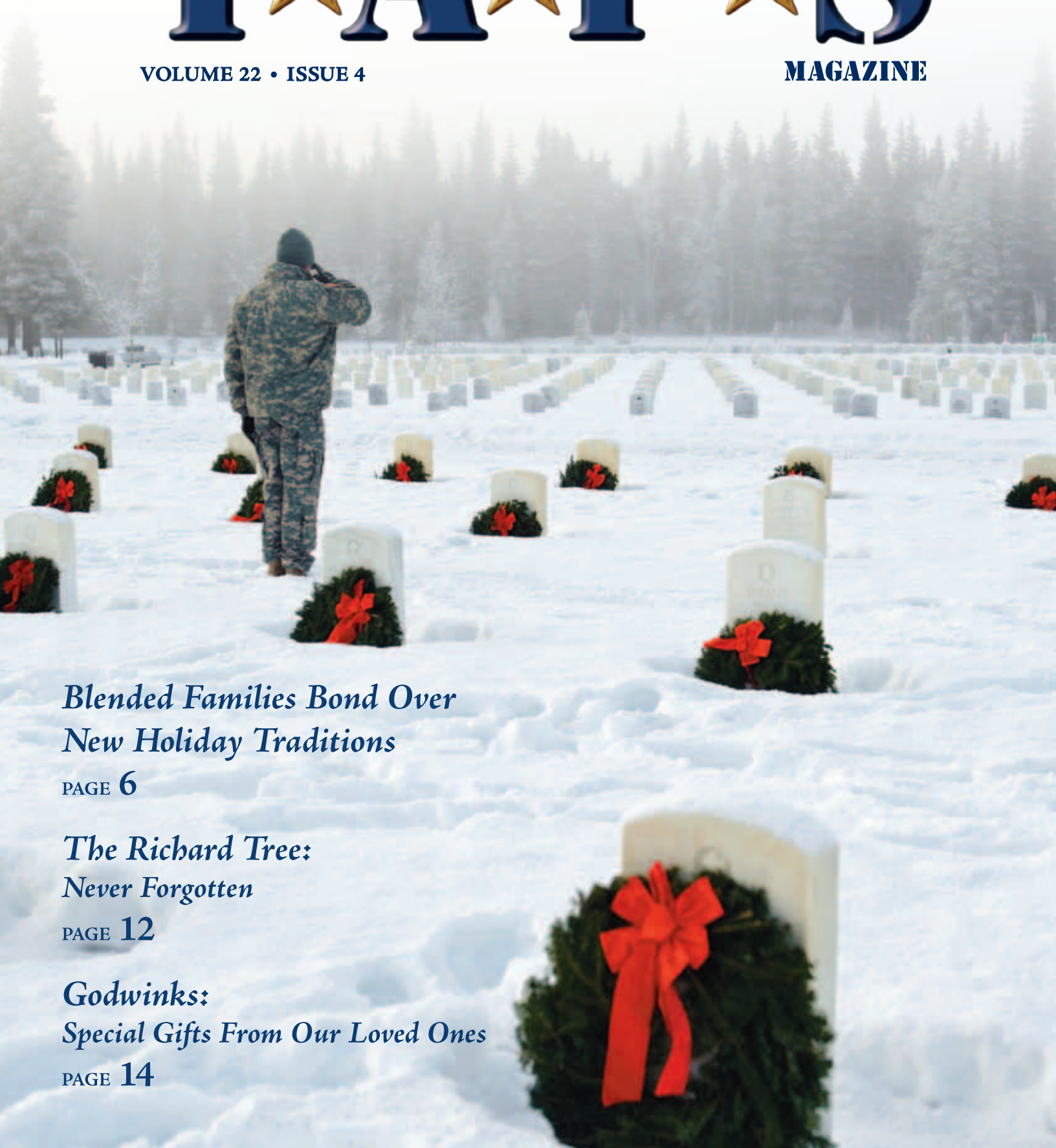


For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served & Died

T★A★P★S[®]

VOLUME 22 • ISSUE 4

MAGAZINE



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New Holiday Traditions*

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Never Forgotten*

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Special Gifts From Our Loved Ones*

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TAPS Magazine is dedicated to America's fallen heroes and their survivors. The magazine is written by and distributed quarterly to surviving families, friends and caregiving professionals. We hope you find inspiration, comfort, support, resources and a sense of belonging within these pages.

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national nonprofit 501 (c) (3) Veterans Service Organization that publishes *TAPS Magazine* in furtherance of its mission to support survivors whose loved one served and died.



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

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- ★ Grief and Trauma Resources
- ★ Quarterly *TAPS Magazine*

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U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Samuel Ethridge honoring comrades at Fort Richardson National Cemetery in Alaska.

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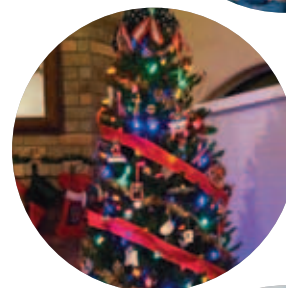
The most important thing about this special time of year is family, no matter what their title. Creating connection for a blended family builds a strong foundation for the future.



