

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

T★A★P★S[®]

Comfort and Support Since 1994

MAGAZINE

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



VOLUME 21 • ISSUE 1

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

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

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

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



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TAPS®

Comfort and Support Since 1994

TAPS offers immediate and long-term emotional help, hope, and healing to all those 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

TAPS

SUPPORTS the bereaved survivor through a network of peer mentors. Mentors are trained volunteers who have also lost a loved one in the Armed Forces and are now standing ready to reach out and support others.

PROVIDES the National Military Survivor Helpline 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, blogs, peer group discussion sites, and an extensive website at www.taps.org.

SPONSORS Military Survivor Seminars and Retreats 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.

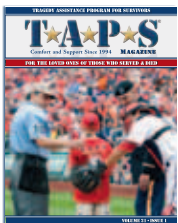
CONNECTS survivors to resources in their local communities and provides grief and trauma resources and information.

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Courtesy of SAIC

TAPS Good Grief Camp participant takes the field at the Washington Nationals' Memorial Day game.



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Let Us Hear From You



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

24/7 Helpline

I called TAPS after a very tearful grief-gripped morning. It's only been seven weeks since I lost my beloved husband to a motorcycle accident on his way to annual training. The TAPS volunteer was compassionate, listened to me through my tears, and helped me get through my crisis and get on with my day. Thank you for making yourselves available, for listening, and for understanding. You made a difference and I appreciate you!

Winona Brackeen, Missouri
Surviving spouse of
SSG Clifford Brackeen

teams4taps

Thanks to the Seahawks staff and TAPS for bringing this together [attendance at Seahawks playoff game as guests of the team in 12th Man Suite]. This is what Army Spc. Robert W. Ellis wanted to do when he got back from his deployment, go and see his team play. Rob loved his Seahawks. It was emotional for us; we miss him so much. Rob would be proud of his team for honoring him by allowing us to attend the game. Each day is different for us. And I thank TAPS and the Seahawks for honoring the fallen families.

John Ellis, Washington
Surviving father of
SPC Robert Ellis

Philadelphia Regional Seminar

I remember the very moment in Philadelphia when my daughter Savannah came to me after the first day and said, "Everyone is like me here; their dads died too," and the comfort that brought her. She still talks about her friends from TAPS in Philly and Nationals. She is excited to see you all again soon.

Aimee Wriglesworth, Virginia
Surviving spouse of
MAJ Chad Wriglesworth

Suicide Survivor Seminar

I remember the very sad phone call I made to TAPS on April 16, 2014 like it was yesterday. I had just been informed that my husband had passed, and I felt so lost. When I called, I heard a comforting, caring voice on the other end. I was so concerned for my four small children; they were so emotional. We decided to attend the 2014 TAPS Suicide Survivor Seminar in October. My oldest daughter Kaylee was paired with an amazing mentor who has been a true godsend. Without TAPS, I don't know where my family would be. You truly helped my family and I am forever grateful. I look forward to a lifelong relationship with my TAPS families.

Megan Sanders, Louisiana
Surviving spouse of
SSG Robert Wike Jr.

TAPS Magazine

I read the article "To Watch or Not to Watch" and was just amazed. I lost my brother in May of 2007. This article really sums up how I feel a lot, even after all these years. It helps to know that I am not alone in my feelings. I have attended a TAPS seminar and hope to go on a surviving siblings retreat, as well as run for TAPS in the Army Ten Miler next year.

Laura Collins, North Carolina
Surviving sister of
MAJ Larry Bauguess Jr.

Camp Pendleton Family Reunion

Thank you for the Camp Pendleton beach picnic. In these busy times it's almost impossible to get everyone or even half of the family together. This picnic was a godsend to reunite us at the end of a long hot summer. The picnic was great and the food was delicious. Sharing our loved one's favorite dish with other families was awesome. Thank you for the love and support you have given me since my son died seven years ago. It was at TAPS that I learned to live with my loss.

Mary N. Lanca, California
Surviving mother of
EMI John A. Lanca



editor@taps.org



Something Borrowed Something Blue

By Kat Stanley and Ester Allgower

★ Surviving sister and mother of Cpl. Richard Allgower

A wedding is a bittersweet event when the bride and her family are still grieving the loss of one person whose presence at the wedding is critical. As my family prepared for my nuptials to my boyfriend of six years, we were missing one important person, my brother and only sibling, Corporal Richard Allgower, USMC. I was so devastated at the loss of my brother that I often wondered if I would ever feel happiness again, much less get married.

On Memorial Day weekend in 2010, Richard stopped breathing due to complications from a cancerous tumor on his brain stem. Emergency medical personnel resuscitated him, and he was rushed to the hospital. A few days later, his doctors told us that there was nothing they could do. Richard was sent home for hospice care and was told he had six weeks to live. I didn't know what to say because my heart was breaking; I could not imagine life without Richard.

A few weeks later, we were worried he would not make it through the night. One by one, we all said our goodbyes to him: grandma, my parents, his wife, and my boyfriend Chris. I told Richard he was my best friend and that I loved him and would miss him. I have no idea why, but I also said, "You're supposed to be at my wedding." As strong as he was trying to be, he started crying, too, just for a moment before he composed himself like the strong Marine he was proud to be. Richard died on August 15, 2010, after an incredibly inspiring and fearless fight with cancer.

At the age of 26, I lost hope in ever feeling the same happiness I had when my brother was alive. Nothing seemed to make me smile or laugh the way Rich could. He was my best friend, and we were supposed to grow old together, fighting one second and laughing the next.

My sister-in-law Lexie attended a TAPS Widows Retreat in August 2011. She told me that I had to attend a retreat, so in April 2012, I attended the TAPS Seattle Siblings Retreat, where the experience and people I met changed my life. For the first time since Richard's passing, I felt hopeful that I could actually live life again rather than just pass time.

Chris stood by my side for the darkest years of my life, and on August 18, 2013, he proposed to me with family and friends watching. I was overjoyed! My mom hugged me and then asked, "Who's the first person you're going to tell?" My heart sank, knowing it would have been Richard. I flashed back to that conversation we had and the sadness that overtook him when I mentioned him not being at my wedding. The joy in that moment didn't go away, but I knew that this would be a bittersweet process.

I couldn't believe Richard really wasn't going to be at my wedding. He wasn't going to be there to tell me when I was being a brat during the planning process, like only a big brother could. He wasn't going to be there to tell me that I looked beautiful in my dress. Richard would have been in our bridal party and his spontaneity and wit would have added humor, light heartedness, and brotherly love to the festivities. From the beginning, I wondered how we could incorporate Richard without allowing his absence and my sadness over it to overshadow the complete joy I had in my heart.

One thing I did know was that Chris was the man I was meant to spend the rest of my life with. He spent a significant amount of time with Richard. The two first bonded on a trip Chris and I took to California to visit Richard and Lexie. Chris was also able to see firsthand how close Richard and I were. Chris and I both wanted to honor Richard, but I definitely

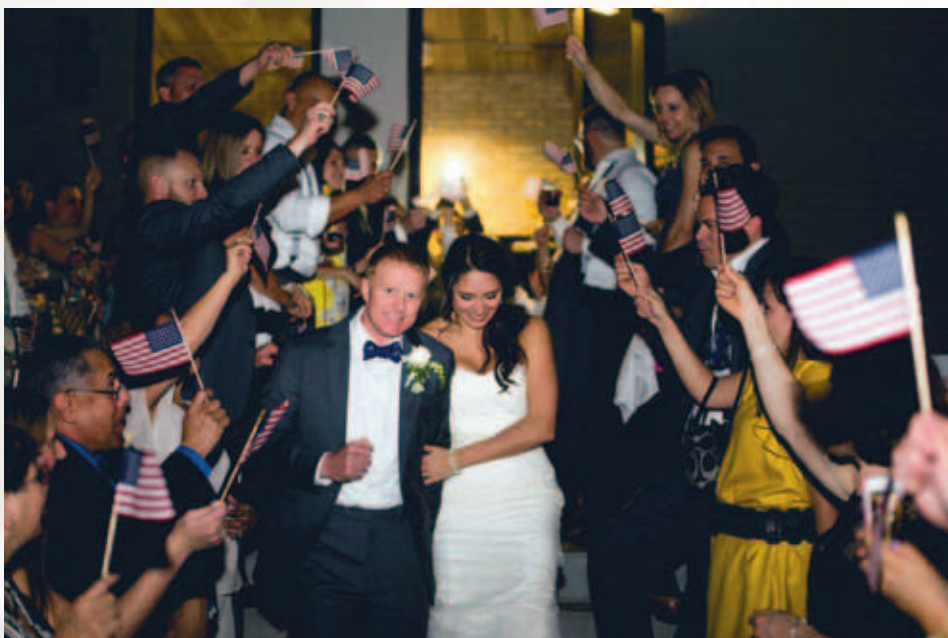


had moments when I had to remind myself that our wedding was not just about his absence. However, I didn't want his absence to be the elephant in the room that everyone was afraid to mention. It's important to me that people not only know how much I miss and love my brother, but also that I will always include and honor him throughout the rest of my life.

Once Chris and I set the date, plans went into full speed. On the day I went shopping for my dress, I realized that the wedding would be touched by Rich. While we were waiting to check out, my mom walked to the section for bridesmaids' dresses and saw the perfect shade of blue, my favorite color. I immediately knew that would be the color for my bridesmaids' dresses. The tag listed the color as "Marine Blue," and so I had my "something blue."

