues that are causing them problems in their life with an eye toward improved functioning.

LICENSED MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPIST

The licensed marriage and family therapist, or LMFT, has received training and licensing similar to that of an LPC but also has specific training and expertise in couples and family dynamics. That focus may be of particular interest to survivors who want to seek counseling as a family. Similar to social workers, LMFTs seek to identify ways in which the presenting issue is manifesting itself in the client's relationships and environment.

LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER

A licensed clinical social worker, or LCSW, has an advanced degree in social work including an internship experience, several hundred hours of supervised practice, and an advanced licensing exam. It's been said that a counselor changes a person from the inside out and a social worker from outside in. That may be a bit simplistic, but a social worker is specially trained to look at individuals within the broader context of their environment—their families, their professions, their daily activities, and their interactions with other people. Although the client's specific issue will be the focus of intervention, the LCSW is trained to identify ways in which that issue is manifesting itself in other circumstances and relationships. For survivors who want to focus primarily on a particular issue,

such as grieving the loss of a loved one, an LCSW may be a good choice. Those who want to work on broader issues, such as how a recent loss may be spotlighting unresolved issues from the past, may find an LPC or psychologist a more appropriate mental health partner.

LICENSED MASTER LEVEL SOCIAL WORKER

This provider has earned a master's degree in social work, including the internship, and has taken an initial exam. They may or may not be on their way to becoming an LCSW, but their clinical work is done under supervision. That doesn't mean that a supervisor will sit in on your counseling session, merely that the LMSW will consult and seek guidance from his or her supervisor on a regular basis.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Clearly there is a lot more to accessing mental health services than just "seeing a counselor." However, by giving some thought to what you envision the counseling process achieving, some types of mental health professionals may seem like the more obvious choice and help you narrow down your search.

Your work, however, isn't finished once you've scheduled an appointment. As a consumer, it's your job to monitor both the service provider and the services you are receiving. In the face of advanced degrees and impressive-sounding titles, it's human

nature to believe that you are receiving competent care. You may believe that it is somehow not your place to question the services you are receiving. To the contrary, you have every right and obligation to make sure that you are getting the support you need.

TRAINING & PHILOSOPHY

As you are calling around, feel free to ask about the counselor's education and training. What licenses does he hold? What degrees has she earned? Reputable counselors will feel comfortable answering questions about their qualifications. Ask about their therapeutic philosophies. What kinds of techniques do they like to use? How do they typically proceed with clients whose issues are similar to yours?

EXPERIENCE

Even a highly qualified mental health professional may simply not have worked with very many people who have experienced the sudden, traumatic death of a loved one. That does not make them less competent; it may simply mean that they are not right for your needs. It's appropriate to ask a therapist about his or her experience with trauma. How many similar clients has she seen? Does he belong to any trauma or bereavement-specific professional organizations or done any continuing education in this area?

RELATIONSHIP

This is a highly subjective category but the bottom line is: does this person seem like someone you will be able to work with effectively? Does his or her demeanor, answers to your questions, and office

environment make you feel safe and respected? If it does not feel right, then it probably is not right for you. Research has demonstrated that a good therapeutic relationship, more than any other factor, predicts counseling effectiveness.

COMPETENCE

Although the vast majority of mental health professionals are both well trained and emotionally stable themselves, for your own emotional well-being certain boundaries must be maintained. If your counselor becomes distraught when you tell your story, if your relationship crosses over the line from professional to personal, if your counselor is sharing what feels like too much of his own personal information, if you feel like you have given it a fair shot but you don't seem to be feeling better, then it's time to look for someone else. Just as you would not continue to take your car to a mechanic who cannot fix the problem or shop at a store with disinterested, rude, salespeople selling products you do not like, you are not under any obligation to continue counseling. Take your business elsewhere.

AFFIRMATION OF GROWTH

Most people who seek mental health services to help them with a specific issue, such as a significant change or loss as opposed to a chronic mental health condition, will not need to be in counseling forever. Part of the therapeutic experience is moving toward the time when counseling is no longer necessary. At appropriate times, your counselor should explore that with you and affirm the strides that you are making. If your counselor is making it sound as though you will be in therapy for months on end, or is resistant to reducing the number of times you meet, and you feel as though maintaining the same schedule is no longer in your best interest, then at least get a second opinion.