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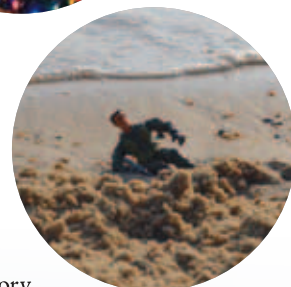
How one TAPS family shared their love for their son with family and friends and found a way to keep his memory close at Christmas.



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There are small reminders from our loved ones waiting this season to come softly and tap us on the shoulder and say, "I'm still here. I still love you. I'm still walking with you."



Stories of Hope

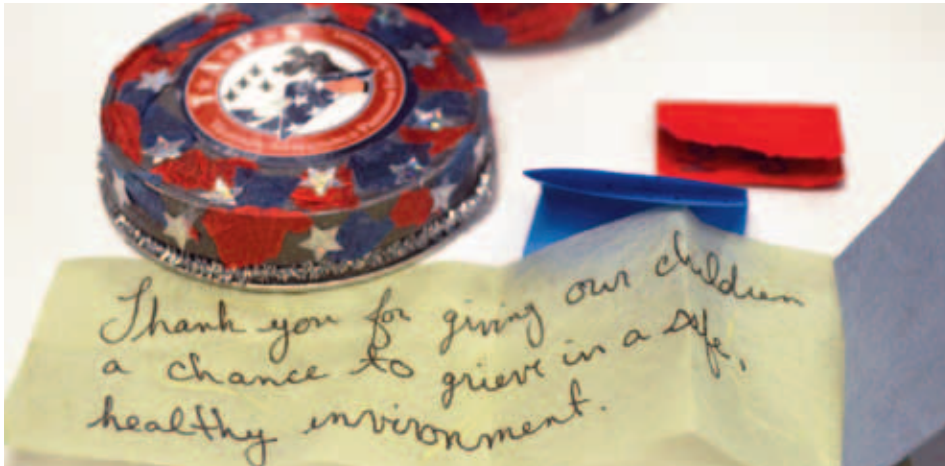
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Share Your TAPS Story



So incredibly grateful to TAPS for everything and especially for always thinking of the little things like having Good Grief Camp Mentors teach our sons to shave. Not everyone understands like TAPS does those small things that you miss out on sometimes because Dad is gone.

I'm blessed that Chris has so many amazing "uncles" to teach him these things. My status would break Facebook if I had to name them all. Thankfully, Demetrius surrounded himself with other amazing men for Chris to have as well. You all know who you are. You raised his crib when I didn't know how (and then dressed him in PJs with a cape to put him to bed in it); you took him into the ocean for the first time in Panama City; you freaked out when I painted his toenails (even though it was a "boy color"); you sat in a giant circle in my dining room and opened, assembled and put batteries in toys and train tracks after enduring super long birthday parties; you surprised him with school supplies, entire bedroom set decorations, a pool, and obnoxiously large Christmas presents.

Best of all, you are always ready with encouragement for us. Chris is so blessed. We are grateful to everyone who picks up where Demetrius can't anymore.

Thank you always, TAPS.

Mikki Frison, Pennsylvania
Surviving spouse of
Army 1st Lt. Demetrius M. Frison

Thank you so much for having a heart that is big enough to give to so many of us. I'd appreciate it you could please pass on my appreciation and gratitude to everyone who was kind enough to share their generosity with me while we were at the Atlanta Regional Seminar. There is no way to express how much you all have touched my life! I am hopeful, but still rather frightened to face all the feelings I have stuffed inside for so long. Thank you.

Susan Braunschweiger, Georgia
Surviving mother of
Navy Petty Officer 1st Class (ET)
Justin M. Braunschweiger

It's uncanny how when I need someone the most, I hear from someone at TAPS. I may call, although it's easier to write. Then, if I cry, I can still communicate. I hate that when I think the water is now going to be calm again, something blows in from a different direction that I never expected. I have learned that I need to somehow be prepared for these kinds of things, but it still doesn't make it easy. Your timing is impeccable and I thank God always for blessing me with the good people at TAPS, and that He also is blessing you in what can't always be an easy job. You're absolutely incredible. Thank you.

Sandra Egts, Indiana
Surviving mother of
Marine Corps Lance Cpl.
Adam James White

I received a text message yesterday afternoon from Sheryl Cornelius introducing herself as my new Peer Mentor. We spoke about an hour later for about 45 minutes. As we talked, I felt as if we had known each other for a while. She shared with me a view of her husband's death, which in the midst of my pain, I had not considered. It truly comforted me and allowed me to see a different side. I am certain there will be many more phone conversations.

I also want to thank Susan Carron for the time she spent listening to me the morning we spoke. God always knows the right time to bring someone across our path. I was having a difficult morning (as it comes in waves) and then all of a sudden she left a message. God's timing is not our timing; however, He is always on time.

Thank you all for giving of yourselves to us who are just beginning our journey. I hope to one day help someone through their difficult journey.

Norma Baker, Texas
Surviving spouse of
Army Sgt. 1st Class
Calvin David Baker

I am grateful for the amazing opportunity to raise money and run at the Disneyland Half Marathon. Our family has made this a tradition since the devastating loss of my nephew, Rudy A. Acosta, on March 19, 2011. TAPS has made an incredible impact on our family, helping us to get through a very difficult time after this loss. This run brought our family together for a weekend after months of training. We share our memories, thoughts and our heartfelt gratitude for those who have lost their lives and served in our military. What an incredible program TAPS is. We have grown so much since our loss. Thank you TAPS for all of your hard work and time.

