

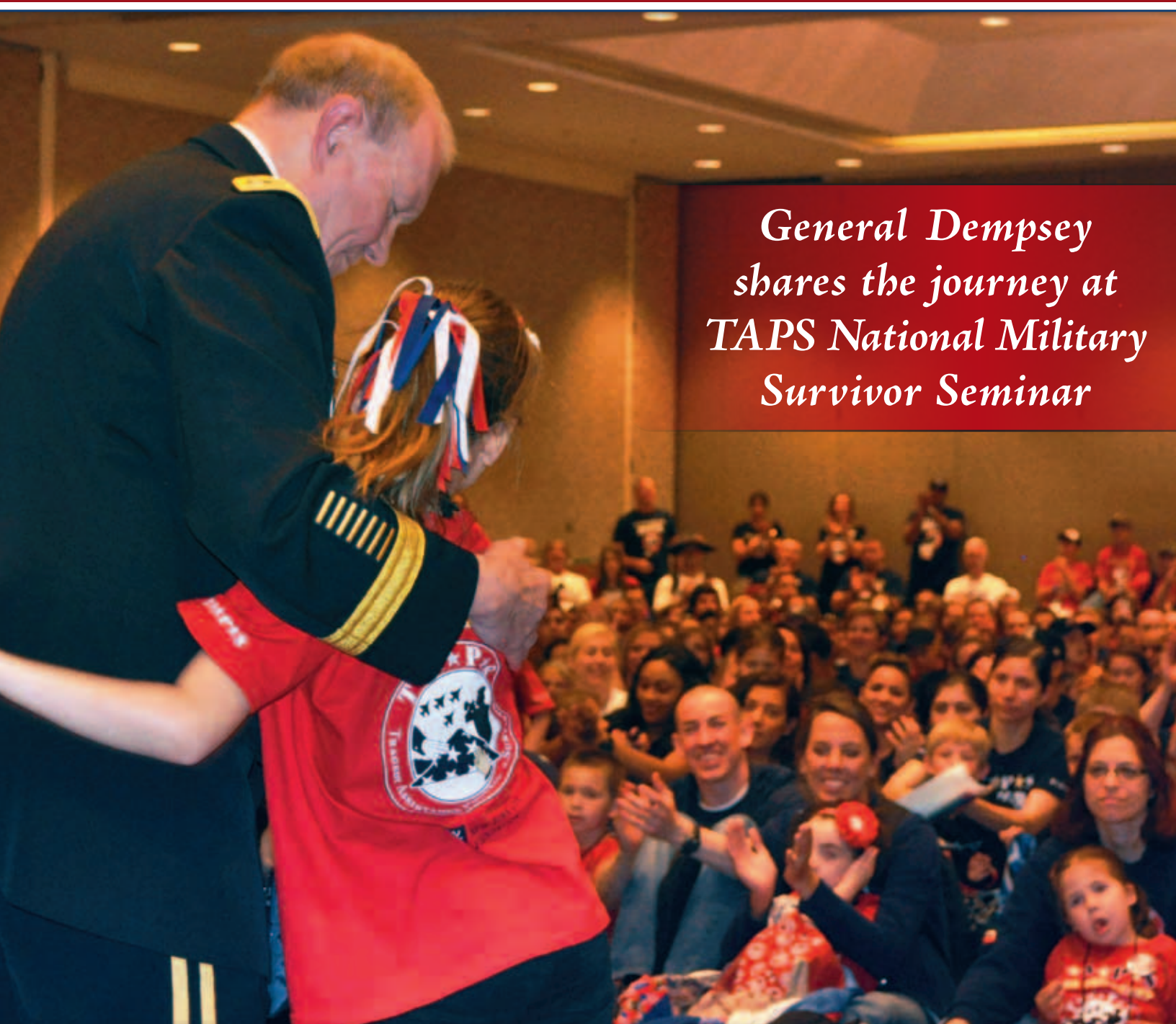
TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

TAPS[®]

Comfort and Support Since 1994

MAGAZINE

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



*General Dempsey
shares the journey at
TAPS National Military
Survivor Seminar*

VOLUME 21 • ISSUE 2

TAPS Magazine is dedicated to the brave men and women who died while serving in the Armed Forces, and to their survivors. The magazine is written by surviving family members, friends, and care-giving professionals. We hope you will find comfort, support, information, inspiration, and a sense of connection within its pages.

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national nonprofit 501(c)3 Veterans Service Organization which publishes *TAPS Magazine* in furtherance of its mission to support survivors whose loved one died while serving in the Armed Forces.

TAPS Magazine is published quarterly and sent free of charge to survivors, their friends and family, service members, and professionals who work with U.S. military survivors.



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Comfort and Support Since 1994

TAPS offers help, hope, and healing to all those grieving the death of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces of America.

TAPS is here for you 24 hours a day 7 days a week

TAPS PROVIDES

- ★ The National Military Survivor Helpline
- ★ National Peer Support Network
- ★ Survivor Seminars and Retreats
- ★ Good Grief Camps for Children
- ★ Connections to Community-Based Care
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- ★ Grief and Trauma Resources
- ★ Quarterly *TAPS Magazine*

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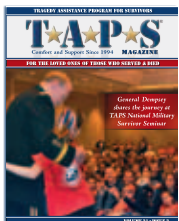


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COVER PHOTO BY
Chelsea Marlow

General Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff visits with TAPS Good Grief Camp, 2015

Let Us Hear From You



Tell us what you think, send ideas for future topics, or submit an article. Write to us at editor@taps.org. Your TAPS family is waiting to hear from you. ★

Casework Assistance

Thank you so much for your help with this matter. I cannot even tell you how awesome it is to reach out to someone at TAPS and even though TAPS doesn't offer the tax service themselves, you all take the time to research it for me and send me all of the information I need to find someone to help me with my taxes. I really appreciate it because sometimes it is just too much to handle without my husband around. Thank you for everything you do for all military survivors.

Cassy Gruenther, California
Surviving spouse of
Maj. Lucas Gruenther

Suicide Loss

Next month will be a year and a half since I lost my son Jon to suicide. It feels like a lifetime ago, and it feels like it was yesterday. I remember feeling so lost, wondering how will I survive this. And then, I found TAPS. The information was listed in the binder I received from the Navy, under Support. I called the 800 number and my journey began. I spent many hours crying with their very supportive and caring staff on the helpline; reading through the literature and newsletters. They helped me to find a professional in my area when I felt I needed additional support. I attended the Annual Suicide Survivors Conference last fall and I can honestly

say I look forward to next year's. TAPS seems to think of everything! I will always be grateful that TAPS has been there to help me navigate my way.

Diane Lesko, New Jersey
Surviving mother of
PO2 Jonathan Lesko

Lifesaver

This program literally saved my life. I was so lost and broken after my son's death, I didn't know where to turn. No one understood my grief. Then I found TAPS and they just knew. They were my life preserver. Thank you TAPS. I couldn't have done it without you.

Raeann Rutledge Garrett, Colorado
Surviving mother of
SSgt Rory Berg

Alaska Widows Retreat

This trip changed my life. I got off the plane in Alaska knowing no one. I was really nervous, but there was Bonnie welcoming me with a warm hug. It was at that moment I knew this organization was something special, and by the end of the weekend I had a new family. I can never thank TAPS enough for that.

Nicole Coan, Michigan
Surviving fiancée of
LCpl Andrew Meisel

Light Years Ahead

Steve and I took a few quiet days away from home this weekend. It is still hard to comprehend that our son Andrew is gone. Life still feels quite surreal, even after one year. Of all of the survivor groups we have interacted with, TAPS is light years ahead in patiently supporting families through most difficult journeys. Thanks to you and so many others on staff who provide this support.

Beth Sipple, North Carolina
Surviving mother of
SPC Andrew Sipple

teams4taps

When I lost my brother in 2004, I went to a TAPS event at Fort Hood with my niece and mom. What a great organization and a real loving group of people. I love hockey, so this is a wonderful thing to see being done by the National Hockey League and the Washington Capitals organization. Thank you, TAPS, for being there for others and helping survivors to adjust to another chapter of their life.

Glenn Cunningham, Georgia
Surviving brother of
SSG Darren Cunningham



editor@taps.org



Time to Retreat

Dear TAPS Family, ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

Summertime is here. A time of sunshine, family vacations, and days spent in the great outdoors. For many it's the time we most look forward to in the year. However, for those of us who have lost a loved one, the stark contrast of the summer brightness with our pain can make us feel even more out of place in the world we had known. Many of us question how we can enjoy the simple pleasures of this cheerful season when our loved one is no longer next to us.

I felt that way in the months after my fiancé's death in July of 2007. The world I knew seemed to have been turned on its head and everywhere I turned I felt like I was overwhelmed with memories of activities and moments the two of us shared.

The first thing I did after I found TAPS was go to a retreat for widows and widowed significant others. It was an unbelievable relief not only to meet other women who understood this loss, but also to travel to someplace new and try things I had never tried before. Some of the women I met that week I count as some of my closest

friends to this day. Laughing one moment and having my eyes fill with tears in the next was completely normal in that space. It felt so good to laugh again and know that it was okay. I felt alive and happy in a way I hadn't felt since Jason died.

TAPS Retreats are designed to bring survivors out of their comfort zone. We get the opportunity to see just how strong we are, even after losing someone so important in our lives. On my first retreat, I went skiing for the first time since I was little. I felt nervous going up onto the mountain, but being with the other women eased my fears.

Each retreat's activities are rated on a star system to help survivors choose which one would be best for them. The light intensity or "recreational" retreats are rated as one star, and "extreme" adventures are three stars. Activities can range from the one-star level, with activities like Segway tours or kayaking, to more physically demanding adventures, such as rock climbing and whitewater rafting in our three-star retreats.



Retreats are designed to create a strong sense of community and peer support among survivors by providing group activities and opportunities for conversation. We have retreats for parents, widows and significant others, siblings, adult children, and moms. We also have retreats that don't break down by relationship, but rather are for just women or just men.