I was toying with several ideas to incorporate Rich into the actual ceremony. The most popular suggestions were to have someone stand in his place or to have a picture of him on the altar.

When I found ways to honor Richard, I pictured him looking down at me saying, "Good job, Kat," and any guilt of being happy subsided.



Instead, I decided to leave the maid of honor position—designated for the bride's best friend—open for him. The more I told people, the happier it made me. It was a subtle gesture, but still made it incredibly obvious what a gap it is not having Rich in my life. The printed program read, "Maid of Honor: Reserved in memory of Richard Allgower, the bride's brother and best friend."

My bridal portraits contained a special photo with the flag that had been draped over Richard's coffin and was presented to Lexie. When I asked her if I could use it in my portrait, it became my "something borrowed." The portrait was on display on an easel in the reception venue.

As a shower gift, I received a locket that contained a picture of Richard in his uniform. Lexie made the floral arrangements and incorporated the locket into my bridal bouquet. I was able to hold Richard in my hand as my dad walked me down the aisle. At the reception, Rich was present in spirit, in part because his favorite cookies



were there. Our grandma and aunt made walnut and apricot kolaches, a favorite Czech dessert to celebrate holidays.

When I found ways to honor Richard, I pictured him looking down at me saying, "Good job, Kat," and any guilt of being happy subsided. The final tribute came at the end of our reception, as Chris and I walked out toward the red, white, and blue decorated pedi-cab. Guests joined in by waving small American flags, a symbolic way of saying, "We miss you, Rich!" He would have loved the gesture, especially when an impromptu chanting of "U-S-A" rang out from even non guests in the street.

The wedding was absolutely beautiful, not because of the decorations or dresses or venue, but because of the love that was apparent throughout. The "something old" in our wedding was how we incorporated our traditions, and the "something new" was the way we honored Rich. The special ways that we honored Richard didn't take away from our wedding day; they made it more special for both Chris and me.

I never could have imagined surviving such an important day without my brother, but TAPS gave me the tools and confidence to allow Richard to be a part of my life without fear of what others might think. The love that we shared was enough to last a lifetime. I still carry it with me and now really celebrate with Richard in mind. *

Photos courtesy of Kat Stanley

My Experience of Trauma

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

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

When I went to bed on the night of October 22, 1983, my life was stable, predictable, safe, and happy. Within twenty-four hours, my world toppled, shattering into a million pieces. On October 23, the Marine Corps barracks where my husband lived was bombed, killing 241 service members as they slept.

I felt terror, fear, panic, anxiety, worry, and confusion. I couldn't sleep or eat. I felt numb and detached from my world, alone and abandoned, as if I were going to die. I remember only certain details about that first week, the most painful: when I turned on the TV and saw the grisly scene, when I got the news that John was missing in action, when I got the news that he was dead, when I saw my aunt and mother caring for my baby because I felt totally incapacitated.

I seemed to be grieving. I cried a lot. I felt a lot of emotional pain and loss, pining for my husband and the life I once had. But for the most part, I kept the terror, the unbearable fear, buried inside. I knew I had a baby to care for, and that being a depressed mother could lead to a depressed child. So I shut off my emotions in order to parent, and got very, very busy. I pretended to be okay. But I was really in shock for the most part of two years.

It was actually detrimental to me that others were encouraging me to "go on," when inside I wasn't ready. I was still trying to process what had happened and all the emotions that accompany a traumatic loss. They also encouraged me "not to think about it," or "put it behind me." What I really needed was to think about it, talk about it, and let my insides "scream" for a while—release the pain, so I could heal. Instead, all the busyness

and avoidance just put a crude scab on a really infected wound.

The second year I became extremely depressed and hopeless. Going back over the trauma was not something I thought about doing, and even seemed impossible because others seemed to expect me to be over it. It was as if they expected me to avoid talking about him, and if I did, I would be crazy. If they only knew, I felt crazy inside not talking about it.

Actions That Can Help

There is nothing that can prepare you for a sudden, traumatic death. But there are things you can do afterward to help yourself cope better. Only then can you help your children cope.

• Talk It Out •

Talk and talk and talk to someone who will listen, patiently and nonjudgmentally. That may be a friend, a counselor, a minister. A therapist trained in trauma

recovery would be an excellent choice. Or another person who has "been there" can be very helpful.

• Review the Details •

Talk about them: what you saw, heard, did, didn't do, where you were, what was going on around the trauma, what you felt.

• Allow the Deepest, Darkest Feelings to Be Expressed •

There are no rules about recovering from trauma. Be honest about what you feel—there is nothing bad or wrong to feel. You may find yourself resorting to former ways of coping (good and bad). This is called regression. It can be seen in forms of dependency on people or substances such as alcohol, drugs, or food.

• Let Yourself Feel and Express Anger •

After a traumatic loss, your set of assumptions about life changes. There can be tremendous anger at others, at the person who died, at those you thought could have



prevented it, at yourself, at your children, at God.

• Use Any and All Resources at Your Disposal •

Join a support group or use Internet resources to chat with others who have suffered a traumatic loss, write a journal, get counseling or therapy, join a gym. Aerobic activity has been documented to reduce anxiety and help with trauma recovery.

• Make Time for Yourself •

Spend time in quiet. Meditate, pray, read, use guided imagery or relaxation. Walk. Jog. Get a massage. Be with people who comfort you, not those who push you. Know that you may feel more irritable, sleep less, get angry easier over little things, and be more impatient.

• Allow Time to Pass Because You Have the Task of a Dual Recovery •

At first you must deal with the trauma, then the grief. Trauma is different from grief in that there is much anxiety and damage to your emotions. Avoid stressful situations as much as possible, and simplify your life.

• Have Realistic Expectations of Yourself and Your Children •

Your life cannot and will not operate the way it did before the loss, so don't expect everything to go smoothly, nor for you or your children to behave the way they once did. Until there is time for healing, everyone will be reacting and acting in unpredictable and often confusing ways. Let yourself and your children know that trauma does not have a quick cure.

I still believe that the best things I did to recover from the trauma were staying close to my family; staying busy with things I enjoyed doing; being with others who were caring, calming, and supportive; and giving a lot of my time and energy to the upbringing of my son. Though I was traumatized and hurting, I literally immersed myself in that role. Sometimes I think I just didn't know what else to do. Giving myself so fully to him and his welfare helped me find a purpose for living,



gave me a diversion from the trauma and grief, and was an investment that would pay great dividends.

Although I had to postpone many things in my own life until years later, the only thing I would do differently would be to have gotten professional help from the beginning and through the years that were so hard. Help is out there if you can recognize that you need it or want it. I thought a lot of what I was experiencing was just "normal," but what I didn't know was that I didn't have to suffer in silence about it. My friends got tired of my need to talk about the trauma long before I did, so I began to suppress too much and often drifted into unhealthy ways of coping to escape and ease the burden and pain.

Trauma recovery is a life-long process. Aspects of the trauma still surface from time to time even after all these years. But I know better how to cope with it when it does, and I know it is to be expected. I will never forget it, but I have learned to live with it and go on. New meanings have emerged, and my life has taken on a different view and direction. I have not escaped painful resurgences of the trauma, but I have learned to be gentle with myself when those times come. I continue to grow and learn. *

Information about helping your child heal from trauma will be featured in the next issue. You can also read Lisa's article, "Mother and Son, A Life and Legacy Together" online in *TAPS Magazine* archives.

About the Author



Lisa Hudson raised her son Will in the aftermath of the loss of her husband. She also went on to earn a master's degree in psychiatric and mental health nursing to add to a bachelor's degree in nursing. She was Board Certified as a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing in 1995 and had her own practice. She also became a licensed esthetician and certified life coach. She is now retired and enjoying her grandson while offering volunteer assistance to those suffering grief and loss, parenting issues, depression, and PTSD.

Vacations, Who Needs 'Em?

By Betsy Beard ☆ Surviving mother of Spc. Bradley Beard

When our son died, there were so many details and arrangements vying for attention I couldn't begin to comprehend all the changes that would follow. At some point in the next year or so, one of those changes surfaced: the way I felt about, planned for, and took vacations. Many survivors have found vacationing to be problematic, so as we head into the warmer months let's give some thought to the who, what, when, where, why, and how of vacationing.

Why?

In the early days, it may be difficult to consider going somewhere to have fun. For some survivors, it may be impossible to think of enjoying a vacation, even after many years. For others, it is a welcome respite from grief. How do we find a reason to travel again? Each of us will have a different approach.

For surviving fiancée Ellen Andrews, a vacation was helpful. "I chose a place I had never been before so I could be away from people asking questions and having that pitying look on their faces. I just needed to get away."

Allowing time for reflection was surviving mother Marcia Tomlinson's goal. "For two years I zipped myself into a fraud suit every day, putting on a face as someone in control,

marvelously strong, and totally put together," she said. "But I was a complete fraud." She wanted time away to re-think who she was now.

Honoring her hero's vision factored into surviving spouse Sarah Green's decisions. She wanted to travel to places they had never been able to visit, but had dreamed of. It allowed her to honor her husband, fulfill his vision of seeing other parts of the world, and to see the world for herself.

How?

Sometimes it's hard to figure out where to start. A first step could be taking a day trip or planning a weekend away. This affords you the option of returning to your comfort zone sooner. It also allows you a shorter time frame for attempting the new roles you may be assigned, particularly if you are a surviving spouse with young children.

