

**TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS**

# T★A★I★P★S<sup>®</sup>

Comfort and Support Since 1994

**MAGAZINE**

**FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED**



**VOLUME 16 • ISSUE 4**

*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 provide support services to the survivors of servicemembers who have died while serving.

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



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# T★A★P★S®

## Comfort and Support Since 1994

TAPS offers immediate and long-term emotional help, hope, and healing to anyone grieving the death of a loved one in military service to America, regardless of their relationship to the deceased or the circumstances of the death.

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

Call us at 800-959-TAPS  
Or visit us at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)

## T★A★P★S

**SUPPORTS** the bereaved survivor through a network of Peer Mentors, volunteers who have also lost a loved one in the Armed Forces and are now standing by to reach out to others.

**PROVIDES** a national toll-free help and information line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 800-959-TAPS (8277). Support is available from leading experts in the field of grief and trauma.

**HOSTS** the TAPS Online Community of survivors, providing secure chat rooms, message boards, peer group discussion sites, and an extensive website at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org).

**SPONSORS** Military Survivor Seminars for adults and Good Grief Camps for young survivors in locations across America, giving survivors the opportunity to share, grow, and help each other heal.

**CONNECTS** families to resources in their local communities and provides grief and trauma resources and information.

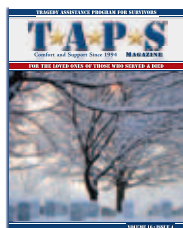


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**COVER PHOTO PROVIDED BY  
United States Army**

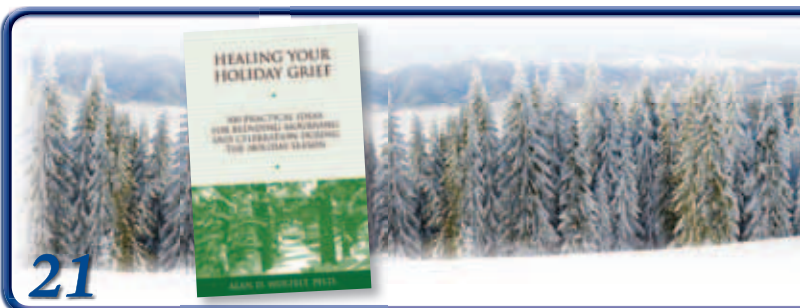
*Snow at Arlington National Cemetery  
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# Letters To TAPS

We want to know your thoughts, perspectives, and opinions on TAPS programs and publications. Tell us what you think, send ideas for future topics, or submit an article. Submission Guidelines can be found online at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org). Your TAPS family is waiting to hear from you. ✧



## Open doors

Thank You so very much for this weekend's Suicide Survivor Seminar: a weekend we will never forget. I left with tears in my eyes, knowing I have left part of my family for another year. Thank you for helping me open doors that have been shut for nine years.

**Mary Anne Burke, Virginia**  
Surviving mom of  
Seaman Raymond Matthew Burke

## Truly a blessing

I enjoyed my weekend at Fort Hood. Thank you all so very, very much for all the hard work that you all do for us. I do not take any of this for granted because it is truly a blessing that we have you all to turn to in our greatest time of need.

**Patricia Wright, Arkansas**  
Surviving spouse of  
Tech Sergeant Thomas Wright

## Friends of TAPS

I just wanted to say thank you for everything you do. The work and support that this organization provides for military families who have lost a loved one while in service to our country is priceless! Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

**Emily Feeley**  
Veteran and Army Wife

## Online Community

I just want to say thank you to the TAPS Online Community. My husband recently passed while he was on deployment. I had a chat tonight with some wonderful ladies, and I just want to thank those who keep this organization together. It is nice to know that there is a place where I can feel like I am not alone.

**Sandra Warren, New Hampshire**  
Surviving spouse of  
Staff Sergeant Kyle Warren

## Compassionate care

Thank you, TAPS, for literally saving my life. I lost my son in 2006 in Iraq, and a few months later I called you in the darkest of moments. I didn't want to go on without Chad. The person I spoke to offered such compassion (and tears as well) and got me set up with a counselor who called me and got my life back to semi-normal through therapy at the Vet Center in Tucson. Thank you TAPS from the bottom of my heart. Chad was my one and only child but he is now my hero for life. If his song is to continue I must keep on singing.

**Charmaine Dorris, Arizona**  
Surviving mom of  
Hospital Corpsman Chadwick Kenyon

## No longer alone

Thank you, TAPS, for the weekend in DC. Being my first seminar I did not know what to expect. I could not even begin to express how important this weekend was for me. You do amazing work. Thank you for letting me go to a place for an entire weekend and not feel so alone with my grief. I wish I had the next week off from work to process and reflect.

**Julie Sinclair, Maine**  
Surviving mom of  
Specialist Jake Bishop Saltus

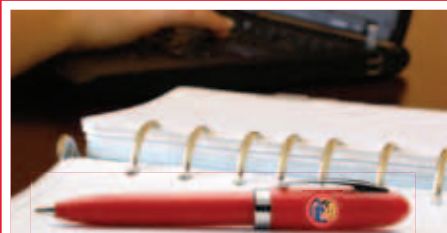
## Tremendous support

I just wanted to take a moment to say thank you. Diana and I really got a lot out of the seminar, both as a couple and as individuals. I only wish we had attended something like this sooner. It means so much to meet the other families, and we feel we will bond with many of them even more in the future. The support is tremendous. We were already looking up the next event.

**Daniel Cross, North Carolina**  
Surviving father of  
Sergeant Andrew Bryan Cross



[editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org)







# Helping Yourself Heal During

By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

*Holidays are often difficult for anyone who has experienced the death of someone loved. Rather than being times of family togetherness, sharing, and thanksgiving, holidays can bring feelings of sadness, loss, and emptiness.*

## Love Does Not End With Death

Since love does not end with death, holidays may result in a renewed sense of personal grief—a feeling of loss unlike that experienced in the routine of daily living. Society encourages you to join in the holiday spirit, but all around you the sounds, sights, and smells trigger memories of the one you love who has died.

No simple guidelines exist that will take away the hurt you are feeling. We hope, however, the following suggestions will help you better cope with your grief during this joyful, yet painful, time of the year. As you read through this article, remember that by being tolerant and compassionate with yourself, you will continue to heal.

## Talk about Your Grief

During the holiday season, don't be afraid to express your feelings of grief. Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away and talking about it openly often makes you feel better. Find caring friends and relatives who will listen—without judging you. They will help make you feel understood.

## Be Tolerant of Your Physical and Psychological Limits

Feelings of loss will probably leave you fatigued. Your low energy level may naturally slow you down. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. And lower your own expectations about being at your peak during the holiday season.

## Eliminate Unnecessary Stress

You may already feel stressed, so don't over-extend yourself. Avoid isolating yourself, but be sure to recognize the need to have special time for yourself. Realize, also, that merely "keeping busy" won't distract you from your grief, but may actually increase stress and postpone the need to talk out thoughts and feelings related to your grief.

## Be With Supportive, Comforting People

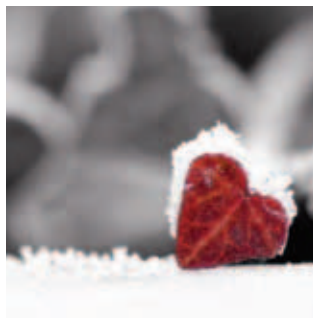
Identify those friends and relatives who understand that the holiday season can increase your sense of loss and who will allow you to talk openly about your feelings. Find those persons who encourage you to be yourself and accept your feelings—both happy and sad.

## Talk about the Person Who Has Died

Include the person's name in your holiday conversation. If you are able to talk candidly, other people are more likely to recognize your need to remember that special person who was an important part of your life.

## Do What Is Right for You During the Holidays

Well-meaning friends and family often try to prescribe what is good for you during the holidays. Instead of going along with their plans, focus on what you want to do. Discuss your wishes with a caring, trusted friend. Talking about these wishes will help you clarify what it is you want



# the Holiday Season

to do during the holidays. As you become aware of your needs, share them with your friends and family.

## Plan Ahead for Family Gatherings

Decide which family traditions you want to continue and which new ones you would like to begin. Structure your holiday time. This will help you anticipate activities rather than just reacting to whatever happens. Getting caught off guard can create feelings of panic, fear, and anxiety during the time of the year when your feelings of grief are already heightened. As you make your plans, however, leave room to change them if you feel it is appropriate.

## Embrace Your Treasure of Memories

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. And holidays always make you think about times past. Instead of ignoring these memories, share them with your family and friends. Keep in mind that memories are

tinged with both happiness and sadness. If your memories bring laughter, smile. If your memories bring sadness, then it's alright to cry. Memories that were made in love—no one can ever take them away from you.

## Renew Your Resources for Living

Spend time thinking about the meaning and purpose of your life. The death of someone loved created opportunities for taking inventory of your life—past, present, and future. The combination of a holiday and a loss naturally results in looking inward and assessing your individual situation. Make the best use of this time to define the positive things in life that surround you.

## Express Your Faith

During the holidays, you may find a renewed sense of faith or discover a new set of beliefs. Associate with people who understand and respect your need to talk about these beliefs. If your faith is important, you may want to attend a holiday service or special religious ceremony.

As you approach the holidays, remember: grief is both a necessity and a privilege. It comes as a result of giving and receiving love. Don't let anyone take your grief away. Love yourself. Be patient with yourself. And allow yourself to be surrounded by loving, caring people. \*

»»» **EDITOR'S NOTE:** For more information on holiday grief, order Dr. Wolfelt's excellent book *Healing Your Holiday Grief: 100 Practical Ideas for Blending Mourning and Celebration During the Holiday Season*. It is available through his website, [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com), as well as most retail and online bookstores. The TAPS Book Shelf book review appears on page 21 of this issue.

### About the Author



Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD, is a noted author, educator, and grief counselor. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado and is on the faculty at the University of Colorado Medical School Department of Family Medicine. Dr. Wolfelt is known for his compassionate philosophy of "companioning" versus "treating" mourners. Among his many publications are the books *The Journey Through Grief*, *Healing Your Traumatized Heart*, *The Mourner's Book of Hope* and *Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart*.



# Steering into the Skid

## A strategy for coping with grief

By Randy Beard, surviving dad of SPC Bradley S. Beard



Grief feels a lot like winter. Winter is cloudy, overcast, and cold. The heavy, gray skies make you want to withdraw. People tend to stay closed up indoors, isolated from their friends. The days are dark and icy and bleak. Our family's grief-winter started when two Army officers showed up on our doorstep early one morning in October 2004. It felt like a cloud of winter descended over everything. Its icy fingers reached into every crevice. My heart, my mind, and my world were forever changed.