We also offer Wilderness Adventure Retreats for those seeking an opportunity to spend time in nature. These adventures challenge participants physically and foster connections with a small, diverse group of survivors. On our Empowerment Retreats we use a holistic approach to explore ways to move forward within our new normal. We hope you will consider joining us at a retreat in the near future.

With warmth and care,
Erin Jacobson
TAPS Retreats Senior Manager

.....
If you are more than one year beyond your loss, consider attending a TAPS retreat: www.taps.org/retreats
.....



Messages of Love

By Claire Perkins ★ Surviving mother of Cameron Perkins

Over the years since my son's death in 2004, I have received many messages and signs from him. Some have come in dreams, some through songs on the radio. Perhaps the most powerful have been the heart-shaped stones and shells washed up by the sea to remind me that love never dies.

Calling Out

Four months after my son died, I visited South Padre Island and walked the beach, feeling broken and drained, and missing Cameron. I shouted and cried my grief into the sky and the sea. I felt a hollow emptiness, a black hole in the place in my heart that Cameron used to fill. I called out to him, "Are you still here? Do you still know me?"



Moments later, I spotted a piece of shell, black with silver streaks, shaped like a heart and washed smooth by the sea. I knew instantly this was an answer, a message of love and connection from my black-sheep son. It occurred to me that the

most beautiful bits of shell, smooth and polished, only become so after being battered and beaten relentlessly by the flow of the sea. Perhaps there is hope for me, I thought.

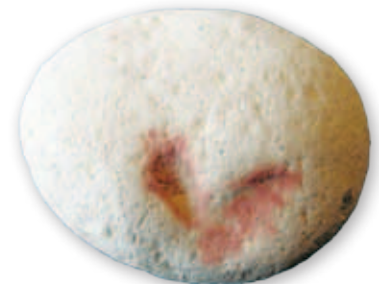
The gift of the little black heart brought me some peace. The black hole in my own heart seemed to shrink just a little that day. Whether it was Cameron or the sea or the universe that answered my cry, someone was trying to tell me that love endures. On the drive back from the beach, I saw a sign at the county line that I hadn't noticed on the way in. I was startled to see that South Padre Island is in Cameron County. How fitting.

Letting Go

A few months later, I found myself once again by the sea, this time in Puerto Vallarta. I was feeling tremendous guilt over Cameron's death by overdose and second guessing everything about my parenting. I felt I had failed as his mother. I wrote an emotional letter to Cameron in my journal, expressing all that I was feeling and telling him how sorry I was for the many ways I felt I'd let him down. It was a good release and I felt lighter for having done it.

After writing the letter, I walked on the beach, collecting stones, shells, and driftwood. I decided to leave all that I'd gathered on a giant driftwood log that I could tell

would be under water at high tide. It would be an altar to letting go. I lined up all the little treasures I'd collected along the top of the log and offered them to the sea, thinking all along of the cycles of life and death, the high and low tides, the coming and going of everything. It is natural for things to change and pass away—even the people in our lives. I talked to Cameron and told him how much I missed him, but that I would try to let him go even though I would never stop loving him. I turned from the altar I'd created, willing it to the sea, knowing it would wash away during the night.



As I started to walk away, something caught my eye. It was a gray, egg-shaped stone, just a plain river rock, but it had these two indentations in it that made the shape of a heart and the indentations were bright red. Like the little black heart-shaped shell from South Padre, here was another gift from the sea in answer to my love and sadness, this one in stone, carved deep and permanent.

Whether it was Cameron or the sea or the universe that answered my cry, someone was trying to tell me that love endures.

I recognized the progressive transformation I'd made from emptiness and longing to a willingness to let go and finally to a peaceful certainty about the eternal bond I have with my son.

It seemed to be a message about letting go of everything but love—letting go of the guilt and the grief, but remembering that love is eternal and holding on to that. In my willingness to let go, I'd been given a lifeline to hang on to.

Knowing

A few years later, after lots of processing and inner work, I had made much progress in my healing journey. I was beginning to be able to remember Cameron without pain, and I was growing more and more certain that we were still connected despite his death. One day I found myself back at South Padre Island. Remembering my last two experiences, I was anticipating connection and communication with Cameron.

Feeling a little cocky, I stepped from the parking lot to the sand and said, "Okay, kiddo. I'm here. Where's my gift?" Instantly I found at my feet a stone with the shape of a heart carved nearly all the way through it. I walked the beach all the way down to the end that day and never saw another stone, only shells, seaweed, and sand. I was delighted. It was as if this third time I wasn't asking from an empty space, a sad space, a longing space. Instead I was asking from a knowing space, a space of expectation, knowing before I ever saw the gift that it would be there for me, knowing in my heart that the connection was there.

Later, I drew a picture of myself on the beach, arms up to the sky, with a bunch of little hearts in the sand around my feet. I journaled about my drawing and the three experiences of finding hearts on the beach. I recognized the progressive transformation I'd made from emptiness and longing to a willingness to let go and finally to a peaceful certainty about the eternal bond I have with my son. I wrote, "I don't have to hold my arms out in longing; his love is all around me all the time."



Surrounded By Love

The following month, I went to Rocky Point, Mexico, with my husband. It was a great, relaxing getaway and I didn't feel any need to look for heart gifts from Cameron. I walked the beach several times, alone and with my husband, never really even thinking about looking for a heart. On one walk, alone, it crossed my mind that here was yet another step on the healing journey. Not only was I not sadly longing, I didn't even feel the need to ask with expectation. I just knew with no need for confirmation that we were still

connected. At that moment, I looked down and all around my feet there were dozens of little heart-shaped fragments of shell. It was just like the picture I'd drawn.

Maybe heart-shaped shell pieces and stones are more common than I realized. Maybe they were always there and I just never noticed. Maybe they didn't come from Cameron at all. Maybe my own wishful thinking created a message I wanted to hear. But I don't believe that. I believe that somehow Cameron's out there watching over me, watching over his sister and brother, watching over his dad. He's watching over all of us and sending waves of love. *

Adapted from *The Deep Water Leaf Society: Harnessing the Transformative Power of Grief*, Intuitive Journey Press, 2008.

About the Author



Claire Perkins is a Transformational Arts Coach and award-winning author of *The Deep Water Leaf Society: Harnessing the Transformative Power of Grief*. After losing her eldest son to a drug overdose in 2004, Claire embarked on a conscious and creative journey of healing and personal growth. By using a unique combination of dream work, journaling, expressive arts, and inner guidance, Claire learned that within this deep experience of grief a gift of profound spiritual transformation awaited her discovery.

Men in Pain

Walk Away or Stay?

By Bob Baugher, PhD

You've heard the comments:

"Men can't handle pain."

"Men think they're so tough. They could never go through the pain of childbirth."

"Men may not cry as much as women, but they sure don't like pain."

"My husband was in pain for weeks before he finally told me. I took him into the emergency room immediately and the doctor said, 'Why'd you wait so long?' I said, 'What do you expect? He's a man.'"

In my work with hundreds of bereaved people it has become clear to me that a huge part of the bereavement process is the management of pain. Let me ask you some questions about the emotional pain you've been feeling related to the death (or deaths) in your life:

1. How much pain are you in right now? On a scale below, choose a number:

1---2---3---4---5---6---7---8---9
[None | A little | Some | A great deal | An extreme amount]

2. Where is it located? In your heart, gut, head, face, throat, eyes, jaw, neck, shoulders, chest?

3. Does it move from one part of your body to another?

4. Is it dull or sharp?

5. Is it concentrated in one area or is it widespread?

6. What causes it to become greater or less?

7. How do you decrease it?


After answering the preceding questions, think about the following questions. What did you discover about yourself? What do you realize about the intensity

and description of your pain? Most importantly, is there anything that you can do about it?

Much research has been conducted on physical pain. However, it is difficult to conduct real life studies because most ethics boards (rightly) prevent researchers from delivering painful stimuli directly to a person's body even if they volunteer. What we do know is that the report of pain is a combination of objective and subjective data. We know that we can plunge the hands of several hundred volunteers into ice water and ask to keep them there for ninety seconds and find a wide range of self-reported levels of pain. Thus, the self-report of pain varies widely from person to person. When it comes to emotional pain, such as that which accompanies the death of someone we love, researchers have a difficult time conducting meaningful studies.

Has this ever happened to you? You are having a heated discussion on a difficult issue with a person you care for deeply and the person leaves—splits—takes off—disappears. If you are the person left standing, it is likely that you become even more ticked (a nice word for boiling mad). Why would someone do this to you? Or if you are the fleeing person, why are you taking off in the middle of a sentence?

A beginning answer to these questions has been the subject of fascinating research from the lab of psychologist John Gottman. Dr. Gottman has been investigating the way couples handle conflict in their marriage. He invites couples into his lab, hooks them up with wires attached



Has this ever happened to you? You are having a heated discussion on a difficult issue with a person you care for deeply and the person leaves—splits—takes off—disappears.

to machines that measure their heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, and so on. He then asks the couple to discuss an area of disagreement in their relationship while he videotapes.

Amazingly, after a few minutes the couple has acclimated to their new environment and is bickering away. As a result, for the first time in history, we are able to have a close look at exactly what happens to a person's body in the midst of an argument. Gottman found some obvious results: the more sensitive the topic, the higher the level of physiological arousal. His most intriguing finding, however, was evidence from the physiological data that one of the partners often displays consistently higher levels of arousal. Furthermore, the arousal levels are often sometimes so painful that the partner finds it necessary to get up and leave the room. And who is the partner most likely to do this? Have you guessed it, yet? That's right: men.

When I give workshops on anger and grief, and I get to the point of revealing who it is that most often leaves during an argument, I pause for a moment and when I say "men," the room explodes in laughter. And the laughter is not, I believe, a way intended to put down men. But for those who live with a man, especially a bereaved man, the laughter appears to be a release that finally validates what both parties have known all along. In keeping with the idea that some of the information in this article may also apply to women,

Physical pain is tough. Emotional pain is often tougher, especially when it is in response to the death of someone we love.