Carol Shapiro, California
Surviving aunt of
Army Spc. Rudy Acosta

If you have a question or comment, please write to editor@taps.org.

Will There Be Continuity or Change?



Dear TAPS Family,

Years ago, when I was attending grad school and living in Germany, I heard German scholars and foreign policy experts ask a question that stuck with me ever since. Always practical, the Germans boiled down tough decisions on European security and economic issues into one question: will there be continuity or change?

Here we are, worlds away from that question as it emerged in terms of Germany's modern history. And here we are, worlds away from all our former lives, away from our "befores." And still the question is one I ask at every crossroads: will the most good result from continuity or from change?

To be sure, there will be continuity and change in all our lives. It just feels like more of an imperative with the start of a new year. Should we choose the way things have been or the way things could be? Is the best choice to press forward or to adjust course? Are we able to keep what works, or will we "throw the baby out with the bathwater" in our haste?

Truly, the question of the season is when each should occur. The new year, and its associated resolutions, is a time for turning that choice over in our minds. What is working for us that we will continue? What changes do we need to make to live fuller, richer lives?

As we grieve, the need for continuity drives us to look beyond the physical body, to embrace love that doesn't stop when life does. We figure out how to keep going, how much of the old life is "still good," and how much of ourselves we have pulled forward into new realities.

As always, whether in foreign policy, grief or resolutions at the New Year, the question is what endures, what we can sustain, what parts continue.

Yet, grief forces change. We're never ready for the brutal twist, the moment the ball drops, the loss of comfort, safety and what we know. Change comes unbidden. It shocks the system.

How ironic that the drastic changes wrought by grief may also challenge us to consider whether we are working to create lives that honor the legacy of our loved ones. Is your life bold enough? Are you satisfied with where you are? How are you using valuable time?

Even as we grieve and mourn, change can be proactive, driven, empowered.

We can resolve to live a little bigger, eliminate toxic influences, or leave behind crippling regrets and open ourselves to imperfect grace.

Change should not just be something that happens to us; it should be something that is possible — a way to create the lives our heroes wanted for us.

If you've hit your stride and you're feeling this sense of powerful movement, maybe you just need to keep working your plan. Let's be strong in celebrating what's working for us and how we have coaxed a sense of accomplishment to rise from a sense of destruction.

At the same time, nagging restlessness or dissatisfaction calls us to ask whether or not the status quo is serving us well. Are we being

deliberate, insightful and purposeful? Or are we simply going through the motions? What do you need to continue the mission — continuity or change?

The questions of continuity and change will be present with us this entire holiday season. We will move through traditions we can still bear without loved ones. We will also confront, even if slowly, what will no longer be the same.

I believe that the link between continuity and change is what allows us to bridge the divide between what remains and what doesn't. Change does not erase what has come before it unless it needs to do so.

Let TAPS help serve as the connection between what endures and what passes. When mourning how much has changed, remember what won't. Loving them allows us to carry them forward. Let us move fearlessly into the changes that have to happen, knowing that living their legacy is the most powerful continuity.

Cheers to what has been and what will be,

Emily Muñoz

Senior Advisor,
Strategy and Communications

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For more information about TAPS,
visit www.taps.org.

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Blended Families Bond Over New Holiday Traditions

When Angela and I attend TAPS events together where nametags are encouraged, we get strange looks. We share a last name but don't look anything alike. We get a lot of questions, usually along the lines of, "Are you two sisters?"

We both enjoy smiling and then responding, "Nope. We were married to the same man." Sometimes we explain it was at different times. Sometimes we don't. It's fun either way.

It may seem like an odd situation, the first and second wife being friends, but odd or not — we are both very grateful for our relationship.

We all have special names for each other. The kids have the easiest time with the titles. Half brother and half sister are just replaced with Corbin, Gillian, Max and Roanin. They have always considered themselves siblings, so nothing has changed there. Her kids, officially my stepkids, have always been my "Bonus Kids" because step kids didn't quite express how much I love them. They've called me August since they were little, so that's easy.

Angela's title, however, was a harder challenge. My kids had called her Miss Angela for years, but as all our relationships grew closer that stopped feeling right. Finally, a few years ago, Max came up with the perfect title. If Corbin and Gillian were his half siblings then their mom should be his half mom. When he said it, we all laughed and then agreed it was a good solution. It also rolls off the tongue easier than, "my dad's first wife."

It's an amazing situation, and one I think is fairly unique. Though it didn't come without heartache, and although it took all of us losing Dave to create the right environment for these relationships to flourish, it's a reality we all treasure.

One of Angela's friends asked her shortly after Dave died if she had yet been able to find any blessings in his passing. From the way Angela tells the story, her friend quickly realized it was too early to ask that question. But Angela tucked it in her

mind and when our relationship started to materialize the question came back to her. Maybe, this was one of the blessings? While we have both said repeatedly we would never have wished for this to happen, if it did have to happen, then this outcome is one we can live with.