The wintry blast of the news of Brad's death was disorienting. My mind careened between confusion and disbelief and the awful truth. I was reeling with bits and pieces of information: confusing press releases and interview requests and questions of when Brad's body would be sent back from the war zone and where would he be buried and on and on and on. My thoughts swirled around like a blizzard, so thick that I could barely see the landscape of reality. What would this mean for our family going forward? Now our challenge was to adjust to a world without Brad in it.

Just as winter settles in for a season, grief settled in for a much longer season than I had thought possible. It's been six years now since Brad's death. In looking back, I realize that some of the same strategies for coping with winter weather apply to coping with grief, in particular a driving technique for slippery roads.

When I was young, I lived in Pennsylvania and had to learn to drive in the snow and ice. At that time, most cars were rear-wheel drive vehicles. The engine and all its weight were in the front, but the wheels that propelled the car were in the rear. In slippery conditions, a rear-wheel drive vehicle could lose traction easily since the rear end was light. In making a left turn, for example, the rear wheels could break traction and swing wildly toward the right. The driver's natural reaction would be to turn the wheel further to the left. The result would be an uncontrollable skid, or spinout. The correct way to counteract the skid is to turn the steering wheel into the direction of the skid: in this example, to the right. By doing so, I learned, you can

regain control of the car. At first turning into the skid felt wrong. Everything within me was screaming to go the opposite way, to turn away from the perceived danger. Until I had practiced the technique often and successfully, it was pretty scary.

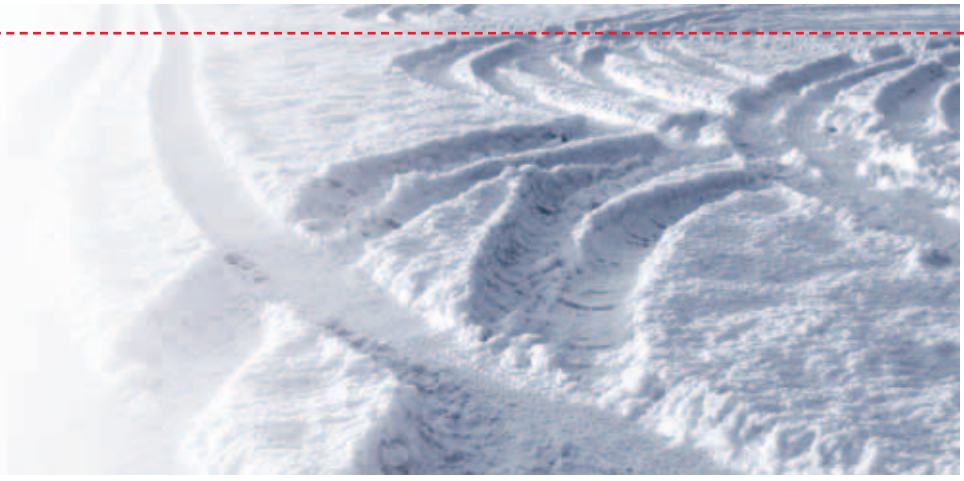
I find that grieving feels a lot like driving on snow and ice in a rear-wheel drive car. Although it may feel counterintuitive, it helps to steer into the wild emotions of grief, purposely setting your course to go toward them. After Brad was killed, I really wanted to avoid experiencing the waves of grief and sadness that came my way. The emotions were so intense they were frightening. I thought that if I allowed myself to feel the emotions of loss I would start an uncontrollable skid. As a guy, I wanted to steer clear of the "messy" emotional turmoil. What I discovered, though, was that when I allowed myself to experience the intensely sad emotions, I seemed to emerge on the other end with a better sense of equilibrium.

For me, steering into the skid meant taking advantage of counseling services offered by the VA's Vet Centers. There was a set time



Although it may feel counterintuitive, it helps to steer into the wild emotions of grief, purposely setting your course to go toward them.





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## Don't try to avoid the wintry patches on your grief road, but rather remember to steer into the skid.

and place every week for me to encounter the turmoil and express my grief in a safe environment, a place where I could give voice to my sadness and loss. I found that trying to express what was going on inside helped me to understand and endure the blizzard-like whirlwind of emotion.

According to John MacDougall, manager of Spiritual Care and the Family Program at a private nonprofit treatment center in Minnesota, "Our bodies are not well designed for the storage of feelings, but they are well designed for the expression of feelings. Grief doesn't go away, and the longer it is denied, the more powerful it can become." Some emotions are difficult for us men; some are easy. Anger is usually easy. Not only does it come naturally, but it is considered okay for a man to be angry. Other emotions are more troublesome. Sad, for me, was difficult. Feeling helpless was another challenging thing for me. I felt helpless as I watched my wife and daughter's incredible sadness and was not able to do anything to alleviate their pain.

Steering into the skid means examining, acknowledging, and expressing the scary negative emotions with other family members and friends, as well. I learned that I didn't make things "worse" for my wife and daughter by talking about Brad. Indeed, they shed tears when we talked about him, but not talking about him wasn't making it "better." I might have been steering away from the skid for myself, but the conclusions they might draw from my silence would not reflect what was truly

going on with me. They might think that I wasn't sad, that I didn't miss him, that I was doing just fine, or even that I was "over" Brad's death. None of these were true, but my silence certainly could not communicate my real internal state. During the times that we talked about Brad there were tears, but my talking about Brad did not cause those tears; it just released them.

In the same way that winter always seems too bitter and too long, I was not at all prepared for the intensity of the sadness or the length of time that it took for me to begin to enjoy life again. I still would like to have my son back every day, but the intense, elephant-sitting-on-my-chest pain has subsided to a quiet sadness that many people don't even notice.

As I navigated my grief-winter, I remember seeing the first sign of a returning "spring." The first time I laughed I felt guilty that I could find anything funny. I mean, how could

I? Brad was dead. I remember thinking that I shouldn't have to give myself permission to laugh. And then the next day as I struggled at my job, I had to give myself permission to feel sad. I realized that I didn't have to function like I did before. A friend of ours whose husband had died before Brad was killed wrote us a letter in which she said, "I get frustrated with myself because I can't engineer my recovery of equilibrium any faster. The seasons of our lives must be lived through, however, not jumped over if we want to be whole."

Because we love someone who died, we must live through the winter of loss. We can't jump over it or get around it or get over it. Acknowledging and expressing grief is a difficult road to navigate, but the price you pay trying to detour around it can be much worse. Don't try to avoid the wintry patches on your grief road, but rather remember to steer into the skid. ★



# Finding Your Way through the Holidays

## A Guide for Parents of Grieving Children

By Andrea Hug MaPC, MPS, LPC

The holiday season is here. At least that's what the advertisers think. We hear "Happy Holidays," "Feliz Navidad," and "Happy New Year" all the time and wonder if we will ever be happy again. For those of us who are grieving, getting from one day to the next may be all we can manage during this season.

Grieving is the hardest and most demanding work you will ever do, and grieving during the holidays demands all your energy at a time when you have so little to give. You are asked to do twice as much in half the time while grieving the loss of your fallen hero. It is a monumental demand. But giving thought to what you might want to do, what you do not want to do, and how those things can sort themselves out is time well spent. Without a plan we might get swallowed up in our grief and blindsided by unexpected events. It is by planning ahead that we will find a way to manage this very difficult season.

When you are grieving, thinking ahead to the holidays can seem absurd, especially since it may feel like there is nothing to celebrate. And still, your children will have expectations, memories, and thoughts about the previous holidays when their loved one was alive and part of the celebration. Children may visualize the holiday as it "used to be" and want it to be the same. However, when you think about it, you know it will be different even as you wish it could be the same. Trying to cope through the holidays with the raw, painful emotions that come with grief often causes anxiety, depression, and anger for parents and their children. Spending time imagining your holidays might help ease the difficulty and increase how effectively your family supports each other.

So, what can you do to prepare? How can you re-vision holidays when you may be struggling to make it through each day? What can you do to keep from being blindsided by all the "should" and "have-to" suggestions that could come your way? How can you help your child through the holidays when keeping your head above water from day to day takes all your effort?

First of all, **remember that children grieve as intensely as adults though it may appear differently. Try to set aside time** when you can talk as a family about the loss and the feelings associated with it. Feelings of fear, loneliness, sadness, or guilt are common and often unspoken.

Your example of open, honest sharing will give your children permission to do the same. That open dialogue gives you a connection and bond that you nurture as they grow.

Help your children recall what used to be and cannot be this year in relation to the holiday. Did your Very Important Person always carve the turkey? String the lights? Light the menorah? Was it a tradition that your Very Important Person always tucked the children into bed on New Year's Eve? While you may not be able to anticipate every way that person impacted the holidays, remembering previous years might help you to anticipate potential problems. Being aware of the differences prepares you for what might come. When you anticipate those things that **must be** different due to your servicemember's death, you can brainstorm new possibilities for your family. Doing so limits the potential for being taken by surprise.

When considering the loss of a spouse who was also a parent, one particular **concern may be** how you and the children will be included in celebrations with your spouse's extended family. Many families will do what they've always done, with no significant changes. Do that only if it is **right for you and your children**. Think through how that will work for everyone involved and **respond** accordingly. If it is likely that you will change your traditions, it is very important to have a conversation with your children about that. Determine if or when the children will see the other side of the family. If it is your former spouse who has died, it might be that he or she took responsibility for the time the children spent with that part of the family. Making those

How can you help your child through the holidays when keeping your head above water from day to day takes all your effort?

arrangements now falls on you. If there will be significant changes in how the children interact with your spouse's extended family over the holidays and where they may (or may not) be going, make sure your children are notified and prepared. This is also a good time to ask for their input.

During the holiday season we usually try to do more than we normally do but have less energy as we do it. Think about what you are able to do this season, then talk with your children and explain it to them. Your children may have ideas of their own to keep things the same or change things completely. Listen to their expectations and hopes, honoring them when you can. If some things are not possible, explain why. If your child is older, perhaps she or he can take responsibility for doing some of the things that you don't feel up to doing. Perhaps they can string the lights or drive a younger sibling to a school party. Enlist their help and acknowledge their contribution. Also, there may be a neighbor, friend, or family member who can help you honor a younger child's hope or wish. Ask for and accept help!

When evaluating your holidays, consider your faith tradition and consider how you can incorporate and honor your loved one through this time. Perhaps your tradition has customs about grieving a loved one

for a certain length of time. Or maybe your tradition offers a ritual that would help you through the season. You may wish to tell stories, light a candle, or set a place at the table for your fallen hero. The holidays are a good time to share your family values and belief systems and give your children concrete life lessons about these values.