There's a learning curve on how to travel when you are the sole event planner, security guard, and tour guide, according to surviving spouse Carole Hilton. Now ten years out from her loss, she enlists the aid of her children in planning vacations. "I try to encourage activities together whenever I can," she said. "Since they are involved in planning, they enjoy it also."

General guidelines that apply to other areas of processing your grief also apply to taking vacations. Be gentle with yourself. Give yourself extra time to accomplish goals. And allow yourself some down time and some time to grieve.

Who?

One of the first considerations is to plan who will accompany you on vacation. The only thing that is certain is that your deceased loved one will not be packing a bag or helping with the driving. Given that he or she can't be with you, it's important to consider whether you prefer to spend time alone, travel in a pre-arranged group, or visit a place together with family.

Will the vacation include young children? Is there another adult who can accompany you to help out? If you plan to include friends or extended family, it's a good idea to discuss the topic of your deceased loved one at the beginning of the time together. You need to let others know if it's a comfort or a hindrance to talk about him or her at this time.

Marcia spent some of her time with family two years after the loss of her son and reported that most of them enjoyed her visits, urging her to return. However, she said, "Some were uncomfortable with me



as I am now, and I doubt I'll be invited to return. It's interesting how that's now okay with me."

And what about grief? In those first few months and years, it somehow manages to travel with us, regardless of who else is on the vacation. It might be wise to plan and pack for it: an extra box of tissues, chocolate, reading material, and journaling supplies.

What?

Once you decide who will be participating in the vacation, you can move forward in deciding what you want to do. You may find comfort and connection in doing something your loved one would have enjoyed. Or you might want to try something entirely different, knowing that your loved one would likely want you to continue to enjoy life. You are, after all, his or her legacy.

Janet, surviving mother of Steven, said, "After his death, I planned the vacation of a lifetime for my granddaughter, daughter, and myself: a seven-day Disney cruise in his memory. It brought back happy memories of his visits to Disneyland as a child."

Marcia found purpose in volunteering. From her starting point at the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar in Virginia, she branched out and attended community suppers, stuffed food bags for

the homeless, and talked to seniors on park benches, all while permitting herself "to remain exposed emotionally, encouraging feelings to enter."

When?

There is no correct answer for when you will be ready to vacation again. Keep in mind, though, that no matter how soon you go or how long you wait, it will be another "first." Survivors vary greatly in feeling that the time is right, so you are your own best judge of when you are ready.

Carole said, "The first year or so after my husband died, I discovered that vacations and time off from school created a lot of anxiety." Her children were very young at the time and she didn't like to have unscheduled time for them.

Sarah shared that on the first anniversary of her husband's death, she took the kids to the beach to learn to surf. "I didn't want my kids to think I was disrespecting their dad," she wrote. "But I explained that their dad would want us to get out there, enjoy life, and do new things. It would be a way to honor him." You can read about it in Sarah Greene's blog by going to www.taps.org and clicking on the Survivor Stories tab.

Where?

Whether we go to new uncharted territory or revisit places we enjoyed with our loved ones is something only we can determine for ourselves. Some feel they can't put themselves through the pain of visiting a place they had enjoyed in the past. Others are comforted by it, knowing their loved ones once walked that same ground. Still others blend the two ideas.

The Lanes haven't been back to the same place they took their son and daughter when they were younger, but surviving mom Carol said they still go to the beach. It's a different location, now, chosen by their daughter.

The McLendons have decided to explore America. "Last year we took a trip to the East coast and explored several hundred

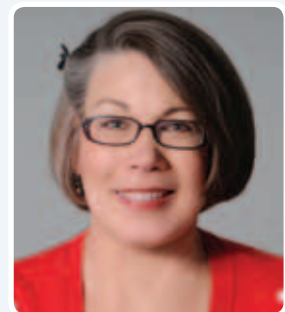
miles of Atlantic coast," said surviving mom Mary-Ann. They plan on doing the same thing this year, but in a different part of the country.

TAPS Seminars and Retreats

After Brad died, the idea of enjoying anything was beyond my ability for a long time. And I didn't feel safe traveling to places where no one would understand us. Our only travel plans in those first years were to attend military memorial events or participate in the annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar. Later, as TAPS introduced regional seminars and therapeutic retreats, we attended those as well, knowing we would be in good company, travel to new and different places, try something new, enjoy the benefits of outdoor activities, and get a new perspective on life and grief in our time away from home.

Whether you are just starting out on your grief journey or are years past the date of the death, attending TAPS events may be just what you need this year. Check out the calendar of TAPS events on pages 18 and 19 to get started. *

About the Author



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



Helping a Grandparent Who Is Grieving

By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

"When a grandchild dies, grandparents grieve twice. They mourn the loss of the child and they feel the pain of their own child's suffering. Sometimes we forget about the grandparents when a child dies. You can help by not forgetting, by offering the grandparents your love, support and presence in the weeks and months to come." ~ From *Healing a Grandparent's Grieving Heart* by Alan Wolfelt

A child or young adult has died. Everyone who loved the child is now faced with mourning this tragic, untimely death. The child's parents are heartbroken. But what about the grandparents? How might they be feeling? How can you help them with their unique grief?

This article will guide you in ways to turn your concern for the grandparents into positive action.

When someone loved dies, we all ponder the meaning of life and death. When a child or young adult dies, this search for meaning can be especially painful.

Realize That a Grandparent's Grief is Unique

When a grandchild dies, the grandparent often mourns the death on many levels. The grandparent probably loved the child dearly and may have been very close to him or her. The death has created a hole in the grandparent's life that cannot be filled by anyone else. Grandparents who were not close to the child who died, perhaps because they lived far away, may instead mourn the loss of a relationship they never had.

Grieving grandparents are also faced with witnessing their child—the parent of the child who died—mourn the death. A parent's love for a child is perhaps the strongest of all human bonds. For the parents of the child who died, the pain of grief may seem intolerable. For the grand-

parents, watching their own child suffer so and feeling powerless to take away the hurt can feel almost as intolerable.

Acknowledge the Grandparent's Search for Meaning

When someone loved dies, we all ponder the meaning of life and death. When a child or young adult dies, this search for meaning can be especially painful. Young people aren't supposed to die. The death violates the natural order of life and seems terribly unfair.

For grandparents, who may have lived long, rich lives already, the struggle to understand the death may bring about feelings of guilt. "Why didn't God take me, instead?" the grandparent may ask himself. "Why couldn't it have been me?"

Such feelings are both normal and necessary. You can help by encouraging the grandparent to talk about them.

Respect Faith and Spirituality

Many people develop strong commitments to faith and spirituality as they get older. If you allow them, grieving grandparents will "teach you" about the role of faith and spirituality in their lives. Encourage them to express their faith if doing so helps them heal in grief.

Sometimes, however, faith can naturally complicate healing. The grandparent may feel angry at God for "taking" the grandchild. He then may feel guilty about his anger, because, he may reason, God is not to be questioned. Or the grandparent may struggle with feelings of doubt about God's plan or the afterlife.

Talking with a pastor may help the grandparent, as long as the pastor allows the grandparent to honestly express her feelings of anger, guilt, and sadness. No one should tell a grandparent that she shouldn't grieve because the child has gone





Give the grandparent permission to express her feelings without fear of criticism. Learn from the grandparent; don't instruct or set expectations about how she should respond.

Allow the grandparent to experience all the hurt, sorrow and pain that he is feeling at the time. Enter into his feelings, but never try to take them away. And recognize that tears are a natural and appropriate expression of the pain associated with the death.

not forgotten this important child whom the grandparent loved and misses so much.

Be Aware of Holidays and Other Significant Days

The grandparent may have a difficult time during special occasions like holidays and other significant days, such as the child's birthday and the anniversary of the death. These events emphasize the child's absence. Respect this pain as a natural extension of the grief process.

These are appropriate times to visit the grandparents or write a note or simply give them a quick phone call. Your ongoing support will be appreciated and healing. ★

to heaven; mourning and having faith are not mutually exclusive.

Listen with Your Heart

You can begin to help by simply listening. Your physical presence and desire to listen without judging are critical helping tools. Don't worry so much about what you will say. Just concentrate on the words that are being shared with you.

The grieving grandparent may want to share the same story about the death over and over again. It's as if talking about the death makes it a little more bearable each time. Listen attentively. Realize that this repetition is part of the grandparent's healing process. Simply listen and try to understand.

Sometimes grandparents, especially grandfathers, don't want to talk about the death. They may have been raised to believe that talking about feelings is frivolous or selfish or unmanly. It's okay; they don't have to talk. Simply spending time with them demonstrates your love and concern.

Be Compassionate

Give the grandparent permission to express her feelings without fear of criticism. Learn from the grandparent; don't instruct or set expectations about how she should respond. Never say, "I know just how you feel." You don't. Think about your helper role as someone who "walks with" not "behind" or "in front of" the grieving grandparent.

Avoid Clichés

Words, particularly clichés, can be extremely painful for a grieving grandparent. Clichés are trite comments often intended to provide simple solutions to difficult realities. Grandparents are often told, "God needed another angel in heaven" or "Don't worry, John and Susie can have another child" or "You have to be strong for your child." Comments like these are not constructive. Instead, they hurt because they diminish the very real and very painful loss of a unique child.

Offer Practical Help

Preparing food, washing clothes, and cleaning the house are just a few of the practical ways of showing you care. And, just as with your presence, this support is needed at the time of the death as well as in the weeks and months ahead.

