

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

T★A★P★S[®]

Comfort and Support Since 1994

MAGAZINE

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



VOLUME 21 • ISSUE 3

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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Printed in the USA

TAPS®

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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- ★ Education Support Services
- ★ TAPS Online Community
- ★ Grief and Trauma Resources
- ★ Quarterly TAPS Magazine

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COVER PHOTO BY
Chelsea Marlow

A TAPS surviving child and her mentor bond at the New England Regional Seminar.

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. ★

Education Support Services

Thanks to TAPS Education Support Services. The education system and education benefits can be difficult to understand and navigate. The team at the TAPS Education Support Services is there to help educate survivors on their benefits and guide them through the processes they will be encountering. They are always there to offer a quick response to survivors, and I don't know where we would be without their assistance. This service has filled a huge void, and I am aware of many survivors who have benefited from this program.

Michelle Fitz-Henry, Illinois
Surviving spouse of
SCPO Theodore Fitz-Henry

Good Grief Camp

I am not a veteran or active duty military. However, I've always appreciated the sacrifices our men and women in uniform have made over the years, and I absolutely love kids. Luckily, TAPS made a place for me in their family, and it has been an awesome five years of being a mentor at the Good Grief Camp. Part of me wishes TAPS did not exist, for obvious reasons. But TAPS, in my opinion and experience, is a wonderful "balancing act" of helping the kids deal with their pain and loss, while also understanding that sometimes, kids just need to have fun.

Lincoln Gaffney, Virginia
Good Grief Camp Mentor

24-Hour Navy Cruise

Thank you to the wonderful TAPS group from California for coming and spending the day out at sea with us on the U.S.S. John C. Stennis. You inspired and blessed us with your stories. I am thankful for such a wonderful organization that is there for our families of the fallen and the support that they bring to one another. It is very important for us to educate our Sailors and their families on organizations such as TAPS, and it is ultimately our responsibility to ensure these families know that they and their loved ones will never be forgotten.

CPO Rex Parmelee, Florida
U.S.S. John C. Stennis

Asheville Siblings Retreat

I find that my heart has grown to love twenty-four strangers as my new siblings that have been so graciously given to me by TAPS. I found new avenues and new ways to help my path in the loss of my brother Matthew. This group of amazingly goofy, wonderful, quirky, intelligent, beautiful people has opened my eyes and my heart. My walls came crashing down, and my new sibs have kept that wall down during this weekend. Now I have to work to keep those walls down and allow myself to feel, grieve, and, most of all, heal.

Morgan Everett, Iowa
Surviving sibling of
SSG Matthew Mackey

TAPS Resource Kits

The day Dominic took his life will never fade from my heart or mind. The day your package arrived, I was sitting with my causality officer, and I know God had his hand in that. Thank you for the books you sent; they will be helpful to me. My heart was warmed when I opened the box, knowing that someone took time to gather all the loving items put in it. Good will come out of the sadness that I know I am working through daily and one year at a time.

Anthony Pavelko, Ohio
Surviving father of
LCpl. Dominic Pavelko

Camp Pendleton Seminar

Thank you for this past weekend. It was my first TAPS event and when I came home last night, I told my four boys about how much it meant to me that I had the opportunity to attend. Not only was I able to cry a lot since my husband died in 2013, but I was able to connect with others. At first, I had a lot of panic and anxiety, and I was so scared to go. But, I'm so glad I did. I will never forget what I learned and the stories I heard.

Cathy Hope, California
Surviving spouse of
Gysgt. Timothy Hope



editor@taps.org



One Step at a Time

By Jennifer Freitas ★ Surviving spouse of Maj. Cesar Freitas

“Pole, Pole.” “Slowly, slowly.” It wasn’t a race to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, but rather an exercise in continually putting one foot in front of the other on the six-day ascent. Our guides, who had walked this same path hundreds of times, knew the best way for us to arrive at the summit, and reach our goal, was to go slowly, deliberately.

Along with nine other intrepid explorers, I set out on the TAPS Expedition to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. What I found was reclamation and a bond like no other.

Looming above us during our ascent was Uhuru (Freedom) Peak, the highest point on Mount Kilimanjaro. At 19,341 feet, it is also the highest point on the continent of Africa. At the onset of our journey, the peak seemed nearly unreachable. We could see it in the distance, but could hardly imagine we would soon be standing on top of it. As the days progressed, the summit seemed steadily closer, more attainable.

Most days we hiked and climbed from six to nine hours, going up and down and allowing our bodies to acclimate to the elevation. More often than not, it seemed as if little progress was being made. The journey was long, but we filled the time,



taking in the changing landscape as we traveled through rainforests and alpine deserts. The trees changed and eventually disappeared as we ascended above timberline. We talked of our loved ones; we carried their pictures on our packs and their love in our hearts. While they were with us this entire journey, this trek was about more than honoring the love and lives of those we lost. It was about reclaiming life for ourselves.

We ranged from one and a half years out from the loss to more than eight years. For some, this was their first time doing something on their own since their loved ones died. They had shared their previous experiences with this special person; now they were setting out on their own. It was both terrifying and empowering. Knowing that a chapter had closed, yet another was opening in a powerful way.

There were others in our group who had never slept in a tent before setting out on our expedition. Yet, there was something drawing them on this journey, and their very first camping trip was one of epic proportions. For most, this was the first mountain they had summited. We took our existing limits, fears, and doubts and pushed beyond our comfort zone.

Most of us had never met each other until we arrived in Arusha, Tanzania, a world away. When we first met, there was an instant bond, the kind that only exists between people who understand. When we came back down that mountain, that bond had transformed; it had deepened. We spent seven days sleeping in tents, climbing for hours on end together, and not showering. We endured cold, rain,

We talked of our loved ones. While they were with us this entire journey, this trek was about more than honoring the love and lives of those we lost. It was about reclaiming life for ourselves.



heat, exhaustion, illness, and the effects of altitude. We pushed ourselves not only physically, but mentally and spiritually. The hours of climbing provided plenty of time to talk and when the altitude was no longer conducive to conversations, we had hours of quiet reflection. The pressures and expectations of our daily lives lifted away.

The determination I saw in my teammates to reach the summit continues to motivate me. One teammate was unable to make the summit on account of illness. Knowing the toll sickness had taken on her body, she wisely chose to not continue. But, make no mistake; she has Kili firmly in her sights. I know one day, she will stand on that summit. On the anniversary of her loss, the team made it to the summit and shouted her loved one’s name. After all, we were in this together.

There was the lone male, brave enough to join a group of nine women on this climb. I can only assume he did so with some trepidation, but that was soon replaced with camaraderie. He provided us with

We will carry those who we loved and lost forward with us. We will not be defined by our grief and loss. Accepting grief as part of our story, we began writing a new chapter.

laughs and was an amazingly good sport about the variety of “women’s topics” that arose during our time on the mountain. He walked away with nine sisters, although I’m sure he often felt we were more motherly than sisterly.

Two women struggled as we neared the summit. The altitude and days of climbing began to take their toll. Yet, even when our experienced guide expected them to turn back, they did not. They pressed onward. They reached the summit. One slow step at a time. They persevered, their bodies fighting with each and every step. They showed a strength that was truly inspiring. We stood together on the summit, and we were victorious. I think we all reclaimed a bit of ourselves that day. A bit of our lives that was stolen when that person so dear to us was taken away.

Our primary guides, Verne and Carole Tejas, were incredible, not only providing us with the skills for a successful journey, but also with emotional support, laughter, and even a bit of harmonica playing. Our Tanzanian guides looked out for us continuously, helping carry our packs when the weight became too much. They sang songs on the cold, dark trek to the summit. They laughed with us; they danced with us; and they shouted encouragements to us along our journey.

The cooks provided far better meals with a propane stove at 13,000 feet than what I eat at home. The soups were absolutely amazing and nourished both the body and the soul with their warmth. The porters

and support staff carried their gear, plus much of ours, the tents and food, and passed us. They would take down the camp after we left and set it up before we arrived at the next location and greet us enthusiastically with song and dance as we came into camp. It was humbling. Along the journey, we were met with so much support and encouragement.

For those times when the going got tough, we were taught the “rest step” and “pressure breathing.” Rest steps allowed us to keep moving while helping our muscles to relax, allowing us to go farther without needing to stop as frequently. Pressure breathing is a technique that allowed us to make the most use of the oxygen available at higher

altitudes. These helped us overcome the terrain and altitude during the ascent.

Focusing on the rest step and pressure breathing techniques, we were able to keep moving forward and take our minds off the difficulty of the journey itself. When the trek became difficult, I focused on these techniques and made each next step count.

This brave, new post-loss world is not a place any of us wanted to be; yet we wouldn’t have been standing on that mountaintop if we hadn’t been united by tragedy. We honored our heroes, but we also honored ourselves. We took this life of grief and grabbed it by the horns, determined to live again. We embraced life and all that it has to offer.

We will carry those who we loved and lost forward with us. We will not be defined by our grief and loss. Accepting grief as part of our story, we began writing a new chapter. We did this together.

Each of us had our own struggles, our own demons to face down on the journey. While there is a significant physical component to endurance activities, the battle is won and lost in the mind. We each made the decision to keep taking one more step. We proceeded pole, pole, taking one step at a time.

Much like our grief journeys, some of those steps are harder and more draining than others. And when that happens, use the rest step and pressure breathe. One step at a time, you will reach the summit.*



Metaphors of Grief

Turning Small Talk into Great Talk

By Emily Muñoz ★ TAPS Strategy and Communications Senior Advisor

Traveling the country to host Regional Seminars, the TAPS team hears about the sense of freedom that comes from connecting with other people who understand. At TAPS events, you can be yourself – the armor can come off; the mask can fall away. As this happens, our bonds as a TAPS family strengthen and grow. And then, Sunday rolls around, and with it comes the real world – and some of us need that armor back. We don't want to send you home with your same heaviness. We want you to find safety and hope with us, and we want to help you create this in the worlds to which you must return. Don't worry; we have a plan.