Gottman found that some of the people who left were women. What are you more likely to do during a discussion of a highly charged issue such as the death of your loved one?

If what you are reading makes sense to you, I want to end with a few suggestions:

1. Show this article to the person(s) in your life who might benefit from reading it.
2. Sit down and decide on a signal that you both could use that indicates your need to leave the scene. For example, it could be a hand signal, making the letter "T" for time out.
3. In your discussion of the signal, make an agreement that whoever uses the signal is responsible for bringing up the (obviously difficult) topic of discussion as soon as their physiological arousal level has returned to normal.
4. If you are the partner who more often stays, understand that it may take your partner several minutes to several hours to return to normal. In some rare cases, you may have to wait until the next day.
5. To repeat: It is critical that you return to the topic of discussion as soon as both partners are ready. Do not use this technique as a way to avoid discussing difficult issues.
6. On the other hand, there may be a few issues that are just too difficult to discuss at all. For example, a year after the teenage daughter of a couple was murdered by her boyfriend, they had several intense arguments over forgiveness: the husband had reached a point where he had forgiven the murderer, and the wife vehemently disagreed. After more than a year of several screaming arguments, the couple went to counseling and eventually hammered out an

agreement that any discussion of forgiveness was off limits. Although neither partner relished the idea of closing off certain areas of communication, they both agreed that, in this case, it was the best solution.

Physical pain is tough. Emotional pain is often tougher, especially when it is in response to the death of someone we love. For reasons that experts are still sorting out, it appears that many men and some women have a predisposition to experience high levels of physiological arousal in the context of discussing emotionally charged issues. In our increasing understanding of the grieving process, this fact can help us as we interact with the important people in our life.*

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"Men in Pain: Walk Away or Stay?" was first published in *Grief Magazine*, Nov-Dec, 2000.
.....

About the Author



Dr. Bob Baugher is a psychology instructor at Highline Community College where he teaches courses in psychology and death education. He is a certified Fellow in Thanatology and a trainer for LivingWorks, where he has trained more than 1,000 people in suicide intervention. Dr. Baugher has presented more than 700 workshops and has written books and articles on grief and loss. He helped produce *Men & Their Grief: Then and Now*, a DVD set that addresses men's grief. For information about the video, contact Dr. Baugher at b_kbaugher@yahoo.com.

Normal Isn't Normal Anymore

By Betsy Beard ☆ Surviving mother of Spc. Bradley Beard

I used to believe, along with author Patsy Clairmont who wrote a humorous book of the same title, that *Normal Is Just a Setting on Your Dryer*. But it seems like so much more to me, now. When our son died, “normal” flew out the window and hasn't returned. And because of its departure, leaving confusion, chaos, and disarray in its wake, the concept of normal seems far more important now than just a setting on the dryer. And not quite so funny.

It should come as no surprise to us that psychologists and psychiatrists have ideas about what constitutes normal behavior among humans. I mean, someone decided at some point that we needed to define the parameters. And so they wrote a whole book of aberrant behavior, called *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). Periodically mental health professionals get together and compare notes—classifying, measuring, and defining all the things that are deemed to be “not normal.” Disorders, dysfunctions, dysphorias, delusions, and disruptions are all listed and catalogued,

along with criteria and measurements and treatments.

Those of us grieving the death of a loved one know all about disruptions, delusions, and dysfunction. We know that we are not the same people we were before the death. We know that we will never be that person again. After the initial mourning period allotted by society—something like three months—some of my friends bemoaned the fact that I was

Those of us grieving the death of a loved one know all about disruptions, delusions, and dysfunction. We know that we are not the same people we were before the death.

not much fun. They wanted the old “me” back. They were not alone. I wanted the old “me” back as well, but she was nowhere to be found.

Although we were notified of the death, no one notified us of the extreme emotions we would experience. They only told us the bare facts of time, place, and

method, leaving out the really important information about how the death would affect us. For years to come.

For months after my son died, I dragged myself to a Vet Center each week to see a grief counselor. Each time, I would share with him some bizarre feeling I had or strange activity I had engaged in. I told him about finding Brad's old sock under the bed and sealing it in a Ziploc bag to preserve its smell. And lining up all the gifts Brad had ever given me as a memorial display on my first birthday after his death. And listening to his music that I never liked when he was alive. Nothing seemed to surprise the counselor, and his response was usually a variation of, “That sounds pretty normal to me.”

I could not believe it. Normal? My answer was, “Well, it may sound normal to you, but it is definitely not what I would call normal. I have never done or said or thought or written anything like that before. It feels crazy. Demented. How can it be normal?”

What I really couldn't understand at the time was that the constellation of symptoms I was exhibiting was exactly normal for someone whose loved one had died suddenly and traumatically. I was sad, depressed, listless, and touchy. I could barely function. And I did weird things. It felt so crazy that I figured the grief counselor would have to agree with me at some point and institutionalize me.

So I would tell him about my off-the-wall thoughts and actions. Like scrounging through the garbage cans to find glass containers to throw on the patio, so that they shattered into tiny pieces. “Normal.” Like making grilled cheese



We call the place where we find ourselves now our “new normal.” I know this because when I attend TAPS events, I find people who are experiencing the same feelings I have.

sandwiches for dinner every single night for a month, because I didn't have the energy or creativity to do anything different. “Normal.” Like begging God to let me be the one to die in Brad's place and bring him back to life instead. But guess what? “Normal.”

Finally, in exasperation, I asked what it would take for me to shock the counselor with something abnormal. What would get his attention and worry him? The answer was, “If you came in happy, carefree, and exuberant, that would be abnormal for the current circumstances of your life. And that would worry me.”

The light bulb finally went on. If I hadn't been behaving and feeling as I did at this point in time, that would not have been normal—in fact, it would have been abnormal. But this strange “normal” was not what I was accustomed to. It didn't fit. It didn't feel right. And I hated it.

It took a long time to come to terms with the fact that I had no say in the matter of Brad's death. It took a lot of talking and writing and crying. I am still not “okay” with the fact that he is gone. But at this point I realize that there is nothing I can do to get the old life and the old normal back.

Many who have mourned a significant loss have come to realize this, as well, and we call the place where we find ourselves now our “new normal.” I know this because when I attend TAPS events, I find people who are experiencing the same feelings I have. We talk about the bizarre, aberrational things we have done in our grieving. We sometimes find that we have even done the same strange things. And since a majority of us discover that our reactions are similar, we are in fact setting

the benchmark for what is now “normal.”

After the initial shock and numbness wore off, we were left with pain, turmoil, confusion, hopelessness on some days, depression on other days, and sadness much of the time. Finding each other helps us because we can share in the remnants of joy when we find them, and we can also understand and be there for each other on the not-so-wonderful days: the holidays, the anniversaries, the birthdays, and the inexplicably painful days. We find that although we can't go back to our old way of life, we can go forward. Together.

After ten years, I think I have adjusted to the absence of Brad's presence. Life is different from what it was before. So much so that we divide time by “before” and “after” the death. Time has moved on. We have found ways to cope with the pain and absorb our new circumstances. We have begun to find hope and meaning in our lives.

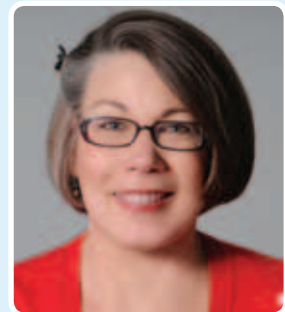
As we continue to move forward, living our lives for lack of anything better to do, we find that there are times of joy, unwarranted happiness, and feelings of well-being that spring up at odd moments. Those times make me recollect the “old normal.” But they don't take me back there, because somehow the new feelings are shadowed by loss, tempered by the knowledge of death, anchored by the sadness of missing the way we were. I don't think the weight of sadness will ever vanish entirely. But we are stronger and better able to bear the weight. We are better at lifting the load.



We know that we can live with the pain of absence. We are able to reach back into the darkness and extend our hands to help others, sharing their similar loads. We find new purpose. We discover that the things in which we find meaning are different. Events and circumstances that bring us comfort, joy, and laughter are different.

This is our new normal. But it's our normal now. And it's so much more important than the setting on our dryer.*

About the Author



Betsy Beard has served as the editor of *TAPS Magazine* since 2008. She lives in North Carolina with her husband, Randy. Their lives were forever changed by the death of their only son, Army Specialist Bradley Beard, who was killed in action in Ar Ramadi, Iraq in 2004. In the years since Brad's death, the family has found help, hope, and healing within the TAPS family.

Seek Reconciliation, Not Resolution

By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

“Mourning never really ends. Only as time goes on, it erupts less frequently.”
~ Anonymous

How do you ever find your way out of the wilderness of your grief? You don't have to dwell there forever, do you?

The good news is that no, you don't have to dwell there forever. If you follow the trail markers on your journey through the wilderness, you will find your way out. But just as with any significant experience in your life, the wilderness will always live inside you and be a part of who you are.

A number of psychological models describing grief refer to resolution, recovery, reestablishment, or reorganization as being the destination of your grief journey. You may have heard—indeed you may believe—that your grief journey's end will come when you resolve, or recover from, your grief.

But you may also be coming to understand one of the fundamental truths of grief: your journey will never truly end. People do not “get over” grief. My personal and professional experience tells me that a total return to normalcy after the death of someone loved is not possible; we are all forever changed by the experience of grief.

Reconciliation is a term I find more appropriate for what occurs as you work to integrate the new reality of moving forward in life without the physical presence of the person who died. With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence, an ability to fully acknowledge the reality of the death, and a capacity to become reinvolved in the activities of living. There is also an acknowledgment that pain and grief are difficult, yet necessary, parts of life.

As the experience of reconciliation unfolds, you will recognize that life is and will continue to be different without the presence of the person who died. Changing the relationship with the person who died from one of presence to one of memory and redirecting one's energy and initiative toward the future often takes longer—and involves more hard work—than most people are aware.