Write a Personal Note

Sympathy cards express your concern, but there is no substitute for your personal written words. What do you say? Share a favorite memory of the child who died. Relate the special qualities that you valued in him or her. These words will be a loving gift to the grandparent, words that will be reread and remembered always.

Use the name of the child who died in your personal note and in talking to the grandparent. Hearing that name can be comforting, and it confirms that you have

About the Author



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

Love, Loss, and Legacy

Finding Hope Among Military Survivors

By Don Lipstein ☆ TAPS Peer Mentor Support and Training Coordinator

In some ways March 15, 2011, seems like yesterday and in others it feels like an eternity ago. That was the day my life turned upside down. I was completely helpless as my oldest son Joshua, 250 miles away from me, hung the phone up before he took his own life. That moment in time is seared into my memory forever. Somehow I just knew that he was gone, but I dialed 911 anyway.

Once a very proud Petty Officer 2nd Class Riverine Squadron member with high aspirations, Josh had suddenly lost command of his hopes and dreams. Events over which he had little control seemed to blind him to all the good that surrounded him. His pride got in the way of allowing him to get the help he desperately needed.

Several days later, and after official notification of Josh's death, I began to plan his eulogy. In the darkness of my living room, I sat there wondering what had happened to my family. How were we going to be able to live the rest of our lives? We were dealing with a double loss within one month: my ex-wife's death from cancer and Josh's suicide. How could I take away the pain my remaining children felt? What about my own pain? Who in the world could possibly understand what we were dealing with? Who could help me understand how my son was brave enough to serve our country as well as he did, but was unable to face his own demons?

After one long and sleepless night, as the morning light began to fill the room and my mind was racing to nowhere, a thought flashed over me. It was a thought that blazed in among all of the negative emotions going on. It was a powerful thought, and I believe it was Josh's way of commu-

nicating with me. I don't remember much about that time, but I clearly remember that. Josh wanted us to find a way to turn his tragic death into something positive. Was there a way to honor his life instead of focusing on how he died?

end, and it wasn't long before she encouraged me to attend the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar in Colorado Springs. I had been to a few support groups already and had found them uncomfortable, so I needed convincing that this would be different.



The red folder our casualty assistance officer left for us the day after Josh's death caught my eye. I started picking up the various brochures and putting them down in a mindless sort of way. None of it was making sense to me—not until I picked up one with TAPS on the front. "For the loved ones of those who served and died," it said. I turned it over, and there it was, the answer to my earlier question: Remember the love. Celebrate the life. Share the journey. This totally resonated with me, and I knew I had to make the call.

I went to the website, and shortly afterward dialed 800-959-TAPS. I immediately felt a connection with the person on the other

After expressing my fears, and although no promises were made, I was assured of a remarkable experience. I thought about the bravery it took my son to go into a war zone. If I couldn't summon the courage on my own, I would find what I needed through my memory of him.

Six months after I had initially thought I was completely alone, I attended the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and found myself surrounded by more than 300 other survivors of suicide loss. I had never felt so much love, compassion, hope, and healing in one place. I was grateful to have been led to this haven.

The Peer Mentor Program is the heart of the TAPS mission. I'm proud to say I have found meaning in the loss by being a part of this vital program.

The journey began to move forward from that point on, and I was able to learn what it meant to be a TAPS Peer Mentor. As survivors, we are all mentoring each other in one way or another. "Survivors helping survivors heal" is the magic of TAPS. We are able to connect with each other in a way that others could never understand.

But how do we know we are being the best support we can be? What do we know about grief other than our own experience?

It wasn't until I went through the TAPS Peer Mentor Training that it dawned on me. Each of us experiences grief in a very personal way, and although there are similarities in many of our stories, there are just as many differences. Through the training I realized I would never be an expert on grief. Mentoring is not about teaching; it's about listening and learning. It isn't

about having the answers; it's about sharing the journey. One of my mentors, Darcie Sims, used to say, "Your presence is the greatest gift you can offer someone else."

After the training, I felt confident in my ability to restore hope in other actively grieving survivors without causing them additional pain. TAPS has allowed me to remember the love I shared with Josh, celebrate his life, and share the journey with my new TAPS family.

The Peer Mentor Program is the heart of the TAPS mission. I'm proud to say I have found meaning in the loss by being a part of this vital program. I will always love and miss my Joshua, but his legacy will be here forever, especially with the connections I have made. *

THE TAPS PEER MENTOR PROGRAM

The TAPS Peer Mentor Program connects adult survivors with other adult survivors who have lost a loved one serving in the Armed Forces. If you feel that you could benefit from additional support, please request a peer mentor. If you feel you are ready to support others in their grief, consider becoming a peer mentor.

Classroom training will be held at the National Military Survivor Seminar in Washington, D.C., on May 21, 2015. If you are unable to attend, please check online for a list of upcoming interactive web-based trainings.

Request a Peer Mentor

A TAPS Peer Mentor is a person who has experienced a similar loss, is at least 18 months past their loss, and has been trained in how to companion someone else who is grieving. When you request a mentor you are connected one-on-one with another survivor, someone who understands and cares. A mentor is not a mental health professional, but someone who shares your experience of loss. You can connect by phone, email, or in person for as long as you need their support.

Become a Peer Mentor

If you are an adult survivor at least eighteen months beyond the loss of your loved one and are ready to listen to another's grief story without focusing on your own grief, please consider becoming a TAPS Peer Mentor. Training consists of an online written training module and exam, which you can complete at your own pace, followed by a live interactive web-based training (or in-person classroom training at a national seminar). Join with others at TAPS who are part of the circle of love, understanding, and hope.

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For more information
call 800-959-TAPS,
visit www.taps.org/peermentors,
or email peermentors@taps.org.
.....



Don Lipstein presents training certificates to new TAPS peer mentors.

The Myth of Divorce Following the Death of a Child

By Stephanie Frogge, MTS

Experts on grief and loss often present the “myths of mourning” as a way of challenging commonly held beliefs and giving the bereaved more realistic and accurate information. We’ve all heard some of the myths, and you probably have a few you would add to this list:

- Talking about the deceased only prolongs the grieving.
- Children don’t grieve.
- Time heals.
- Grieving follows orderly and predictable stages.
- It’s best to put the past behind you and get on with your life.

Despite a wealth of research to aid in our understanding, few bereaved people escape the influence of some of these myths. For many survivors, the coping talisman in the face of misinformation is simply thinking, “They have no idea; they’ve never experienced anything even remotely like this.”

Harder to deal with, however, are the myths perpetuated by those who should know better, including professional caregivers. When it is our own grief counselor who advises us to stop visiting the grave, or our own support group leader who implies that we’ve been crying too much, our internal myth detector might be slower to respond.

One particularly frightening myth about parental bereavement is the myth that suggests that a high percentage of parents divorce after the death of a child. It is hard to imagine a more painful prediction following the death of a child than



the suggestion that one’s marriage is also at risk. Yet countless married survivors have been exposed to this myth in some form.

Myth Origins

Like many myths, nestled inside is a tiny kernel of information that snowballed into its current, unrecognizable form. One of the earliest books on grief and loss, groundbreaking at the time, was *The Bereaved Parent* by Harriet Schiff, published in 1977. It was the first of its kind, and bereaved parents everywhere found solace in the words of a woman who was also on the grief journey following the death of her ten-year-old son. Schiff was not a mental health professional, but a former reporter, able to articulate the perspective of a bereaved parent.

In the book’s chapter entitled “Bereavement and Marriage,” Schiff writes, “In fact, some studies estimate that as high as 90% of all bereaved couples are in serious marital

One particularly frightening myth about parental bereavement is the myth that suggests that a high percentage of parents divorce after the death of a child.

difficulty within months after the death of their child.” Schiff doesn’t cite her sources, and subsequent analyses of the bereavement research of that time do not clearly indicate where that opinion might have originated. Yet somehow this relatively innocuous statement about marital strain became a divorce “fact.” People began to perpetuate the notion that 90% of all marriages end in divorce following the death of a child.

Some subsequent references attributed this so-called fact to a 1985 article by Dr. Therese Rando published in *Social Work* magazine. Although the article provides one of the earliest scholarly examinations of the ways the death of a child can strain a marriage, the author makes no predictions of divorce; in fact, the word *divorce* does not even appear in the article.

Some of the momentum of the divorce myth may be explained by a look at the culture of the time in which it began. The 1960s were characterized by a tendency toward challenging authority and breaking rules. Divorce rates skyrocketed in almost a single generation, peaking in 1981. Schiff’s observation about how a child’s death impacted marriage may have been seen by some as further evidence that the whole institution of marriage was crumbling.

Grief experts challenged the myth but there was little empirical evidence to help refute it. The impact of a child’s death simply hadn’t been studied to any significant degree. And on a personal micro level it’s hard to challenge the myth when the devastation of the loss is, in itself, an isolating factor and creates a strain on one’s own marriage.

But on a macro level, as difficult as the death of a child is, research has not found a link between parental bereavement and increased divorce rates. This is particularly significant in light of studies that suggest that the loss of an adult child results in more intense grief than the loss of any other family member. Given the intensity of grief following the death of a child, conventional wisdom would certainly suggest higher rates of divorce, another reason, perhaps, for the myth's durability.