It's the shared experience of grief, and the easy nature of our seminars, that facilitate open communication during our time together. We get to stop "faking it," to let go of suppressed emotions, and – most importantly – we can say what we actually mean without the impulse to censor for the audience, for manners, or for time. We get to, in many ways, let go of the small talk.

It's the repeated "I'm fine's" and the "One day at a time's" that wear us down in our daily lives. These are the casual exchanges that are further complicated by distractions, scarcity of time, and lack of emotional energy. You are tired of having to answer big questions during small talk. When we're grieving, it's an even larger drain on the emotional reserves; instead of using energy to heal and process, we're using those resources to manage small talk. We associate small talk with not really caring, but with just being polite. It's an exchange of pleasantries, not a real connection.

It's not just us. In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, T.S. Eliot famously laments

about small talk. The character in his poem, Prufrock, finds small talk tedious, stifling, and isolating.

How many times have we been saying one thing while our brains start screaming, "Do you really want to know how I am?"

The things we often most desperately need to express are the very things that are most difficult to say. What grief wants us to own is hard to say and hard to hear.

He fantasizes about injecting meaning into conversations. When faced with the grind of repetition, shallow interactions, and people who just aren't trying, he considers shock value as a way to actually connect – a way to force communication.

Haven't we all thought about the potential shock value of what we're really thinking?

Or maybe someone asks about another family member, a child or a spouse, and that's when it happens. Your mouth answers with pleasant words while your brain replays meltdowns, nightmares, a single, widowed-parent experience on the first day of school. And since that feels like too much, we go through the motions of small talk.



The use of metaphors creates common ground. It not only starts a conversation, but it continues it. And it creates congruence – what you're thinking is what you're saying.

The problem is that grief longs for connection, even though real communication often requires emotional energy we might not have. But when we leave an interaction that consists of nothing but small talk, do we feel any more connected to the world? More cared about or more detached? Have we allowed unburdening, compassion, or empathy? Even if it's easier, is it what we really need when we are struggling with hopelessness and loneliness?

Prufrock dreams of interrupting the exchange of pleasantries, even at the risk of alienating other people. He imagines that, even if other people turn away, angered or uncertain, they will at least have seen a glimpse of his intense inner life. And haven't we all been there, too – wanting to rip the mask off, to show people what it's really like, to stop wearing the grief game face just long enough for someone to get that we're not okay?

Despite temptations to yell everything from, "I hated your casserole!" or "Stop complaining about your husband!" to "Only tell me one to two things about your exceptional children!", we really do risk alienating our support system. We're stuck trying to find the easiest way out. The things we often most desperately need to express are the very things that are most difficult to say. What grief wants us to own is hard to say and hard to hear.

However, yelling our deepest, most vulnerable thoughts at an acquaintance in front of the meat counter at the Piggly Wiggly may not be the most constructive route. It may feel good for a minute, but (and I really hate to say this) venting is not communicating. So, we're back to feeling isolated, separate, embarrassed, and probably a little bit wistful for the time when we weren't the crazy people yelling in the Piggly Wiggly. Moreover, your acquaintance did not deserve that (even if she did have makeup on, or even if his son did get assigned to fly fighters). If others don't know what's screaming in our minds,

how do we know what's racing around in theirs? Small talk leaves everyone a little worse for the wear – a little more tired, a little more run down, a little lonelier.

So what is the alternative? It's big talk. Great talk. It's in depth and honest. Great talk demands vulnerability and requires conveying feelings, not just descriptions. Great talk feeds our souls, helps us understand yet move beyond our own pain, and keeps us invested. You know what this feels like if you've ever been to a TAPS event. This is part of what makes it difficult to come home – to face again that the Great Talk that is so easy around your TAPS family yields to timid small talk.

Why is this? Because Great Talk can be difficult to undertake during a parking lot chat, a church hallway hug, or a grocery store encounter. But remember; we have a plan.

Each one of our 2015 Regional Seminars has had a defined theme. In San Antonio, we focused on remembrance, going to the Alamo and placing our losses in the context of American military history. At Fort Campbell, we went bowling – comparing grief to feeling knocked over or the clumsy bowler – hurling hope down the lane and praying for gutter guards to keep things on track. At Green Bay and Orlando, we used a roller coaster to describe the intense emotions of grief. Our time in Connecticut was based on helicopter motion – learning how to hover, rise above, and gain perspective in the absence of a flight plan. In Norfolk, we compared grief to needing to find safe harbor – to being adrift, battered by storms, and needing a place to rest, repair, and plan. Camp Pendleton's theme referenced the iconic Iwo Jima Memorial and was built around claiming ground even in the places we don't want to be – staking out a place for our heroes' legacies and ourselves.

Each theme incorporates a metaphor – the bridge between small talk and Great

Talk. Metaphors give us a way to explain *how* we feel without explaining *why*. They create an instant connection with the other person in the conversation because you're asking them to be a part of the story, to find a way to relate to you.

Most people can understand the feeling of being on a roller coaster or imagine the last time they felt their stomachs jump into their throats. Most people can develop a mental image, or even a movie reference, for being scared and seasick and looking for a lighthouse, or the shore.

As Frank Campbell, grief professional and longtime friend of TAPS, explains at each seminar, the use of metaphors creates common ground. It not only starts a conversation, but it continues it. And it creates congruence – what you're thinking is what you're saying. Instead of feeling isolated and misunderstood, we create space for empathy, compassion, and connection.

Imagine the possibilities if each of our encounters felt like Great Talk – if we were able to take off the armor and live instead in the truths and triumphs of our grief. With each metaphor, we gain new possibilities to express, explain, and even invite. Come join us, and expand your own emotional language. We want to hear you say, "great talk."*

About the Author



Emily Muñoz can be found speaking at Regional Seminars, where, despite her role, her main priority is to listen - so she can help shape TAPS to meet current and future survivor needs. She believes in the healing power of dogs, dance parties, and great talks.

Learning to Swim

By Tara Cameron ★ Surviving sister of SSgt. Joshua Jacobs

I share a lot as a writer. I like to think of myself as transparent. But there are still a lot of things about me that aren't transparent. I struggle with letting others see my grief. Mourning in front of others is a challenge. Some people bottle up their anger and frustrations. Me, I bottle up my tears.

Anyone who knows me personally knows that I don't like to cry in front of an audience. I don't like to let those walls down because I hate feeling vulnerable like that. But recently, I talked about this with my best friend of more than twenty years. I told her how hard it had been, keeping all those tears bottled up around my kids since my brother Staff Sergeant Joshua Jacobs died two years ago. Even my own kids didn't get to see my vulnerabilities. I couldn't think of a time I had ever cried in front of them. Aside from feeling vulnerable, I also never wanted my kids to feel my burdens; I never wanted them to feel like they had to take care of me or be sad, stressed, or worried for me. I just want them to be kids. In my mind, tears would put my burdens on them.

My friend gave me simple, yet such meaningful advice; "Give it a try some time." So, I did. I was sorting through old military uniforms of my husband's and mine. My friend is making me a quilt of as many of my brother's things as our mom could bear to part with, and she needed some more items to fill it in. Since my brother, my husband, and I were all three in the Air Force, I figured our old uniforms would blend nicely. I also always felt like my little brother has followed in some of my footsteps, and it seemed fitting to have our uniforms together. I was proud to share the common experience of military service with him. He had made great strides in his career and worked his way through TACP and JTAC School, the "elite of the Air Force."



I let my children know that grief and sadness are parts of life, and love and hugs are the lifesavers that will help us float and eventually swim.

They didn't have any words, and I imagine they knew they didn't need any. They only hugged me, and words weren't needed. They understood. They had all I needed right in those moments.

While sorting, I came across a military-issued raincoat of my brother's that he had given me when I couldn't find my own. I had forgotten about it. I was so happy to see the raincoat. I put it on and it brought me joy for a few minutes. But as I kept wearing it around the house, the sadder I got. Then I felt the wave of grief rolling in.

I could still hear his voice, "I've got one you can have, Sister." I replayed the memory of him giving me that coat, having never before realized how special such a seemingly small moment would be one day. The thought of never having any more of those moments hurt terribly. Then the memories of the day he died, September 13, 2013, came rolling in on top of the first wave; swallowing it up in one gulp. He was only twenty-three years old. He still had too many places to go and see in this beautiful world. The memories began to play in my mind again. I couldn't listen to them anymore.

All I could feel was the moment my entire identity, the only one I'd ever known, was stolen from me and would never again be given back. I could feel the terror, the panic, my whole world crashing down and being swallowed by the monstrous ocean of grief. I was drowning in its depths, and I couldn't breathe. I could feel that moment when I realized I truly have no control in this life because the ocean of grief can be far bigger and stronger than me. I was reminded that the only choice I had was to submit to its authority and learn to swim.

I could feel a sudden wave of tears swelling in the pit of my stomach and make its way

into my throat. I tried to ignore the tears and continued sorting. But I realized I couldn't ignore them any longer. My first instinct was to hide in my room. So I did, and I let the wave of grief come over me. As I sat against my bedroom door, feeling the waves swell up and then break as tears fell, I remembered what my friend said. It took me a couple of minutes to gather the courage to drag myself from my room. But I did. I went back to sorting the clothes in the living room where I had left them and just let the tears fall. Once the kids took notice, they began to ask questions.

I kept it simple; "I'm sad because I miss Uncle Josh." My grief was received with silent, sincere hugs; it wasn't as bad as I'd imagined it would be. It was comforting. It was healing, and I realized that it was okay to cry in front of my kids. I was amazed at the way kids instinctively know how to comfort. They didn't have any words, and I imagine they knew they didn't need any. They only hugged me, and words weren't needed. They understood. They had all I needed right in those moments.

I had given it a lot of thought since the talk with my friend. I had wondered if it would be a good idea and if I'd even be able to do something like that. But was I really protecting them by always hiding my tears? Or was I only protecting myself? Would they grow up and know how to comfort someone else in moments of sadness if they were never allowed to see them? Would they grow up and think that they had to bottle up their sadness

and go through it alone too? Would they think the rest of the world wasn't allowed to cry and that it was something everyone should always do in private?