As for the practical things, the holidays can be extremely chaotic. Your child will need to stay on a regular schedule, eating and sleeping a healthy amount for his or her age. If you notice changes in eating or sleeping—loss of appetite, increased appetite, nightmares, bedwetting, or the inability to sleep alone—consider grief as a possible explanation. Sticking to a routine is predictable and can help your child feel secure. Still, a child might feel tension and react to it. Similarly, a child may withdraw, have trouble in school, or complain about imaginary illnesses. This may increase during the holidays when stress is high. Talking to your child about things (and allowing your child to talk to you) can alleviate anxiety and provide a compassionate place for them to express their emotions.

Finding ways to get grief out of one's body is very important. Physical activity helps. Encourage your children to exercise to help relieve the stress caused by the holidays.

It may be a good time to exercise with your children

to relieve stress. Exercise can become a way to express feelings. Maybe a trip to the skating rink or the sledding hill would be a fun way to relieve that pent-up energy. Be creative as you brainstorm ways to "move" through this time. While a younger child shows emotion through play (grieving their loss as they do), older children often find their own ways to express grief. An older child might express his or her loss by writing, reading books, drawing, or listening to music. Encourage them to find ways to get their story, pain, and memories out in the open.

Although there are many obstacles, it is especially important to remember one thing. Children are naturally hopeful. That feeling of hopefulness leads to their resilience. What they need most to get to that place is what you already give them naturally: your love. Responding with frequent signs of affection will comfort both you and child. We cannot give a hug without getting one in return, and those signs of affection are profoundly important ways to connect with your precious child as you find your way through the holidays. \*

#### About the Author

Andrea is the surviving spouse of Lieutenant Christian A. Hug, USNR, a search and rescue helicopter pilot who died in 1993. At the time of his death, their three young children were four, two, and 4 months old. Andrea holds master's degrees in both Pastoral Counseling and Pastoral Studies from Loyola University in Chicago, and is a Licensed Professional Counselor. She works with TAPS Survivor Support Services, having spent the past six years working in hospice care with young surviving widows and children.





# The Honorable Celestial Discharge

## New terminology to bring comfort and hope

By Colleen Betlach, surviving mom of Navy Seaman Jesse P. Henry



*It helped me to know that my Jesse had experienced the glory of an angelic celestial transfer of duty.*

As the holiday season approaches and our thoughts turn to holiday music, miracles, lights, and angelic hosts, I am reminded of a Thanksgiving night that I experienced many years ago while working at a VA Medical Center (VAMC). It was then that I first heard of an Honorable Celestial Discharge.

I began my work at a VAMC shortly after my own Honorable Medical Discharge in 1973. I had previous experience working with the critically ill and dying, having worked during my high school years in a local nursing home. Although death was scary to me, I seemed to understand the sacredness of loss. While tending to the dying, I always felt a mixture of awe and sadness in their presence. My job was to hold the hand of the dying, yet it was not hard work to me. It was a sacred privilege instilled in me all of my life.

But on that Thanksgiving night so long ago, I was a new station secretary being trained by a seasoned station secretary. As time and memory would have it, I do not recall this precious lady's name. We were present while a medical team performed cardio resuscitation on a WWII veteran patient. As station secretaries, we stood by to label all blood tubes for the lab as well as to make phone contacts with appropriate departments for assistance. On that night, sadly, we were not able to revive the veteran. As my senior trainer and I returned to our nurse's station to begin the paper work, she said to me, "Another Honorable Celestial Discharge."

I stopped and looked at her, asking what she meant. She smiled and said, "It's simple; they all get discharged from the military; eventually they all are discharged to the

heavens to meet and serve under their Senior Commanding Officer.” She kept the faint smile as she prepared the paperwork, then stopped and winked at me as she said, “Don’t tell the Commander in Chief. He doesn’t like to be outranked.”

I thought about the celestial discharge all the way home. The vast majority of those leaving the service after completing an initial enlistment are separated rather than discharged. The difference is that a discharge completely alleviates the veteran of any unfulfilled military service obligation, whereas a separation (which may be voluntary or involuntary) may leave an additional unfulfilled Military Service Obligation (MSO) to be carried out in the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). The military discharge, however, is given when a member of the Armed Forces is completely released from their obligation to serve. Having previously served in the military, I was familiar with the five types of military discharges: honorable, general (under honorable conditions), other than honorable, bad conduct, and dishonorable. Each of these denotes the quality of

service and discharge conditions under which the service member completed his contract. Clearly the Honorable Celestial Discharge was not listed.

Years later when my son, Navy Seaman Jesse P. Henry died on July 3, 1998, it came back to me and brought a great measure of comfort. His death bothered me terribly, especially considering that neither I nor any of his family were with him at the most critical breath of his life—his last. I agonized over that for many, many years. It helped me to know that my Jesse had experienced the glory of an angelic celestial transfer of duty. While I was at first troubled that Jesse had died without me or family with him, I was comforted in realizing that he had indeed been very well tended to.

After several years, I was drawn back to hospice care, tending to those who, like my son, die while serving away from home and family. I now feel the presence of a room full of Honorable Celestial Discharged veterans gathering to bring another home. As I witness the release of each life, I am awed at the sacredness of another spirit joining comrades known and unknown, gathered to escort another to their final discharge.

As I work with those who are dying and as I hear on the news of each military death, I am reminded of the time

I spent with my senior trainer on that night long ago. And so, for the purpose of this article, I would like to add a new discharge to our vocabulary under the Military Type of Discharge: the Honorable Celestial Discharge. This discharge would be appropriate for any veteran or active-duty service member who dies either while serving in active duty or as a veteran. This would apply to a large number of men and women in America, since 25% of all Americans dying in 2009 were veterans.

The military has many terms to differentiate the way someone is separated from military service, but whatever our belief about the hereafter, the Honorable Celestial Discharge sounds very comforting and regal to me. It brings consolation to me to picture what that must be like; no pain, no disease, no evil, and no darkness. I picture all the veterans in heaven lining both sides of the heavenly pathway, as they welcome each new Honorable Celestial Discharge... much as the members of the Patriot Guard line the walkways during earthly funerals. I wonder if, once in heaven, they are assisting the angels in preparing for some ultimate, cataclysmic battle. Do they serve their Omnipotent Commander in a military capacity? If we are to believe in the approaching hoofbeats of the Apocalypse, is it possible that they will ride on the great steeds of heaven to earth to reclaim us?

Or are they fishing? \*



#### About the Author

Colleen Betlach is the surviving mom of Jesse Henry and founder of Beyond the Folded Flag ([www.beyondthefoldedflag.com](http://www.beyondthefoldedflag.com)), a long-term grief counseling and bereavement education program for surviving family members of military, contractor, or terrorist-related casualties. Colleen is a TAPS Peer Mentor and Care Group Facilitator and continues to volunteer part time at a Florida VAMC serving the Chaplain Services on the Hospice Unit. She notes that her personal motto that people shouldn't die alone parallels the Soldier's Creed which states, "I will never leave a fallen comrade."



# Uncharted Territory

## Dating after Loss

By Angelia Brinneman, surviving spouse of SGT Steven M. Brinneman

With the coming of the holiday season, do widows and widowers feel more alone? I know I always do. Parties, get-togethers, and holiday celebrations seem to bring out couples everywhere, but I am still alone. We are expected to be cheerful... and even happy to meet our friends' and siblings' new significant others, but all it does is make us feel more alone. Nobody really understands why we aren't joyful during the holidays. They don't seem to realize that it brings back into sharp focus our feelings about the many things we have lost.

As we face this time of celebrations and parties, still alone, the idea of dating may come up. As with all other aspects of grieving, we each have different reactions to the thought of going out again. Will we feel pressured to find someone to go on dates with just to make ourselves feel less lonely? Because let's face it, that's what we are—lonely.

**Nobody really understands why we aren't joyful during the holidays. They don't seem to realize that it brings back into sharp focus our feelings about the many things we have lost.**

We all want someone to share our days with, to come home to, to go to events with. Or will we brave the elements and go to functions alone? We hate seeing the look on people's faces when we walk in by ourselves... again. It's the pitying look of, "Aw, she still hasn't found anybody. I feel so badly for her." You just want to scream, "I'll be okay! Stop looking at me like that!" Or will we just stay home and mow the lawn, clean the gutters, watch a video, or read a good book?

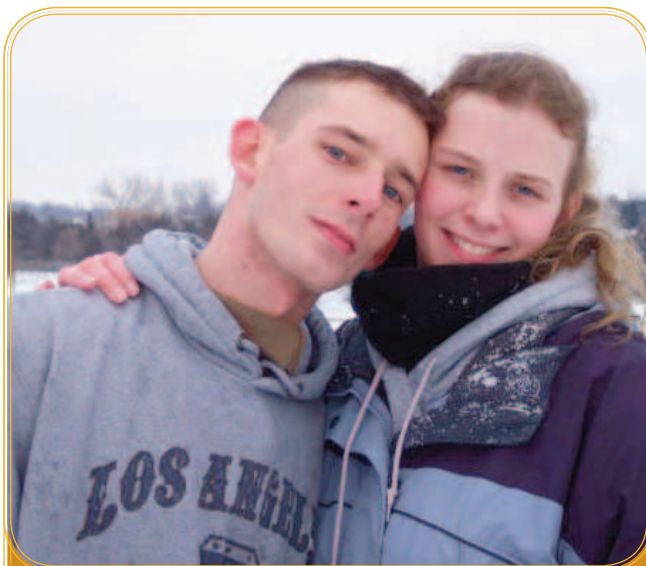
As thoughts of dating arise, you might want to consider some of the following questions. Do I want to date again? When is a good time to start dating? How long should I wait? Should I feel guilty for dating too early or even dating at all? Am I cheating on my deceased spouse? These questions and many others will come to mind when the thought of dating again surfaces.

### Do I want to date again?

Starting over, moving on, finding someone new, not wanting to be lonely anymore, finding someone to fill the void, or trying to find happiness again — these are all reasons that people start dating again.

### When is a good time to start dating?

Many widows and widowers, when discussing this topic, talk about when to date and whether others have started yet, but no one has all of the answers. Dating after the death of a spouse or fiancé is something that you should do according to your own individual timeline; there is no wrong or right answer, no handbook for these situations, or guidelines to live by. As you begin to explore this new territory, be aware of your feelings. If you feel that it is too soon,



Steven and Angelia Brinneman



then wait and give yourself more time, no matter what your friends may say. However, if you think you are ready to go on dates and have a relationship on some level, don't let anyone else tell you it's too soon. I know of widows who have started dating within three months of their husband's death and others who, after three years, still haven't put themselves out there. Remember, if you make a mistake and start dating too soon, you can always stop and take more time for your healing. This is your life, your grief, and your emotional state of mind. Being open and honest with yourself and others about your feelings can help you to ease into this new territory.