As a licensed professional, your counselor has to maintain the standards set by his or her licensing entity, adhere to a code of ethics and abide by a conflict resolution process when there has been a complaint. With most licenses, you can find out if someone really does hold that license or has had any complaints filed against them. You can also find out the procedure for filing your own complaint if a serious problem arises. Much of the information



*Finding a counselor ~
and giving him or her
access to our most
tender places during
perhaps the most
difficult time of our lives
~ takes some work.*



can be easily found on the Internet and can further assist you as you explore your counseling options.

Catherine Doherty, a 20th century social rights activist, is credited with having said, "Someone has said that it is possible

to 'listen' a person's soul into existence." For many survivors, good counseling has been their soul's bridge back from despair to life. With a little bit of information and the will to be a good consumer, you can find a counselor who can be an important part of your healing journey. ★

Stephanie Frogge is a staff associate for TAPS serving on the Helpline. She has more than 30 years of experience in the area of trauma response and crime victim services, and is the former national director of victim services at Mothers Against Drunk Driving. She holds a master's degree in theological studies from Brite Divinity School and is a trained mediator.



A SIMPLE ACT CAN CHANGE A LIFE

At TAPS, we understand service and sacrifice. We live lives that honor our loved ones. We are their living legacy. Today, we have an opportunity to continue their mission by giving those around the world who are less fortunate a chance at a better life.

TAPS has partnered with our sister organization in Afghanistan to provide hope to the families of their fallen and stand in solidarity with Afghan widows and orphans desperate for hope.

By purchasing this beautiful lapis lazuli bracelet made by the widows of Kabul from the finest gemstones mined in northern Afghanistan, you are creating a job and providing an education, you are ensuring a safe home for a child, and you are continuing our loved ones' legacy of fighting for freedom and a better way of life for the next generation of children around the world.

One Purpose, Three Options

1. 20k Gold Charm and Lapis Bracelet, \$80
2. Lapis Bracelet with Silk Knot, \$40
3. Lapis Bracelet with Elastic, \$25

AVAILABLE AT TAPS.ORG/AFGHAN

Understanding why People Die by Suicide

*Learning the facts can lead to a deeper,
more informed understanding
of suicide behavior.*

“Why did they do it?” “What happened?”

The answers to the questions are complex. When someone we love dies by suicide, it can be overwhelming and confusing, and bring with it many emotions and questions. Those affected by suicide often struggle with how, and if, their life will ever fit back together again. More than anybody, it is the suicide loss survivor who is left with endless “whys” and “how could this happen?” While every circumstance is as unique as the loved one who has died, there can be many commonalities and factors that are often associated with deaths by suicide.

While this article cannot address exact scenarios or give precise answers as to why someone’s loved one died by suicide, acquiring an understanding around the concept of suicide can often shed light on the topic as being a complex phenomenon and a multi-factored event. Based on suicidology (the scientific study of suicide), some of the prominent theories, current research, and testimonials help to better explain the suicidal mindset and why people die by suicide. This understanding also helps in identifying some of the indicators, signs, and factors that often contribute to a person’s risk for suicide.

For those who have lost a loved one to suicide or for those at risk for suicide, it is important to note that talking about prevention efforts and details around suicide might elicit or evoke various feelings or responses that are unique to how each individual has processed their grief. It is common for survivors of loss to reflect or wonder why more wasn’t

By Carla Stumpf-Patton, Ed.D., M.M.H.C.

Surviving Spouse of D.I. Sgt. Richard E. Stumpf, Jr., U.S. Marine Corps

done to help their loved one. Some people may struggle with anger or blame at one's self or towards others if these efforts were not offered to their loved ones.

There may be feelings of regret over how they didn't know then what they have come to know now. It is important to note that learning new information about suicide does not mean you should hold yourself responsible for something you did, or did not do, in the past. While we may never get the exact answers we seek, understanding more around this subject matter can often help survivors of loss as they heal through the grieving process.

Dr. Edwin Shneidman, who is known as the father of suicidology, refers to the psychological commonalities of suicide in his book, *The Suicidal Mind*. Shneidman called the psychological pain associated with suicide as "psychache," which included intolerable emotion, unbearable pain, and unacceptable anguish, and where the common purpose of suicide was to seek a solution to a problem that generated intense suffering. He noted the common emotions of suicide as being hopelessness and helplessness, where the person at risk for suicide feels the situation is unsalvageable and seeks an escape from the suffering. Shneidman also proposed the mind of a suicidal person has a difficult time perceiving options, and mistakenly believes there are only two choices: either to continue suffering or to die.