I concluded I had been doing them an injustice to shield them from my sadness and tears. I am setting them up to fail in a world full of emotions that people have to deal with every day. Sadness is a part of life. Grief is a part of life. It is real, and to deny its existence, I believe, is only going to hurt them in the long run. They cannot learn how to face the difficult parts of life in healthy ways if they have never been exposed to them.

When my daughter hugged me she began to cry too. Maybe she needed it just as much as I did. It was the first time since he died that we cried together and acknowledged that the grief is even there. I realized then that the walls I had put up to shield them from my pain had also created a barrier for them to be able to share their pain too.

Now, we are learning to swim together, and I know that it's okay. I let my children know that grief and sadness are parts of life, and love and hugs are the lifesavers that will help us float and eventually swim. We cried. We hugged. We worked through the wave of grief together in love and then carried on about the rest of our day. There is a difference in a parent who casts burdens onto his or her children and a parent who allows children to see how to cope with them in healthy ways. I am learning that difference.*

Healing Your Grieving Heart

By Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

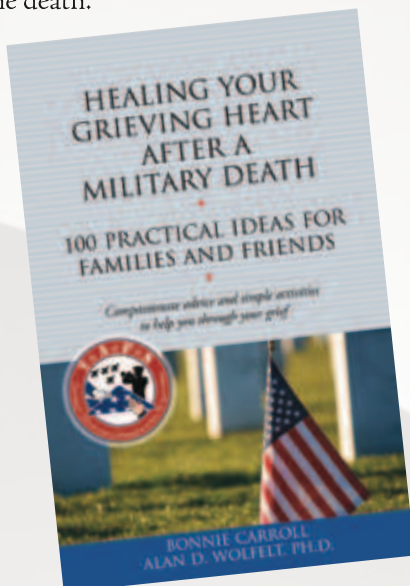
“Believe in the wonderment of life, the magic of love, and the reality of death.”

– Carroll Bryant

You may have heard of the “stages” of grief, popularized in 1969 by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s landmark text, *On Death and Dying*. In this book she lists the five stages of grief that she saw terminally ill patients experience in the face of their own impending deaths: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, she never intended for her five stages to be applied to all grief or to be interpreted as a rigid, linear sequence to be followed by all mourners.

Usually, grief hurts more before it hurts less. This is because the initial numbing eventually wears off, often right about the time when friends and family withdraw their support, assuming you are doing better.

You will probably experience a multitude of different emotions in a wave-like fashion. You will also likely encounter more than one need of mourning at the same time. Understandably, survivors of sudden, violent death also tend to spend more time and effort on the first need of mourning: acknowledging the reality of the death.



1. Acknowledge the reality of the death.

Your first need of mourning is to gently confront the difficult reality that someone you love is dead and will never physically be present to you again.

Even when a death is anticipated, acknowledging the full reality of the loss may take weeks or months. Accepting the reality of sudden and violent deaths usually takes longer.

You will first come to acknowledge the reality of the loss with your head. Only over time will you come to acknowledge it with your heart. As Stephen Levine has noted, “There are pains that cannot be contained in the mind, only in the heart.”

At times you may push away the reality of the death. This is normal. You will come to integrate the reality in doses as you are ready.

You may be saying to yourself, “I feel like I’m dreaming. I keep hoping I’ll wake up and none of this will have happened.” We hear this often from trauma survivors. Your shock protects you from being overwhelmed by the loss. You need and deserve time to reconstitute yourself after this traumatic death. You need time to become accustomed to thinking and feeling in your new reality. Go slow. There are no rewards for speed.

2. Embrace the pain of the loss.

This need of mourning requires us to embrace the pain of our loss – something we naturally don’t want to do. It is easier to avoid, repress, or push away the pain of grief than it is to confront it.

It is in embracing your grief, however, that you will learn to reconcile yourself to it.

You will need to slowly – ever so slowly – “dose” yourself in embracing your pain. If you were to allow in all the pain at once, you could not survive.

People with chronic physical pain are taught not to tighten around the pain but to relax and allow the pain to be present. When pain is resisted, it intensifies. You don’t want to fight with your pain; you want to allow it into your soul in small doses so that eventually you can move from darkness to light.

3. Remember the person who died.

When someone loved dies, they live on in us through memory.

To heal, you need to actively remember the person who died and commemorate the life that was lived.

Never let anyone take your memories away in a misguided attempt to save you from pain. It’s good for you to continue to display photos of the person who died. It’s good to talk about him. It’s good to save belongings and mementos of his life.

Remembering the past makes hoping for the future possible. As Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard noted, “Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.”

4. Develop a new self-identity.

Part of your self-identity was formed by the relationship you had with the person who died.

You may have gone from being a “wife” to a “widow” or from a “parent” to a “bereaved parent.” The way you thought of yourself and the way society thinks of you has changed.

The part of your identity that was shaped by your military status or affiliation is also morphing. The military is very good at creating a strong culture – regulations and processes and ways of talking and thinking that bind military members and their families together. This culture may have given you a sense of belonging. But now that your military ties may be

dissolving, what does that mean for the part of you that identified as a military family member?

You need to re-anchor yourself, to reconstruct your self-identity. This is arduous and painful work. One of your biggest challenges may be to recreate yourself in the face of the loss of who you once were. Let us assure you that you can and will do this.

Many mourners discover that as they work on this need, they ultimately discover some positive changes to their self-identities, such as becoming more caring or less judgmental.

5. Search for meaning.

When someone loved dies, we naturally question the meaning and purpose of life and death. It's hard – maybe even impossible – to make sense of a death that can seem so senseless. While some people find profound meaning in the idea of sacrifice to country, others struggle with what can seem like the squandering of a precious life. And it's not uncommon for survivors to feel a little of both! Regardless of your feelings about the circumstances of the death, it is normal and necessary to struggle with the "why" and try to find meaning.

"Why?" questions often precede "How" questions. "Why did this happen?" comes before "How long will I go on living?"

You will probably question your philosophy of life and explore religious and spiritual values as you work on this need. You may also find yourself questioning the military's rationale or decision-making that contributed to your loved one's death. After someone you love is taken from you, it's normal to question.

Remember that having faith or spirituality does not negate your need to mourn. "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted."

Some people may tell you that asking "Why?" doesn't do you any good. These people are usually unfamiliar with the experience of traumatic grief. Try to reach out to people who can create a supportive atmosphere for you right now.

6. Receive ongoing support from others.

As mourners, we need the love and understanding of others if we are to heal.

Don't feel ashamed by your dependence on others right now. Instead, revel in the knowledge that others care about you.

Unfortunately, our society places too much value on "carrying on" and "doing well" after a death. Because of this, many mourners are abandoned by their friends and family soon after the death. It has been said that grief rewrites your address book.

One of the touchstones of grief is that each and every one of us as humans are connected by loss. As you experience the physical separation from someone you love, you are connected to every single person who has experienced or ever will experience a similar loss. Part of the TAPS motto encourages us to "share the journey."

When others offer to help, tell them something practical they can do, such as babysit, grocery shop, or mow the lawn.

Grief is a process, not an event, and you will need the continued support of your friends and family for weeks, months, and years.

Though the "Needs of Mourning" are numbered one through six, grief is not an orderly progression towards healing.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking your grief journey will be predictable or always forward-moving.

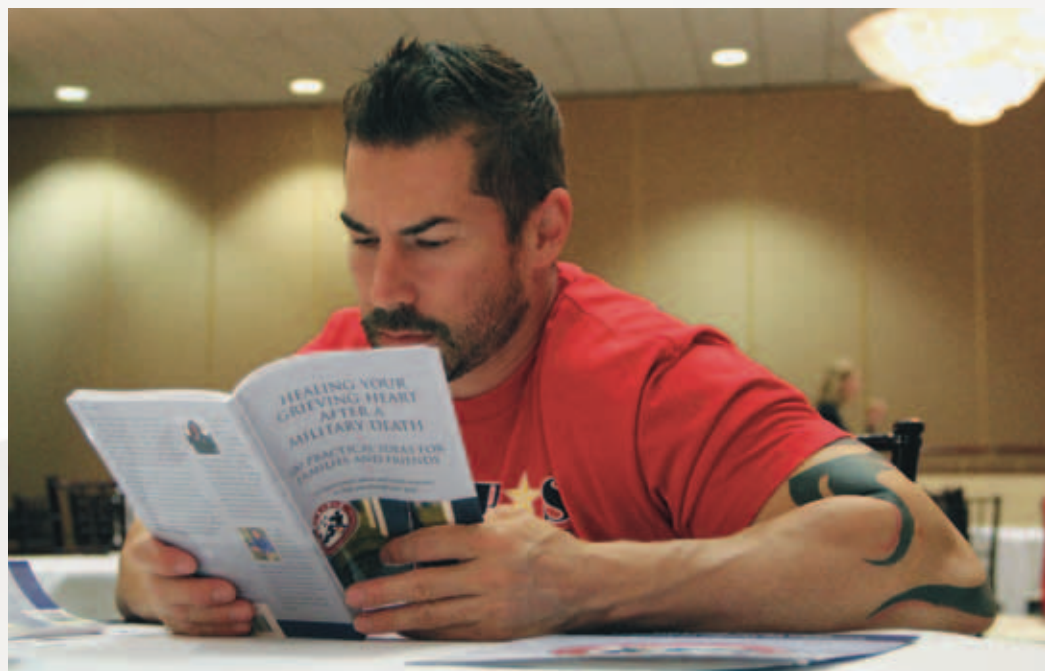
Be compassionate with yourself as you experience your own unique grief journey.*

.....
Excerpted from *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (Companion Press, 2015)
.....

TAPS is proud to announce our new book of comfort and care, written with love for all who are grieving a loss in the military.



If you haven't received your copy yet, please write info@taps.org today.