### **Should I feel guilty?**

#### **Am I cheating on my loved one?**

As much as we hate to admit it, our husbands or wives are gone. We can't cheat on them. There is nothing we can do that could be considered cheating. This is a very hard concept and you might struggle with feelings of betrayal and guilt when you start dating again. No matter how much you think you are ready to move on, these feelings of guilt might sneak up on you. I have had these feelings when I was simply having a friendly conversation with a guy. It seemed impossible for me to even talk to another guy without feeling I was cheating on my husband. My friend felt as if she was cheating after dating a guy for almost a month. Honesty helps in this situation. Explain how you feel and see if this improves the situation by being honest with your date as well as yourself. Sometimes expressing your feelings gets them out of your system and you are able to move forward. Don't let others judge you!


Some people will judge you for dating no matter how long you wait. "I can't believe you are moving on already!" is something you may hear from people you know. Others could judge you for dating too much or for rebelling against what has happened and going a little crazy.

### **Do I really want a relationship?**

Maybe you aren't ready for dating or being in a committed relationship yet, but simply want the connection of being with another human being. If you are going out to simply have fun, use good judgment and be careful. Having a good time may also generate feelings you're not ready for, in the same way that dating might bring these feelings to the surface. Keep your friends around you and up-to-date with what you are doing. They don't need to know everything, but they need to have an idea so that they can support you and help you keep your head on straight and be smart about what is happening. If you

get hurt while dating and were hiding your activities from your friends, they won't be able to support you or give you a shoulder to cry on. Dating is an individual decision that you as a widow or widower can only make for yourself. You have the choice to date or not, and you have control over the situation when you begin to date after your loss. If you find that you don't like it or aren't ready yet, simply stop. Surround yourself with those who love you and those who support you, and remember you did not choose to be in the position of having to date again. Whatever we decide, I believe that our loved ones would want us to live a full life and be happy again. \*

*Photos courtesy of Angelia Brinneman*



**Surround yourself with those who love you and those who support you, and remember you did not choose to be in the position of having to date again. Whatever we decide, I believe that our loved ones would want us to live a full life and be happy again.**



# Christmas Eve

By Richard Dew

*Silent night, Holy night...*

"It's about time" he says quietly.  
Deliberately, wordlessly,  
They gather the materials  
Carefully put away last year,  
The matches, candle, candle jar  
To fend off the harsh winter wind.

*'Tis the season to be jolly...*

Slowly they drive toward the town's edge,  
Past homes with bright, blinking bulbs.  
Cars of faraway relatives  
Fill their drives. Happy, laughing  
Families, children home from school,  
Pass by on the way to midnight Mass.

*It's the most wonderful time of the year...*

At last, town lights left far behind,  
They sit mute, each wrapped in private  
Cocoons of memories of Christmas past,  
Excited whispers from their room,  
Silly giggles, fervent good-night  
Kisses, anticipation of morning.

*On a cold winter's night that was so deep...*

Through the gate, down the drive, engine killed.  
Frozen grass crunching underfoot  
Hand in hand they walk up the hill  
To the familiar moonlit stone.  
With practiced hands they brush it clean,  
Then prepare their votive Noel.

*The world in solemn stillness lay...*

Lump in throat, arm in arm,  
Candle lit, they stand and weep,  
But not so bitter as in years past.  
The pain's as deep but not so long,  
As once again they dream of things  
That should have been but never were.

*The stars in the sky look down where he lay...*

Let's go," he says. She nods assent.  
They leave, though turn back once to see  
The lonely flame of their lost boy  
Gleaming peacefully through the dark  
He whispers softly, his visit done,  
"Merry Christmas and good-night, my son."

*Sleep in heavenly peace,*

*Sleep in heavenly peace. \**

## About the Author

Dr. Richard Dew, MD is the surviving father of Bradley Dew, who was 21 when he was murdered. "Christmas Eve" is from the book of poetry he wrote in his struggle to cope with grief. *Rachel's Cry: A Journey Through Grief* is available at [www.dewbooks.com](http://www.dewbooks.com).





*You are cordially invited to attend*  
**T \* A \* P \* S** 17<sup>th</sup> Annual

**NATIONAL**  
**Military Survivor Seminar &**  
**Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors**

Memorial Day Weekend

May 27 to 30, 2011  
 Washington, DC

\*\*\*\*\*  
*Please join us in the nation's capital as we bring leading professionals in the grief and trauma field together with survivors from across the country to share a weekend of understanding, hope, courage, and love. An atmosphere of care and support awaits you in a safe and supportive environment. Meet other survivors and share the journey, as we honor our loved ones.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Remember the Love,*  
*Celebrate the Life, Share the Journey*



## 2011 National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors



TAPS photo by Jackie Ross



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### Memorial Day

★ 2011 ★

Please join us for  
our 17th year of  
bringing survivors  
and caregivers  
together to  
“Remember the  
Love, Celebrate  
the Life, and Share  
the Journey.”

TAPS extends a warm invitation for you to experience a weekend that will touch your heart and strengthen your spirit. Since 1995, TAPS has welcomed all who are grieving the loss of a loved one who died while serving in the military, providing a full weekend of events for adults and children alike. In Washington, DC, we are surrounded by the monuments of our nation that honor the service and sacrifice of our loved ones and remind everyone that “Freedom is Not Free.”

“I have been searching for a while to accurately describe the feeling one gets while attending a TAPS seminar. I think I came up with the right term the other day when leaving the hotel in DC with my two children. The feeling is one that encompasses support, love, understanding, and comfort: sanctuary. We have been without my husband for almost six years and still feel the bitter sting of his absence. Yet when we come to gather with fellow survivors, there is a sense of order and meaning again. We feel at home among strangers and unconditionally accept those we meet. There is a safety in our grief.”

~ Sarah Greene ~

Surviving spouse of Lt. Col. David S. Greene



“I am grateful TAPS was and is here for me. I am happy and privileged to be part of the TAPS Family. Thank You to all the people from TAPS who encouraged me to come to the seminar. For those of you, thinking about attending next year’s TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar, I say to you, ‘I know how you feel!’ Yes, it is awkward walking in alone and asking if you can sit at a table, but I promise you, when you leave that table you will have become a member of a family greater than you can ever imagine. You are not alone; we are all here for you!”

~ Faye Crawford ~

Surviving mom of SGT Jay R. Gauthreaux



TAPS photo by Jackie Ross



TAPS photo by Jackie Ross

For anyone faced with the traumatic loss of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces, TAPS provides a supportive atmosphere that offers comfort and nurtures healing. At the seminar you can connect with others who have suffered a similar loss, learn coping strategies, and hear how others find the strength to live again.

Workshops, support groups, activities, and events— all are structured to provide you with resources and information! You will receive support and training from nationally known grief experts. Equally important, you will receive the precious gift of spending time with hundreds of other survivors, all walking a similar journey through grief. The four-day event begins with registration and opening sessions on Friday and ends with attendance at Memorial Day services at Arlington National Cemetery.

Your registration fee assists TAPS in defraying a portion of the cost of selected meals, workshop materials, TAPS shirt and tote bag, as well as ground transportation to all special events during the four

day conference. The registration fee for children attending the Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors assists with the costs of meals, transportation, two Good Grief Camp shirts, a TAPS backpack, and other camp materials.

Along with these tangible items, you will take home the priceless experiences of the weekend: joining with others and forming vital connections that last a lifetime. A single investment in yourself provides dividends long after you depart! The time we spend with each other and the memories we take home are invaluable to us as we face each new day and take each new step in this most unexpected life of loss.

We hope you will plan to share our Memorial Day weekend. Whether it is your first visit or you are returning for our annual “family reunion,” a friendly smile, an understanding heart, and open arms await you. Join us as we Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey... together! ★

### ★ WORKSHOPS FOR SURVIVORS & PROFESSIONALS ★

Our carefully chosen topics include understanding complicated grief; coping with new family dynamics; special issues facing children, parents, siblings and significant others; and recognizing post traumatic stress.

### ★ SPECIAL EVENTS ★

The seminar is held in Washington, DC and we will be attending special ceremonies at the Marine Barracks, the U.S. Capitol, and Arlington National Cemetery. There is also plenty of free time for relaxing and visiting with your newfound friends.

### ★ PEER MENTOR TRAINING ★

If you are 18 months beyond your own loss and ready to be there for others, we offer a full day of training on the Thursday prior to the seminar. You will learn more about grief and trauma, gain basic helping skills, and become part of our TAPS Peer Mentor Team.

### ★ SUPPORT GROUPS ★

We offer gentle, supportive discussions that allow you a chance to share with others who are facing similar experiences.

Register Online at  
**WWW.TAPS.ORG**



TAPS photo by Jackie Ross



TAPS photo by Will O'Neal



## 2011 National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Start planning now to attend the 17th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar! Register online today at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org). From our home page, click on National Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp for more information and link to registration.

### ★ Logistics & Registration ★



- All events and workshops for the 2011 seminar take place in (or depart from) the comfortable and inviting Crystal Gateway Marriott on Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington, Virginia.
- The Gateway offers complimentary airport shuttle service to Ronald Reagan National Airport (Flights into Dulles or BWI require transportation by taxi or SuperShuttle with fares ranging from \$45 to \$65.)
- The Crystal Gateway Marriott boasts two restaurants, in addition to a fitness center, indoor & outdoor pool, and access to the Crystal City Shops and eateries. Room amenities include TV, telephone, clock radio, hair dryer, iron and ironing board, and coffeemaker/tea service.
- The seminar registration fee of \$185.00 includes selected meals, workshop materials, ground transportation to all special events, and a TAPS shirt and tote bag.
- The Good Grief Camp registration fee of \$50.00 per child assists in paying for selected meals, transportation for field trips and events, two Good Grief Camp shirts, a TAPS backpack, and other camp materials.
- A limited number of scholarships are available if you are facing financial challenges. Please call TAPS at 800-959-TAPS (8277) for more information.
- To make your hotel reservation, sign up as soon as possible. Visit the seminar webpage at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) to get our special conference rate of \$119.00 per night.
- Events begin with registration on Friday morning, so plan to arrive before noon on Friday, May 28 for attendance at our opening session. Departures should be scheduled after 3 p.m. on Monday, May 30, to allow for our return from Arlington National Cemetery. Should your plans require that you return home to participate in local Memorial Day ceremonies, you may wish to schedule departure Sunday evening, May 29, after our last session ends at 4 p.m. ★