When my husband's convoy was hit by a suicide bomber in late October 2011, outside of Kabul, I became one of those wives with the men in blue on her front porch. After my official notification was over, they told me that teams had been sent to his father's house and Angela's house. Calls started coming in from his dad's house but nothing from Angela's. Finally, I sat on my bedroom floor with the phone in my hand and dialed her number. I don't remember what all I said, but I do remember sobbing as I begged her, "Please, please Angela. Just let me see the kids one more time." Her answer will forever be emblazoned on my mind. "August, I know how much you love my kids and how much they love you. I will never keep them from you." My moment of sheer panic at not seeing my Bonus Kids vanished, and Angela

and I began our unique walk together as moms of kids who have lost their dad.

Because of the timing of Dave's death, those first few months were filled with holidays: Thanksgiving, his birthday, Christmas, New Years. Because he was supposed to be deployed, my boys and I already had plans to be with family on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Apparently, that happened because I've seen the pictures; I don't remember any of it, but there is proof we were there. Looking back, I wish we had all been together that first year but my head was cloudy and logistical planning was not on my list of possibilities.

The idea of the next day, even the next hour, was hard enough to cope with, so trying to conceptualize the next year's holiday plans was impossible. But then Dave's sister stepped in and everything changed. A few months before Thanksgiving, my sister-in-law reached out to me with an invitation. Why didn't I bring my boys down to Houston and join her, the family, and Dave's ex-wife and her kids? All four of Dave's kids could

Morrow Photography, Abilene, Texas.

Link only for digital version <http://www.stevemorrowphotography.com>





celebrate Thanksgiving and what would have been Dave's 43rd birthday as one family.

I will admit at first pass I wasn't sure this was a good idea. Angela, Dave's ex-wife, and I had become closer through all the craziness of his death. We were openly committed to keeping all four kids as connected as possible. She and her kids had even stayed at my house early that year for the burial ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. But a major holiday? With a family I hadn't spent much time with? And his ex-wife?

There were people in my life who thought I had lost my mind when I accepted the invite. But, fortunately, my head had cleared enough for me to realize what an opportunity this really was, and I jumped on the internet and bought tickets for three of us to head south. It was emotionally rough; his death still felt new and being around a large extended family made me feel even more alone. But watching my two boys spend time with Corbin and Gillian brought a much needed smile to my face. They reveled in each other's company and had a great time just being normal kids with their mass of cousins.

But something else really important happened: Angela and I had time together. We laughed at the same crazy things Dave had done during her marriage to him and to me. We got sad his kids were without a dad. And we realized we had a lot in common. As hard as that first Thanksgiving was, becoming friends with my late husband's ex-wife was an unexpected, but much appreciated, gift.

My favorite moment that year was when we looked at each other and realized, that while Dave had his faults, he had amazingly good taste when it came to picking wives.

We enjoyed our time there so much that when our sister-in-law invited us back to Houston for the next Thanksgiving, Angela

and I both accepted the invitation. Another trip to Houston. Another long weekend with a huge extended family. Another chance for long talks with Angela. And the tradition of sharing holidays with each other became our reality.

Angela went from Dad's first wife to half-mom. And she and I went from former wives to friends. We've traveled to Texas. They've traveled to D.C. We might even meet in the middle one of these days. But no matter what the landscape looks like, we'll all be together to celebrate a special day.

Over the last few years, the specific holiday we celebrate has changed. Instead of celebrating Thanksgiving in Houston, we are now honoring our relationships over Memorial Day weekend at the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar. This year was the first time all six of us could be together, but it was amazing. Corbin skipped his high school graduation to be there and with true TAPS magic, he walked across the stage in his cap and gown in front of his TAPS family. And we were both there. Both of us in tears. Both so amazed at that boy who lost his dad and is now on the verge of being a man any kind of momma, with any title, would be proud to love.

Gillian has already announced that she will be skipping her formal graduation

this year, opting instead for a TAPS graduation. I will be sitting beside Angela again, both of us crying, watching this sweet girl as she grows into an amazing woman in her own right.

Angela and I agreed in those first few horrible hours after the notification teams left that the kids should stay as close as possible. And while some things never change, the kids will always have their siblings, other things do shift over time. Angela went from Dad's first wife to half mom. And she and I went from former wives to friends. We've traveled to Texas. They've traveled to D.C. We might even meet in the middle one of these days. But no matter what the landscape looks like, we'll all be together to celebrate a special day.

And really, aren't family and friends — no matter the title — the most important thing about holidays?



BY AUGUST CABRERA
Surviving spouse of
Army Lt. Col. David Cabrera

August is raising her boys with the love and support of her friends, family and fiancé near Washington, D.C. Currently pursuing a degree in writing, she says, "I kept waiting for the right time to follow my dreams, but it turns out now is all we have." She believes in teaching her boys to be grateful for what is, not wishing for what was. And according to her, her TAPS family is near the top of the list of things she is grateful for in her life.

Healing Horizons

September was National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. Organizations across the country focused their efforts in partnership with TAPS to raise awareness about suicide and prevention. We provided education on both risk and protective factors and offered connections to crisis and community resources as we spread a message of hope, help and healing.

At TAPS, we understand that hope saves lives and that negative messaging may increase hopelessness in those who are suffering. We prepared safe messaging guidelines and a resource toolkit available at www.taps.org/hopehelpheal to help empower each of us with the best information on prevention, reporting and talking about suicide. Throughout the month, we featured your stories of healing and hope after loss on our blogs so you could share with others what you have learned about suicide prevention since your loss.