The Hike to Healing

By Gavin Bradshaw ★ Surviving son of DC2 Cory Smith

Cory J. Smith. The man that would unknowingly send me to Alaska to be surrounded by the love and support of others on the grief journey like me.

I have been a part of the TAPS family for many years, but never have I shared a bond like this with another group of adult children. We traveled to the “Last Frontier,” not knowing quite what to expect and maybe for a few, like myself, questioning what exactly we were hoping to get out of this retreat. However, after the mixed feelings and emotions subsided, we

found comfort in each other’s presence. Comfort you can only get from sharing with someone traveling the same road as you and running into the same obstacles. The road to healing is far from over, but I now know I don’t have to travel that road alone because of the love that was found in, of all places, Alaska.

The adventure began with sharing stories of our fathers, which brought feelings of nostalgia over the room. I realized that everyone there was dealing with the same hurt as me. This made it a bit easier to

talk with the group about my situation, as I am usually not one to share my feelings with others.

We headed out for our hike up Flattop Mountain. At the base of the trail we were each asked to find a rock that somehow spoke to us. We traded rocks with another member of the group. The rocks represented the burden we carry, and by trading our rocks we were taking away someone else’s burden and accepting it as our own. We carried one another’s burdens to the top of the mountain with

I WENT TO ALASKA ALONE, BUT I LEFT WITH A WHOLE NEW FAMILY WITH WHOM TO SHARE MY JOURNEY.





GAVIN'S FATHER, NAVY DC2 CORY SMITH



GAVIN ON THE RETREAT IN ALASKA

us, where we would eventually chuck them off of the side of the mountain. Some of the “burdens” were small, but I can think of one in particular that was rather hefty, and it was still lugged up the mountain for a friend all the same.

The hike up the mountain was the perfect opportunity for bonding and forming new relationships, as the group of almost strangers did not let each other fall behind and continuously pushed one another forward. Once at the summit, we celebrated our victory by relieving our burdens. It felt great to conquer the climb together as a group. And I can boast that, with the exception of two very well conditioned brothers, I was the first to the top. It amazes me how close we became as a group on the hike up a mountain - and this was only the beginning.

I also felt connected to my father in these moments. Before going on the retreat, my mom emailed me photos TAPS could use for the photo button of my father. While we were on top of the mountain, I took a photo, holding up the American flag. It wasn't until we descended that I realized the photo of me matched one of the images my mom sent of my father holding an American flag in Kuwait. It seemed fitting that I'd experience a close connection to him in such a safe space.

A few of us met back at the hotel for some much needed relaxation. This was where the first deep healing conversation happened for me. We spoke more personally of our fathers and the space left inside after our losses and how they affected

our lives individually. In this moment, there were lifelong friendships being formed. Even though the circumstances that brought us together were dismal, I am glad I got to meet these other adult children. I know the road to healing is a long journey, but in just one conversation between people on the same level as me, I traveled quite a ways.

The next day was another trek up the side of a mountain; this time it would be a whole new experience as we headed to Exit Glacier. It offered even more opportunity for supporting each other as it was not an easy hike. We made it as a group. We developed inside jokes along the way. It seemed as if we had known each other for much longer than a day. One of our glacier guides asked me if our group knew each other before coming on this trip. He was astonished that, with the exception of a few, we had just met. No length of time would bring us as close as the common bond we all shared.

Even though our legs were aching and our bodies drained, we were not done exhausting ourselves; we still had a 5K or marathon to run. That was no easy task after the long hikes we had done the days before. I didn't think I had enough strength left to finish the run, but I was not about to give up on the last leg of our trip. The Big Wildlife Run was brutal, but the whole time I felt like my dad was watching me as I ran. I was running for him, so there was nothing that was going to stop me from crossing the finish line. Finishing that run felt amazing, and

I was lucky enough to have such great people waiting at the finish line to congratulate me.

The weekend was definitely not one for the weak at heart; I still wonder how I kept going. At some points during the weekend, I felt like I couldn't go any further. But the thought of my father and how much he had always believed in me, accompanied by the encouragement I received from everyone around me, kept me moving forward through it all. In a weird way, the physical pain actually felt good. I went farther than I thought I could, and I met some great people along the way. I was proud that I actually allowed myself to open up and share my story instead of keeping it bottled inside like I always had before. It felt good to stand on top of a mountain and look down at just how high I had climbed.

In the end, even with all of the punishment I put my body through, how bad it hurt to keep putting one foot in front of the other, I wouldn't change a single part of the trip. These activities brought us all together and gave us someone to lean on in the future. I went to Alaska alone, but I left with a whole new family with whom to share my journey.

Thank you, TAPS, for the love and hope you give us all in dealing with our loss. And a special thanks to Bonnie Carroll for blessing us all with such a great place where we can feel welcomed and understood. A place where we all belong and can find comfort in the presence of others.*

Mentors Available for Surviving Children

Since 1995, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors has connected the children of America's Fallen Heroes with individual military mentors – service members from every branch of the Armed Forces who have volunteered their time to provide individual support to a grieving military child.

Children initially connect to their mentors at the TAPS Good Grief Camps, which are held throughout the year all across the country. In this setting, TAPS Group Leaders and experienced children's bereavement professionals are able to monitor the initial interaction between a child and their trained mentor, and ensure the connection is a successful one. Once the relationship is established, the mentor and child often remain in contact going forward, with many of these friendships lasting years (several are now more than a decade old).

The goal of the TAPS Military Mentor Program is to provide children with lasting relationships that reconnect them to the military life they knew while giving them coping skills and support systems, developed in a peer setting with new found friends who understand their struggles.

Over the past five years, TAPS has connected more than 7,000 children with military mentors. As one volunteer put it, "Being a mentor at the TAPS Good Grief Camp

has substantially altered my life. These kids have experiences what are probably the greatest fears and heartbreak that a child can have, and they have grown through their grief. They were there to learn ways to cope, but I learned from them. If I could explain it all, I would. However, it really comes down to one word for me and that word is transformational."

When a need arises for a connection beyond the relationship established at the TAPS Good Grief Camp or in a location around the country where a TAPS Camp isn't convenient for the family, TAPS teams with Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) to find the right connection through the BBBS Military Mentor Program (MMP).

Recognizing that children who have lost a parent in the military face unique challenges that may include additional losses such as separation from the military community and the world they once knew, BBBS expanded their extraordinary network of care to include children of the fallen.

Like TAPS, the BBBS mentor program also engages active duty, reserve, or retired/separated military personnel, as well as civilians as volunteer mentors. The BBBS staff carefully matches adult mentors and youth mentees in long-term, one-to-one friendships and provide professional support for the volunteers, children, and families throughout the life of the match.

In addition, the MMP reinforces the child's connection with the parent and community, respects and acknowledges the importance of military values as a platform for the child's personal development, and facilitates educational and skills achievement.

The military mentor is free of charge to you, and provided through organizations with decades of experience providing the very best support to military surviving children. If you would like to learn more or request a mentor for your child, please call TAPS at 800-959-TAPS (8277) or email mentor@taps.org.*

"Pretending to be happy when you're in pain is just an example of how strong you really are. The strongest people are not those who show strength in front of us, but those who win battles we know nothing about."

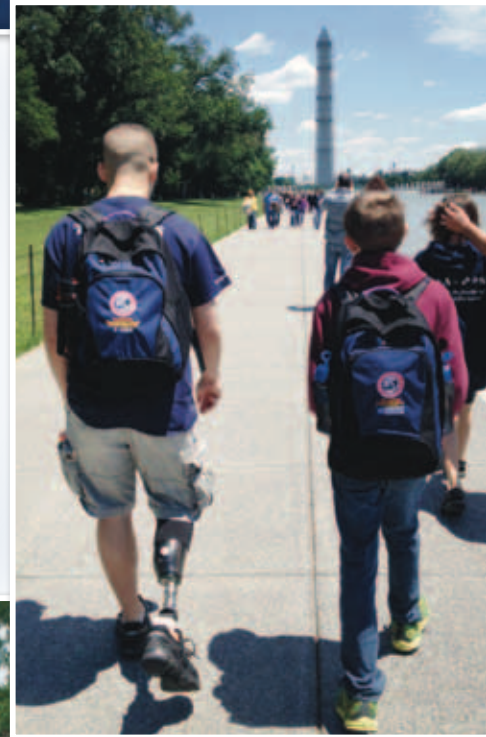




TAPS and Big Brothers Big Sisters provide mentors to surviving military children.

The program is free of charge and available to all.

To request a mentor, please call TAPS
800-959-TAPS (8277)
or email milmentor@taps.org



“TAPS is a great organization and the feeling I get from volunteering for it is humbling. I cannot fathom the pain these children feel from losing their parents or loved ones at such a young age. I enjoyed every minute with my mentee, from the fun things we had planned to do to the moments of sadness in which I had to help cheer her up.”

“TAPS has been one of the most rewarding events I’ve been a part of. Helping family members heal after their loved one paid the ultimate price for our freedoms is an amazing experience. When the family members give you warm smiles and hugs, all the long hours were more than worth it. I’m so appreciative to the service members and their families.”

“TAPS is a program that truly captures the emotion of the friends and families left behind. I have never been a part of such an amazing program and would highly recommend it to anyone. It was the most rewarding weekend I have ever had, to see a child be able to let go of their pain and work through it. No one should ever have to fight grief alone.”