We, as human beings, never resolve our grief, but instead become reconciled to it.

We come to reconciliation in our grief journeys when the full reality of the death becomes a part of us. Beyond an intellectual working through of the death, there is also an emotional and spiritual working through. What had been understood at the “head” level is now understood at the “heart” level.

Keep in mind that reconciliation doesn't just happen. You reach it through deliberate mourning by:

- talking it out
- writing it out
- crying it out
- thinking it out
- playing it out
- painting (or sculpting) it out
- dancing it out
- et cetera!

You don't get to go around or above your grief. You must go through it. And while you are going through it, you must express it.

You will find that as you achieve reconciliation, the sharp, ever-present pain of grief will give rise to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. Your feelings of loss will not completely disappear, yet they will soften. And the intense pangs of grief will become less frequent. Hope for a continued life will emerge as you are able to make commitments to the future, realizing that the person you have given love to and received love from will never be forgotten. The unfolding of this journey is not intended to create a return to an “old normal” but the discovery of a “new normal.”



To help explore where you are in your movement toward reconciliation, the following criteria that suggest healing may be helpful. You don't have to meet each of these criteria for healing to be taking place.

Remember, reconciliation is an ongoing process. If you are early in the work of mourning, you may not meet any of these criteria. But this list will give you a way to monitor your movement toward healing. You may want to place check marks beside those criteria you believe you meet.

SIGNS OF RECONCILIATION

As you embrace your grief and do the work of mourning, you can and will be able to demonstrate the majority of the following:

- A recognition of the reality and finality of the death.
- A return to stable eating and sleeping patterns.
- A renewed sense of release from the person who has died—you will have thoughts about the person, but you will not be preoccupied by these thoughts.
- The capacity to enjoy experiences in life that are normally enjoyable.
- The establishment of new and healthy relationships.
- The capacity to live a full life without feelings of guilt or lack of self-respect.
- The drive to organize and plan one's life toward the future.
- The serenity to become comfortable with the way things are rather than attempting to make things as they were.
- The versatility to welcome more change into your life.
- The awareness that you have allowed yourself to fully grieve, and you have survived.
- The awareness that you do not "get over" your grief; instead, you have a new reality, meaning, and purpose in your life.
- The acquaintance of new parts of yourself that you have discovered in your grief journey.

- The adjustment to new role changes that have resulted from the loss of the relationship.
- The acknowledgment that the pain of loss is an inherent part of life resulting from the ability to give and receive love.

Reconciliation emerges much in the way grass grows. Usually we don't check our lawns daily to see if the grass is growing, but it does grow and soon we come to realize it's time to mow the grass again. Likewise, we don't look at ourselves each day as mourners to see how we are healing. Yet we do come to realize, over the course of months and years, that we have come a long way. We have taken some important steps toward reconciliation.

Usually there is not one great moment of "arrival," but subtle changes and small advancements. It's helpful to have gratitude for even very small advancements. If you are beginning to taste your food again, be thankful. If you mustered the energy to meet your friend for lunch, be grateful. If you finally got a good night's sleep, rejoice.

Of course, you will take some steps backward from time to time, but that is to be expected. Keep believing in yourself. Set your intention to reconcile your grief and have hope that you can and will come to live and love again.

GUIDELINES FOR RECONCILING THE LOSS

Movement toward healing can be exhausting. As difficult as it might be, seek out people who give you hope for your healing. Permitting yourself to have hope is central to achieving reconciliation.

Realistically, even though you have hope for your healing, you should not expect it to happen overnight. Many grieving people think that it should and, as a result, experience a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem that leaves them questioning their capacity to heal. If this is the situation for you, keep in mind that you are not alone.

You may find that a helpful procedure is to ask yourself questions. Am I expecting myself to heal more quickly than is

humanly possible? Have I mistakenly given myself a specific deadline for when I should be "over" my grief? Recognize that you may be hindering your own healing by expecting too much of yourself. Take your healing one day at a time.

You can't control death or ignore your human need to mourn when it impacts your life. You do, however, have the choice to help yourself heal. Embracing the pain of your grief is probably one of the hardest jobs you will ever do. As you do this work, surround yourself with compassionate, loving people who are willing to "walk with" you.*

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This article is an excerpt from Dr. Wolfelt's book *Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart*.
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About the Author



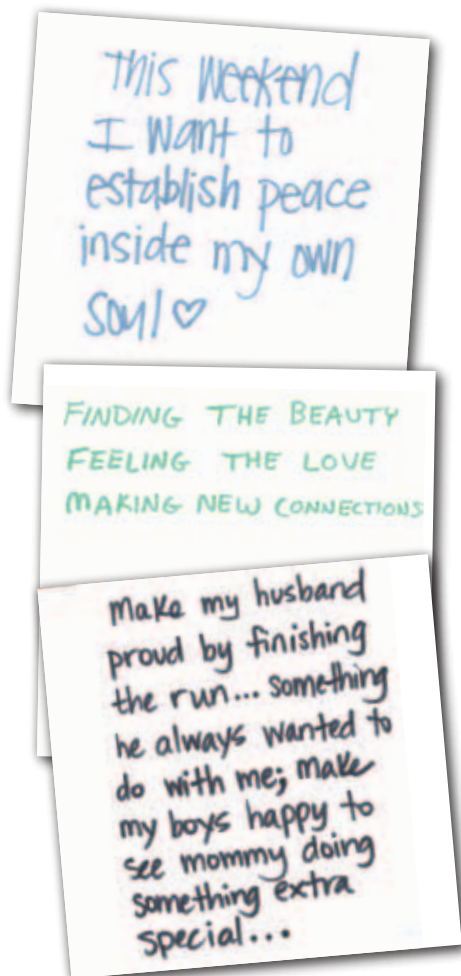
Dr. Alan Wolfelt is a respected author and educator on the topic of healing in grief. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is on the faculty at the University of Colorado Medical School's Department of Family Medicine. Dr. Wolfelt has written many compassionate, bestselling books designed to help people mourn well so they can continue to love and live well. Visit www.centerforloss.com to learn more about the natural and necessary process of grief and mourning and to order Dr. Wolfelt's books.

Intention Setting

Making Goals That Honor You and Your Hero

By Kelly Griffith ★ Surviving sister of Maj. Samuel Griffith

The knock at the door came, and my world stopped. But within weeks I realized the world was still spinning for others. And they couldn't understand why mine wasn't. They wanted to know when my world would be in order again. They didn't realize that everything—including my priorities—had changed. I found myself feeling as if all the life goals I had before my brother died weren't worth much anymore. And I didn't know how to replace them. How could I ever plan for a future without him here to motivate me in the tough moments and help me celebrate my victories? We were supposed to grow old together. How could I grow at all now?



By now you have likely discovered that it takes time to reorient yourself, to figure out how to move forward on your grief journey. It takes time to find the new you, but one thing you can consider as you reinvent yourself is that you have the freedom to make goals that honor both your loved one and yourself.

Here are some tips to help you in your intention setting:

Start Small

At first, it may be a major goal just to get out of bed or brush your teeth. And that's okay. Once you start setting small goals and accomplishing them, you can begin to build momentum so that you can tackle tougher goals. Although it was difficult in the early days, I found that making sure I stayed healthy was a really important way to honor my brother's memory. After about a week without eating much of anything, I decided to focus on my eating habits. Somehow it seemed easier to eat when my family went to Sam's favorite restaurant and shared stories.

Ruth Wiley, surviving mother of Lieutenant Colonel Jim Wiley, said of her first small goals, "In the beginning, our first priority was to go to the cemetery every day, making sure the flowers were fresh, and the flags were flying. We still care that the cemetery is well kept, but now we keep a bouquet of flowers at our table. It reminds us of the wonderful times we shared as a family while Jim was here. Sitting down to family dinner is so important, not to share the food, but to share the love."

Help Others

Our loved ones had a profound impact on our lives. How better to honor them and

ourselves than to try to have a positive influence on others? Julie Webb, surviving mom of Lance Corporal Jeffrey Webb, started volunteering her time with the USO of North Carolina's family support team, helping other families of the fallen when they travel in the days and weeks after their loved one's death. It allows her to honor Jeffrey and find fulfillment for her own heart.

Some families choose to set up scholarship funds in honor of their service member. Lisa Freeman started the Captain Matthew C. Freeman Memorial Sibling Scholarship to help siblings of service members killed in the line of duty. Lisa wanted to honor the life of her son and acknowledge the struggles and emotional pain of his sisters.

Leslie Blei Shapiro, surviving mother of Eugene Bonacci, III, has made it a mission to get others to sign up as organ and tissue donors in hopes they will save lives, as her son did with the gifts of his organs after his death. She said, "Out of our horrible tragedy came a ray of hope and some positive impact on more than forty-eight people whose lives were either enhanced or saved that evening of his death. More people were helped from skin and bone transplants in the months after his death."

Get Moving

You may find running to be an outlet for your grief and a way to honor your hero. I had started running before Sam died, but shortly after his death, I restarted a plan with run/walk intervals and built up to a 5K. After I was able to run that far, I kept going. I started working on my speed as well. The first Thanksgiving after Sam's death brought my best 5K time to date, and I felt my brother cheering me on the whole time. As much as my

brother didn't like to run, I know he really supported me in my efforts. Now I'm slowly building up to run a half marathon for Team TAPS.

Many of us find that running for Team TAPS is healing in both the physical activity and the ability to raise awareness and money for TAPS. Kyle Balduf, surviving twin brother of Sergeant Kevin Balduf, ran the Marine Corps Marathon last October after many months of training. Running was one of Kevin's favorite things to do, but he never got the chance to run a marathon, so Kyle ran it for him.

Use Available Benefits

Often survivors have mixed feelings about using benefits. We may feel hesitant because it seems we are taking advantage of a tragic situation or profiting from our loss. However, our loved ones wanted to ensure that we would be taken care of. They made us their beneficiaries to provide for us through the death gratuity, SGLI, DIC, and SBP. In addition, the death opened doors to help many survivors better themselves through education.