The capstone event for the month was the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar in St. Petes Beach, Florida. Over 1,000 survivors found the courage to make their way to healing horizons and spend time with their TAPS family. As a group, they discovered that we each have a story to be told, and it is within our power to define the words and memories we choose to represent our future.

We cherished with hope the gift we are given — the opportunity to join together and celebrate the lives of those we love. We learned to walk pathways of remembrance and rebuilding as we ultimately shared the story of our futures with hope and healing. We invite you to learn more about our stories online and in these photos and to join us next year on Oct. 6-8 in Phoenix, Arizona, for the 9th Annual National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar.





KIM RUOCCO, MSW
Surviving spouse of
Marine Corps Maj. John Ruocco
Kim is the Chief External Relations Officer for Suicide Prevention and Postvention for TAPS. She is an international public speaker who has a unique combination of personal and professional experience, education and training that provides a comprehensive understanding of suicide prevention and postvention.

Open Your Heart to Healing

Emotional Engagement in Your Own Life

Have a Walkabout

While the term “walkabout” originates in Australian Aboriginal culture as a soul-searching rite of passage, it has found more general usage to describe movement intended to alleviate the feeling of being unsettled, restless, dissatisfied or bored. Having a walkabout means going outside, whether in wilderness, an urban jungle, or your own neighborhood, and looking at things with new eyes. It involves being present, looking with perspective, and detaching one’s self from fitness or destination goals. Go out and experience the feeling of movement. Open your senses, try on new perspectives. Don’t plan a route (but keep yourself safe!); don’t stick to your normal patterns. Go where your walkabout takes you, and you’ll know when you’re done. By disrupting your own uncomfortable stalemate, you’ll look at the world as something to explore, not just something to survive.

Give Love and Time

When you can’t reach out and express how much you love and miss the person who’s not there anymore, make a conscious decision to put that love somewhere else. Choose to speak, act and live to represent that love through volunteerism, visiting shut-ins or nursing homes, staffing a local animal shelter or soup kitchen, or organizing or participating in a charity food or toy drive. Give someone the gift of time — babysit for new parents, cover someone’s obligations so that they can spend extra time with an ailing family member — and do so without bitterness that the gift of “enough time” didn’t come for you. By focusing instead on the gifts of time you did receive, you’ll learn to appreciate the gifts of time and love you can still give.

Find New Tools

Opening your heart may mean opening yourself up to new tools and even new technology. Whether you are attached at the hip to your smartphone or think of it as a necessary evil, there are ways to use your smartphone to help you practice opening yourself to new information, constructive habits and better health. Apps like Headspace, Calm and Mindfulness can help you with guided meditation that’s accessible, fun, progressive, and, in some cases, social. Nutrition and wellness apps like MyFitnessPal and Noom can help you commit to healthier eating choices by providing accountability, information and easy-to-use food diaries and food guides. True to its name, the app Happify is geared toward life improvements. When you

open it, you’ll be prompted to select a goal like finding more time for yourself or getting better at handling stress, and the app will provide you expert advice, activities, and even games to keep you on track. By trying something new that helps you focus on small changes and incremental improvements, you’ll remember that flowers bloom gradually.

Embrace Imperfection

Rigidity is the enemy of openness. Restricting yourself to the way things “should” be keeps you away from embracing life. Furthermore, a focus on the daily “shoulds” can reinforce feelings of betrayal and bitterness, as the big “should” (our loved ones should be here) remains unresolved. If you tend toward needing and wanting structure and control, lean into mess and chaos whenever you can. Think of experience first and effect second. If you’re holding yourself back from travel, social engagement or the fullness of the season because of insecurity, anxiety or fear, don’t wait on your self-imposed standards to be a part of a world that wants you, not perfection. Create space for magic, not standards for “musts.” By embracing your own imperfections, you’ll pave the way for others to do so, too.

Create Readiness

Openness is about being ready. It’s about setting the stage for something wonderful. There’s a reason why we feel better when we take time to feel “put together;” it’s because we’ve created a platform for flexibility and confidence. If you’re in the habit of letting part of your appearance go, shower, shave, get a haircut, put on your makeup or jewelry. You’ll feel pride in your own effort. You’ve

Even in the darkest moments of loneliness and grief, you are part of a larger story, a story that demonstrates the ability to connect love and loss across miles, across spheres of consciousness, and across and among families.



*The pity party may have to happen, but it can't last all night.
By accepting that there is still a rest of the story,
you'll resolve that it's one we can still use to make a difference.*