@teams4taps

teams4taps officially started with a Twitter account on November 1, 2013. The program has worked to raise money and awareness about TAPS and create meaningful opportunities for surviving families through partnerships with sports teams, leagues, and individual athletes. Surviving family members from all across the United States have had the opportunity to participate in events to honor their heroes.

teams4taps is at the baseball field, basketball court, football field, tennis courts, ice rink, horse ring, and the soccer pitch. This summer, surviving children took the field at Yankee Stadium on a beautiful July Fourth afternoon with some of their loved ones' favorite players. A daughter completed her father's dream of attending a 49ers game as a guest of the team and met his favorite player of all time. A fiancée both honored her loved one and

reclaimed her own life with the help of an equine therapy opportunity. A sister joined other survivors to honor her sister's service and sacrifice at the U.S. Open.★

.....
If you would like to take part in the teams4taps event, have a great story about the team your hero loved, or you would like to honor your loved one at a sporting event, email teams4taps@taps.org. We would love to hear from you.
.....

teams4taps @teams4taps
A beautiful view for @TAPS4America at the @usopen ~ thank you @EpiqSystems for inviting TAPS to your suite! @USTAFoundation



teams4taps @teams4taps
We are in #Atlanta w/the @Braves for a very special evening ~ @teams4taps is so excited to be here! #BravesCountry




teams4taps @teams4taps
A beautiful night to meet her fallen hero's favorite player... @49ers @49ersCommunity @JerryRice @TAPS4America @NFL




teams4taps @teams4taps
Smiling faces on lots of little soccer fans from @TAPS4America! Thank you @NavyFederal & @dcunited #DCU #tapsfam



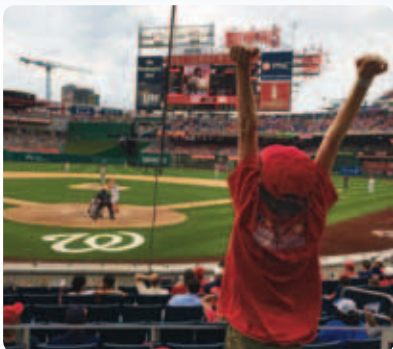
teams4taps @teams4taps
We are at the beautiful @SalamanderVA for a special session of Equi~Spective, thanks to @WIHS & Sheila Johnson.



teams4taps @teams4taps
What a night for @teams4taps w/@SASStars! Thank you #SASTARS #Spurs Sports & Entertainment ~ we had a blast! #tapsfam



teams4taps @teams4taps
Love moments like this. Thanks #Nats, from all of us at @teams4taps



teams4taps @teams4taps

Loving #RavensCamp! Thanks to @RavensCommunity for hosting @teams4taps today @Ravens



teams4taps @teams4taps

@teams4taps is on the mound & there goes Gunner w/the first pitch! TY @Padres! @mlb #HonoringHeroes at @PetcoPark



teams4taps @teams4taps

Nothing like a visit from the QB! Thanks @M_Ryan02 for coming to meet kids from @teams4taps! @FalconsCR



teams4taps @teams4taps

@TAPS4America hanging out w/@zbritton & @Orioles! TY Zach for always making time for families of the fallen



teams4taps @teams4taps

We are at @MLStadium for #ATLvsNYJ! Thank you @NFL ~ @TAPS4America is excited to be here!



teams4taps @teams4taps

A perfect end to a great day with the @RAIDERS! Thank you! #RaidersCamp15 @teams4taps



teams4taps @teams4taps

Honored to be at @Yankees with @teams4taps & families of America's Fallen Heroes for a TAPS Field of Dreams



teams4taps @teams4taps

Kids from @teams4taps w/ the amazing @WashKastles! Can't wait for @KastlesClassic~Thanks for helping TAPS



teams4taps @teams4taps

Grateful for all @RGIII & @Fo3Foundation do ISO #military families of fallen heroes incl today's visit & donation.

teams4taps @teams4taps

We are playing baseball tonight! @teams4taps is part of the All-Star game with @IronBirds #Ripken @MILB



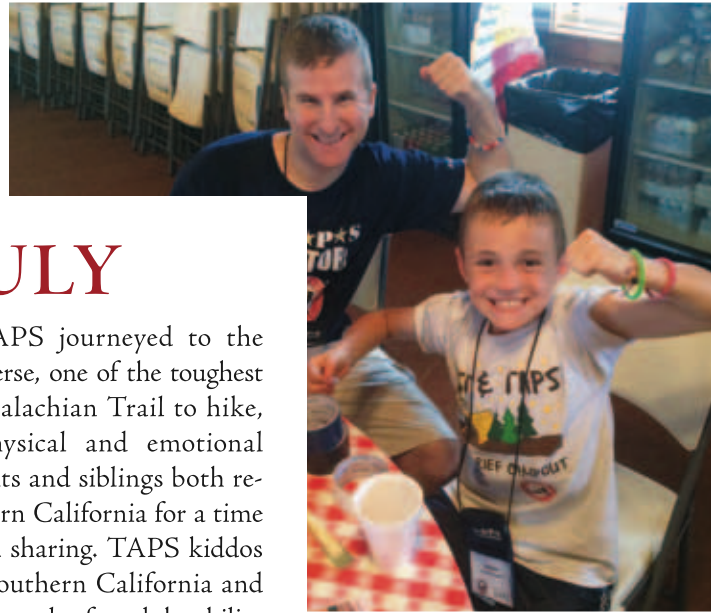
Our Summer Vacation

Making New Memories to Honor Our Heroes



JUNE

Adult children spent a weekend in Asheville, North Carolina, finding confidence and building trust on a ropes course and finding new friends. In Miami, widows found empowerment among the crocodiles of the Everglades. Survivors learned the importance of the team as they worked together through the rapids while white water rafting. And families came together to acknowledge the ups and downs of grief at the Green Bay Regional Seminar.



JULY

The men of TAPS journeyed to the Presidential Traverse, one of the toughest parts of the Appalachian Trail to hike, to overcome physical and emotional challenges. Parents and siblings both retreated to Southern California for a time of surf, sand, and sharing. TAPS kiddos camped out in Southern California and Tennessee. Survivors also found the ability to hover above and gain perspective like a helicopter at the New England Regional Seminar.





AUGUST

Our families met for a weekend of healing and connection in Orlando, Florida. Adult children experienced the beauty of the Alaskan mountains and honored their heroes in the Big Wildlife Run. Survivors hiked in the Grand Canyon on a wilderness retreat while others trekked up Mount Kilimanjaro for the first TAPS Expedition.



SEPTEMBER

Team TAPS got moving at the Disneyland Half Marathon Weekend with the help of dedicated volunteers. At the Norfolk Regional Seminar, families found safe harbor among the ships and other survivors who understand the journey. Families gathered for a weekend of learning coping skills at the Camp Pendleton Regional Seminar. Surviving family members found solitude and strength in the Boundary Waters Area of Minnesota. And Team TAPS hit the ground running with the Air Force Marathon in Ohio.*



Choose Forgiveness

By Carlene Cross ★ Surviving mother of Cpl. Jason Bogar

July 13, 2008 started out like any other Sunday. But a knock at the door changed everything.

I looked through the peephole, clouded by years of Seattle rain, to see two blurry figures clenching clipboards to their chests. "Solicitors," I thought as I stepped back, waiting for them to leave. They moved alongside the house. A deep voice cut through the air, "There must be a back door."

A mother's intuition gripped my heart. I rushed to the bedroom window and pulled back the curtain. Ascending the steps of my porch were two erect military officers. Running to the door, I threw it open and pleaded with them.

"Just tell me he isn't dead." I grabbed the porch railing, bracing myself for their news. It didn't matter how Jason came home, as long as he was alive. We had gotten through difficult things before; we would get through this. The Chaplain's face was gray, set. I wanted to slam the door on the featureless beings sent from Dante's Inferno. If they returned to the Underworld without delivering their message, maybe Death would release my son.

"I regret to inform you..." the Chaplain began.

After Jason's death, I couldn't concentrate on what anyone was saying. Everyone was uninteresting, every conversation pointless. I lay alone in the dark, scanning my life to identify my vital misstep, an act of



selfishness, a narcissistic oversight that lead to my son's death.

I cried all the time. I cried into my breakfast, my tears streaming into my oatmeal. I cried at work, quietly trying to hide from the world at my desk. When I wasn't crying inside the house, I was crying outdoors. I hauled six yards of topsoil and worked for months to create a memorial garden for my son, weeping as the Seattle downpours beat down on my face and cursing God, the military, and myself.

Then one morning, during the summer of 2011, I remembered my daughter had asked me to send her Jason's paratrooper beret. I went to the garage and opened up the cedar chest that housed all my son's final belongings. I picked up a note that lay beside Jason's books. It was the letter

he wrote to us before leaving for his last assignment. He had a premonition about his own death, scribed a farewell letter, and asked one of his comrades to deliver it to us if he didn't return home.

To My Family,

I feel my days are numbered and so I want to say this while I can. Never have I felt as strong that what I am doing here in Afghanistan is the right thing and is understood and accepted by god. As a result, death is easier to accept.

For me to prepare myself to take life without hesitation has been a very difficult thing to do. To take away a woman's son, husband, or brother has always bothered me, but I believe it is understood by my God and I am forgiven.

For the man that took my life, I know he felt exactly the same way about me when he killed me. I've always used the analogy if you are told the color blue is green your whole life, you can have all the facts in the world to prove it's blue, but at the end of the day it's still green to you.

My love for every one of you is what drives me and brings me comfort under stressful situations. Know that you all are the reason I am here and to give my life for that is nothing to me.

I fell to my knees and cried as I read the love and absolution it contained.

My son devoted himself to his family and this world, beyond life and regret. And he forgave the man who was about to take his life.

Releasing my bitterness was a choice I could make. I had the ability to live in the moment, to free myself from the anger separating me from life. From joy.

**If I had a limited number of days on this earth,
it was a misguided indulgence to squander one moment.
More importantly it was a disservice to my son.**

I walked into Jason's memorial garden, where I often sensed his presence in the bright wheel of the sun that warmed the flowers along the path or in the breeze of a summer evening, in the flight of song birds through the black bamboo or in the rain on the cedar pagoda.

I stood under a honeysuckle vine twisting in fragrant elegance up the trestle and listened to the brook trickling nearby. I thought of my son, the brave little boy who loved to play short stop, the soldier who had empathy for his enemy, and, in the end, the fearless warrior who gave his life for his family, his brothers, and his country. I had never known anyone more courageous than Jason. Would he want me to live huddled up in my reclusive bitterness? Was I honoring his bravery, his compassion, his sacrifice?