Leading suicidologist Dr. Thomas Joiner proposes why some individuals may engage in suicidal behaviors as explained in his Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicidal Behavior and in his book *Why People Die by Suicide*. Joiner states that for an individual to die by suicide, there must be two major components occurring at the same time. This first component is the desire to die (which includes the two elements of perceived burdensomeness, such as "I am a burden" and failure to belong, such as "I am alone." The second component is the capacity or ability for self-harm or suicide—which includes a fearlessness of dying.

Otherwise stated, feelings of loneliness and being a burden to others, combined with the capacity for self-harm, converge to create a fatal combination necessary for suicide behavior or death to occur.

SUPPORT FOR SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVORS

Since 2008, TAPS has served more than 11,000 suicide loss survivors grieving a loved one. Through these efforts, TAPS has developed a successful model of care that provides comprehensive, peer-based support and programming to survivors of military suicide loss. The TAPS Suicide Postvention Model is being adapted across the country and throughout the world, and is considered best practice in postvention care. The model provides hope and healing to suicide loss survivors through a three-phase approach: stabilization, grief work, and post-traumatic growth.

Stabilization focuses on survivors identifying and addressing suicide-specific issues that may complicate the grief journey. Grief work involves moving away from how a loved one died and shifting focus toward how they lived and served. Post-traumatic growth involves finding meaning from the loss, newfound purpose and belonging, and feeling empowered in one's life.

The TAPS Suicide Prevention & Postvention team is comprised of dedicated professionals with clinical expertise and lived experience. In addition to supporting its own population of military survivors, the team delivers the TAPS Suicide Postvention Model in trainings to agencies and organizations that support survivors of suicide loss.



MYTH vs FACTS

There are many myths surrounding the topic of suicide. So learning the facts can also lead to a deeper, more informed understanding. The following are some of the accurate details that may reframe the common misconceptions around suicide:

- ★ Talking or asking about suicide does not cause it to happen and actually increases the likelihood that people will seek help, so the real risk is in NOT talking about suicide.
- ★ People who talk about killing themselves are trying to express the psychological pain they are experiencing, and all threats should be taken seriously.
- ★ The majority of people at risk for suicide do not simply want to die, but more so are ambivalent about death; they want to end the pain and see no other option.
- ★ Suicide attempts are not “just for attention,” and people in crisis (or those at risk for suicide) often need professional level of care, where attention should be given to any and all attempts.
- ★ People at risk for suicide may often give clues or signals, but many people around them are not aware of what they may be observing. In fact, loss survivors often share that in retrospect, the people who died by suicide gave some indications or warning signs.
- ★ When asked directly about suicide, many who may be considering suicide will tell clinicians that they are often relieved to be asked and to know someone noticed their distress.
- ★ There are many factors and possible behavioral health issues which can contribute to suicide, such as depression and bipolar disorder, PTSD, substance use and addiction, traumatic brain injuries, and other mental health issues.
- ★ Suicide does not simply result from people who are weak or of poor moral character, and it is not an issue of will power; when left unattended or overlooked, suicide can be a life threatening emergency just as any other unrecognized or untreated health issue.
- ★ Just as with any other disease or life-threatening illness, a family history of suicide can potentially place someone at increased risk, so communication, early detection, and treatment can be preventative.
- ★ Suicide does not have to be inevitable and in many cases, can be prevented with proper interventions and treatments. The majority of serious suicide attempters do not go on to die by suicide and many are at risk for only a short amount of time, so seeking help can be life-saving.

It is important to note that much of what we have come to learn about suicide has emerged from the shared experiences of both survivors of suicide loss as well as that of suicide attempt survivors. For survivors of suicide loss, education and prevention efforts can often become an important element in grief healing, as we want others to learn from our tragedies to somehow use the information to prevent future loss of life.

For suicide attempt survivors, their story becomes living proof that help does exist, and with it also comes the possibility of hope. A special, heartfelt thanks is offered to all those courageous people who have dedicated their lives, their stories, and the memories of their loved ones, in order to better understand the topic of suicide. ★

POTENTIAL RISK FACTORS FOR SUICIDE

- ★ Previous suicide behaviors or suicide ideation
- ★ Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- ★ Issues with substance abuse and addiction
- ★ Fearlessness of injury, pain, or death
- ★ Relationship, job, legal, or financial issues
- ★ Recent separation from military
- ★ History of abuse, violence, or trauma exposure
- ★ Family history of suicide or mental health issues
- ★ Changes in social support system
- ★ Health and medical problems
- ★ Access to lethal means, such as firearms
- ★ Death of loved one, friend, or colleague

HELP IS AVAILABLE >

Our 24/7 Helpline is available to you for support at 800-959-TAPS (8277).