Bereavement Research

In her review of the literature in 1998, Dr. Reiko Schwab, professor emeritus at Old Dominion University, found no evidence of higher divorce rates among bereaved parents. In fact, she noted relatively lower rates of divorce, less than 20%, which coincided with her own observations as a grief support group facilitator for bereaved parents.

A more extensive examination of existing data was presented in a paper published in *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* in 2003. The authors noted that only two out of more than 100 papers found evidence of higher divorce rates among bereaved parents. Other researchers have questioned the validity of the findings of those two studies, noting significant methodology problems.

In a 2006 study commissioned by The Compassionate Friends, parental divorce following the death of a child was found to be around 16%. The findings were

As terrible as it is, the death of a child serves as a shared trauma experience, which can have the effect of bringing a couple closer together.

consistent with an earlier study conducted by the group that showed equally low divorce rates among bereaved parents. Interestingly, less than half of those who were divorced following the death of their child felt that the death had contributed to the disintegration of the marriage.

Staying Together

In the paper on parental bereavement published in *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* in 2003, the authors take note of four contributing factors to marital stress: gender differences in grieving styles, quality of marriage prior to the child's death, cause and circumstances of death, and displacement of anger and blame onto the spouse. Experts agree that maintaining the ability to tolerate a partner's grieving style, keeping open lines of communication, developing a support system beyond that of one's partner, and making a commitment to remaining married in spite of the stress all contribute to marital survival.

It's hard to imagine that something as devastating as the loss of a child can have any consequences that are remotely positive. And it should be noted that there is, in fact, nothing positive about the death itself. But against all odds, some parents have experienced a deepening of their marital

relationship. It is important to acknowledge that any positive effects stem from the actual struggle to cope with the tragedy and its aftermath, and not from the loss itself. The necessity of coping with the

tragedy is what creates a new normal. And it is the struggle itself that forces parents to survive and brings about any positive changes, whether it is courage to persist in living, a deeper compassion for others, or a genuine desire to help others.

As terrible as it is, the death of a child serves as a shared trauma experience, which can have the effect of bringing a couple closer together. As one survivor noted, "It took a lot of work but we ended up bonding more. It was a choice that we made, plain and simple. We would not let the death tear us apart. We talked with other parents and learned that we had to grieve in our own time and our own way, not someone else telling us to just get over it." *

About the Author



Stephanie Frogge holds a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Texas Christian University and a master's in Theological Studies from Brite Divinity School. She is the assistant director of the Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue at The University of Texas at Austin. With more than thirty years of experience in the area of trauma response, Stephanie is the former National Director of Victim Services at Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and served two years as the Director of Peer Support Services for TAPS.





2015 Calendar of Survivor Events

MARCH

- ★ Alaska Widows Retreat



- ★ San Antonio Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
- ★ Charleston Moms Retreat

MAY

- ★ 2015 National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp



JULY

- ★ Men's Wilderness Retreat
- ★ New England Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
- ★ Tennessee Good Grief Camp Out
- ★ Southern California Parents Retreat
- ★ Southern California Siblings Retreat
- ★ Southern California Good Grief Camp Out

JUNE

- ★ Asheville Adult Children Retreat
- ★ Widows Empowerment Retreat
- ★ All Populations Wilderness Retreat
- ★ Green Bay/Chicago Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
- ★ Texas Good Grief Camp Out

APRIL

- ★ Asheville Siblings Retreat
- ★ Fort Campbell Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
- ★ Arizona Widows Empowerment Retreat
- ★ Austin Parents Retreat



SEPTEMBER

- ★ Norfolk Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
- ★ Camp Pendleton Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
- ★ All Populations Wilderness Retreat
- ★ Widows and Children Family Camp Out
- ★ Boston Widows Retreat



NOVEMBER

- ★ Women's Retreat
- ★ Charleston Moms Retreat
- ★ Camp LeJeune Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp



AUGUST

- ★ Joint Base Lewis McChord Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
- ★ Alaska Adult Children Retreat
- ★ Montana Men's Retreat
- ★ Colorado Good Grief Camp Out



OCTOBER

- ★ National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
- ★ Tennessee Parents Retreat



DECEMBER

- ★ Fort Benning Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp
- ★ Phoenix Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp



For dates and availability of these events, please visit www.taps.org and click on the Survivor Events tab.

Is Suicide a Choice?

By Kim Ruocco, MSW

There are so many questions following a death by suicide. How could this happen? Why did this happen? Why didn't I see it? Why didn't I do something? Why didn't the military do more?

When my husband died by suicide in 2005, I asked myself all these questions and many more. But the most painful question, by far, was: why did he choose to leave us?

I agonized over the thought that the man I had known and loved for twenty-three years chose to leave our two beautiful boys and me. I felt his death was a rejection of his life with us. I couldn't understand why our immense love for him wasn't enough to keep him alive. I was desperate to answer this question. During the day, I would search for answers by researching, talking to anyone who might know the answer. At night, I would have nightmares about him walking away from us. I felt tortured by the thought that he could choose to leave us.

After much effort, I began to gain understanding and relief, having spoken to many survivors of suicide attempts as well as survivors of suicide loss. Long-time friend of TAPS, LaRita Archibald, addresses this question in her book *Finding Peace*

Without All the Pieces. It helped me better understand the suicidal mind and shift my thinking from "it's all about us" to "it's mostly about him."

In the book, LaRita references Edwin Shneidman's *The Suicidal Mind*, in which he defines the commonalities of suicide. He points out that the common purpose of suicide is to seek a solution to a problem. The common goal of suicide is to end pain, not necessarily to die. He asks, "Is suicide a choice? Or did the individual who ended

After much effort, I began to gain understanding and relief, having spoken to many survivors of suicide attempts as well as survivors of suicide loss.

his or her life believe, at that time, there was no other way to find relief from the pain? Was it their choice to be gone from this life, and their loved ones, or was it an act born of a desperate need to be free of emotional pain, pain they perceived as endless, unrelenting, and permanent? Pain that was so overwhelming and persistent they were blinded to other options?"

LaRita adds, "Following my son's suicide I was greatly conflicted over the issue of choice. It was beyond my comprehension that this cherished young man, who loved his family and appeared to love living, would choose to leave us by deliberately ending his own life. His 'choice' was contrary to everything he had been taught and that we thought he believed. It was not until I began to study the vast variability of human behavior, and especially suicide, that I had an inkling of how difficult and painful that 'choice' had been for him."

LaRita continues, "At a suicidology conference a number of years ago I made the acquaintance of a young man who had attempted to end his consciousness in order to stop unendurable pain. He eloquently articulated the pain of living; of going through the motions every day, trying to keep at bay the overwhelming pain he felt. As the pain of living grew more intense and his future seemed more hopeless, he planned how he could end his life. One morning he awoke with a greater sense of dread and hopelessness than ever before. He opened his pill stash and swallowed one handful after another. His life was saved when his brother stopped to wish their mother a Happy Mother's Day and found him. As a result, depression was



diagnosed, treatment begun, and his sense of well-being eventually restored. He had come to tell others of his choice, his near death, and his revived love of life. When I asked him why he had chosen Mother's Day of all days he answered, 'I was totally oblivious to what day it was when I swallowed those pills. I just knew I could not face another hour of living with my pain.' He realized that had he died that day his mother might have forever perceived his death as a message of complete rejection."

This excerpt from *Finding Peace Without All the Pieces* was supported by information I gained from others who had attempted suicide. One of the most pivotal moments of my own grief journey was hearing Kevin Hines talk about his suicide attempt. Kevin described a depression and emotional pain that was all-consuming and so intense that he could not think of anything but ending the pain. He expressed unwavering love for his parents and girlfriend but admitted that in that brief moment he could not even think of them or the pain he would inflict, should he end his life. In fact he had convinced himself that they would be better off without him. His ability to think of any other escape was also absent. He went on to say that he alone knew the extent of the hopelessness and helplessness that he felt.

As Kevin spoke, I felt a wave of calmness and understanding that I had not felt in years. I began to accept that my husband did love us. He chose to end his pain in a moment when his thinking was clouded and narrow. His pain was great at the same time that his ability to see other options was blocked. He did not choose to leave us; he just could not see another way out of his darkness. Like Kevin, he must have convinced himself that we would be better off without him. It was the only thing that made sense to me.

Although it is so hard to imagine the suffering and pain of our loved ones, it does help to understand their state of mind at the time of their death. We can never fully understand the depth of their despair, but we can find comfort in knowing that they were most likely trying to end pain—

not their life or their relationship with us. It also helps to know that a "suicidal mind" is not a mind that is logical. Most survivors of suicide attempts look back at that moment and say things like "I had tunnel vision" or "I just couldn't see any other way."

We cannot bring back our loved one, but we can learn from our experiences and move forward with more information about preventing further losses in our families. If you or a family member are having thoughts of hopelessness or helplessness and having thoughts of suicide, get help. Don't continue to suffer day after day. Don't wait until the day is so dark that you lose hope. *

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 The National Veterans Crisis Line (800-273-8255) is available 24/7 to TAPS survivors. It is confidential and can connect you with local resources. The TAPS helpline (800-959-8277) is available for peer-based grief support.

About the Author



Kim Ruocco has been a social worker for more than twenty years, providing mental health services in various settings both in the military and civilian communities. She came to TAPS following the suicide of her husband in 2005 and is now the director of Suicide Postvention Programs and Special Programs for the organization. In this capacity, with professional skill and personal dedication, Kim provides suicide prevention and postvention programs to military families and personnel throughout the country.