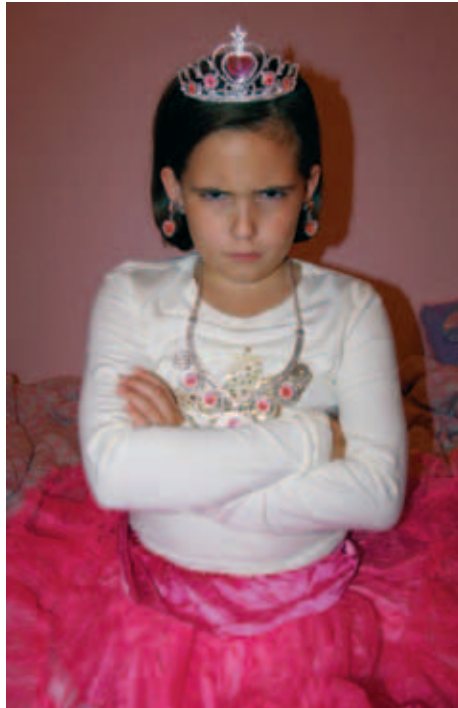
taken care to ready your best self for whatever the day holds. If you're in the habit of procrastinating and putting off things until later in the day that you know you need to do get up and get them done. Allow yourself the freedom to know that the rest of the day belongs to possibility, not postponement. If you're moving toward setting personal or professional goals, find ways to prepare yourself for those new endeavors — find a training program, get paperwork together, ask questions. By opening yourself to potential, you'll be prepared and ready for new challenges.

Consider a Social Media Holiday

Remember that social media can make us feel connected to others, which often has a positive effect on mood. However, as compassionate human beings, we can also be affected by the anger, emotional distress, and inevitable comparisons to which we introduce ourselves when we passively experience social media. Taking a break from social media may be a way for you to focus on how you're experiencing the holidays, and how you really feel about what is happening in your own life, without imagining how other people might view it. The key is to use your own lens for determining how you feel and for evaluating what you want and need, not the virtual or imagined lenses of others. Instead, focus this energy on your touchstone people and friends, the ones who know how you're doing, not how you seem to be doing on social media. Make efforts to reach beyond the stories other people tell, too. Try to be the person who values connection and genuine interaction. There are times when we do need the perspective of others to help us realize things about ourselves, recognize warning signs, and identify options and solutions. Those points of view are almost always more well-received when they're the result of real, active communication. When you pick up the phone, swing by a friend's house, let people in, meet for coffee or a meal, you'll trade scrolling through life for intentional communication.

Have a Pity Party, but Be Cinderella

Whatever part of the holidays you celebrate, or don't, as we mark the end of one year and the beginning of another, at some point,



we'll all hear the familiar strains of "Auld Lang Syne" or the good old days. The song, meant to shepherd in one year while paying tribute to the times that have come before, is almost an anthem of mourning. When you're missing the good old times, when you're grieving the ways life could have been different, when you're just not feeling like yourself, or when you're frustrated with having to work so hard at a time when so much seemed to come easy — it's OK to sit with those feelings for a while. How easy it is for the divide between the world we want to live in, and the world in which we find ourselves, to cause us pain and to make us feel bad about our situation and the human situation. It's easy to seek pity, to be sad, to wonder: why me or why us, or why them. It's easy to extrapolate from there — why sickness? Why accidents? Why war? And why did all of these things happen to these people we loved so much? If you need to sit with these questions, and even with the feeling of feeling sorry for yourself, do so. Have a pity party, but impose a deadline. If you're alone on New Year's Eve for the sixth straight year with no one to kiss, it's OK to feel sorry for yourself. Until midnight. And then Cinderella has got to leave the pity party. If you're feeling misunderstood the whole holiday season, and your family and friends are just not seeing

your anguish, mourn the ease of the past and then hop into the pumpkin coach, and resolve to do better. The pity party may have to happen, but it can't last all night. By accepting that there is still a rest of the story, you'll resolve that it's one we can still use to make a difference.

Consider Yourself as Part of Something Larger

Even in the darkest moments of loneliness and grief, you are part of a larger story, a story that demonstrates the ability to connect love and loss across miles, across spheres of consciousness, and across and among families. You are part of a story of persistence and perseverance, of hope, even when you feel least like this is the case. Besides the story of the human experience, and what it is like to be a part of this world, you're also a part of the story of our country. You are living the history of our time, and you are taking your place in the long line of patriots, warriors and flag-bearers. As such, you are part of the larger TAPS family and community. And so, wherever you find yourself, whether you are feeling unexpected or longed-for joy at what is, or whether the bleakness of the landscape tugs on your heart, you're not the only one experiencing it. Reach out. Know that we are with you, wherever you are. When you find comfort in your TAPS family, however you find us this season, you'll keep your heart open to healing. We're sure that there is still enough love to fill it, and we can't wait to help you find it.



BY EMILY MUÑOZ

**Strategy & Communications Senior Advisor
Surviving spouse of Army Capt. Gil Muñoz**
Emily is living a personal campaign to be the person her late husband loved — and is using the Inner Warrior program to empower survivors to do the same.

THE RICHARD TREE

Never Forgotten

Christmas 2010 came four short months after the death of my 29-year-old son, Cpl. Richard Allgower.

As the holiday approached, neither my husband, daughter nor I could find any Christmas spirit. In fact, we wanted desperately to avoid the sadness we felt as everyone around us was wrapped up in holiday planning. We needed to get away from the pervasive joy in the air this time of year. What could we do to avoid the emptiness we felt at the realization that Rich wouldn't ever again be physically with us at Christmas?

I was almost in panic mode as I walked around the house. I knew that by this time in past years the tree was already up in our living room and every corner of our home had some symbol of Christmas. At least 10 boxes and storage bins waited in the attic for us to bring down, open each box and fill our home with the signs of Christmas joy accumulated over 31 years of married and family life. But I couldn't even bring myself to watch television because of the

holiday commercials, traditional music and movies. In no way was I ready to tackle the Christmas decor.