At that moment, I knew if Jason could reach down from beyond, he would take me by the shoulders and say, "Get your butt up, Mom. You need to start living again." I owed it to my son to live with the same strength, love, and forgiveness that he did. But in order to do so, I knew I had to release my bitterness. My anger, guilt, and resentment was handcuffing me to the past, to my pain.

I knew intellectual assent to this fact would not be enough. I needed to physically cleanse myself of this burden. I pulled out a pad of paper and made a list of reasons I was angry. I imagined my hatred becoming part of the paper, transferring my bitterness into the fibers and chemical pulp. I lit the fire in the barbecue and threw it in. Red flames curled it into black broken edges, then ashes. Grey

flecks floated up into the night. I pictured it catching a stronger breeze crossing continents of geography and oceans of time. I watched it disappear and with it, a great burden followed.

I realized the power of choice I possessed—like the eruption of knowledge when you learn a foreign language, how it coils, and moves, then emerges into life right under your eyes. Releasing my bitterness was a choice I could make. I had the ability to live in the moment, to free myself from the anger separating me from life. From joy.

I was sure that there would be days I'd be tempted to reclaim my resentment, when I noticed a handsome young father carrying his newborn son or teaching his daughter to kick a soccer ball – things I had wished for Jason's future. I might have to write and rewrite the list and burn it again, but in that moment I was free.

If I had a limited number of days on this earth, it was a misguided indulgence to squander one moment. More importantly it was a disservice to my son. I still had life; it was my privilege, even my duty, to find beauty within it.

At that moment, I felt unbound from history, unbound from the anger that tied me to the past. Today, I am at peace. I will always miss Jason, his teasing, the sound of his laughter, but I am no longer paralyzed by his death. And, on the rare days when his loss is suddenly present, I quiet myself and let it pass. I try to dwell in this moment and release the past with forgiveness and compassion.

It is how my son lived and what he would expect of me.*



New Relationships and Dating After Loss

By Amanda McPherson

If you are reading this, you may have been fortunate to have found that special someone, only to have them taken from you too soon. I will not claim to understand your pain. You will forever be shaped by the experiences you shared with your lost loved one as well as your journey of healing. As I'm sure I don't need to tell you, there isn't one authority for handling grief or a how-to guide for healing from such a painful heartbreak. While comfort and connection can be found within a community of people who have experienced similar pain, each of us must find our own path to healing, and no two journeys will look alike.

For some, exploring the idea of having a new romantic partner has absolutely no

appeal right now. Others may be in the contemplation stage, beginning to think about what it might be like to enter the territory of dating and romantic connection. And some have already decided they are ready to be out there again and are actively engaged in dating. Again, no two paths will look the same and no particular path is any "better" than the other.

One of the topics that causes the most anxiety and stress is the search for romantic love. After all, searching for the right partner, engaging in the dance of dating, and connecting with someone on a deep and intimate level can be one of the most exhilarating and/or excruciating activities in which we engage. There is no official rulebook for maneuvering the

complex world of two people coming together in the most vulnerable and intimate of ways. Even your most well meaning friends and family members don't necessarily know what is best for you in this arena. Dating and relationships are complex topics for everyone. But, when you have lost a mate these topics can feel especially sensitive and taboo to think about and discuss with others.

So, what do you do? How do you know when or if you are ready to explore romantic love again? And, if you are ready, how do you approach the world of dating?

I know of only one failsafe guide: You.

Here are some questions to help you check in with the smartest, wisest guide that exists— your inner voice— when it comes to dating and exploring the territory of romantic love:

Is Loneliness or Readiness in the Driver's Seat?

Loneliness is one of the most feared human emotions. It is so scary to most of us that we dare not even utter the word. We'll share our feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, or even depression, with our friends and loved ones. But, to admit that we're lonely... well, that's just too sad. Too dark. Too scary.

Loneliness is a feeling most of us work hard to avoid. We join clubs, volunteer, and make new friends. These choices are certainly understandable. They are even healthy additions to our lives.

While comfort and connection can be found within a community of people who have experienced similar pain, each of us must find our own path to healing, and no two journeys will look alike.



But, *loneliness* can also be a great teacher. It can show us how strong we are and it also can allow us the opportunity to get to know ourselves better. Loneliness can cause us to get really honest about what we value. It can give us fresh insights as to how we want to invest our time and energy. To ignore or deny our feelings of loneliness can short-change an otherwise deep and meaningful process.

Carrying the emotional weight that comes with the loss of a loved one can cause us to feel stuck in our lives with no particular direction. The readiness to work through this undesirable condition isn't fueled by avoidance, but rather a feeling of opening up to new possibilities. *Readiness* vibrates with a deep, calming energy. Choosing avoidance brings us only anxious, fearful energy. Spend some time examining which emotion is driving your thoughts, feelings and actions.

Considering if an avoidance of *loneliness* or a feeling of *readiness* is guiding you. Trust yourself to know where you are in the process.

Who were you before? And who are you now?

I recently had dinner with a friend who lost her husband a little more a year ago. She told me that her single girlfriends were telling her that she should be dating. She was pretty sure her kids would say she shouldn't be glancing in the direction of any man, much less dating. The conversation was peppered with so many "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts," it made my head spin.

My friend is a beautiful person inside and out. She is caring, funny, smart and so many other wonderful things. She was a devoted, faithful wife to her husband. Among all of her wonderful traits, she is also someone who is wired for connection with men. This doesn't diminish the love that she feels for her departed husband. Yes, she is changed in many ways due to her untimely loss. But, she is still my spunky, flirtatious, energetic friend.

Embrace the changes and lessons that heartbreak has taught you. Consider the person you have become. The person you were is healing now. Changed, yes. But also stronger and wiser.

She is capable of being *all* of these things.

On the other hand, my mother expressed absolutely no desire to explore the possibility of another partner after my dad died. Despite knowing that my brother and I would absolutely bless her finding a companion, it simply isn't her nature to actively pursue relationships with men. She currently finds joy and contentment in spending time with friends, volunteering, and watching a good movie on the couch with her lapdog. But, the thing is, I'm not surprised by this at all. This is, and always has been, my mom's nature.

These are the stories of two special women who are dealing with loss. Each of them is finding her own way to her future. Embrace the changes and lessons that heartbreak has taught you. Consider the person you have become. The person you were is healing now. Changed, yes. But also stronger and wiser. And, know that it's okay to embrace the parts of yourself that existed before your loss. Honor this new, beautiful, strong combination of your past and present. Allow this person to lead you as it pertains to all facets of your life—including the delicate topic of romance.

Are you reclaiming your sense of hope?

We all need hope. It's what makes us get out of bed in the morning. It whispers to us to keep moving even when we don't think we can budge. When we are carrying the emotional weight that comes with losing someone so close and dear to us, we can feel stuck. Unable, and frankly sometimes uninterested, in moving in any particular direction. But, with some time and healing, we begin to feel glimpses of hope. And, with even more time, the weight of the

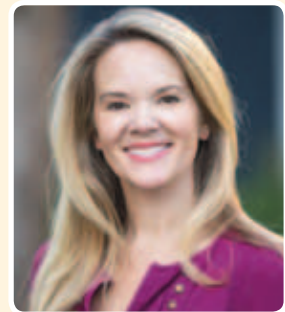
pain feels lighter and our sense of hope grows larger.

Hope fuels our enthusiasm for the future. If you are thinking about the future at all, then you have some expectations for your life. For some, interest in the idea of dating is a healthy, natural outgrowth of the healing process.

Dating, along with many other things, is an indicator that we are allowing ourselves to have expectations, plans, and hopes for the future. You don't need to apologize for having this sense of hope. It doesn't negate the connection you had with your loved one or the grief you feel about not having a future with that person.

Regardless of how you're currently feeling about the idea of dating and new romance, it is important that you find whatever it is that connects you to a sense of hope. Whether that comes in the form of a dinner date or a night at home with your lapdog is totally and completely up to you.*

About the Author



Amanda McPherson encourages clients to live and love boldly. After fifteen years of working in the political arena, she decided to pursue her passion for helping others by seeking a Masters degree in Counseling and becoming a Life Coach. In addition to working with clients, Amanda inspires hundreds of women through her blog, "Girl, Get Your Roots Done," and her writing has been featured in several online publications. Visit www.lifecoachamanda.com.

Healing and Hope After Suicide

By Iris Bolton

Surviving the death of a dear one is to endure great pain. Surviving a suicidal death is to compound that pain, often with guilt, anger, and confusion.

Fortunately, hope is on the horizon with of the growing knowledge about grief and traumatic loss. This hope is fueled by a new willingness to talk freely about death.

The grief community is learning about the causes of suicide, helping to discover ways to assist with suicide prevention and postvention.

Most importantly, we have scientists and grief professionals who are starting to understand the emotional rhythms that can influence the healing of battered minds and tattered psyches.


Indeed, a new day awaits every suicide bereaved person who dares to hope. Support and love are available. So are research and clinical experience. I can attest to the power, the therapy it provides, and the closing of stubborn wounds.

I can say this because I've been there. I became one of suicide's walking wounded on an unforgettable Saturday afternoon in February of 1977. My twenty-year-old son Mitch ended his life while talking to his ex-girlfriend on the telephone. She ended their relationship three weeks earlier. He questioned her, "Who is the most important person in your life?" She responded, "I am. I have to be." He said, "Then I will be a star in the sky and watch over you."

His unbelievable action changed her life forever. It devastated my family and friends.

I now know that clinical depression, post-traumatic stress, drug or alcohol abuse, or the accumulation of events like failure, humiliation, loss, and a feeling of being a burden to others may cause a self-inflicted death. One of the major causes may be unbearable emotional pain, which the person can no longer tolerate. Sometimes suicide is an impulsive act. There are as many different combinations of factors why people give up on life as there are people who die by their own hand.