2015 National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar

★ October 9–11, 2015 ★

Cheyenne Mountain Resort
 Colorado Springs

If you are grieving the suicide death of your service member, please consider joining us in the fall at our annual National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar. You will be surrounded by love, acceptance, and understanding as we walk alongside each other in our grief journeys. Here's what a few survivors had to say about the 2014 Seminar:

★ ★ ★

Simply loved feeling safe...

★ ★ ★

What an emotionally, healing, supportive, hopeful environment. I found strength among the other families.

★ ★ ★

I spent about half the time crying tears that were locked up and the other half feeling good, refreshed and ready to continue healing.

★ ★ ★

We hugged, cried, smiled, shared memories, crammed ourselves into a photo booth way beyond capacity, and wrote songs of our heroes. We shared our pain, memories, love, and strength with each other. That's family: we are forever intertwined with each other, always there for each other.

★ ★ ★

Registration for this event will open in late spring. Watch the Calendar of Events on www.taps.org for more information.

Hold My Hand

By Carol Lane ☆ Surviving mother of Sgt. Bryon Lane



*Hold my hand
When darkness comes
In those times I feel alone.
Grief is an unexpected gloom,
But look...what's that I see?*



*A light is shining through the dimness
Like a lighthouse beacon.
Others who have known such loss
Are reaching through the darkness.*



*Coming toward me as I stumble,
Giving me support,
Showing the way to a different place
Where love is not forgotten.*



*Healing through their gentle touch
Together we can make it.
They have come to
Light the way...
And hold my hand.*



You are cordially invited to attend



21ST NATIONAL

**MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR &
GOOD GRIEF CAMP FOR YOUNG SURVIVORS**

★ MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND ★

May 22 to 25, 2015

Washington, D.C.

*Join us for a weekend of hope and courage in
an atmosphere of understanding and support.
Share the journey as we honor our loved ones.*

Remember the Love ★ Celebrate the Life ★ Share the Journey

2015 National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Join us as we *Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey.*

Since our first national seminar in 1995, TAPS has welcomed all those who are grieving the loss of a loved one who died while serving in the Armed Forces, providing a full weekend of events for adults and children. Whether you are new to TAPS or have been part of the family for many years, you'll have the opportunity to make connections with other survivors, learn new coping skills, participate in healing activities, and honor your loved one. There is also plenty of free time for relaxing and visiting with your newfound friends.

If this is your first year to attend our national event, be assured that we want you to feel comfortable and supported. Special groups for newcomers will meet on Friday, giving you a chance to get to know others who are starting their own grief journeys.

All our activities—whether they are workshops, sharing groups, offsite activities, or special evening events—are structured to provide resources and information to help you continue to heal. Nationally known grief experts will be on hand to provide

support and training. Equally important, you will be connecting with other survivors, all walking a similar journey through grief. The four-day event begins with registration and opening sessions on Friday and ends Monday afternoon after attending the Memorial Day Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery or the National Memorial Day Parade.

Start planning now to join us for a powerful and life-affirming weekend of support, care, and hope. Whether this is your first TAPS event 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.



★ REGISTRATION ★

Registration is now open and space is limited. Go to www.taps.org and click on the Survivor Events tab on the left side. Your registration fee assists TAPS in covering the cost of selected meals, workshop materials, TAPS shirt and tote bag, and ground transportation to all off-site events during the four-day conference. The registration fee for children attending the Good Grief Camp 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 memories of the weekend and the lasting connections with other survivors.



★ ACTIVITIES ★

PEER MENTOR TRAINING SURVIVOR CONNECTIONS

If you are eighteen months beyond your own loss and ready to be there for others, we offer a full day of training on Thursday, May 21, 2015. You will learn more about grief, gain basic helping skills, and become part of our TAPS Peer Mentor Team. Register for the peer mentor training as part of the general registration.

Small group settings offer gentle, supportive discussions that allow you a chance to share with others who are facing similar experiences. Some groups are topical discussions and some are reserved for specific relationships.

WORKSHOPS

Our topics meet you where you are in your grief and include topics such as understanding complicated grief; coping with new family dynamics; and special issues facing children, parents, siblings, and significant others. We also offer workshops that explore alternate methods of expressing grief through art, writing, music, meditation, and yoga.

BOOK DISCUSSIONS

Through the stories of others we can gain perspective, insight, and new compassion for our own stories. Join us, whether you have read the book or not, to learn more about others' journeys.

EXCURSIONS

Rock climbing, kayaking, walking the labyrinth, and guided tours of an art museum can be used as metaphors for our grief journey. Join us off-site as we explore active ways of learning coping skills for grief.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Special concerts, ceremonies, and tours in Washington, D.C., give you a chance to get out and experience our nation's capital. We have both traditional events (Marine Corps Evening Parade, Pentagon tour, Arlington National Cemetery) and new venues, so register early and keep checking the website.

GOOD GRIEF CAMP

TAPS Good Grief Camp is America's first established program for children and teens whose parent or sibling has died. In our unique model, children are paired with trained mentors who support them as they share, learn coping skills, and have fun in a place where they feel they belong. TAPS offers a parallel program, Honoring Heroes Camp, for children who may not need grief coping skills, but still are part of the military heritage. Because children grow and face different developmental stages, each with its own new challenges in the grief journey, children aged four to nineteen are encouraged to attend. Childcare is offered for children three years old and under.

SURVIVOR SANCTUARY

The Survivor Sanctuary, set aside as a quiet place for adults, is a retreat for sitting, reflecting, and processing—a space to take a break and draw apart for a time. It opens each morning with a time of meditation and closes with vespers in the evening.

2015 National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Start planning now to attend TAPS 21st National Military Survivor Seminar. Online registration is open, and space is limited. Go to www.taps.org and click on the Survivor Events tab on the left side. Then select the National Military Survivor Seminar for the link to registration.

★ LOGISTICS ★

- All events and workshops for the 2015 seminar take place in (or depart from) the comfortable and inviting Crystal Gateway Marriott on Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington, Virginia. Additional rooms will be available at the adjacent Crystal City Marriott, which is connected by an underground walkway.
- Both hotels offer complimentary airport shuttle service to Ronald Reagan National Airport. (Flights into Dulles or BWI require transportation by taxi, train, or SuperShuttle with fares ranging from \$45 to \$70.)
- Each hotel offers an on-site restaurant in addition to a fitness center, indoor 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.
- To make your hotel reservation, visit the seminar webpage at www.taps.org to get our special conference rate of \$129 per night. The last day you can register for the seminar and reserve a room is Tuesday, April 28, 2015.
- For information about free airfare through Fisher House Foundation's Hero Miles program, please check the seminar information pages on the TAPS website. The last day to apply for Hero Miles is Friday, March 13, 2015.
- Events begin with check-in on Friday, so plan to arrive by 9:00 a.m. on Friday, May 22. Departure should be scheduled two hours after the end of the event you attend on Monday, May 25, to allow for our return from the event. For example, if you attend the ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, schedule your travel after 3:00 p.m. since the event ends at 1:00 p.m. Our last scheduled event is Monday evening.
- The seminar registration fee of \$195 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 \$75 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 or email scholarships@taps.org for more information. The deadline to request a scholarship is Tuesday, April 28, 2015.



Spotlight on Service

★ Maria Elena Bancroft ★

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

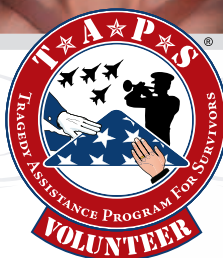
Recuerda el amor, Celebra la vida. Comparte el viaje. Remember the love. Celebrate the life. Share the journey. Our TAPS motto crosses both cultural and language barriers with the help of volunteer Maria Elena Bancroft.

Maria Elena lost her husband U.S. Marine Corps Captain Matthew Bancroft thirteen years ago, and eight years later found TAPS to join her on the journey through grief. Two years ago, Maria Elena began volunteering, using her unique talents and skills to benefit others. As an outreach volunteer for the TAPS Survivor Care Team, Maria Elena has made calls to families whose native language is not English.

Maria Elena's proficiency in Spanish was recognized nearly two years ago at the Camp Pendleton Regional Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp and she was asked to assist the TAPS Survivor Care Team.

Maria Elena conducts outreach to surviving families, explaining the TAPS mission, history, and programs. She then assesses their needs based on the level of care and support they have received from their casualty assistance officer. Ultimately, she makes the connections between the family and the specific services they need from TAPS in order to continue their grief journey with healing. Maria Elena said that being able to give back is what drives her efforts. Although she sees her part as a small piece of the TAPS mission, Maria Elena is making a big difference for families grieving the loss of their fallen heroes.

TAPS has made a big difference on Maria Elena as well; she has felt the hope and healing. Maria Elena has witnessed her



Muchas gracias, Maria Elena

daughter Maddie attending Good Grief Camps and opening up to other children in similar situations. Seeing her daughter enjoy being with the TAPS family and getting so much out of it has been motivating for Maria Elena.

"While she's private about things, she expresses feelings about her father in the Good Grief Camp," Maria Elena said. "That's huge." Maddie, now thirteen years old, was only eight months old at the time of her father's death. Maria Elena

has been able to navigate the turbulent times, but understands it's not the same for Maddie at such a young age. She is grateful for the impact TAPS has had on their family.