Surviving spouses, children, and siblings can take advantage of scholarships that fund higher education. It's a wonderful avenue for working toward a dream and honoring your service member. Ashlynn Haycock, surviving daughter of Sergeant First Class Jeffrey Haycock and retired Senior Airman Nichole Haycock, wanted to honor both her parents and herself by completing college. Now, as the TAPS Education Support Services Coordinator, Ashlynn helps other survivors find education benefits and scholarships to help them finance their college careers.

Continue to Grow

As you create and accomplish goals for yourself, you will oftentimes find it is bittersweet. But there can be beauty in it. My younger brother David used the impact Sam made on his life as a catalyst for his Eagle Scout project. He designed, raised funds for, and led the construction

of a War on Terror memorial in our hometown, honoring all of the heroes from Wake County, North Carolina, who died while serving our country since September 11, 2001.

David raised all the necessary funds, executed the project, and dedicated it with hundreds of community members.

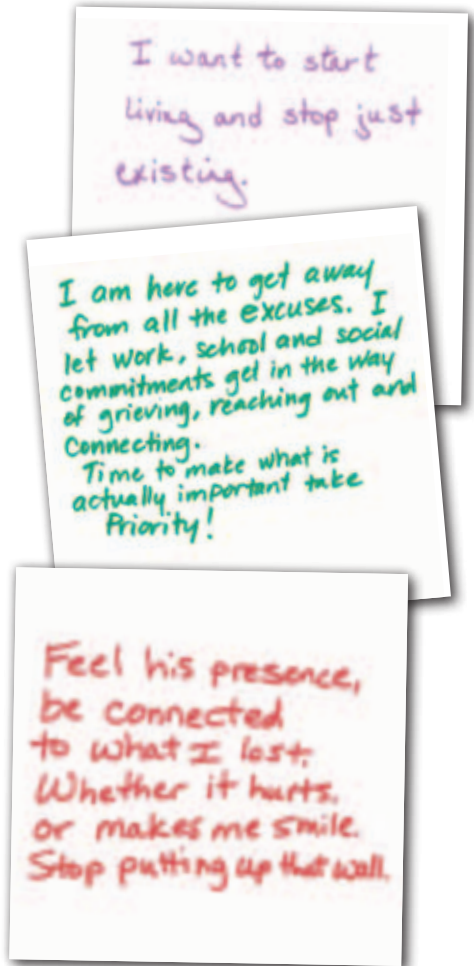
Although our brother isn't here to see us grow, David and I take comfort in knowing he is with us in our hearts and realizing how proud he would be that we are part of his living legacy. One of my favorite memories of my brother was a time he stopped at my parents' house and I was the only one home. I made him dinner and I thought to myself, "I can't wait until I have a place of my own and I can cook like this for Sam." Now that I have moved out on my own, I want to make sure I welcome other friends and family members into my new home. And there will be plenty of cooking.

Find Help from Others

Your TAPS family is here to help you set and achieve your goals. You can reach out for support by calling the 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline at 800-959-8277. Or you can make connections and learn from other survivors in person at a TAPS running event, seminar, or retreat. New this year, empowerment retreats give members of the TAPS family the opportunity to start planning for their future, whether that means finding the next chapter in life or new love.

The early days of grief can be some of the darkest, but take heart. I have realized it is possible to set and accomplish new goals. It is possible for me to be part of Sam's living legacy. And with each goal achieved, I find a little part of the old Kelly mixed in with the new me—a new me that also honors my brother.*

.....
We invite you to share how you are your loved one's living legacy by using #livinglegacy on social media and tagging @TAPS4America.
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About the Author



Kelly Griffith is the surviving sister of Marine Corps Major Samuel Griffith, who was killed in action in Afghanistan on December 14, 2011. Raised in North Carolina, Kelly now lives in the Washington, D.C., area where she serves as the editorial associate for *TAPS Magazine*. Her degree in journalism and the profound impact of her older brother's life and service enable Kelly to fulfill her goal of sharing the compassion and care of TAPS with other survivors through her writing.

A Child's Experience of Trauma

By Lisa Hudson, RN, MS ☆ Surviving spouse of Lt. John Hudson

My son's experience has been unique. Will never knew his father, yet he has experienced the grief of absence, growing up without a father. It surfaced first when he went to first grade and recognized that other boys had dads who went fishing with them, did Cub Scout projects and campouts, let them help around the house, or played football in the backyard.

It surfaced again between his sixteenth and seventeenth year, following another loss. He actually grieved for a life he dreamed of, a father he never knew and wished to know, for being without a father to do things with, share his life, to guide him, to be proud of, and to imitate. He began to desire to be more like him, even deciding to become a doctor, like his father.

Will wanted to see pictures, newspaper articles, and magazine articles about the event. We got out letters John had written so Will could see his handwriting, read his words. He even tried on his shoes. Will wanted to be with his friends more, and he wanted to talk to them about it. He withdrew from me. He cried and mourned

and, of course, I felt a resurgence of my own grief when he was going through his. Once again, I had to find ways to take care of myself.

What May Help Your Children

1. Encourage but don't force them to talk to you, a trusted friend, or a clergy person. If the details of their trauma distress you, get extra help from a therapist trained to work with victims of trauma.
2. Let them draw about their feelings. Art is one way children process their feelings of trauma and emotional pain. From their drawings, you may even learn what particular aspects of the trauma are most distressing them.
3. Let them play out their feelings. One friend of mine whose husband died in a plane crash had a four-year-old son who would play with toy airplanes and have them "crash." This play-acting of the trauma would trigger a flood of emotions and cause her significant distress while he was doing this. She recognized it was his way

of processing the trauma. So she would leave the room, but let him keep playing out his feelings.

4. Help them develop rituals to remember the person who died.
5. It's okay for them to see you cry and mourn. That gives them permission and freedom to do the same. It's not good for you to hold everything in, or pretend everything is okay, because they won't feel safe to let their feelings show.
6. It's not good for children to feel abandoned by you too. If you find that you are isolating yourself too much or not being there for them, you need to seek help. Try not to become involved in intense new or intimate relationships too soon after a traumatic loss. It may distract you from your pain and make you feel better temporarily, but will take time and attention away from your priorities: yourself and your children. Children need and depend on you to be available emotionally and physically for them. They cannot do it for themselves. They need to feel secure and safe by your being there for them. If you take care of their smaller fires now, you won't be putting out bigger fires later. If you aren't emotionally and physically available for your children when the trauma and loss occurs, you will pay a higher price later.

7. Know that you will probably have a higher need for control than ever before, because a trauma leaves you feeling so out of control. You have experienced something unanticipated. You may find yourself being overly protective for a while. Communicate this to your children and explain why you may need more reassurance of their whereabouts than before.

8. Communicate often to your children that they are loved, wanted, and needed. Hold and hug them frequently. They may feel much more afraid than ever, and the

Lisa Hudson with her son Will



world feels just as unsafe to them or more so than it feels to you.

9. Let them know it is not their fault.
10. Provide information as is necessary.
11. Keep the child a part of the family unit. Don't send them away from home too much. They need to be a part of the grief process, the support, and the healing process.
12. If you need a break, locate resources to help you find time for yourself. Arrange sitters, family, or friends to keep your children for a few hours every week or even an hour each day at first when you need to decompress.
13. Do not depend or rely on your children to be your sounding board. They do not need to feel responsible for helping you cope. It is too much of a burden for them. Get your own counselor, and try to journal your feelings or save your most problematic emotional conflicts until you meet with your counselor. It frightens children to see a parent hysterical or losing control. They feel there will be no one to take care of them.
14. Most importantly, get help for yourself first. You cannot help your children unless you help yourself.

Will Hudson with his son John

Be aware that a grief reaction may surface years later in children as they go through different developmental stages of understanding the loss. Don't think something is necessarily wrong with their need to process their loss at different times in their life. Get professional help if other aspects of the child's life seem affected (school performance, peer relationships, conduct, mood changes, behavior changes, developing nervous habits like nail biting, hair pulling, bed wetting, picking at their skin, angry outbursts, headaches, stomachaches, frequent physical complaints, or isolation).

After one year following a trauma, many children show few or no symptoms. But it's not uncommon to observe symptoms recurring years later when they are reminded of or confronted with situations which cause their loss to resurface.

Having my son gave me a reason to get up every morning. He gave me a reason for living when I had lost mine, and we have learned a lot on our journey together. He is the greatest proof that one can indeed recover from traumatic loss. In our school of trauma, Will is my report card, and I think I got an A.

An Afterword by Will Hudson

I was three months old when my dad was sent to Beirut and eight months old when he died. I have no memory of him; I have no memory of the day he died; and I have no memory of any of the days, months, and immediate years that followed. I have never heard my father's voice and I have never seen his face. Every joyful milestone in my life has also been a painful reminder of what I was also missing.

My mom never remarried; I spent my entire life as an only child of a single parent. She was my best friend growing up and will always be my hero. We did not succumb. We are survivors and fighters.

There are days that I see my son, and I am overcome with such emotion that I sob tears of joy. The person I am, the person I want to be, the husband I want to be, the father I want to be, have all been defined by Beirut. *

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Excerpted from *How Do We Tell the Children*
by Dan Schaeffer
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About the Author



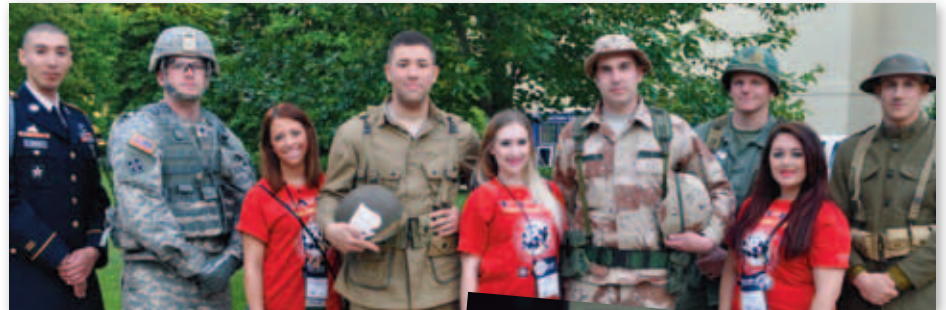
Lisa Hudson earned a master's degree in psychiatric and mental health nursing and was board certified as a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing in 1995. She also became a licensed esthetician and certified life coach. She is now retired and enjoying her grandson while offering volunteer assistance to those suffering grief and loss, parenting issues, depression, and PTSD.