If you, or someone you know, may be at risk, seek immediate help by: calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255), call 911, text the Crisis Text Line at 741741, or go to the nearest emergency room.



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVE

WARNING SIGNS AND INDICATORS

- ★ Threatening to harm or kill one's self or others
- ★ Talking about death or relating strongly with other suicides
- ★ Expressing feelings of the situation being unfixable or beyond help
- ★ Talks about being a burden ("everyone would be better off without me")
- ★ Isolation/withdrawal/loneliness ("I'm all alone," "nobody understands")
- ★ Mood or behavioral changes (appears sad or depressed, manic or uncontrollable, anxious, reckless or self-destructive behavior)
- ★ Lacks a sense of meaning or purpose in life
- ★ Sleep disturbances (insomnia, sleeping all the time, unable to get out of bed, and/or lethargic)
- ★ Agitation, aggression, or irritability
- ★ Increased substance use (self-medicating to numb the pain)

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE NUMBER IS 800-273-TALK (8255).

Carla Stumpf-Patton, Ed.D., is the director of Suicide Postvention Programs at TAPS. She is a board-certified counselor who holds a doctorate in education counseling psychology and is a licensed mental health counselor. She is a certified Fellow in Thanatology and holds certification as a clinical trauma professional.

HEALING WISDOM FROM

Trees

Even when a tree is uprooted and near collapse, it can be nurtured back to life, its roots digging deeper and branches growing higher than thought possible.

By Erin Jacobson | Surviving fiancée of Cpl. Jason Kessler

There are times in life where we feel completely lost. The foundations that held us in place and helped us to make sense of the world are broken and we are left trying to make sense of a new reality. This is particularly true when we go through the loss of a loved one. Not only do we go through the grief of losing a person we love, often times we lose our sense of self and our place in the world. In times of confusion or pain, nature can help to make sense of the deepest things we feel especially during grief. Trees in particular have been a source of symbolism across cultures and centuries. The tree of life is a powerful image in many religions and faith practices from the stories of the Vikings to the scriptures of Christianity. Trees are also used in memorial, planted to remember something significant and precious.

In the aftermath of the destruction of the Twin Towers, workers found a pear tree amid the rubble. Originally planted in the 1970s, it had been badly damaged during the attacks on September 11, 2001, but it was still alive. The tree was taken to a park in the Bronx where for nine years it was nurtured and cared for. Despite the trauma it suffered, over time new growth emerged from the scars of the broken branches. In 2010, the tree was strong enough to be transported back to lower Manhattan, to be replanted at the site of the

9/11 memorial. A steel railing was placed around it for protection and cables were installed to help keep it upright. Over time, the tree gained enough strength for those supports to be taken off, and it now stands strong on its own. If you visit the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, you will notice that although many new branches have formed, the scars from the loss are clearly visible. The trauma it went through is still a part of the tree but that isn't the end of the story. Its roots run deep and its branches reach high. The tree is a living reminder of hope, resiliency, and rebirth.

People often talk about life in terms of seasons. “To everything there is a season,” the poet writes in Ecclesiastes. During this season, take the time to reflect and feel gratitude for the things like the autumn tree that are different but beautiful in your life.

As the seasons turn from summer to autumn, nature is here to support, teach, and help us. Imagine a gentle rustle of wind stirring around you. Above is a canopy of red, orange, brown and gold. Rough bark solidly supports you as you lean into the round trunk. Below you roots curve into the ground in sinewy lines.

You close your eyes and take in a deep breath. The rich scent of earth mixes with the sweet smell of change. The tree that just a few months ago was saturated with the bright green of summer has now transformed. Instead of clear light dancing in an emerald shimmer, the sunbeams are muted and softer than before. It may be different than it was, but that doesn't mean it's not beautiful.