Maria Elena thoroughly enjoys her volunteer experience, knowing it certainly isn't for the faint of heart. It takes someone special to make these tough phone calls. It must be something you're drawn to and feel passionate about doing. "You've got to *want* to do it," Maria Elena said.

Thinking of her own grief and knowing that the families she reaches out to still have the hardest days ahead of them can be difficult. "You know it's a hard time," she said, "and it's so recent." It's a gift to families that Maria Elena is so close to the TAPS mission. She can empathize with and understand those grieving the loss of a fallen hero in a way many others simply cannot.

Maria Elena has touched the lives of many hurting families—some that may not have received an understanding of TAPS services if not for Maria Elena's volunteer work with the TAPS Survivor Care Team. Tom Brokaw once said, "It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference." Maria Elena Bancroft is doing just that, making a difference for each family she calls.

TAPS is thankful for the two years of service Maria Elena has so generously given and is certainly looking forward to the years ahead. ★

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

Eating to Live or Living to Eat? Personal Responses to Grief

By Victoria H. Hawk, MPH, RD, CDE

“How can I eat at a time like this?”

“It all just tastes like cardboard...”

“I don’t have the energy to plan a meal, let alone cook it.”

Throughout life, different circumstances will affect our ability to eat well. One of the first things we notice about grieving is that it affects our relationship with food. And since we all grieve differently, there is no one-size-fits-all grief response to eating. The only constant is that like so many other areas of our lives, it changed quickly and drastically when we received that knock on the door. We may lose our desire to eat entirely, or seek comfort from food and eat more than ever. Whatever the case may be, the grieving process provokes a stress response in the body that can put our health at risk.

Eating a variety of foods is essential to life. In other words, we need to eat to live.

Our bodies cannot manufacture all the substances we need and therefore we must consume foods to produce energy and to provide the building blocks necessary to sustain life. Eating foods with a range of nutrients such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and healthy fats provide our bodies with the materials needed to keep our systems functioning well.

We all know this, but our response to grief may make it difficult to eat or easy to overeat, difficult to plan meals or too focused on tasks like cooking. Often we choose foods that have little or no nutritional value, perhaps for comfort, or simply because they are available. During times of stress, it is helpful to adopt a routine pattern for meals, exercise, and sleep. Eating consistently will affect mood, energy level, and how clearly we think.

Here are some things to consider as you navigate your own grief journey.

Choosing Foods to Improve Your Mood

Some foods have a physiological response in the body and may improve your mood. Carbohydrates serve as the main source of energy for your body and the preferred fuel for your brain. Eating foods containing carbohydrates may improve your energy level and increase the amount of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter

shown to boost mood and improve sleep. However, not all carbohydrates are created equal and thus it is preferable to choose whole foods rather than refined or highly processed carbohydrates. The carbohydrates in whole foods are absorbed slowly, causing a gradual increase in serotonin levels, and promoting a stable blood sugar level. Whole foods that supply carbohydrates include fruits, starchy vegetables, whole wheat, whole oats, popcorn, beans, and brown rice.

Caffeine helps alertness chemicals in your brain do their job. Consuming moderate amounts of caffeine may help you feel more alert and improve your mood, concentration, and reaction time. But moderation is necessary, so be careful how much you drink. Too much caffeine can cause increased anxiety, nervousness, and difficulty sleeping. You may need to limit caffeinated beverages to the morning hours. Sources of caffeine include coffee, tea, energy drinks and many sodas, as well as some candy, chewing gum and coffee flavored foods. The amount of caffeine contained in different products can vary widely, so be sure to check the package label.

Limiting or Avoiding Foods That May Depress Your Mood

You may be familiar with the expressions “drowning your sorrows” or “drinking to forget” as they relate to using alcoholic beverages to cope with stressful situations.

One of the first things we notice about grieving is that it affects our relationship with food. And since we all grieve differently, there is no one-size-fits-all grief response to eating.



Although it may initially feel like a stimulant and mood enhancer, alcohol is a depressant and may substantially decrease the body's ability to extract nutrients from the food you eat, and make you feel worse the next day. Consider limiting or avoiding consumption of alcoholic beverages. If you are using alcohol as a sleep aid, think about speaking with your doctor about safer alternatives.

Eating Too Little

For some people a decrease in intake over a few days may not present any serious problems, but if your intake has decreased significantly and lasts more than a week, you may be at nutritional risk. In addition to the emotional stress response to grief, the decreased intake will invoke a stress response in your body that can negatively impact your health. After a few days of not eating enough, you will likely notice a decrease in your energy level and ability to think clearly, increased irritability, and possibly dehydration. If your intake remains inadequate over a longer period time it may weaken your immune system, increase your risk for several chronic diseases, and result in unplanned weight loss.

In situations when your intake of food and liquids has decreased you can monitor your hydration status by noticing increased thirst, headache, changes in color or volume of urine, and increased fatigue. If you notice these changes you may need to drink more liquids. Keep fluids available throughout the day, drink liquids with meals, and choose foods that have high water content such as clear soups, Jell-O, fruit, vegetables, and popsicles. Consider keeping a bottle of water with you during the day and aim to refill it often.

Over time, eating too little will result in unplanned weight loss. To promote weight maintenance, consume foods that are rich in calories and nutrients. Small quantities of these foods contain concentrated amounts of both calories and nutritious substances, so eating a little goes a long way. Choosing these foods can be helpful when you do not have much of an appetite. Some calorie and nutrient rich foods include commercial

liquid meal replacement shakes (e.g. Instant Breakfast, Ensure), peanut butter, cheese, and using whole milk instead of water for preparation of soups, puddings, or smoothies. If it is too difficult to eat three regular meals, consider eating four to six small, frequent meals during the day. Have nourishing foods available for snacking rather than candy or chips. These could include dried fruit, nuts, healthy snack bars, pudding, or yogurt. Keep your favorite foods on hand so that they are readily available. If after several weeks you are unable to maintain your weight, consider talking with your doctor.

Eating Too Much

You may have discovered that you could not eat in the immediate aftermath of the death, but that with time you are reaching early and often for comfort foods to take your mind off your sadness or loss. If you are gaining weight because of the grieving process, try to identify activities other than eating that can bring comfort, like listening to music, taking a walk, or writing in a journal.

When you do reach for food, it is helpful to have healthy, lower calorie food items available. Try stocking your kitchen with healthy foods such as low fat microwave popcorn, nonfat yogurt, fresh fruits, canned fruits packed in water or juice, sugar free jell-o or popsicles, and skim milk. Starting your day with a healthy breakfast of whole foods and proteins may help suppress hunger and control your intake throughout the rest of the day. If you have questions or concerns about your weight gain, speak with your doctor or consult a registered dietitian.

Preparing for the Difficult Days

Take into account that you will have good days and bad days during your grief journey. Planning ahead for healthy, appetizing meals on the bad days is essential.

- Have a supply of shelf-stable convenience foods on hand – items that are ready to eat with minimal preparation such as soups, frozen meals, and meal replacement shakes.



- Buy foods that are quick and easy to prepare – bagged pre-washed vegetables, frozen vegetables, packages of pre-cooked brown rice, pre-cooked grilled chicken breasts, canned tuna, eggs, canned beans, chicken broth, and whole grain pasta.
- Cook larger quantities of foods on good days and store some in the refrigerator or freezer for days when you are not able to cook.
- Freeze foods in small portions that are easy to reheat in the microwave oven.

As you grieve the loss of a loved one, remember the importance of taking care of yourself for your own health and for the sake of others who may be depending on you now and in the future. Be kind to yourself. Eating healthy foods and staying hydrated are important elements of your recovery, and will help prepare you to take steps toward better times in the days and months ahead. *

About the Author

Ms. Hawk earned her master's degree in nutrition from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). She worked as a clinical dietitian at the VA Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina, and then at UNC-CH with responsibilities in both clinic and health literacy research. She now works with the Salisbury VA Home Based Primary Care program that serves North Carolina veterans around Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and Hickory.

Healing a Grandparent's Grieving Heart

By Alan D. Wolfelt

Reviewed by Carol Flack ☆ Surviving grandmother of Spc. Bradley S. Beard

A grandparent's loss packs a double whammy. There is grief for your grandchild who died and grief for your child's devastating loss. But there's also the feeling that you must try to be strong for the sake of your child who is grieving. *Healing a Grandparent's Grieving Heart* by Alan Wolfelt is a book that addresses the special concerns of grandparents in the aftermath of their loss of a grandchild. It contains one hundred easy-to-read messages ranging from "Giving yourself permission to mourn" to "Embracing the ways you are growing through grief."

Wolfelt suggests writing down memories and, as a grandparent, I set out to do just that. I read through our letters and looked through pictures, which brought back many happy memories. Then I typed a sheet about Brad for each of the early years of his life. I went through the letters and photos several times and still do once in a while, even after ten years.

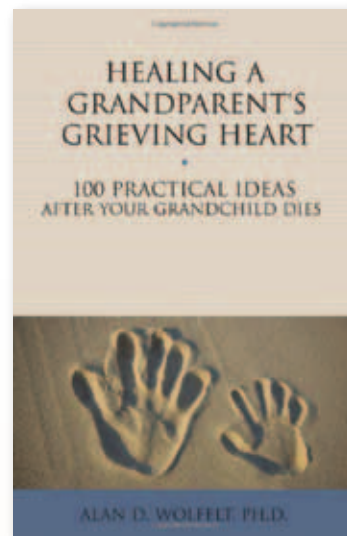
Bereaved grandparents often feel helpless to ease the pain of their child's bereavement.