2015 Family Reunion National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp



Friday

FRIDAY: We were serenaded by General Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and then spent the evening in various activities, including an exclusive tour of the Pentagon hosted by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter.



"To me TAPS is one big family and it felt like a family reunion."



Peer Mentor



Training

THURSDAY: Before we all arrived, TAPS trained new peer mentors to help others share the journey.



"Thank you for making my daughter's first Good Grief Camp such a good one. She didn't want to leave."



Saturday

SATURDAY: Adults attended workshops or connected with new friends, and then enjoyed a family style banquet together. Good Grief Camp went to "Playfield in the Park," with super heroes and sports heroes.



"I am beyond grateful for everyone that makes TAPS so special!"



"The best weekend I ever had!"



"There were times of tears, but also shared celebrations of the lives of our loved ones."



Sunday

SUNDAY: TAPS children honored the lives of their loved ones and made new friends, as adults participated in workshops and sampled TAPS Retreat activities including kayaking and rock climbing.



"This was the first time my son and I attended. The experience was like watching miracles happen."



"Such an uplifting weekend."



Monday

MONDAY: We honored our heroes at the Arlington National Cemetery Memorial Day Ceremony. We also marched in the Memorial Day Parade with our friends from Oshkosh Defense.



"Thank you for remembering the needs of our youngest survivors."



"I don't know where my family or I would be without TAPS."



Special thanks to our many wonderful volunteer photographers.



2015 Calendar of Survivor Events

Those who have attended a TAPS event can tell you how much healing comes from spending time with other survivors, face to face. If you have never participated in a TAPS retreat, seminar, or Team TAPS event, you might want to consider signing up this year.

These are the programs we have lined up for the second half of 2015. Be sure to visit www.taps.org to confirm dates and check availability, as some of the venues and dates are tentative at the time of this printing.*

JULY

- ★ **Presidential Traverse Men's Wilderness Retreat**
July 8 to July 12, 2015
Challenging Adventure



- ★ **Southern California Good Grief Camp Out**
July 10 to July 12, 2015
Camp Pendleton Area



- ★ **Southern California Parents Retreat**
July 15 to July 19, 2015
Active Adventure

- ★ **New England Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp**
July 17 to July 19, 2015
New England Area



- ★ **Southern California Siblings Retreat**
July 22 to July 26, 2015
Active Adventure

- ★ **Tennessee Good Grief Camp Out**
July 23 to July 26, 2015
Fort Campbell Area

AUGUST

- ★ **Florida Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp**
August 7 to August 9, 2015
Orlando, Florida

- ★ **Alaska Adult Children Retreat**
August 13 to August 17, 2015
Challenging Adventure



- ★ **Big Wild Life Runs**
August 16, 2015
Anchorage, Alaska

- ★ **Montana Men's Retreat**
August 26 to August 30, 2015
Recreational Adventure



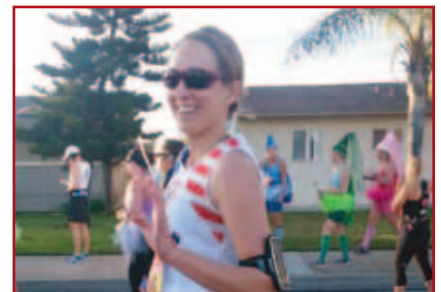
- ★ **Widows and Children Family Camp Out**
August 28 to August 30, 2015
Recreational Adventure

- ★ **Grand Canyon All Populations Wilderness Retreat**
August 31 to September 4, 2015
Challenging Adventure



SEPTEMBER

- ★ **2015 Disneyland Half Marathon Weekend**
September 4 to September 6, 2015
Anaheim, California



★ **Norfolk Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp**
September 4 to September 6, 2015
 Norfolk, Virginia

★ **Camp Pendleton Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp**
September 11 to September 13, 2015
 Camp Pendleton, California

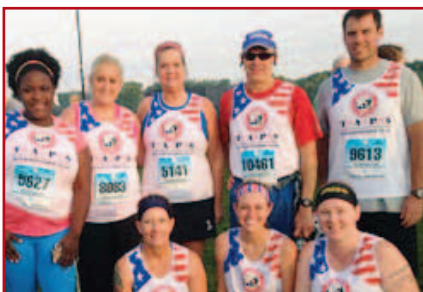


★ **Boundary Waters All Populations Wilderness Retreat**
September 16 to September 20, 2015
 Challenging Adventure



★ **Air Force Marathon, Half Marathon, 10K and 5K**
September 19, 2015
 Dayton, Ohio

★ **Navy-Air Force Half Marathon and the Navy 5 Miler**
September 20, 2015
 Washington DC



★ **Colorado Good Grief Camp Out**
September 25 to September 27, 2015
 Fort Carson Area



★ **Boston Widows Retreat**
September 30 to October 4, 2015
 Challenging Adventure

OCTOBER

★ **National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp**
October 9 to October 11, 2015
 Colorado Springs, Colorado



★ **Army Ten Miler**
October 11, 2015
 Washington, D.C.

★ **Marine Corps Marathon, 10k, and Kids Run**
October 25, 2015
 Washington, D.C.



★ **Tennessee Parents Retreat**
October 28 to November 1, 2015
 Recreational Adventure

NOVEMBER

★ **Charleston Moms Retreat**
November 18 to November 22, 2015
 Recreational Adventure



★ **South Carolina Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp**
November 20 to November 22, 2015
 Columbia, South Carolina



DECEMBER

★ **Jeff Galloway 13.1**
December 12 to December 13, 2015
 Atlanta, Georgia



TAPS Honor Guard Gala

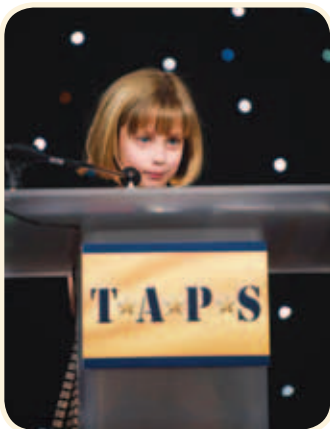
Washington, D.C. ★ March 18, 2015



Liam and Landon Gilbert, TAPS survivors, help HLN's Kyra Phillips introduce General Martin Dempsey as the keynote speaker.

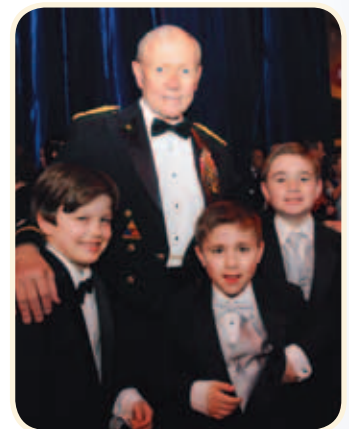


General Dempsey performs with the "President's Own" U.S. Marine Band's contemporary country music ensemble.



TAPS survivor Christina Wilson offers the invocation for the 2015 TAPS Honor Guard Gala.

The TAPS Honor Guard Gala raises funds each year to support TAPS programs for families of our fallen service members. This year's event raised \$2.1 million while saluting those who have made a difference in the lives of military survivors.



General Dempsey shares a moment with TAPS surviving children.



For United Technologies' support of TAPS, Retired General Howie Chandler accepts recognition from TAPS Founder and President Bonnie Carroll.



JP Morgan Chase and Company representative Maureen Casey, center, accepts recognition for the company's sponsorship that helped fund TAPS newest program, Education Support Services.



Photos by Charlie Archambault, Rod Lamkey Jr. and Jackie Ross



Surviving spouse and daughter Shalan and Mary Webb present the 2015 TAPS Congressional Award to Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen.



Surviving mother Patricia Bye, left, accepts the 2015 TAPS Senator Ted Stevens Leadership Award from last year's winner, Nicki Bunting, and Alaska Senator Dan Sullivan.



Star of TNT's "The Last Ship" Eric Dane presents the 2015 Military Award to Vice Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Michelle Howard, accepting on behalf of Admiral Jonathan Greenert, Chief of Naval Operations.



TAPS Founder Bonnie Carroll with emcees Kyra Phillips of HLN and John Roberts of Fox News.

National Seminar for Suicide Loss

“There is no safer place in the world than being surrounded by hundreds of people who understand what you are feeling.”

That safe place was the TradeWinds Resort in St. Pete Beach, Florida, this past October for the 6th annual TAPS National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar. More than 430 adults, 150 children, 150 volunteers, and thirty-five TAPS staff members came together for three days of care, comfort, compassion, tears, laughter, and even a little bit of fun. Each and every attendee was grieving the loss of a loved one by suicide, either during active military service or shortly thereafter.

Workshops and activities were offered all weekend so that adult survivors could learn more about suicide grief, coping techniques such as art therapy and journaling, and how to move forward in their lives and relationships as they integrate the loss.

Children in the Good Grief Camp, each paired one-on-one with a volunteer active-duty service member mentor, had

opportunities to meet other kids who had suffered a suicide loss. Together they shared stories about their loved ones and learned healthy methods for expressing their emotions through age-appropriate (and fun) ways including sand castle contests and beach volleyball tournaments.

We hope you'll consider joining us in Colorado this year for the 2015 TAPS Military Suicide Survivor Seminar.*



"I learned that it is okay to feel how I feel, that nobody can tell you how to grieve."

"I left with newfound hope for myself."

"I made lifelong friendships that have encouraged me and loved me through every challenge."

"Making the decision to attend was one of the best choices I have made."



Mark Your Calendar!