We were an average family. My husband Jack worked in advertising as the owner of a successful agency that represented television and radio stations. I was the Director of The Link Counseling Center, a well-known family counseling center in Atlanta, Georgia. I counseled individuals and families for six years prior to Mitch's death. I was attending Georgia State University in a Master's program on Community Counseling. Our four sons, ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-two, were getting their education from various nearby



Emotions come and go in orderly fashion. They twist and turn like a kite tossed in mid-air. Be gentle with yourself and know that, like the kite, eventually you will come back to rest on earth.

schools and colleges, all except Mitch, who had been trying to find himself in the world of music.

Early in his teens, Mitch demonstrated a rare talent for writing original songs and accompanying himself on guitar or piano. His interest at first was rock and roll, later jazz and blues. Sometimes, he and I played guitars and sang together at schools, churches, and hospitals.

Why would this sensitive, loving young man do this? I was obsessed with the "Why?" Our family wasn't perfect, but there were no major issues. Suicide was not in the realm of possibilities. Yet it happened to us – not on television or in the newspaper.

I was numb and in disbelief when my husband told me the news. It hit me hard, reducing me to automatic responses and a total feeling of personal unworthiness. To climb from that emotional abyss would be the hardest battle of my life.

Of the many emotions of grief, guilt is perhaps the most punishing. I remember that first day, sitting on my bed saying over and over, "What did I do wrong? If only I had done more." My senses told me that I had failed as a parent, a professional, and a person. Guilt hits hard and flits in and out of other moods.

Anger became rage at the world, at myself, at God, eventually at my son himself, at the unfairness of life. In grief, injustice is a very tender spot. Anger must be expressed through talking about it, being with a witness, hitting a punching bag, getting it out of you in any safe, appropriate way.

Stigma and shame were aspects of grief that made me feel isolated and alone. When Mitch died, very few people ever mentioned suicide. The stigma was very real and still is in our country. Fortunately, that is changing with many people speaking out and educating the public. There is still more to do in the area of suicide prevention. Currently, there is a united effort in the United States, by individuals and organizations like TAPS, to eliminate

the stigma. Shame is self-inflicted and may need to be worked through with a counselor. It is a powerful and overwhelming force, which must be addressed to find peace and acceptance.

Depression is too common. Really, it's more of a constant companion, lurking within your psyche for days. Then it springs like a wolf at your throat at the most unexpected moment.

Acceptance is the realization of the fact that what has happened is permanent and real. Finally you believe it. You know it happened; it can't be changed. Now, you must make a decision about your future and how you will live. You can't change destiny, but you can take charge of how you respond.

Other concerns – fear, anxiety, faith questions, etc. – are common and need to be addressed, perhaps with a professional. Emotions come and go in no orderly fashion. They twist and turn like a kite tossed in mid-air. Be gentle with yourself and know that, like the kite, eventually you will come back to rest on earth.

Ultimately, one does begin to hope again. Hope treads lightly at first, but as time passes, its steps become firmer. Condolence letters contain messages of encouragement, love, and hope. Strangers send notes of empathy. The church and community show support.

I was in grief counseling for more than two years, and my therapist helped me make the choice to survive and make meaning from the tragedy. Eighteen months after Mitch's death, I went to Emory University and majored in suicidology, the study of prevention, intervention, and postvention. I started one of the first support groups in the country and focused a spotlight on the plight of the suicide bereaved. I started a program at The Link Counseling Center for suicide prevention and after-care. It is still an important resource in the country today.

Six years after Mitch's death, I wrote my first book, *My Son...My Son...A Guide to*

Healing After Death, Loss, or Suicide, with my father Curtis Mitchell. My next book, *Voices of Healing and Hope: Conversations on Grief after Suicide*, is expected to be published later this year.

All of my efforts give meaning to my son's life.

Most families and friends suffering a loss to suicide do survive the aftershocks. They catch their breath again. They crawl back up on wounded knees to face the tortuous journey of grief. They may fall again and again, only to stand on wobbly legs, eventually moving into some kind of acceptance and peace.

In the end, you can survive and thrive again.*

.....
Parts excerpted from *My Son...My Son... A Guide to Healing After Death, Loss, or Suicide* (Bolton Press, 1983).
.....

About the Author



Iris Bolton, grief therapist and Director Emeritus of The Link Counseling Center, graduated from Columbia University and received a Masters degree in suicidology from Emory University. She is the co-founder of The Compassionate Friends Atlanta Chapter and founder of the Atlanta-based Survivors of Suicide Support Groups and Support Team. For nine years, she appeared on a television segment on mental health. Bolton's newest book, *Voices of Healing and Hope: Conversations on Grief After Suicide* comes out later this year.

Tapestry

By Donna Burns Stewart, PhD ★ Surviving stepmother of SSgt. David Stewart

*You held your child close,
oh so close
to your heart*

*You remember little things
and small moments
as vividly as milestones*

*Your memories are stitched together,
woven into a tapestry that
tells a story – your story –
about your child*

*Each tapestry is different,
with threads and hues and textures
that whisper the story of
your child's life*

*The tapestry is soft and worn
from the caressing of memories
by the gentle fingers of a mother*

*When people ask, you smile
and share your tapestry,
“This is my child” you say
as you gently wrap the tapestry
around their shoulders*

*Thank you for raising a child
of honor and integrity
and for sharing your tapestry with us*

*You held your child close,
oh so close to your heart...
you still do*

2015–2016 Calendar of Events



NOVEMBER

★ **United Kingdom Parents
& Spouses Gathering**

November 3-12

London, England

★ **Charleston Moms Retreat**

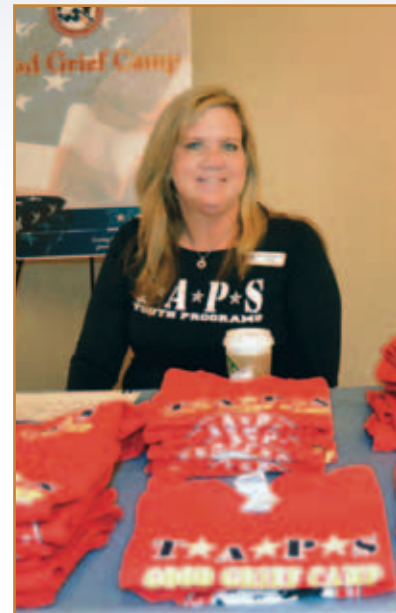
November 18-22

Charleston, South Carolina

★ **Columbia Survivor Seminar
& Good Grief Camp**

November 20-22

Columbia, SC



DECEMBER

★ **Scottsdale Survivor Seminar
& Good Grief Camp**

December 4-6

Scottsdale, Arizona



JANUARY

★ **Pacific Northwest Survivor Seminar
& Good Grief Camp**

January 8-10

Joint Base Lewis-McChord



Colorado Celebrity Classic TAPS Benefit Celebrates 10th Anniversary

By Christine Burt

Anniversaries are meaningful – especially to survivors. And, the tenth anniversary of an event that celebrates and remembers the lives of our fallen heroes and their families is an especially important milestone.

The Colorado Celebrity Classic has grown into a series of events including the Songwriters Show, the Saluting our Fallen Heroes Dinner and Concert, a golf tournament, and a Memorial Day show and dance party with local musicians.

This year, more than 500 TAPS supporters met in June for the Saluting Our Fallen Heroes Dinner and Concert. Hosted at Steve Grove's Ranch at Cherry Creek, the evening featured a pit-roasted, prime rib

barbecue dinner prepared by the Coors Cowboy Club "Chuckwagon Crew."

Tony David and WildeFire kicked-off the evening with dinner music, joined by vocalist Lindsay Solonycze. Number one country chart songwriter Billy Montana and Grammy Award winner Frank Myers performed their original song written especially for TAPS, *I'm Here for You*. Their handwritten lyrics were sold during the live auction. Carin Mari played a western music favorite – complete with a taste of her award-winning yodeling. John Adams and the John Denver Tribute Band entertained the capacity crowd with stories and beloved tunes. Radio news

anchor for 850 KOA Steffan Tubbs kept the evening on schedule as emcee.

The audience was moved to tears by survivor Torey Sonka as she explained what TAPS does and why it matters. She talked about her husband, Corporal David M. Sonka, a Marine and an elite K9 dog handler who was killed in Farah Province, Afghanistan, in 2013, along with his dog, Flex.

Over its ten-year history, under the direction of founders Bo and Lynne Cottrell, the Colorado Celebrity Classic has netted more than \$3.2 million for TAPS. This year's contribution to TAPS will be nearly \$250,000. Proceeds from the several Colorado Celebrity Classic events will help sponsor the TAPS Suicide Survivors Seminar and Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors held in Colorado Springs this year.

These generous contributions are made possible by numerous individuals and companies. More than sixty volunteers covered duties that included organizing and running the silent auction, tracking registrations and donations, escorting celebrities, recording photos and videos, manning the bars, working the golf tournament, stocking the gift bags, decorating the stage and tables, valet parking, and setting and cleaning up for the events.



VERN NELSON, JOHN SIEBER, BILL KINGERY, BURTON GILLIAM AND EDDIE JOHNSON



EVENT CHAIRS KEVIN KREYMBORG
AND LINDA CAVANAGH



LYNNE AND BO COTTRELL



JILL AND GENERAL GENE RENUART (RET)



VIP SPONSOR CENTERPIECE



DINNER IS SERVED

Joan Beninati, Dave and Anne Gill, and David and Jennifer Lee were honored as 2015 Tony David Volunteers of the Year.

The Colorado Celebrity Classic Board of Directors sells sponsorships, tables, and golf teams for the several events. They actively participate and often are among the largest donors. Board members Kevin Kreyborg and Linda Cavanagh co-chaired the Classic.

Jake Jabs and American Furniture Warehouse was the Title Sponsor, a role reprised from the first Colorado Celebrity Classic.

Premier Sponsors included Congressman Mike Coffman, Pete and Marilyn Coors, the Dyk Families, the El Pomar Foundation, Greiner Electric, the Radisson Hotel Denver Southeast, Taylor Oil Properties, and WizBang Solutions, which printed all programs pro bono.