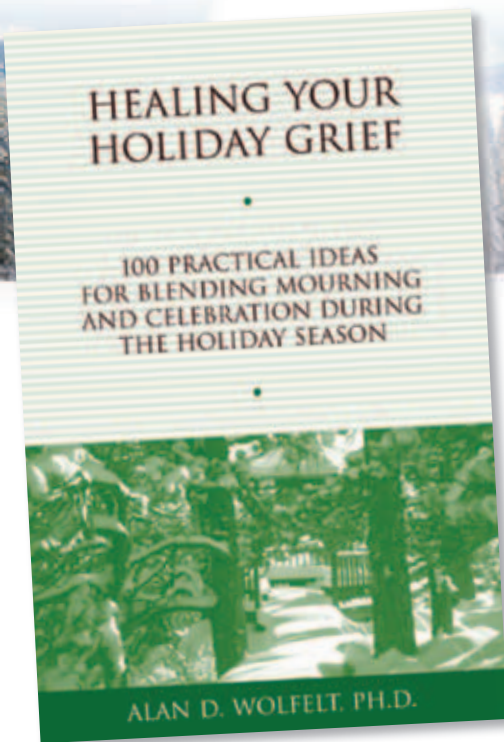
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# Healing Your Holiday Grief:

100 PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR BLENDING MOURNING AND CELEBRATION DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD ☆ Reviewed by Betsy Beard



The winter holidays, with their emphases on miracles and gifts, are difficult for those of us grieving the death of an important family member or other loved one. While the hearts of others are lifted in celebration and merry-making, our hearts seem to grow heavier with thoughts of our loved one and the gaping hole they left in our lives.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt wrote this practical guide to help us blend (not ignore) mourning with celebration in a way that will work for us and our families. It contains 100 "practical thoughts and ideas to help you understand your holiday grief and, even more important, express it." Although the book

is written to address primarily the winter holidays from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day, the principles can apply to whatever holidays are most meaningful to you as an individual, including birthdays, anniversaries, and other holidays that occur throughout the year.

*100 Practical Ideas* is actually a series of books including different volumes customized for the relationship or the type of loss. There are books tailored for teens, parents, spouses, adult children, and siblings. In addition to the books with guidance for the different relationships, there are also books for your grieving soul, your grieving body, your workplace, and for dealing with sudden, traumatic death. The basic principle of each book is to enlist us in actively mourning so that we can actively heal.

Each page contains one idea or suggestion. Some of the ideas explain the fundamentals of grief and loss. Others offer suggestions of activities that you can use to help yourself along in your journey. The suggestions are not necessarily sequential, so you can pick and choose randomly, finding one

thought each day that seems to speak to your specific need on that day.

The text is arranged with bullet points for easy reading and quick understanding. After reading the selection, there is an exercise at the bottom of the page to suggest ways to incorporate the thought into your life. The exercise is labeled *Carpe Diem*, which is Latin for seize the day. The *Carpe Diem* suggestion is designed to help you "do something with your grief, right here and now." By giving us suggestions of activities that are easy to complete, the guide gives us a concrete manner of expressing our grief in a way that is helpful and meaningful.

*Healing Your Holiday Grief: 100 Practical Ideas for Blending Mourning and Celebration during the Holiday Season* is exactly what its title suggests: an abundance of ideas to help us fully express our loss while participating in some small way in celebrating life. ☆

The 100 Ideas Series is available at [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com).

Click on Companion Bookstore.



# After the Holidays

## Surviving the Mid-Winter Gloom

By Darcie D. Sims, PhD, CHT, CT, GMS



### *Why can't January be warm and gentle — especially after the struggle of the holidays?*

Why does January seem so empty? Just as the world is stiff and frozen outside my window, I feel dead and cold and scattered inside myself. I managed to make it through the holiday season, though the “how” of that feat is truly beyond my recollection. I can't even remember eating the holiday meals. (I do, however, remember doing the dishes — again and again and again. Next year we are eating out or using paper plates!)

In those glittering days, I managed to smile and even to find a few moments of peace and joy. But here in the gloom of winter, all I seem to see are the scattered pieces of my life, cast before me on the card table, waiting for me to pick them up and make the picture.

But what picture do all these pieces form? I used to think I knew. I used to know who I was and where I was going and how I was going to get there. But now, now in the chill of winter, I can't even remember where I fit into the puzzle.

I think I'm still grieving, and that surprises me! It's been (too long, regardless of the time frame you insert), and I should be getting better. Why do I still ache from sunburn I got years ago when we were together on the beach? Why is there still sand in my shoes and why does your name still stick in my throat? Who am I now that the memories grow cold in winter's chill?

Am I still a mother if there is no child to tuck in at night? Am I still a dad if there is no one to loan the car keys to? Am I

still a wife if there is no one to snuggle up to in my bed? Am I still a husband if there is no one waiting at home for me at the end of the day? Am I still a sister or a brother if there is no one to tease? Am I still a child if my parent has died? Am I still a human being, capable of loving and being loved, if the one person I loved more than anything has become frozen in time? Who am I now that my loved one has died? The gloom has permeated even my toes, and my whole body seems icy.

Why can't January be warm and gentle— especially after the struggle of the holidays? I need some sunshine, some warmth, some help in turning over the puzzle pieces and putting them back together. I need some springtime. But springtime

is a way off and I must somehow get through these days. If you're feeling like I am, perhaps these

few suggestions will help you find the pieces to your new puzzle.

**1** Identify specific feelings. Do not generalize. Try to figure out exactly what is bothering you. Look for the tiny grains of sand that are still hiding in the bottom of your shoes. Acknowledge them. Be honest with those feelings, whatever they are. If you're angry, be angry. If you're sad, be sad. Be specific in your sadness.

**2** Pick your worries. Focus on only one worry at a time. Give up being worried about being worried. Prioritize your worries. This helps fight feelings of being overwhelmed, and you can decide which worries to keep and which to send to your: mother, children, family, neighbor, enemy.

**3** Keep a picture or two of the sand castle where you can enjoy it every day. You may decide not to make a shrine out of your memories, but don't lose the joy that you had in making that marvelous moat! That's what memories are for—a place to stash the important stuff that we need.

**4** Become as informed and as knowledgeable as possible about this new world in which you live. We fear what we don't know, what we can't see, what we can't touch. Read, listen, and learn all you can about grief. It's not where you planned on being this winter, but it is where you are. Look around.

**5** Listen to everyone. You will receive enough advice about how to grieve to sink a fleet of battleships. Be grateful... at least someone is talking to you! But follow your own music.

**6** Be kind to yourself. You survived the holiday season, and now it is the beginning of another season, another way of living. Learn to forgive yourself for living.

**7** Set small goals first. Accomplish them. Then, set bigger goals. Try starting with getting the garbage out on the right day. Then, open the closet... the drawers... the heart. Try going out. The next time you might be able to get farther than the driveway. Take your time. It's a long way to the beach. You'll get there again... someday.

**8** Remember that life requires effort on your part. Make friends with the vacuum, the checkbook, and the car. Determine to remember to remove the box before microwaving the dinner.

**9** Don't wait for happiness to find you again. Make it happen. Build another sand castle, maybe on a different beach this time. Don't lose the memories just because they hurt. Look at the pictures, listen to the song, remember the love... you haven't lost that. How could you possibly lose the love you shared?

**10** Keep turning the puzzle pieces over, but don't keep trying to put them back into the same picture. That picture is gone. There is a new picture to be made of those scattered pieces. Search for that scene. Search for the new you. Search for the new person you are becoming.

**11** Don't forget how to dream, how to laugh, how to dance. The music is different but so is the season. The room may be empty, but the heart is not. The spirit may be filled with sand, but the shoes remember the steps. One day at a time is okay if you can manage it, but know that some days all you can manage is one minute at a time. But minutes add up to years, eventually, and each grain of sand adds to the strength of the castle. Build the sand castle again, if only in your memory. Just because it's January, doesn't mean the beach is closed forever.

Build your new castle in the middle of winter. Find the new occupant—the new you.

Be gentle this winter season. Turn the pieces over slowly, experiencing each piece as a newly found treasure. We can fill our days with bitterness and anger that the picture will never be the same. Or, we can hope for the picture of spring that will surely come if we let it.

I know there are good things on the horizon. Winter can't last forever. If those things turn out to be less than we hoped, we will simply have to make whatever we get into something livable. Perhaps that is the secret to melting winter into spring. The challenge is to always carve out something beautiful from the icicle. There is joy in living, if we allow time in the winter to reassemble the thousand-piece puzzle. \*



#### About the Author



Darcie Sims is a bereaved parent and child, long time friend and keynote speaker for TAPS, author, thanatologist, pastoral bereavement specialist, licensed psychotherapist, and president and co-founder of GRIEF, Inc.

For more information visit:  
[www.griefinc.com](http://www.griefinc.com)

*I know there are good things on the horizon. Winter can't last forever.*

# The Impact of My Brother's Death

## Meeting Life's Milestones Alone

By Morgan Moore, sister of LCpl William C. Koprince, Jr.

There are days in your life you will never forget... like your first date, your first kiss, your first car, your first job. A date that has impacted my future more than any other date, though, is a date I would like to forget. The date is December 27, 2006: the date my brother was killed in Iraq. You may ask how this day forever changed my life, and I would say, "Just let me count the ways."

Now that I am an only child, the sole surviving offspring of my parents, I have no one to laugh with about the times we had growing up or to remind me of memories I have forgotten. I regret that I will have no nieces or nephews. My children, should God bless me with them, will not know their uncle. And most importantly, I lost a friend.

I will not tell you that my brother and I were best friends growing up. In fact, we had hard times, but that is what made our relationship work. This is what also made it so difficult to say good-bye. My brother and I did not start working on our relationship until after he joined the Marines. He was one week shy of 21 years old when he left for boot camp. I was an 18 year-old freshman in college.

We wrote letters during boot camp, and when he was deployed to Africa we talked on the phone every now and then, which allowed our relationship to blossom and mend. Now that I know what I was missing and will forever miss, I can't believe I didn't try harder in the earlier years. My biggest regret in life is neglecting to tell my brother how much he meant to me, not because he is an American hero, but because he was and still is my big brother.

Billy was killed 17 days after my birthday, two weeks before my spring semester started. I was preparing for my Praxis Exams, a requirement for teachers in Tennessee before receiving a license. I passed one exam but I had to retake the other two exams. Not only did my brother's death impact my test-taking abilities, but it influenced how I worked in the classroom the next semester.

One of my required education classes put me in a classroom with another teacher, and I had to teach a certain number of times to receive credit. My class was a special education class. Most of the students had ADD, ADHD, or a learning disability. They reminded me of my brother because he hated school and struggled with it. Most people do not want to teach the child who needs extra help or does not get it, but I found myself drawn to that. I realized one day that I could do this and I would do it in honor of my brother. If it hadn't been for my desire to honor Billy, I would have missed out on this special blessing at work.