7th Annual National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar

October 9–11, 2015
Cheyenne Mountain Resort
Colorado Springs

Please join us this year in the beautiful, peaceful mountains of Colorado Springs for our seventh annual TAPS Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. Registration is scheduled to open in June 2015.

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Visit www.taps.org and click on Survivor Events for updates and information. If you have any questions, call the TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline at 800-959-TAPS.
.....



"I always thought my son was a hero but didn't think anyone else would. When I saw his picture on that banner I felt proud. And I could let it show."

"I would say it was worth every bit of effort, time, and money."

"It was incredibly helpful to be around hundreds of people who understood some of what I was feeling."

"I would encourage anyone to go. The experience I had was positive and emotional, and the feeling of honor was wonderful, giving me a peaceful feeling that I belonged and could be myself."



Lean on Me

Building Your Support Network

By Jill Harrington LaMorie, DSW, LCSW

Experiencing the death of a loved one can challenge us in many ways as we learn to adapt to the loss in our lives. Although there are no right or wrong ways to grieve, getting support and taking care of yourself can help you deal with your feelings of loss.

One of the single most important factors in healing from loss is having support. Sharing your loss can make the burden of grief easier to carry. Even if you are not comfortable reaching out to others for support under normal circumstances, it is important to garner support while you are grieving. In fact, connecting with others can be one of the most important steps in your process of healing.

There are varying types of support after a loss, both practical and emotional, and all of them can help you on your journey. Here are some suggestions for how to build your network of support.

Identify Your Needs

In the early months after the death of a loved one, it may be very difficult for your friends and family to see you in pain.

They may want to rush you through the process, further reinforcing that you need to run away from or bury your feelings of grief. It's important for you to get to know yourself during this time and tune in to your needs. This will build your confidence in making the choices that help you heal.

Grief can overwhelm you physically and emotionally. If you recognize this from the start, you may feel better about allowing others to help you. Overbooking your schedule and keeping overly busy to avoid feelings of grief will only delay you in coping with the loss. Pay attention to your feelings, allowing yourself the full range of emotions that come after the loss of a loved one: sadness, anger, guilt, fear, and loneliness.

You may need to find time in your daily schedule for outlets that help you cope with your grief. This can be time and space for being alone with your feelings, crying, journaling, walking, exercising, creating art, or talking with friends. Take some quiet time for you, whether that is taking a nap, or just lying down.

Rely on Others

We often take pride in being independent, strong, and self-sufficient. Accepting help from others can make us feel fearful that we may become too dependent or a burden on others. But this is the time to lean on the people who care about you. It is said that death and grief cause us to re-write our address books.

As you identify your needs, it may be a good time to weed out unhelpful friends and family, staying close to those who are truly supportive. As you discover those who will support you, accept the assistance that's offered.

Oftentimes, people want to help but don't know how, so it might work well if you make a list of the things you need them to do to allow you to feel supported. When they call and offer to help, you can give them a choice from the items on your list—whether it's a shoulder to cry on or help with the laundry.

★ **For practical support:** Now is the time when you might need help with babysitting, cleaning, meals, car pools, walking the dog, cutting the grass, or grocery shopping. In the early weeks you might assign a family member or friend to act on your behalf to take phone calls and listen to voicemail messages. You might need assistance with funeral and memorial plans. Later you might want help writing and mailing thank you notes.



Managing social media can be daunting when you are grieving, so you may want to suspend your posting activity for a time. On the other hand, you may also find these outlets healing and may want to ask others to help create memorial pages.

★ **For emotional support:** Try to identify friends and family you can talk to—those who can be empathetic, understanding, patient, and compassionate. Whether it is a family member or a friend who has also lost a child, spouse, sibling, or cousin, these are the people you know you can rely on to take your call at ten o'clock in the evening or seven o'clock in the morning.

★ **For respite care:** Even though it is valuable for your long-term healing to confront your feelings of grief early on, it is exhausting to be continually immersed in the feelings of pain, sorrow, sadness, anger, and anxiety. Some of your friends, family members, neighbors, or paid caregivers may be skilled at giving you respite so you can re-engage in activities that bring you emotional or physical relief. A surviving spouse with children may want to try and arrange a friend to babysit for a few hours. It may be for a simple trip to the hairdresser or a walk in the park. A surviving sibling or child may want to reach out to those friends and see a movie or go to the mall. A surviving mom and dad may need a walk on the beach with a local faith group or a close neighbor. Finding others who can provide you respite may give you the sanctuary you need for a time.

Build a Medical Support Team

Grieving is hard work and can take a toll on our bodies. If you are not already connected with a good primary care physician, contact your insurance company, friend, or family for a referral. Because the mind and body are connected, you'll also feel better emotionally when you feel good physically. Fight the stress and fatigue of grief by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Be careful about using alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief. It is also good to know what to do when physical symptoms may lead to crisis. In these instances, a 24-hour or emergency care facility is always recommended.

Seek Spiritual Support

If you follow a religious or spiritual tradition, embrace the comfort its mourning rituals can provide. Spiritual activities that are meaningful to you—such as praying, meditating, or going to church—can offer solace. If you're questioning your faith in the wake of the loss, talking with a clergy member or others in your religious community may help. Just as grief is a highly unique and personal journey, so is your spiritual journey in the aftermath of loss.

Talk to a Grief Counselor

As time moves forward, if you are feeling overwhelmed, constantly down, fearful, and anxious or depressed, you may want to seek professional support. An experienced grief counselor can help you work through intense emotions, and help companion you on a path of healing. TAPS can make the connection for you with a mental health professional who is experienced in working with grief and loss.

Join a Support Group

Grief can feel very isolating and lonely, even when you have loved ones around. Sharing your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses can help.

To find a bereavement support group in your area, contact TAPS for an individualized Community Resource Report. Many groups are offered at local hospitals, hospices, funeral homes, and counseling centers. In addition to helping you find local support options, TAPS offers other avenues of peer-based emotional support. Find out more about peer mentors, online chat groups, regional and national survivor seminars, suicide support seminars, retreats, and local care groups by calling 800-959-TAPS or visiting www.taps.org.

To Sum It All Up

Realize that while others have “moved on,” grief can be a long journey for those whose lives are directly affected by the loss. Having realistic expectations that it will take time to adjust to your loss will help you rethink your priorities and set realistic goals for yourself. In the meantime, don't hesitate to allow the people around you the chance to make a difference in your life.★

About the Author



Dr. Jill Harrington LaMorie is the surviving spouse of Navy Lieutenant Commander Andrew LaMorie and proud mother of their children, Madeline and Alexander. She served as the TAPS Director of Professional Education for three years, as well as being a peer mentor, group facilitator, and workshop presenter. Jill completed her doctorate in social work at The University of Pennsylvania and currently works as the Senior Field Researcher on the National Military Family Bereavement Study.



Men and Their Grief

By Bob Baugher, PhD

Reviewed by Sam Griffith ★ Surviving Father of Maj. Samuel Griffith

Sitting down to watch Dr. Bob Baugher's two-DVD set about men's grief, I was apprehensive. Like many men, I suppose I didn't want to talk about or even watch other men discuss their grief. The first video of the two-part set introduced each of the eight fathers, husbands, and brothers at a point in time when they were two to ten years out from the death. When I realized none of them had lost a loved one in the military, I was skeptical, concerned that it would be just another psychologist telling me how I was feeling when they can't really know.

But after the men in the group started talking, I found there was a direct correlation between each of their stories and how I felt. The topics of discussion ranged from society's response toward grieving men to anger, avoidance, denial, triggers, sexuality, crying, and crises. As they shared, I saw much of my grief journey mirrored in theirs. I am glad I watched, as it really validated my feelings.

Men and Their Grief taught me some coping skills, like saying to myself what I want to do before I leave a room. This simple technique can help fight off those moments of feeling crazy when you walk into a room and can't remember why you're there. It was really nice to get some reassurance that I'm not crazy. Many started projects they never finished and would recommend not to start anything you can't keep your train of thought long enough to complete. Others struggled with many of the



same problems I have had to face in grief. Too often, we men feel as if we're never going to get out of the fog, never going to feel good again. It was really nice to hear that those feelings are normal.

The second DVD was similar. Twenty years after the first video, six of the men returned to share how they had grown in their grief journey. I was surprised that the men still had times of experiencing difficult feelings and continuing to grieve. They felt their losses were still significant

By the end of the two DVDs, I felt like I could easily have been one of those men, sitting together and sharing.

many years later. It offered a harsh reality check that I'll miss my son for the rest of my life, but it also offered hope. Many of the men had grown. A widower had found the confidence to date again and had even remarried.

Both DVDs detail how men grieve. Men try to put others first. Many try to fill their time with projects or work to try to stay busy. One man talked about going back to work too soon. His boss came to him just six weeks after his loss and told him he wasn't being productive. After Sam's death, I realized I went back to work too quickly, too, and ended up having to take more time off. In those early days of grief, I was trying to use my job as a way to preoccupy my time and stifle my grief. I was afraid of feelings like sadness, anger, and confusion and didn't want to deal with them head on.

Like many of the men in the video, I have found that you can run but you can't hide from grief.

By the end of the two DVDs, I felt like I could easily have been one of those men, sitting together and sharing. Similarly, when my wife and I have attended TAPS retreats with other parents, there is a wide range of ages and circumstances around each loved one's death. Throughout the video many of my TAPS family members came to mind. Although there are differences between us, all of our grief journeys matter and we can share them together.★



Quick Series Guides

It is often said by parents that they wish their children had come with a handbook. As those who mourn the loss of a loved one, we can feel the same way about grief. The confusion, uncertainty, and general craziness of our emotions following the death can make us wish that we somehow had a guide to get us through the days and, even worse, the nights.

Recognizing this, TAPS set out to create a series of booklets to help guide military survivors in their grief journey. Using Quick Series Publishing, we created our first pocket-sized, spiral-bound booklet in 2010 and called it the TAPS Survivor Guide. It consists of thirty-six short, easy to read pages. Its size allows it to travel with you easily, in a purse or pocket. Because of its success at TAPS events and among casualty offices of various service branches, the TAPS Survivor Guide is now in its fourth printing.