People often talk about life in terms of seasons. “To everything there is a season,” the poet writes in Ecclesiastes. During this season, take the time to reflect and feel gratitude for the things like the autumn tree that are different but beautiful in your life. Maybe it's a new friend or job or place that you live. Maybe it is gratitude for small things that you didn't appreciate before. The seasons and the trees remind us that new growth, even from the scars, is possible. ★



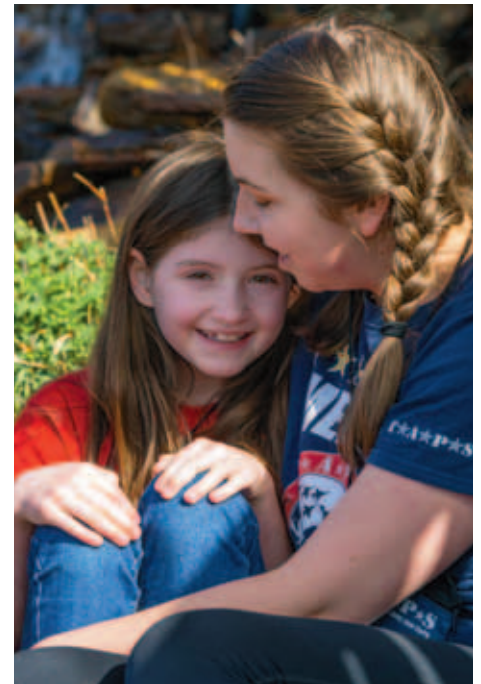
PHOTO: JIN LEE



**AS THE
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We Are Here *for You!*

TAPS offers immediate and long-term emotional help, hope, and healing to all those grieving the death of a military loved one. This at-a-glance guide outlines some of the ways in which TAPS provides compassionate care.



National Military Survivor Helpline

Grief doesn't follow a schedule, and often some of the loneliest moments come at night or on weekends or holidays or even in the middle of a busy day. Continuously operational since 1994, our Helpline consists of a network of trained peer professionals who are on call for you 24/7/365 at 800-959-TAPS (8277), whether you are in emotional crisis, need to connect with TAPS resources and programs, or just want to remind yourself that you are part of a loving, supportive family.

Peer Mentor Network

The TAPS Peer Mentor Program means you'll never walk alone. We equip survivors who are at least 18 months past their loss to serve as mentors to fellow survivors looking for someone who truly

understands. They are there to listen when you need someone to talk to, be a friend when you're feeling lonely, and celebrate the triumphs in your grief journey. Knowing you are not alone, you can find validation and ultimately a sense of hopefulness with your peers. Find out more: taps.org/peermentors.

Casework Assistance

In the midst of emotional exhaustion, many of the bereaved are surprised by the complexity of managing benefits, paperwork, and the loose ends that require attention. We work closely with trusted partners to find and use as many resources as possible that fit your needs. Close relationships with government agencies and service branches help us resolve issues regarding burials, benefits, eligibility, records, and more, while a network of other organizations consults regularly on

everything from health care and insurance issues to financial hardship and credit counseling. Find out more: taps.org/casework.

Connections to Grief Counseling

TAPS provides connections to free and unlimited grief counseling, trauma resources, and local area support groups. Individual grief counseling is important to many survivors traveling the grief journey. Sitting one-on-one with a skilled therapist who understands grief and trauma can help you work through some of the most painful parts of your loss. Finding the best fit is important, and we can help. The right grief counselor can help you discover strengths, develop your own coping skills, and help you work through questions, changes in relationships, and secondary losses. Find out more: taps.org/griefcounseling.

Education Support Services

TAPS serves as a guide to scholarship information and benefits resources for military survivors. We work with you to align resources with your goals; help you communicate with schools, college, and universities; and support you in going confidently into the next phase of your life. Your education is part of your loved one's legacy for you—and we want you to grow into it with as much peace of mind as possible. Find out more: taps.org/edu.

Suicide Loss Support

A death by suicide can leave behind a wake of emotions that complicate an



already painful grieving process. Many of us ask, “Why did this happen?” We worry that our loved ones will be remembered for how they died instead of how they lived and served. Suicide loss survivors can be assured that they have a safe space within TAPS to remember, honor, and grieve their loved one's entire story. Special TAPS programming and resources, including the annual National Military Suicide Survivors Seminar, provide gentle, understanding support as we work through the emotions associated with this type of loss. We have walked in your shoes and are here to offer comfort and care. Find out more: taps.org/suicide.

TAPS Online Community

The TAPS online grief support groups are here for you wherever you are in the

grief process—and wherever you are in the country or the world. Whether you want to share your story or just read how other survivors are sharing and coping, our online grief support community is a way for you to develop and strengthen your connections with your TAPS family from the comfort of your home. As a gathering place for survivors, the TAPS Online Community hosts chat sessions for real-time conversations, message boards that provide space for questions and comments, a blog, and peer-based sharing groups to drive conversation and connection. Find out more: taps.org/onlinecommunity.