After exams and student teaching, I came to one of the first major milestones that I would reach without my brother: graduation from college. I graduated just twelve days before the first anniversary of



Photos Courtesy of Morgan Moore



my brother's death. Talk about difficult. I placed a gold star with my brother's picture on top of my cap. That was my way of having my brother with me, as he would have been out of the Marine Corps by then.

Another milestone that most people recognize is that of growing older than their sibling, and I have reached that milestone. Billy was 24 years old when he was killed and on my last birthday I turned 25. Somehow I was not freaked out by it or upset. In my mind my brother still keeps getting older because I still celebrate his birthday, and when people ask about him, I tell them he would be 27. My belief is a coping strategy that works for me.

One of the two biggest milestones I am afraid to reach is starting a family without my brother here. Billy had the biggest heart in the world for kids and he would have been an amazing uncle. The day he died the most upsetting thing to me was that he would never be a father or an uncle. I mourn for myself but more importantly I mourn for my unborn children as they will miss out on a wonderful uncle. He would have been one of their biggest fans and playmates. Not only will my children never have an Uncle Billy, but they will never have cousins from our side of the family. I will talk about my brother often and share stories and experiences, but it will never be the same.

A major impact my brother's death has had on my future family is that I no longer want to have only two children. I want three children because if something were

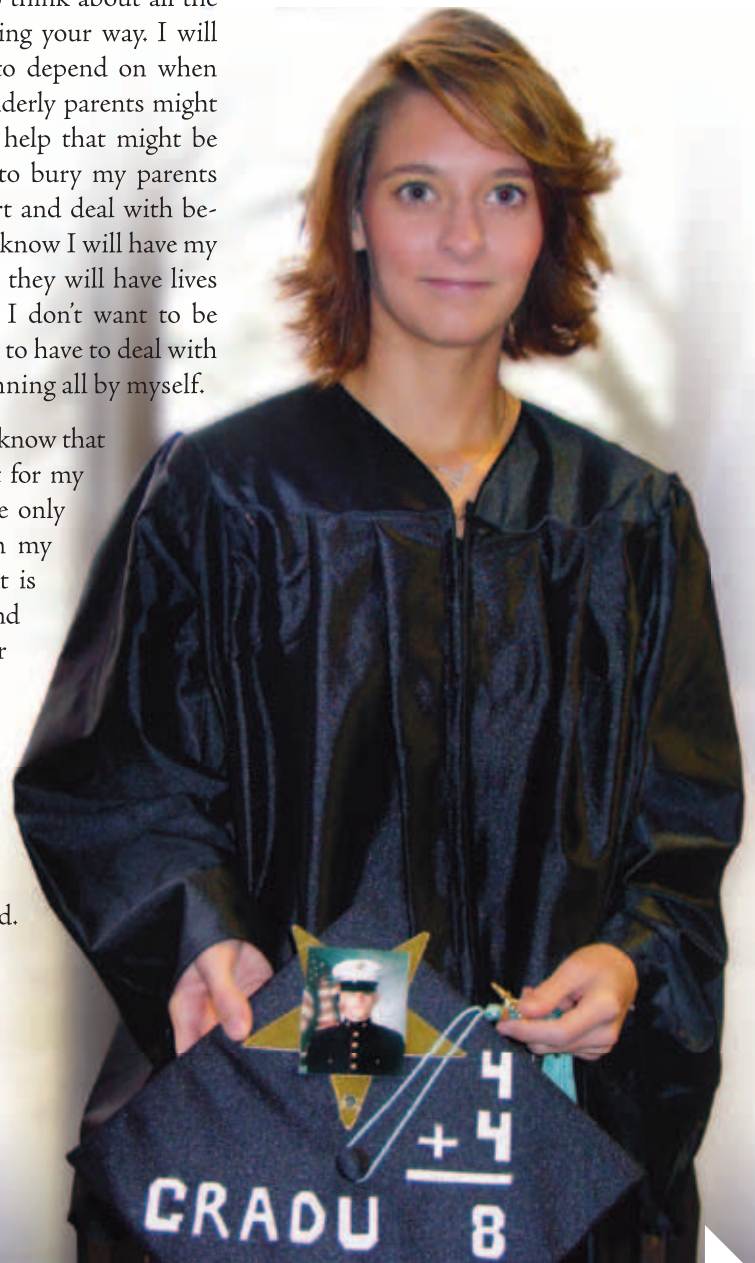
to happen to one child then the other won't be left alone. This may seem like strange thinking to many, but unless you are left alone after 22 years of having someone who looks just like you and was raised in the same family, you probably couldn't understand.

The other big future milestone that I do not want to reach without my brother is my parents getting old and needing help. There are those who may think I am too young to worry about that, but when you go from having a sibling to lean on to being left alone, you start to think about all the changes that are coming your way. I will never have a sibling to depend on when it comes to the care elderly parents might need or the financial help that might be required. I will have to bury my parents without Billy's support and deal with being the only one left. I know I will have my immediate family, but they will have lives of their own as well. I don't want to be alone and I don't want to have to deal with the emotions and planning all by myself.

I may only be 25 but I know that I am the only one left for my parents. I am now the only hope for every dream my parents ever had. That is a lot of responsibility and burden. It may never have been spoken, but now, as an only child, I definitely feel it.

The final impact my brother's death has had on my life is that my purpose has changed.

Everyone's past molds their future, but I didn't know I would undergo this huge character-building experience at 22. Billy's death has impacted me in more ways than the more obvious negative and sorrowful ways. It has encouraged me to get up every day with as much of a smile as I can muster and make the world a better place. If my brother can die for my freedom, the least I can do is enjoy that legacy to the best of my ability. Not only do I want make the most of my life, but I want others to realize what was sacrificed so that they can also enjoy life to the fullest. \*



*Everyone's past molds their future,  
but I didn't know I would  
undergo this huge character-building  
experience at 22.*



# Alcohol is Not the Answer

By Margaret Gerner, MSW

**We are frequently cautioned about the dangers of mixing alcohol and drugs.**

**We are frequently cautioned about the dangers of mixing alcohol and driving.**

**We are seldom cautioned about the danger of mixing alcohol with grief.**

The shrieking pain of early grief tempts the bereaved to escape in any way they can—to shut out the terrible reality of their loss, even for a short time. Usually they are not eating properly or sleeping well, and there are sometimes physical ailments such as stomach or chest pains, headaches, chronic fatigue, and mood swings.

Those who grieve may turn to a "friend in a bottle" for relief. It should be clearly understood, however, that alcohol is just as much a drug as any chemical compound or prescribed medication. The added subtlety in alcohol use is the ease with which it is obtained, and the acceptability of its use in our society. It requires no prescription and no one is overseeing its use or controlling its consumption.

There is some danger that the person who has never had a problem with alcohol or drugs prior to their bereavement can fall victim to its use afterward. But for the person who has an established drinking pattern, or is inclined to deal with life's problems chemically, it is a time to be especially alert and guarded. If there has been a pattern of drinking or drug use prior to the grief, it is likely that the drug/alcohol problem will escalate.

## »»» PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

Depression is common following loss. Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant, and it can magnify such symptoms of depression as sleeplessness, chronic fatigue, nervousness, abdominal symptoms, and the inability to concentrate. Alcohol will increase the intensity of any of these conditions.

Getting to sleep is difficult for most grieving people, and for some there may be a temptation to use alcohol to help induce sleep. But there is no worse drug to choose. Alcohol can affect the quality of sleep and add to the insomnia. A tolerance is created, and more is needed each time to produce the same effect. Sleeplessness is an extremely unpleasant side effect of grief, but it is temporary and will ease over time. Addiction to alcohol or drugs will not.

Sometimes alcohol masquerades as a sedative. To the restless, nervous, fatigued griever this can be an appealing alternative. However, in a few hours the sedating effect is gone and the "jitters" are worse than before.

The danger is increased that tranquilizers will be added to sustain the effect, and this combination can be lethal. Finally, sleeping pills may look like the answer, but again the tolerance level is soon reached, and the combination of the two drugs is extremely dangerous—sometimes even fatal.

The long-term consumption of alcohol increases stomach distress and reduces an already diminished appetite, which can cause malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies and increase grief symptoms dramatically. Concentration is already difficult in bereavement, but the chemically-dependant griever has an added problem. While drinking, the mind is slowed by the depressant effect of the alcohol, but when the effect begins to wear away, there is a hyperkinetic reaction. The body may tremble, the heart and mind are racing, concentration is impossible; and there is a temptation to start the cycle all over again.

Alcohol will not relieve grief for more than a few hours, and it takes more and more to sustain the effect. The price the griever pays for that relief is too great! There is no problem that alcohol will not make worse.

## »»» HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

There is no exact amount of alcohol that can define the difference between harmful drinking and a couple of drinks that make one comfortable for a short time. Everyone is affected in a different way. Body structure plays an important role. A larger person can consume more alcohol than a small-framed person before experiencing the same effect. Individual metabolism, emotional condition, and whether the alcohol is taken in conjunction with other drugs are also important factors.

Frequency of drinking is less important than the role that alcohol plays in the life of the grief victim. A simple test is





to assess the much or how often. If the situation can be assessed objectively and honestly, and it is clear that there is a dependency on alcohol, it is clearly necessary to seek professional help. Consult a doctor, a specialized treatment facility, or Alcoholics Anonymous.

For the drinker who is also grieving, there may appear to be no hope, but it is never too late to get help with your grief. People do not die from grief, but they can die from alcoholism. It is important to remember that grief over the death of a loved one is an excuse for drinking, not a reason for it.

### »»» FAMILY DYNAMICS

In families where alcohol use has become a problem, family members sometimes contribute to a drinker's problem by excusing them because "they hurt so much." Without realizing it, they are, in a real sense, giving the person permission to drink.

In other families, family members may be blamed by the drinking member for everything from the loved one's death to problems in the family. They may be accused of not caring or of placing additional burdens on the drinker.

Because the drinker must find fault in order to justify and enlarge the excuse for drinking, others must be blamed, and soon the family is controlled by the alcoholic.

If families are to escape the trap of becoming slaves to the drinker, they must learn to defend themselves against the manipulations of the drinking person. This requires outside help, often available through the National Council on Alcoholism or the Alanon Family Groups. Some treatment centers have special programs for the family of the alcoholic, too.

### »»» FINAL THOUGHTS

A family can be destroyed by grief. A family can be destroyed by a drinking member. Put the two together and there is a higher risk that the family will be destroyed by the combination. The drinking will not magically end when grief is "over." Without treatment, problem drinking can only get worse. If you or a family member is drinking, look carefully at the effect it is having on everyone. Don't let one problem compound another. Seek help. \*



#### About the Author



Margaret Gerner is a bereaved mom who battled alcohol addiction after the death of her son, Arthur. Margaret holds a master's degree in social work from the University of Missouri at Columbia and has worked in the field of bereavement for more than 25 years. She has written extensively for The Compassionate Friends (TCF) and Bereaved Parents USA (BPUSA) and has worked with both organizations to help other bereaved parents learn healthy ways of coping with grief.