My daughter, Kat, announced that she didn't even want to recognize Christmas that year. My husband, Alan, told me that I should respect her wishes because she was missing her brother. Ever the loving Dad, he wanted to make Kat happy and that wasn't going to happen without her brother here for Christmas.

It seemed natural for our family to go into escape mode. But where could we go to feel safe? Kat came up with the solution. We would fly to Pennsylvania to visit Grandma and stay with Aunt Anita and her family. They would understand how much we were missing Rich, because they were also missing him. Christmas 2010 came and went without Rich, but with a loving family to cry with us and a safe haven 1,400 miles from our home in Texas.

Christmas 2011 arrived faster than I expected. How can time pass so quickly when one is so unhappy? I thought that only happened when you're having fun and grieving isn't fun. I could feel myself dreading this second Christmas without my son and kept thinking that I had to do something or I'd go crazy.

I remember sitting in my favorite spot in the living room and looking at the space where our tree always stood. I thought of the many Christmases we shared as a family in this home. I could picture Rich and Kat opening presents as children and then as adults. One Christmas, when Rich was deployed to Iraq, we even left the tree up with his gifts under it until he returned in March. Then he and his wife, Lexie, opened their gifts together.

Our Rich loved Christmas, the idea of Charlie Brown's Christmas tree and all the food that comes with the holidays. He loved



the movie "Elf" and opening presents. All the memories of 29 Christmases with Rich washed over me and made me feel his presence rather than his absence. Somehow, I heard him say, "Mom, you have to celebrate Christmas!"

Suddenly, I felt the way I always did when either of my children asked me for something that really meant something to them and I had to do it or get it for them. I went into "Mom mode." I knew I had to put up a tree and decorate the house because Rich loved it. The problem: how to convince Kat, who was already dreading another holiday, that we would put up a tree this year and celebrate Christmas?

Again, the inspiration came from Rich. Celebrate with him. So I braced myself to convince my daughter we needed to do this as a family. If she accepted it, her dad would go along.

The tradition in our home is to decorate for Christmas during the weekend after Thanksgiving, so the decorations are up for

When people see it for the first time, the ornaments require the telling of moments in our son's life and we are able to talk about him without tears or the fear of being judged as someone who can't move on.



The best reaction I have received is from one of our guests who said, "Even though I never met Rich, by looking at the Richard tree, I feel that I know him." Her comment makes me feel that Rich is always a part of our Christmas.

the entire month of December. That meant I had to approach the subject over Thanksgiving, which was that coming week. Thanksgiving was a challenging event for us as well, but bringing Christmas back to our family was the task on my mind.

After our Thanksgiving dinner, as we sat in the living room, I plunged into the subject by announcing to Kat, her boyfriend and Alan that, "Rich told me to put up a Christmas tree." Kat looked at me as if I had said that I was flying to Mars. Alan and Chris decided to ignore me and I could see that Kat was prepared to argue with her one word response, "MOM!" But I didn't give her a chance. I jumped right in.

"You all know how much Rich loved Christmas and I know he would want us to celebrate it as if he were here."

"But he isn't, Mom!" Kat interrupted me.

"Kat, I think we should decorate the tree with things that remind us of Rich, things that he liked so we can 'feel' him in the room. I'm thinking we can use red, white and blue ribbons, and Marine and Star Wars memorabilia."

I could see the wheels were turning now. It wasn't an immediate acceptance on Kat's part, but her heart was warming to the idea. We started to brainstorm about the ornaments and items we could put on the tree to remind us of Rich.

That Saturday we put up the tree and started with the strings of multi-colored lights — traditionally Alan and Kat's job. Then we visited the usual stores for decorations, Walmart and Hobby Lobby. It was almost like being on a scavenger hunt to look for "Rich reminders." Alan wanted to be sure that Rich's love of Star Wars was visible on the tree, so he ordered nearly all the characters and spaceships online. Each day, packages arrived via FedEx for the Richard Tree.

The tree had a picture of Rich in his Marine uniform in a silver frame. Then came the patriotic decorations such as flags, Marine memorabilia and an eagle. Star Wars figurines: Luke, Han Solo, Princess Leia, Chewbacca, Obi Wan, C-3PO, R2-D2

and Rich's favorite, Yoda, were added. We had to have a picture of Bailey the dog, Rich's sidekick, too. And there had to be footballs and Texas ornaments for both the state and university. Jalapeno lights adorned the bottom of the tree because Rich loved chili peppers and hot sauce!

We were so excited about our tree that we told family and friends what we were doing. Their reaction was unexpected and touching. They wanted to contribute to the tree and their ornaments showed what they remembered about Rich. Friends who knew how Rich loved to eat contributed a variety of food ornaments like a plate of sushi and a hamburger. Kat's co-worker gave us a USMC Semper Fidelis tree skirt. One of my friends who didn't know my son, but wanted to contribute, bought a red and white R for his initial.

Among the most unique decorations were a Blizzard cup from our neighbors who owned the Dairy Queen in town and knew how Rich loved Oreo Cookie Blizzards, a hand-painted dog figurine whose markings matched Bailey's, an armadillo bottle opener, and a replica of a T-shirt Rich loved, that had a hole in the armpit of the sleeve, and called his "holey shirt."