In 2012, TAPS created the Benefits and Finances Guide to help survivors take stock and think of important financial considerations in the early months of loss. We added another publication in 2014, the Education Support Services Guide. The newest member of our Quick Series family is the Children's Grief Guide, published in April 2015.

Survivor Guide

The TAPS Survivor Guide introduces newly bereaved families to TAPS. Sharing

information about our mission and programs allows survivors to find out how to become part of the TAPS family. The guide gives tips on how to cope with early grief. It explains everyone's need to grieve differently, offers coping strategies, and defines grief and trauma. In addition to the hard copy, this guide is available as a free downloadable app for your phone or tablet. Search for "TAPS—Tragedy Assistance" in the App Store.

Benefits and Finances

Designed to help survivors take a breath and find their financial footing, the TAPS Benefits and Finances Guide helps navigate the initial panic and uncertainty many families face. The guide covers benefits awarded to survivors from the immediate death gratuity to the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance to Dependency Indemnity Compensation, sharing who is eligible for each benefit. It takes the reader through health care, social security, and, briefly, education benefits. Survivors are also given tips on organizing their finances and building for their future.

Education Support Services

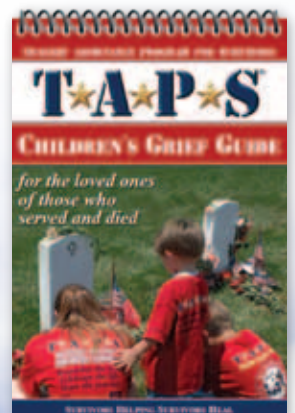
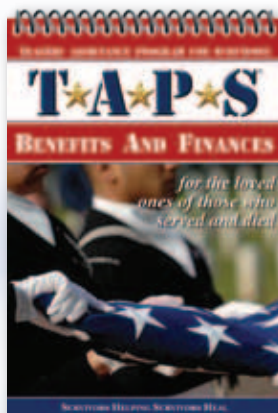
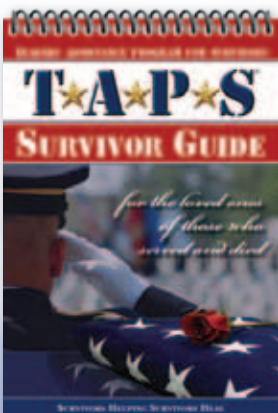
The TAPS Education Support Services Guide provides survivors with knowledge of financial assistance and benefits available for furthering their education. It includes advice on choosing the right college and introduces survivors to the online TAPS Education Portal. Federal, state, branch

specific, and community-based scholarships are included. There is a special section with information specifically for surviving spouses—from information on how to prepare and choose a college to the application process and finding in-school support. There's even a checklist to help survivors make sure they have all the necessary materials for scholarship and grant applications.

Children's Grief Guide

The TAPS Children's Grief Guide, published this year, gives a brief overview of children's grief, including advice on how to talk with your child about the death and a list of warning signs that indicate the need for additional support. It walks parents through the developmental stages and shares some of the effects of grief on a child's psyche. The guide offers coping skills for children and a list of age-appropriate books that are good for starting a conversation on death and grief. TAPS programs geared towards helping young survivors are explained. *

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The TAPS Quick Series Guides are intended as aids in finding the right support and realizing you are not alone in your grief. They're available at many of our events and seminars and can be found in the resource village or at our resource table. You can also request a guide by emailing info@taps.org.
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Spotlight on Service

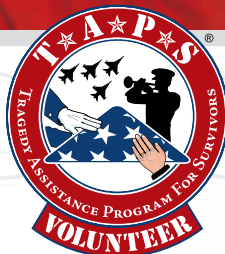
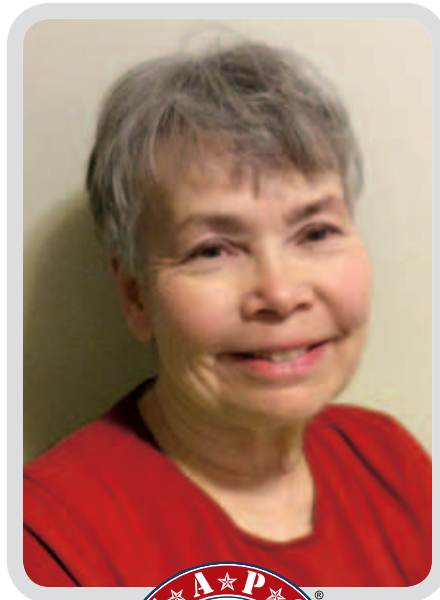
★ Ruth Roberts ★

*Volunteers are an important part of the TAPS family.
We are grateful for the time they donate in support of our mission.
Volunteers, we salute you!*

Is the desire to volunteer the product of nature or nurture? In the case of TAPS volunteer Ruth Roberts, it may be a combination. Ruth was born a fifth generation Dutch citizen in The Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia. During World War II, her father suffered brutal treatment as a prisoner of war, and her mother, along with Ruth and two of her siblings, lived in Japanese detention. After the war, a bitter struggle for independence made it unsafe for the family to remain in their homeland. In 1953, they embarked on a journey to Holland, where they lived as refugees for several years. Despite the difficulties, Ruth's parents taught their children that there was always someone who had it worse. And that they should live by the Golden Rule. Her father's mantra was, "You can't just be good, you also have to do good."

Born with a nomadic and very independent spirit, Ruth decided to move to the United States in 1967. And she never left, retiring in 1998 after more than twenty-five years in the insurance industry. At that point, Ruth decided to study and become a licensed tour guide. She joined the Guild of Professional Tour Guides of Washington, D.C., where she has used her experience and seniority to influence their philanthropic endeavors.

Five years ago, Ruth found TAPS when she was contacted about providing tour guides for the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar. Ruth has always been open to helping others who have had less fortunate experiences in life, those who either can't do for themselves or just need another person's compassion. She was immediately drawn to the TAPS mission, in part because her son serves in the United States Army. "I'm very aware that while he comes home, some of



*Thank you,
Ruth*

the members of his unit don't," Ruth said. She wanted to work with an organization that cares for those who are grieving a loss, because she understands the importance of having those services available.

As an individual volunteering with TAPS, Ruth has developed quite a diverse portfolio, from selling Courage hats and t-shirts that benefit TAPS during Capitals and Wizards games, to cleaning up a TAPS storage unit in preparation for the national seminar. She has also been an advocate for TAPS within her

guild, arranging for tour guides to assist with specific projects in support of the TAPS mission. Over the years, Ruth's guild developed an outreach program aimed at philanthropy and volunteering, and it was through her initiative that TAPS was introduced. "If a stipend was necessary, I would pay for it or find guides willing to volunteer," Ruth said.

The experience of meeting the families and listening to the love being shared in stories about their service member who died is something that Ruth truly values. "To see people feel safe in talking about their loved one in a culture where we don't talk about, or are afraid of talking about, death" makes the national seminar her favorite TAPS volunteer venue throughout the year.

Ruth believes in what TAPS is doing and wants to be a part of that success and positive change. "Talking to the families is what impressed me," said Ruth. "I can only imagine; but seeing the positive change and a good experience for those participating" keeps her coming back year after year. For Ruth, the experience of meeting and interacting with TAPS families is important.

The message that Ruth would send to those unfamiliar with TAPS or those who want to get involved is, "If you're going to give, give it your all...one-hundred percent." This might just be a testament to how she was raised, or maybe it's her genetic makeup. Either way, TAPS is fortunate to have Ruth's support.*

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TAPS welcomes new volunteers. Visit us at www.taps.org and click on Support TAPS or email us at volunteer@taps.org.
.....

A Hero's Welcome

By Robert Longley

*Time to come home, dear brother,
Your tour of duty through.
You've given as much as anyone
Could be expected to do.*

*Just a few steps further,
The smoke will start to clear.
Others here will guide you;
You have no need of fear.*

*You have not failed your brothers;
You clearly gave it all,
And through your selfless actions
Others will hear the call.*

*So take your place of honor
Among those who have gone before,
And know you will be remembered
For now and evermore.*



From the Author

Robert Longley would be happy to provide a unique poem, free of charge, to any family member whose loved one died in service to America. You can see more of his work and prints at www.sacredpoems.com

Message from Eric Dane

Many of us are familiar with TNT's hit TV series *The Last Ship*, starring Eric Dane as Commander Tom Chandler. What we may not have known is that Dane himself is a military survivor. Dealing with the death of his father was a big part of his life and is, in part, the reason that the TAPS mission is near and dear to Dane's heart.

At the 2015 TAPS Honor Guard Gala, Eric said, "I come from a Navy family, and my father died when I was just seven. There was no Good Grief Camp for me then, nor was there support for my mom. Seeing the lives that TAPS has touched and the difference their care has made inspires me and humbles me. I know that it matters. And I am committed to supporting this awesome cause."



While Dane was in Washington, D.C., he participated in a Pentagon briefing and met with the Joint Chiefs, visited the TAPS National Headquarters, attended a dinner at the Embassy of Afghanistan, had breakfast with the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, had lunch with surviving families at the Army Navy Club,

and met with officials at the White House, in addition to speaking at the TAPS Honor Guard Gala.

"TAPS has been very blessed to have wonderful support from many sectors of our society, citizens who have stepped forward to honor those who have selflessly served in the cause of freedom," said Bonnie Carroll, founder and president of TAPS. "We're very happy to be connected with Eric Dane, who takes his role as Commander Tom Chandler very seriously. He portrays the Navy in the absolute best light."

While visiting the Pentagon, Dane said, "My job is not just to entertain but also to manifest and honor the courage and commitment that each of you possess. My show is fictional. You're the real heroes." *



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We are grateful to the Friends of TAPS whose personal gifts, memorial tributes, grants, event sponsorships, and planned gifts enable TAPS to comfort and care for the loved ones of those who served and died.

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