# T★A★P★S Suicide Support

## HOPE IN THE FACE OF MILITARY SUICIDE DEATH

By Jill Harrington LaMorie, MSW, LCSW, ACSW ★ Director, TAPS Professional Education

The death of a loved one or friend by suicide has a rippling impact on the bereaved left in its wake. Whether the death is by a direct or indirect act of self-destruction, suicide is commonly experienced as a sudden, traumatic loss. The ensuing trauma, together with an often stigmatizing response from others, makes suicide loss survivors vulnerable to a prolonged and complicated grief process. For each suicide death in the military, there are military families and personnel profoundly affected emotionally, physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually in its aftermath.

TAPS provided help and comfort to families who have experienced the death by suicide of a loved one who served in the military at the 2nd Annual TAPS Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp held October 8-10, 2010 in Washington, DC. More than 200 adults and 50 children participated in the seminar and camp.

At the Friday morning opening session, Major General Philip Volpe spoke to TAPS survivors about the findings and recommendations of the Department of Defense's Task Force on the Prevention of Suicide by Members of the Armed Forces.

During the past year, Volpe co-chaired the task force with Bonnie Carroll, founder and chairman of TAPS.

"Suicide prevention is a huge challenge in the military," Volpe said. "There's stress on our family members and stress on our service members. This is a unique time. Nowhere before in our history did people have to deploy over and over again."

Volpe noted that suicide rates in the military have nearly doubled in the past five years. The general told survivors at the seminar that the task force spent considerable time studying the stigma that prevents service members from seeking help. "The message needs to be: You can be the best warrior in the world but you're still a human being. And calling in for help is no different than if you call in for help for other reasons," said Volpe. The general also told survivors that there's a great need to train family members, a comment met by enthusiastic applause from the audience. Family members often say they knew something was wrong with their loved one, but couldn't pinpoint the problem. They didn't know where to go for help or if their actions would help or hinder, Volpe told the audience.

Family members need training on suicide signs and avenues of help, and this training

needs to include not just the spouse, but the parents, siblings, other family, and friends as well.

"Families are usually the first indicators, first detectors of something not being the same, not being right," Volpe said. "It makes sense for families to be included in a comprehensive suicide prevention program." Volpe also thanked TAPS survivors in the audience for their input to the task force at last year's Military Suicide Survivor Seminar, when more than a dozen families testified before the task force. "What we learned there provided us a guiding light for the remainder of our work," he said.

On Friday night, Colonel Rober McLaughlin, garrison commander at Fort Carson, Colorado, spoke about his lifelong best friend, Marine Major John Ruocco. Ruocco was a decorated Marine Corps Cobra pilot who died by suicide in 2005 just months after returning home from Iraq, where he had flown 70 combat missions in support of the First Marine Expeditionary Force.

"I thought my life was over when my husband took his own life," says Kim Ruocco, John's surviving spouse. "I felt alone, confused and isolated. I didn't know anyone who had experienced this kind of loss. I felt ashamed and confused,



# & Education Program

angry and exhausted, too devastated to even look for help.”

Since that time, Kim has transformed the pain of her own personal loss into a living legacy of hope for others grieving a military suicide. Ruocco, who holds a master’s degree in social work, has helped to create the Suicide Support and Education Program at TAPS. She develops programs that provide direct support



to survivors who are in immediate need of grief and crisis care as well as those living with long term suicide loss in their lives. The TAPS program offers support through peer-based emotional care, providing those newly bereaved by suicide with trained peer-to-peer mentors. Other facets include educational programs, bereavement resource reports, workshops and support groups at the national survivor seminar, and the annual suicide survivor conference.

With the rise of suicide rates in the military, TAPS has seen an increase in the number of survivors of military suicide seeking grief and trauma support services. On average, one or two families experiencing a suicide loss call TAPS each day requesting help. The majority of these survivors face the stigma of suicide, both in the military and the civilian community, which can hinder a healthy grieving process. The stigma of their loved one’s suicide isolates them from their support systems, leaving them to struggle with the chaos of suicide alone. TAPS has responded to the need by building a peer support program specifically designed for the healing process of those bereaved by suicide in the military.

“TAPS carried me through those first years by offering a multitude of support.

I am now using my strength, gathered over time with the constant, loving care of TAPS, to help others,” says Ruocco.

During this year’s suicide loss seminar, experts in the field of suicidology, trauma, and grief provided educational sessions for survivors and trained peer mentors to facilitate workshops and support groups. Participants were offered formal sessions with emphasis on peer support, education, spirituality, and remembrance. Informally, the setting provided a safe, supportive place where survivors could begin to open up and heal.

“I was crushed in my grief,” TAPS Peer Mentor Mary Gallagher recalls. “After my husband, Marine Gunnery Sergeant James Gallagher, took his own life in 2006 after returning home from Iraq, I felt as if each breath and moment was too difficult to bear. I felt alone until TAPS reached out to me and came into my life.”

In addition to workshops and support groups, TAPS survivors at the 2nd Annual TAPS Military Suicide Survivor Seminar were privileged to hear from Major General Mark Graham, Chief of Staff, US Army Forces Command at Fort McPherson. On Saturday evening, Graham shared his experience as a survivor of both military

action and suicide. The Grahams lost their son Kevin, an ROTC cadet, to suicide in 2003. Eight months later their remaining son, 2nd Lt. Jeffrey Graham, was killed in combat in Iraq. The Graham family has been involved with TAPS since that time.

“From our personal tragedies, my wife Carol and our daughter Melanie and I have come to realize that in order to survive, we had to use our

brokenness to reach out and openly share our story and try to give hope to others,” says Graham. “TAPS has given us a way to channel our grief in a positive way.”

After the flag is folded and the day turns to dusk, the suicide death of a military service member profoundly affects the lives of all those they loved and left behind. The TAPS military suicide-loss survivors are helping each other heal while also helping themselves. It is with this power of peer support that TAPS has harnessed the strength, courage, and resiliency of survivors to reach out to one another, to prevent further suicide in military families, and to share in the commonality of their grief.

For further information visit [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) or call 800-959-TAPS. ★

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*TAPS would like to thank the McIntyre family, Hope for the Warriors, Health Net and Morgan Stanley for their support, which helped fund this year’s Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp.*  
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Quotes from Major General Volpe and seminar information excerpted from TAPS news releases by Ami Neiberger-Miller and American Forces Press Service article by Elaine Wilson.



# The Season of Giving (Back)

## Run & Remember Team supports T★A★P★S

As we near the end of the year and think of the many ways TAPS has helped us make it through the darkest nights, many survivors' thoughts turn to supporting the work of TAPS, whether through financial end-of-year giving, volunteering, mentoring, or... running.

Running? Absolutely!

Many survivors join the TAPS Run and Remember Team to give back to TAPS and ensure that the newly bereaved receive the same support they have received. Throughout the year, the runners find many opportunities to help with fundraising efforts. Whether they run in the Marine Corps Marathon, the Army 10-Miler, the Historic Half, or local events of their own choosing, team members honor their loved ones while supporting TAPS.

Here are some thoughts from some of the Run and Remember Team members.

### ★ ROMA ANDERSON ★

*Surviving mom of Lt Col Trane McCloud*

In May 2010, I attended the National Military Survivor Seminar in Washington, D.C. I read with interest the various seminars available. Very timidly, I arrived at the Run and Remember Session. If I had any doubts, they were put aside after Marie Campbell conducted the seminar with loads of enthusiasm and appealing encouragement. I made up my mind I would and could participate in the 10K portion of the Marine Corps Marathon 2010!

My decision to be a part of this event is threefold. First and most importantly, I want to honor my son. Trane ran the MCM three times. I know he would be so very proud of my effort. Secondly, I embrace the opportunity to challenge my ability to even attempt this event. I have been training since returning home from the National Seminar. Each week

I grow stronger and stronger in my endeavor. Lastly, I consider it a joy to give back to TAPS, which has been an enormous support to me. I welcome the challenge to "Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, Share the Journey" in the 35th MCM 2010.

### ★ STEVE MITCHELL ★

*Surviving father of CPT Seth Mitchell*

On October 26, 2009, our family changed forever when Seth died in Afghanistan. Seth was always challenging himself to achieve. In 2006, after his return from a tour in Iraq, he decided to run the MCM. Seth and I talked about the marathon and the challenge that it is. Of course, I said that someday maybe we'd run it together! I was not then, nor am I now, a runner, but it was easy to say.

After Seth's death I told myself that I would run the MCM to honor him. I attended the MCM workshop at the TAPS national seminar to get all the information. I had started to train but still had not committed. My wife, Connie, and I were impressed with the level of commitment to survivors throughout the entire TAPS organization and decided that we needed to support TAPS. At age 58 maybe I should know better, but joining the TAPS Run and Remember Team gives me the opportunity to support survivors. I can't think of any better way to support those who have given so much.

### ★ AIMEE MYERS ★

*Surviving spouse of TSgt Phillip Myers*

On April 4th, 2009, my family was torn apart when I lost my husband and the father of my children. I looked for something to help me endure the relentless grief that had consumed my life. There was not a day in my life that I ever thought that running would be my therapy, my release. I never understood runners; why would

anybody run for fun? Yet somehow I became one of those people.

The moment I learned of the TAPS Run and Remember Team, I decided to join, whether I liked running or not. It would be a challenge for me, but definitely worth it. I was surprised to find that running clears my head, refreshes me, and leaves me feeling great! It gives me not only a sense of freedom, but a chance to honor Phillip as well as all our fallen EOD techs. Running a 10K will be hard on my body. Running in memory of my husband and his friends will be hard on my heart. But I can do it for them, and for all they have sacrificed for our freedom.

### ★ JAMES GOBBLE ★

*Surviving brother of  
Senior Chief Kim Hunter*

Why am I running? To be truthful I don't like to run that much and am mostly involved due to the request of my mother and surviving sister. The most I've run were my days in the Marines, which were long ago. My sister Kim was the runner in the family, always involved in a marathon. As I was getting ready for the MCM over the past few months I came to see this as an opportunity to bond with my sister Kim in some meaningful way. I can not recall ever sharing a moment as testing as a marathon with her, something that I regret. Maybe if I'm lucky I'll see her out there somewhere just in front of me, encouraging me to keep going, one step in front of the other.

As for my support for TAPS, I believe in the mission, and the race is a means for me to support the mission. Our honored fallen held a line and said, "I will risk all." Supporting their families is the responsibility of us all, and I am simply doing my small part.