Although not all of Wolfelt's points will hit home, there is a great deal of good common sense and many down to earth suggestions in this little book.

One of Wolfelt's messages was called, "Give Something Away." He wrote: "Now might be a good time to pare down your belongings. You probably don't need most of them anyhow and maybe someone else could put them to good use."

One of the best suggestions for me when we lost our grandson in Iraq ten years ago was to "adopt someone," reminding us that our hearts have the capacity to expand infinitely. I found a widowed neighbor who needed someone to talk to and I became that shoulder to cry on for her. It helped me to find something constructive to do when I felt so helpless in other areas.

In addition to contributing articles to each issue of *TAPS Magazine*, Wolfelt supports and writes for The Compassionate Friends, which is the largest organization of grieving



parents, grandparents, and siblings in the United States. Similar to the last portion of the TAPS motto, which encourages us to "Share the Journey," The Compassionate Friends credo tells us, "We need not walk alone." Reading a book like this helps us to feel that we are not alone; others have found coping strategies that can help us live with loss. ☆



Suggested reading from
the editor of *TAPS Magazine*

For Bereaved Grandparents

By Margaret H. Gerner

For Bereaved Grandparents is a booklet written by a bereaved grandparent and available from the Centering Corporation. It includes a short synopsis of some of the normal reactions to loss, including denial, shock, sleep problems, appetite changes, crying, anger, guilt, and inability to concentrate.

Gerner also includes a section on what you can do to help your grieving child

whose child has died. Encouraging talking, allowing crying, and listening to your bereaved child head the list. A section on how to listen is a valuable tool for the grieving grandparent. There is also a section specifically for grandfathers, many of whom were raised to be protective and self-sufficient.

A bereaved parent and grandparent herself, Gerner's suggestions come from her intimate knowledge of how it feels to lose a child to death as well as feeling so helpless when her own daughter lost a child.

Fifteen Years And Still Running Strong

It all started when Marie Campbell accepted a challenge from another TAPS widow, Lori Hunter, to run the Marine Corps Marathon (MCM) and raise funds for TAPS. Marie thought about how much TAPS had helped in her journey toward healing and realized this would be an opportunity to give back to an organization that had truly made a difference in her life.

On October 22, 2000, Lori and Marie completed the MCM and raised \$4,000 for TAPS. Marie recruited other runners, and in 2002, the team of eleven runners wore the first TAPS singlets—neon yellow with the names of those they were honoring on the back.

Team TAPS gained momentum over the next few years, adding the MCM



Marie and Lori, October 2000

10K and Healthy Kids Fun Run in 2004. It was also the first year TAPS started matching surviving families to runners who would run in memory of their fallen heroes.

Through the years, Team TAPS has grown to include more than 1,200 runners of every relationship, age, and experience. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been raised and events of all kinds are now included under the Team TAPS banner: Ironman competitions, triathlons, swimming, biking, walking, and tennis events. *

Team TAPS Growth

2005

Introduction of signature TAPS singlet

2007

First expo booth

2008

Army Ten Miler added to race roster

2010

Races throughout the United States added

2012

Charity partnership with Disney

2013

Air Force Marathon, Army Marathon, and Navy 5-Miler added

.....
Visit www.taps.org and click on Fund-raising Events to register and join the team. For more information write to teamtaps@taps.org.
.....



sports teams & athletes + families of the fallen = teams4taps

Many of us feel an affinity toward certain teams or professional athletes because of moments we shared with our loved ones who served. It was yet another connection that disappeared when they died. Together we had poured over stats, watched games, bought team apparel, and revered our favorite athletes.

What many of us may not realize is that scores of professional athletes, like us, honor and respect our fallen. Allowing the chance for surviving families to get together with their loved one's favorite team seemed like a great idea to Diana Hosford, TAPS Senior Advisor of Strategic Partnerships. So she set out in 2013 to create a program for TAPS that has been growing ever since: teams4taps.

Teams4taps connects families with professional sports teams, providing occasions for smiling, laughing, and creating once-in-a-lifetime moments. In addition to fostering meaningful memories, teams4taps raises funds and awareness while working with athletes, leagues, and sports associations. Through teams4taps, professional franchises and individual athletes support TAPS and thank our families for the sacrifice of their loved one in service to America.

At a recent teams4taps event, John Wall, point guard with the Washington Wizards of the National Basketball Association (NBA), said "I think they are excited to see us, but they don't understand we are more excited to meet them and thank them for their service and sacrifice."

Parents, children, spouses, siblings, fiancés, and all those grieving the loss of a loved one carry their heroes in their hearts. Connecting with the sports heroes of their loved one can add a new memory that brings healing.

Surviving sister Amber Park wrote of her experience with the NBA's Utah Jazz, "Anytime we get to do something in his honor, it makes us feel close to Brad. Thank you for allowing us to represent him in a public arena as part of the national anthem. Nothing seems more fitting than to celebrate my brother's life while honoring the very country he loved and served. I appreciate that my children will have yet another very happy memory to associate with their Uncle Brad." *



Robert Griffin III and the Redskins welcomed TAPS to Redskins Park. Families were later honored in front of 80,000 fans.



Thanks to the USTA, TAPS families met Maria Sharapova at the Western and Southern Open in Cincinnati, Ohio.



The Oakland Raiders hosted TAPS families as VIPs.



The NFL invited TAPS survivors to the 2015 Pro Bowl in Arizona.

TAPS kids with John Wall of the Wizards at the launch of the Courage campaign.



The Atlanta Braves welcomed TAPS families on Military Appreciation Night.



The Washington Capitals have been our biggest supporters to date, raising awareness and more than \$300,000 in donations, along with providing opportunities for TAPS survivors.



The San Diego Padres' Dave Roberts met with one of many TAPS families.



Send Us Your Story

We have received stories from survivors across the country who shared a sports connection with their loved one. They tell of children who cheered with their dads or moms for their favorite team and now wear their parent's jersey on game day; surviving brothers and sisters who shared the love of the game but cheered for opposing teams; surviving parents who bought jerseys, tickets, and memorabilia for their service members from an early age.

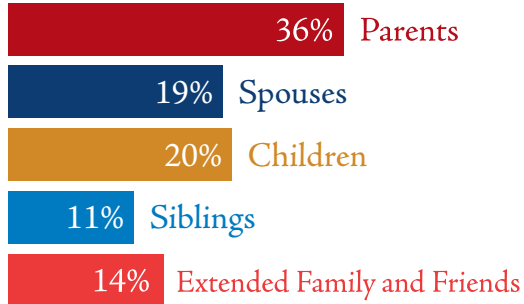
- The surviving child who will inherit his father's Redskins jersey, which accompanied him on his deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Okinawa, and is now packed away in a footlocker.
- The little girl who watched every grand slam tennis tournament with her dad until he died.
- The family of the Red Sox fan who was laid to rest on the day the Sox won the World Series.

These stories show the depth of connection through sports and often inspire the development of a new partnership for teams4taps. If you would like to share a story of your loved one's love of a particular sport or team, please email teams4taps@taps.org.

T*A*P*S[®] by the Numbers

★ WHO WE ARE

RELATIONSHIP to Our Loved One:



SERVICE BRANCH of Our Loved One:



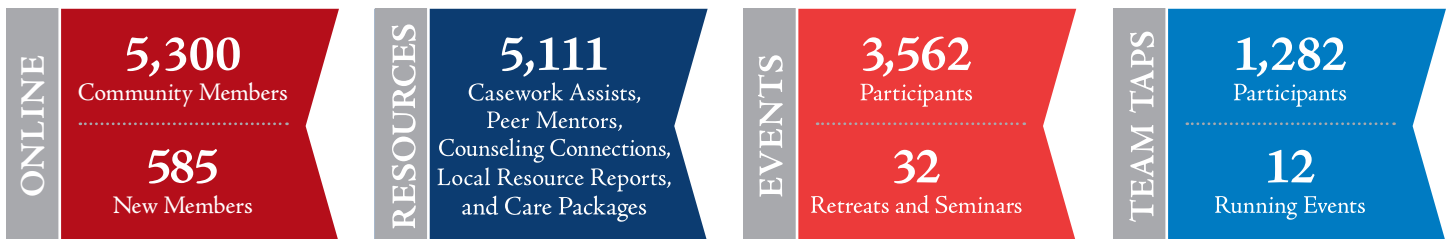
NEW SURVIVORS in the TAPS Family:

2010 – 2014: **18,735**

VOLUNTEERS in 2014:

Volunteers: **2,205** Hours: **46,530**

★ HOW WE SHARED THE JOURNEY IN 2014 ★



★ HOW WE SHARED THE TAPS STORY IN 2014 ★



Followers: **84,133**
Highest Reach of a Facebook Post: **270,467**
Highest Reach of a Tweet: **>1,200,000**



WWW.TAPS.ORG

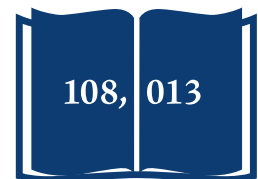
New Visitors: **211,681**
Returning Visitors: **131,685**
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Letters and Calls to Survivors



TAPS Magazines Mailed

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The Hartwell Foundation
Prudential Financial**

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New York Life Foundation
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MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR &
GOOD GRIEF CAMP FOR YOUNG SURVIVORS**

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May 22 to 25, 2015

Washington, D.C.

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