The day after the dinner concert, twenty-four teams, each with a celebrity player, hit the links at the prestigious Eisenhower Golf Club at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Among the military teams, competition was fierce, and Navy captured the win. A rematch from previous winners is promised for next year.*



LT GEN MIKE (RET) AND PAULA GOULD



JAKE JABS



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WILDEFIRE

Grief Support for Military Children



A Guide for School Personnel



Autumn is marked with back to school sales, bright red apples for teachers, superhero lunchboxes filled with healthy sandwiches and sweet treats, backpacks donning beloved cartoon characters, and lockers of new classroom supplies. But for children and youth experiencing the loss of a loved one in the military, the fall school bell often reinforces their sense of uncertainty, loneliness, and hopelessness because they feel no one on their campus can understand their grief or the way it affects them both at home and at school.

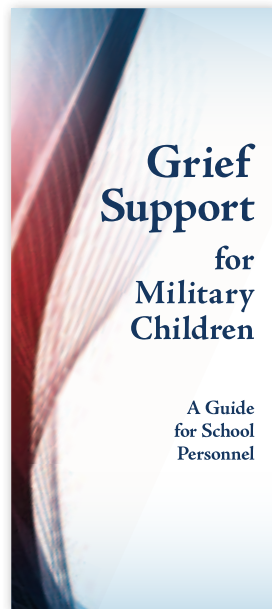
As one middle school student shared, “My teachers don’t get it when I don’t want to talk in class this year. I’m afraid I might just start crying. They don’t understand when I can’t remember the answers on tests, or when I turn in my homework late. I’m not stupid or lazy, I just miss my Dad. I guess because it’s been over six months since he died they think I should be ‘all better.’ Sometimes I feel there is no one in the school who even has a clue how hard it is for me with him gone. It makes me want to just give up.”

Grief, and its outward expressions of mourning, can result in a range of behavioral and emotional struggles for surviving military students. Grief can affect a student’s classroom behavior and their academic performance but also the way he or she participates in extracurricular activities like sports and social clubs. It can be expressed in quiet withdrawal or noisy acting out. It can range from manageable to risky. It can seem to settle with a “return to normal,” reoccur in unpredictable cycles, or linger for months and years.

Given the range of possible expressions of grief and the ways in which they are influenced by a student’s prior life experience (including exposure to family separations on deployments and/or frequent relocations), it is also difficult for teachers and other school-based professionals particularly

those unfamiliar with the military lifestyle - to know how to offer support.

Just in time for the new school year’s start, TAPS has published a guidebook to assist those caring for children and youth grieving the loss of a military loved one. Sponsored by the American Hospice Foundation (AHF), the 20-page guide provides insights on the unique nature of the military lifestyle and resources to help support these students.



Grief Support for Military Children: A Guide for School Personnel gives background on military students, explains possible reactions to loss, shares warning signs to look for among struggling youths and teens along, and offers a list of resources and programs.

“When the loved one of a child dies in service, whether it’s anticipated or not, many school-based professionals aren’t sure how they can best show support,” said Bonnie Carroll, TAPS President and Founder. “TAPS is able to offer this resource to help all those who interact with a grieving military child or teen, thanks to the help of the American Hospice Foundation.”

Teachers may be at a loss for how best to offer help when they see a military teen’s grades suddenly decline or an elementary school child become suddenly introverted. This new guide offers all school-based professionals a context to better understand military student grief and identify challenging issues. It also gives them access to tools and organizations that can be of assistance in creating an appropriately supportive climate for the student.

Educators, school psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses, teachers, administrators, and others school-based professionals can find tips to help military students dealing with loss as well as more information on TAPS programs and services, like Good Grief Camps and Military Mentors, that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of these children and youth.

“Schools can make an important difference in the lives of military children if school personnel are trained to address their grief in effective ways” said Naomi Naierman, former President of the American Hospice Foundation. “This booklet, produced by TAPS with support from the American Hospice Foundation, is a unique and helpful tool for school personnel whose students come from military families.”

The booklet complements AHF’s general grief guide for school-based professionals, *Grief at School: A Training Program for Educators*. The curriculum, endorsed by the national associations of school counselors, school psychologists, and social workers, includes a training guide and resource manual, a computer program, and a training video.

.....
To receive a copy of *Grief Support for Military Children: A Guide for School Personnel* and *Grief at School: A Training Program for Educators* at no cost, school-based personnel may email info@taps.org or call 800.959.TAPS (8277).
.....

Spotlight on Service

★ Katherine Castelo ★

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!

"If someone is on the phone with me and needs me for three hours, I will make myself available for three hours."

That's the approach Katherine Castelo, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, takes when serving TAPS families in her practice. Katherine's dedication is congruent with the level of care TAPS provides to all those seeking assistance.

Katherine never puts a time limit on these conversations. "When [TAPS families are] going through a loss, everyone manages it differently, and I want to address them where they physically and emotionally are." It's in those tough times, when someone needs a listening ear and they've built up the courage and trust to open up, that limiting time can be detrimental and uncompassionate.

Katherine comes from a family steeped in military tradition, with three of her grandparents serving in World War II (her paternal grandparents met while serving in the Navy). She is a military spouse; her husband served ten years in the Marine Corps and continued his service with the USO. Katherine now works as the U.S. Army Reserve's Psychological Health Program Director. She also owns her own private practice, Awaken Wellness Center, in northern Virginia. Specializing for a decade in post-traumatic stress, critical incident and trauma, and loss and grief therapies, Katherine has made it her mission to treat military members, their families, and veterans in her community and nationwide.

"Most of the time the families aren't local; a person who doesn't have resources where they are still needs resources," she said. Katherine utilizes Skype, video, or phone calls to offer support. Sometimes,



*Thank you,
Katherine Castelo!*

the families she serves may travel and need someone with a flexible schedule. Like TAPS, Katherine commits to "stay with that family as long as they need her."

Katherine first connected with TAPS in 2008 when a family came to her about a recent loss. She was working as a civilian employee assistance program manager for the Department of the Navy and a casualty assistance consultant for the U.S. Naval Criminal Investigative Service. The mission of TAPS resonated with her. "[TAPS was] so responsive and took such good care of this family that I wanted to be a part of their network," Katherine said. "I

wanted to offer my expertise to TAPS, even though I was willing to volunteer in any other way needed."

Katherine grew up in Hartford City, Indiana, a small Midwestern town, one of five children to parents who taught her the importance of giving back. Coming up on nine years, Katherine's involvement with TAPS marries her passion for the military and the desire to help others.

She provides clinical therapy to families and recently presented two sessions at the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp, Grief Strikes at Night and Is Therapy Right for Me. "TAPS makes you feel like you're part of the TAPS family," Katherine said.

Volunteering with TAPS families is an experience Katherine truly appreciates. "It's very rewarding to be able to give back to families, to know that TAPS is providing a support network to many who have lost a loved one," she said. "TAPS has made volunteering a very welcoming, smooth, easy, and rewarding experience." For Katherine, time is the biggest challenge in volunteering. "I would like to have more hours in the day to give," she said. While quite busy, Katherine provides care on a level that sets her apart from others.

TAPS is truly thankful for the work of Katherine Castelo and the many lives she's touched. Time is such a precious gift, and Katherine is consistently giving her time without expecting anything in return. TAPS appreciates every minute.*

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

Message from USAA Bowlathon

Tutus. Knee socks. Sweat bands. And bowling shoes? Earlier this year, USAA employees sported some of these items and more to show they know how to have a good time – all in the name of helping surviving families.

USAA joined TAPS in honoring families of the fallen by hosting USAA's annual Bowlathon in San Antonio, Texas. During the four-day event in March, 4,300 USAA employees and their family members helped raise more than \$250,000 to benefit TAPS. According to USAA Community Programs Manager Greg Smith, the 2015 Bowlathon generated the greatest amount of support from employees to date, both in the number of teams bowling and dollars raised.

"It's always uplifting to see the passion and enthusiasm that USAA employees show during the Bowlathon, which is representative of how they serve military members in their jobs every day," Smith said. "It was an amazing view to see a 'sea'



of the green TAPS shirts as I watched our employees having fun while supporting a cause close to all our hearts."

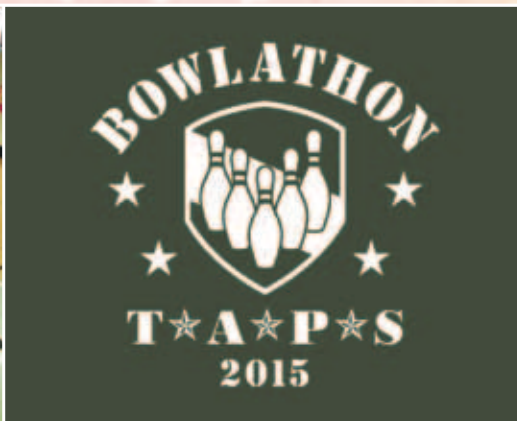
The funds raised will go to help further TAPS programming. But the Bowlathon is just one of the many ways USAA has been involved with TAPS. USAA, The USAA Foundation, Inc., and the USAA Federal Savings Bank have all provided

other financial support, and USAA employees have volunteered to serve as mentors for children at Good Grief Camps in San Antonio and Tampa.

"In all that we've seen, TAPS exemplifies a gold standard for operating a non-profit, from the services it provides to the rigor it uses to measure the impact of its efforts," said Harriet Dominique, Senior Vice President of USAA Corporate Responsibility and Community Affairs.

Last year, Dominique and other USAA representatives toured the TAPS headquarters in Virginia, and attended the annual Honor Guard Gala in March. Dominique also spent time with survivors during a tour of the Pentagon at the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar.

"These first-hand experiences reinforced our decision to support TAPS and the pride we feel in standing behind an organization that does so much to serve the needs of the military community," Dominique said.*



Thank You to Our Donors & Sponsors

We are grateful to the Friends of TAPS whose event sponsorships, grants, memorial tributes, and personal gifts allow us to fulfill our mission of comforting and supporting the loved ones of those who served and died.

HERO

01/01/2015 – 09/15/2015

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and Golf Tournament
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**The USAA Foundation, Inc.
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EAGLE

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