★ LT COL TRANE MC CLOUD ★



★ SENIOR CHIEF KIM HUNTER ★



★ 2ND LT. JEFFREY GRAHAM & KEVIN GRAHAM ★



★ CPT SETH MITCHELL ★



★ TSgt PHILLIP MYERS ★



★ CPL. JOSHUA HARMON ★



★ STACEY MARTINEZ ★

*Surviving fiancée of 2nd Lt. Jeffrey Graham*

I was to walk down the aisle of the First United Methodist Church on November 6, 2004. I did walk down the aisle of this beautiful stone-clad church, only it was nine months earlier and not as I dreamed. Instead of donning my plain, yet elegant, wedding dress and carrying calla lilies, I walked down the aisle wearing black and following my fiancé's flag-draped casket.

Now that Jeffrey is gone, I try to keep his spirit alive by continuing to do the things we loved. Jeff and I were avid runners, and we often ran together. Since Jeff's death, I have completed several half marathons, and I used his memory as my motivation to finish. My next race is the Army 10-Miler, running with and fundraising for TAPS. I am honored to run on Team Wildcats (of the TAPS Run and Remember Team) with four other amazing women, including

Jeff's sister, Melanie, and cousin, Layne. We are running this race in memory of both Jeffrey and his brother Kevin Graham. I just hope that I continue to make Jeff proud.

★ TIMOTHY J COLLINS III ★

*Surviving father-in-law to Cpl. Joshua Harmon*

My daughter, Kristin, was married to Joshua ever so briefly. At the young age of 20, Joshua died. Numerous dreams that they shared were gone forever. One dream was running together when Josh returned. Kristin approached me in April 2009 saying she wanted to carry on their plans and asking if I would participate—help her train and run with her for the 2009 Marine Corps Marathon 10K. At that time she definitely was not a runner, but she trained hard. October came quickly, and her mission was accomplished. We ran past the finish line as teammates.

We have been running together ever since—conquering the pavement together. We recently completed the Virginia Beach Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon and are training for the Army 10-Miler, looking forward to running with the TAPS team once again. This journey has been a truly wonderful and amazing experience for me as I run with my daughter. Our sneakers have taken us through the streets of Washington, D.C., Nashville, The Outer Banks of North Carolina, and state parks of Virginia. We look forward to many more.

If you are interested in becoming a member of TAPS Run and Remember Team, write to [marie@taps.org](mailto:marie@taps.org). ★

*Photos courtesy of surviving family members*



# T★A★P★S Bulletin: *for Kids*

NEWS BRIEFS & UPDATES ★ SUMMER 2010

## NEW CAMPS FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN

*MLB Pitcher Jamie Moyer's Foundation teams with TAPS and USO*

Children of our fallen military heroes will find help and comfort in three new camps being offered jointly by The Moyer Foundation, the USO, and TAPS. The partnership of the three organizations will fund three new Camp Erin/TAPS Good Grief Camps in communities near three of America's largest military installations: Fort Campbell in Kentucky, Fort Lewis in Washington, and Fort Hood in Texas.

The weekend-long camp experience will be filled with traditional camp activities combined with grief support. The USO and The Moyer Foundation's corporate sponsors and donors will help to fund the three new Camp Erin locations. Founded by MLB pitcher, Jamie Moyer, and his wife, Karen, The Moyer Foundation is

well-known for its work to help children in distress. Camp Erin, established in 2002, is the nation's largest bereavement camp in the country, with 36 camps in 23 states serving more than 2,500 children and teens annually.

"It is very gratifying to have the opportunity to work with the USO and TAPS, and we are grateful to all those who are working with us to bring Camp Erin to these new locations, and to provide this service for children from military families who have lost a family member," said Jamie Moyer.

The first camp is scheduled to open at Fort Campbell in summer 2011. Programs at Fort Hood and Fort Lewis will likely open later that year. Surviving families interested



in signing up for the camps will be able to register on the TAPS website at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) three months prior to the event. TAPS will also distribute invitations to children living nearby and will publicize the camps through its online events calendar. ★

## TAPS CHILDREN'S BOOK RECEIVES ACCOLADES

*Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope inspires and offers hope to grieving children*

*Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope*, recently published by TAPS received a gold medal in the Spirit Category of the 2010 Moonbeam Children's Book Awards competition. Presented by Jenkins Group and Independent Publisher Online, the Moonbeam Children's Book Awards honor the year's best children's books, authors, and illustrators.

Written for TAPS by TAPS Magazine editor, Betsy Beard, the book has also earned the Young Voices Foundation Seal of Approval for Family Friendly Products, as a book that inspires, mentors, and educates readers of all ages.

Writer Claudia Pemberton with the Military Writers Society of America gave the

book a glowing review. "*Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope* is an enchanting children's book that is fashioned more from fact than fiction. The fact that *Klinger* is based on a real life caisson horse makes this tale even more magical," wrote Pemberton.

Her review says, "Beard's storytelling ability is mesmerizing for young and old alike. The illustrations will captivate the reader as the vibrant images bring the story to life. The artistry and depth of color in the artwork are incredible."

"*Klinger* will steal your heart with its undeniable charm. I give it my highest recommendation," wrote Pemberton. "This quality hardback storybook (complete



with dust jacket) makes it perfect for gift giving, and is guaranteed to delight Americans of all ages."

The book was written to help children age 12 and under, but resonates with young and old alike. To purchase your copy and extras for gift-giving, visit the online store at [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org). ★



# Celebrity Spotlight

## BEST-SELLING AUTHOR SEBASTIAN JUNGER

By Ami Neiberger-Miller, APR, MA ★ TAPS Public Affairs Officer

Sebastian Junger is the internationally acclaimed, best-selling author of *The Perfect Storm*, *A Death in Belmont*, and *Fire*. For more than a year, Junger and photojournalist Tim Hetherington were embedded with the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, in the remote and heavily contested Korengal valley of eastern Afghanistan.

Reporting on the war from the soldiers' perspective, Junger spent weeks at a time at a remote outpost that saw more combat than almost anywhere else in Afghanistan.

The professional result is twofold: a book titled *WAR* and a 96-minute documentary "Restrepo" that won the 2010 Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival and will air on the National Geographic Channel and in theatrical release.

Because of his concern for our veterans and the families of our fallen, Junger reached out to TAPS, offering to help our organization raise awareness. "When Sebastian called us personally to learn more about TAPS and how we assist families who have lost a loved one who served in the military, I knew he genuinely cared about the families of our fallen," said Bonnie Carroll. "We deeply appreciate his support and efforts to make others aware of TAPS."

Junger prominently displays the TAPS logo on his website and shares a link to the TAPS Web site so others can learn more. He has also written about TAPS on his Facebook page, sharing information



with thousands of others. The DVD for "Restrepo" that is being released in December 2010, will feature a video about TAPS, so viewers can learn more about how to help the families of our fallen.

"Restrepo" is a feature-length documentary that chronicles the deployment of a platoon of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley. The movie focuses on a remote 15-man outpost, "Restrepo," named after a platoon medic who was killed in action. It was considered one of the most dangerous postings in the U.S. military, and the film holds nothing back.

This is an entirely experiential film: the cameras never leave the valley; there are no interviews with generals or diplomats. The only goal is to make viewers feel as if they have just been through a 96-minute deployment. Surviving families who want to watch the film will want to do so with care, remembering that sometimes battle

scenes or images of military conflict can be triggers for grief bursts.

When he speaks, Junger engages audiences with a powerful, emotionally compelling and vivid portrait of the impact of war. Drawing upon his prolific career of more than 20 years of international reporting, Junger shares personal anecdotes and direct experiences from the trenches of the front lines in Afghanistan. A witness to some of the most heroic, disturbing, and life-affirming events that represent the

conflicted nature of war, Junger explores the emotional experience of combat and the impact of war on our everyday lives.

Junger has covered major international news stories in Liberia, Sierra Leone and other places around the globe. He has been awarded the National Magazine Award and an SAIS Novartis Prize for Journalism. Junger became a fixture in the national media when, as a first-time author, he commanded *The New York Times* best-seller list for more than three years with *The Perfect Storm*, which later set sales records and became a major motion picture from Warner Bros. ★

**Thank you, Sebastian  
for all you do in supporting  
TAPS and raising awareness  
of military survivors!**



# VA Introduces New Medallion

## Burial Benefit Option U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



The manner in which families memorialize their loved ones is inherently personal. For those Veterans who, for a variety of reasons, chose not to be buried in a national or state-run Veterans cemetery or request a government grave marker, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced the availability of an additional option to highlight a deceased Veteran's honorable service and their sacrifices for our country.

Beginning this month, the next of kin of a deceased Veteran, or those acting on their behalf, can order a bronze medallion they can affix to an existing privately purchased headstone or marker to signify the deceased's status as a Veteran.

The medallion, depicting a three-dimensional folded flag surrounded by a laurel wreath with the Veteran's branch of service displayed beneath, will come in three sizes designed to fit on various-sized headstones, grave markers, and columbarium niche covers. The sizes are 5 inches, 3 inches and 1 ½ inches in diameter.

This new product will be furnished in lieu of a traditional government headstone or marker to those Veterans whose death occurred on or after Nov. 1, 1990, and whose grave is marked with a privately purchased headstone or marker. Eligible Veterans are entitled to either a traditional government-furnished headstone, marker, or bronze niche marker, or the new medallion, but not both.

After accepting a claim for the new benefit, VA will mail the medallion along with a kit that will allow the family or the staff of a private cemetery to adhere the device to a headstone, marker, or niche cover.

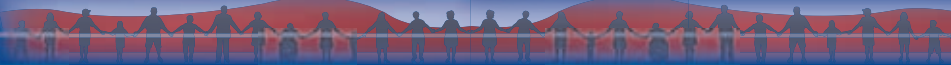
VA created the medallion in response to Public Law 110-157, passed by Congress Dec. 26, 2007. The law gave VA authority to "furnish, upon request, a medallion or other device of a design determined by the Secretary to signify the deceased's status as a Veteran, to be attached to a headstone or marker furnished at private expense."

VA arrived at the distinctive folded flag design after a long deliberation process. Employees of the National Cemetery Administration's Memorial Programs Service, members of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials, and the Army Institute of Heraldry participated in the development of the medallion. After months of exchanges in meetings, workshops and focus groups, NCA submitted the current design to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki, who approved it January 13, 2010.

Instructions on how to apply for a medallion will be updated on the National Cemetery Administration website at [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov). Until a new form specifically for ordering the medallion is available, applicants may use the form used for ordering government headstones and markers, VA Form 40-1330. \*



For more information visit:  
[www.cem.va.gov/hm\\_hm.asp](http://www.cem.va.gov/hm_hm.asp)



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