Publications

TAPS has created a series of pocket-size guides—including “Survivor Guide,” “Benefits and Finances,” “Education Support Services,” “Children's Grief,” “Grief Guide,” and “Supporting Survivors of Suicide Loss”—that are available at no cost to survivors and supported by experts in the field. Other resources include *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death: 100 Practical Ideas for Families and Friends* by Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., and the children's book *Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope*. Find out more: taps.org/publications.

TAPS Events

The grief journey takes you out of your comfort zone. But when you see that others share this journey, you can find new ways to

grow and heal with a little more confidence. Our events bring surviving family members together for sharing, growth, and healing following loss. Hundreds of TAPS events take place all over the country each year. Opportunities for connection include: national and regional survivor seminars; TAPS Togethers, casual one-day events in your local community; health and wellness retreats, empowerment programs, and expeditions; and sports and entertainment experiences.

Youth Programs

Though their lives are marked by grief, young survivors at TAPS know their lives will also be marked by camaraderie,



mentorship, emotional maturity, adventure, and fun. Led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health, and education, TAPS Youth Programs—which include Good Grief Camps at TAPS seminars, summer campouts, teen adventures, and family retreats—provide safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing. Find out more: taps.org/youthprograms. ★

To learn more about the support waiting for you from your TAPS family, visit our website at taps.org or call the Helpline anytime at 800-959-TAPS(8277).

Matthew Navas

Serving others, and finding community

By Melissa Burris

Matthew Navas has dedicated himself to serving others. As an Army combat medic, he served his fellow soldiers. After 9/11, he cared for victims of the attack at the World Trade Center.

Two years ago, Matthew came to the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp as a volunteer with his employer Hasbro – the maker of favorite toys and games such as Monopoly, Play-Doh and Nerf to name a few. The Hasbro network of military employees hosted the Good Grief Camp Zone, welcoming hundreds of grieving military children to their first day of camp. Matthew's work as a designer helped him feel right at home as he interacted with the children and guided them as they played games and met new friends. It didn't take him long to realize his presence was offering a place of comfort and safety for these young survivors.

This experience allowed Matthew to reflect on his own personal journey of grief and motivated him to become more involved with TAPS – as a survivor. In 2005, his brother-in-law LCPL Shayne Cabino was killed in a bomb attack in Afghanistan. TAPS had provided Matthew a community of support where he felt he could freely share his grief in a way he could not do while in the military.

“It had been so long since I had been with people who had been through the same experiences,” he said. At the seminar, Matthew was able to access resources and get to know other survivors. These connections were therapeutic for him and true to his passion for serving others, he decided to complete training and become a TAPS Peer Mentor. Now he is volunteering his time to be a comforting presence to adult survivors as they cope with loss.



“While we all have our own journey to travel, it amazes me what a talk, a walk, or a hug can do for another person's well-being,” he said. “I don't want anyone to ever feel what I felt before, or that they are alone in what they are going through.” Supporting others helps him with his own grief and allows him to honor the service and sacrifice of his brother-in-law.

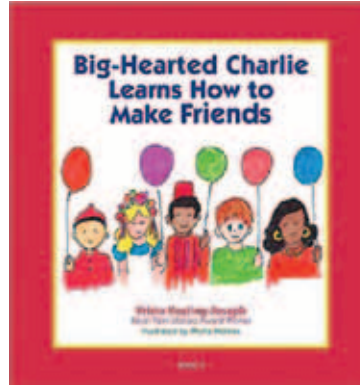
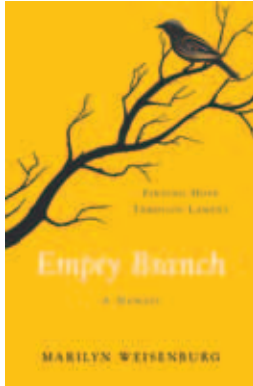
Matthew embodies the Hasbro volunteer credo that ‘service isn't just something we do, it's part of who we are.’ He readily shares that “volunteering with Hasbro at TAPS events has given me a family and sense of community that I didn't know existed before.” He is grateful to the military group

at Hasbro that invited and encouraged him to participate; he is grateful to his fellow survivors for allowing him to share his grief; and he is grateful to TAPS for allowing him to continue serving others. ★

Volunteer with TAPS ▶

Visit taps.org/volunteer to discover the opportunities available for you to join our mission and have an impact on the lives of grieving military families. You can also call the Helpline at 800-959-TAPS (8277) and ask for Volunteer Resources.

Books *by Surviving Parents*



Reading books written by other survivors is a healing companion to loss. Whether we are reading about a lighthearted recollection of the life of a service member or confronting the pain of someone's loss that closely mirrors our own, reading these stories can help us navigate the ups and downs of our own grief. Here are two books for the adult reader, and two written for children.

Empty Branch

By Marilyn Weisenburg

Marilyn Weisenburg has crafted *Empty Branch* to honor her son, National Guard Staff Sgt. David Weisenburg. She recounts the heaviness, the uncomfortable moments, and the struggles she experienced finding her way to a new normal under the profound weight of losing a child. Marilyn's memoir shows her resilience and redemption as she invites readers to travel from the moment two casualty officers arrived at her door bearing the news of her son's death, to the warmer memories of Maui and God's grace; both had a grounding presence in her journey. Marilyn's account of her own wrestling and questioning with grief encourages those who are grieving to not settle on religious platitudes but to dig deep within their communities and their faith to embrace grief as it shapes life after tragedy. (Published by Credo House Publishers; available online, and directly from the author at a discounted rate. Email msweisenburg@gmail.com to order.)

A Mother Remembers: Memoirs of A Fallen Hero

By Bonnie Lou Schreiner

In her first book, Bonnie Lou Schreiner details the life of her son Staff Sgt. Stephen John Wilson. By chronicling the first moments after his birth to receiving the Purple Heart and Bronze Star Medal with Combat V in his honor, she captures Stephen's athletic and courageous

character. Through several chapters, Bonnie describes special events she attended and ways she has honored her son after his death. Writing a book filled with her knowledge of Stephen's years of service in the Corps, matched with personal photos, illuminates Bonnie's commitment to salute the life of her son. This commitment will resonate with other military survivors as Bonnie's memoirs also provide knowledge of military traditions that mean so much in a survivor's life after loss. (Published by LifeRich Publishing; available online, and directly from the author. Email sch_bonnie@ymail.com to order.)

Big-Hearted Charlie Learns How to Make Friends

By Krista Keating-Joseph

The Royal Palm Literary Award-winning *Big-Hearted Charlie Runs the Mile* kicks off a series of children's books written by Krista Keating-Joseph in honor of her son, U.S. Navy SEAL Charles Keating IV. In the first book, the tenacity of a younger Charlie is shown as he embraces hard work to earn a spot on his track team, becomes a stronger runner, and later becomes a Navy SEAL. In the second book, *Big-Hearted Charlie Never Gives Up*, the lessons that ultimately give Charlie the strength and stamina to become a Navy SEAL are depicted through his lifetime of adventures. In this latest installment, *Big-Hearted Charlie Learns How to Make Friends*, Charlie's mom once

again reveals how her son has the courage to stand strong in the face of adversity by making and being a friend despite being bullied. Each book portrays Charlie's enormous heart and continues his legacy by inspiring young readers to have the same positive attitude he had as they strive for their own goals. (Published by Legacies & Memories, available online)

My Daddy's Heart Is Purple

By Karl Porfirio

After a military death, families can feel disconnected. Children, especially, may not know, or remember details about their loved one's service. In this book for children, Karl Porfirio honors his son, Sr. Airman Tre Porfirio, through a dialogue between a boy and his nonno (grandfather) that explores the meaning of the Purple Heart. The easy-to-follow dialogue demonstrates healing through conversation, and is matched with sentimental drawings reflecting pride for Tre. The knowledge the boy gains from his nonno is meant to encourage other young survivors to learn about their own loved one's service. By asking questions, children can share the pride in their loved one with family and their legacy lives on in those memories. (Published by Covenant Books, Inc., available online)

Reviews by Angel Pansini

Fall Favorites at the TAPS Store

Find these items and more at taps.org/shop

1.



2.



3.



- 1. Moleskine Notebook - \$25
- 2. Velcro Patch - \$5
- 3. PopSocket Phone Grip and Stand - \$10
- 4. Grey Pullover Hoodie - \$25
- 5. Denim Shirt - \$40
- 6. Klinger Book & Stuffed Animal Gift Set - \$20
- 7. Fleece Ear Warmer - \$10
- 8. Football Tee- \$20

4.



5.



6.



8.



7.



Grunt Style Giving

“It is our duty to support the families of our comrades.”

“This we’ll defend.”

The motto of the U.S. Army is also the personal pledge of Daniel Alarik, CEO of Grunt Style, an online apparel company that sells military-themed clothing and gear. Daniel’s determination to honor the military community is at the root of his business, and is what drives his personal commitment to support veterans and their families. Daniel came to TAPS in 2016, when Kellie Hazlett, manager of TAPS Peer Mentor program, knocked on Grunt Style’s doors in Carol Stream, IL.

“I was recruiting Military Mentors for an upcoming regional seminar,” Kellie said. “Daniel thought we were looking for a contribution, but we really wanted his time.”

After some persuasion by his assistant, Daniel, an Army veteran, signed up to be a

Military Mentor at the Good Grief Camp. It was at camp that he met 12-year-old Jayden Denfrund, who lost his father, Sgt. Jason Denfrund, in Iraq. Daniel had the opportunity to see first-hand the healing, hope, and connections made over the weekend event.

“We can never forget because they will never forget,” said Daniel, a former drill sergeant.

Since then, Daniel and his company have been an integral part of the TAPS family. Grunt Style supplied backpacks and duffle bags for Military Mentors and Good Grief Camp kiddos at the 23rd Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and shirts for the 24th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar. TAPS was the beneficiary of their 2017 and 2018 Memorial Day shirt campaigns.

Daniel continues to find creative ways to support TAPS and be a vocal supporter of the mission. He connected several of Grunt Style’s partners to TAPS, establishing TAPS as a beneficiary of sales from Custom Off-Sets, Brownells, Merica Bourbon, and Defiance. In April, NASCAR driver Spencer Boyd drove Grunt Style Racing’s #76 Chevrolet in honor of Staff Sgt. Eric Duckworth at the Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth, TX. Grunt Style also hosted TAPS families at a New Jersey Devils hockey game with the Squad 21 Program.

In May, Daniel invited TAPS Founder and President Bonnie Carroll to the Grunt Style warehouse for a surprise. Bonnie and a group of TAPS survivors were greeted by Daniel and Paul Teutul, Sr., of Orange County Choppers, the makers of custom motorcycles. Paul presented Bonnie with a custom-made Army-green motorcycle commissioned by Grunt Style. Daniel explained that it was to be auctioned off with 100 percent of the proceeds going to TAPS. The surprise gift presentation was filmed and later aired on an episode of American Chopper, a show on the Discovery Channel.

The unique motorcycle was also featured on Fox & Friends in New York, where Daniel was interviewed along with survivors Jenni Hansen and her son, Michael, who lost their hero, Staff Sgt. Dennis Hansen, in Afghanistan.

“We support TAPS because these kids could have been mine or my close friend’s kids,” he said. “I believe it is our duty to take care of the families of our comrades.”

An anonymous buyer purchased the motorcycle and all proceeds were donated to TAPS. TAPS is grateful to have Daniel and the entire Grunt Style family by our side. It is a friendship and partnership that continues to grow year after year. ★



From left, Paul Teutul, Sr., of Orange County Choppers, Bonnie Carroll, and Daniel Alarik.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GRUNT STYLE

Support *the Mission*, Honor *the Legacy*

The TAPS National Headquarters in Arlington, Virginia is America's home for the families of our nation's fallen heroes. TAPS is proud to announce a special way to honor all those we love and raise funds to support the critical services TAPS provides to all who are grieving a military loved one.

Remembrance: \$100

Remember your loved one with this 4" x 5" tile.



Tribute: \$250

Create a tribute to your loved one with 8" x 5" tile.



Salute: \$1000

Salute your loved one with this 8" x 10" tile.



Hero: \$2500

Honor your loved one with this 16" x 10" tile.

* Personalize these tiles with a picture and an inscription .



**100% OF YOUR DONATION SUPPORTS
TAPS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

Space is limited

Visit taps.org/HQcampaign today!

ARTIST'S VIEW OF THE ENTRY to our National Headquarters where your hero tile will be proudly displayed.





THANK YOU

To our friends at TAPS for supporting
the families of our nation's fallen heroes.



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800-959-TAPS (8277) ★TAPS.org

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



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS
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Arlington, VA 22201

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“We have shared many griefs, but they are translated into pure love and rejoicing when we meet.” *May Sarton*



PHOTO: ERIN JACOBSON