Red, white and blue ribbons served in place of garland and various angels hang in scattered places on the tree. The tree topper is one of my favorites. Kat's friend Megan found a Buddy the Elf doll who straddles the top branch of the Richard Tree to remind us of Rich's favorite scene in the movie.

The eclectic decorations range from the humorous to the serious, heartwarming to silly, and clever to bizarre. Many of the decorations require an explanation, such as the grill, the fork, the sample-sized Patron bottles, the rock on a string, the snowflake, and the guitar. But that's the beauty of the Richard Tree. When people see it for the first time, the ornaments require the telling of moments in our son's life and we are able to talk about him without tears or the fear of being judged as someone who can't move on.



The best reaction I have received is from one of our guests who said, "Even though I never met Rich, by looking at the Richard tree, I feel that I know him." Her comment makes me feel that Rich is always a part of our Christmas.

It has been six years since Rich left us. We have put up the Richard Tree for four years. When I asked Kat and Alan if we were putting it up this year, they said, "Of course."



BY ESTER ALLGOWER

Surviving mother of

Marine Corps Cpl. Richard Allgower

Ester has a B.A. in English and Spanish from the University of Texas at Austin and a Masters in Ed. from the University of Houston. She retired after 32 years in Education and lives in Taylor, TX with her husband, Alan. She is currently on the TAPS Survivor Care Team.

Godw;)nks

Special Gifts From Our Loved Ones

When I first came to TAPS, I had never heard the term “Godwinks.” I remember feeling quite confused when a co-worker mentioned a Godwink story in our staff meeting. The meaning of the term was clear from her experience of a special song coming on the radio at the exact moment she was feeling alone and missing her parents. The song had always been one she listened to with her mom. It seemed a providential sign coming through her car’s speakers to touch her heart and ease her mind.

Don’t we all long for a crystal clear sign that our connection with our loved one is not gone? They are still out there in whatever celestial or physical space you wish to embrace. They still love us and want us to know we are in their care.

It can seem silly at times to expect that, in the vastness of the universe, our need for affirmation will gain any traction. The expectation of waking up to a message in the snow or finding your loved one’s lost keepsake after years seems, well, unrealistic. But small moments of communication and reassurance happen for many survivors, who recognize coincidences, chance encounters, miraculous interventions and other signs as flashes of certainty.

Think back to how our loved ones may have given us these same reassurances in real life before their passing. Perhaps they shared a wink with us from across a room or called on unexpected days to simply say, “I’m thinking of you.” If they reached out to us in direct ways when they were living, is it really all that hard to believe they would reach out from a next place?

There are small reminders from our loved ones waiting this season to come softly and tap us on the shoulder and say, “I’m still here. I still love you. I’m still walking with you.”


After learning more, I immediately realized that Godwinks were not only possible but very likely. It just hadn’t happened to me, so I didn’t fully understand the way it would feel. It seemed like it would be the most calming reminder that I’m not alone on this journey of life. Would my grandmother reach out? I was very young when she died and couldn’t imagine how that would work.

Then my dad passed away just before Thanksgiving last year and I knew with-

out doubt that the Godwinks would come. It took so much patience to wait for them. However, I knew from hearing stories from our survivors that it could take years to feel that moment of affirmation from a loved one. In the first few months, I felt as if I looked everywhere for some sign. Let’s just say that it must be like watching a pot of water boil. It doesn’t happen until you are relaxed and least expecting a sign.

Fast forward to June at the TAPS Atlanta Widows Retreat. I had the privilege of walking up Stone Mountain with some of the most fearless and wonderful women I’ve ever met. I was so focused on being with them, hearing their stories and supporting their grief that my own loss felt less electric and receded to the back of my mind.

Stone Mountain is a sacred spot for my heart. Before this TAPS event, I had never hiked to the top without my father - it was always something we did together. We would often climb to the top in October for our shared birthday month. So when I set forth with my TAPS family, missing him but grateful, my heart was soft, but my mind was open. (By the way, this seems to be a perfect mental combination to invite Godwink moments.)



10-17-1992

We had been making our way to the top of the mountain on the shady side of the trail because of the 100 degree summer weather. I wasn't in the fast group, so we had time to talk to others who were also making the climb. One man mentioned to us that if we moved over to the left side of the trail, right at the top, there was a slightly easier approach with some shade trees.

I walked ahead to check out the new path while some of the ladies rested to power up for the final part of the climb. I had taken no more than a few steps when I set my foot down beside a carving in the mountain. A date. My birthday. Not just any one of my birthdays, but my 20th birthday, after I had just returned from living on Guam. It was a special, important year because, having not celebrated with each other in a couple of years, that year we were together. Oh, how I knew in that moment that Daddy had given me a tremendously huge God-wink, letting me know that he was walking with me to the top of the mountain just like all the other times.

If you are thinking that this just can't be true, I've got the photo to prove it. But, let's talk about how many other stories there are just like this from TAPS survivors. One mom, who recently attended the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar, said she was standing at the water's edge, feeling afraid to be there and not quite strong enough to join in the event. Asking the great beyond for an affirmation that she was where she needed to be, at that moment she felt something wash over her foot. Looking down, there was a small, green plastic toy soldier in the sand at her feet. She knew then that her son wanted her to find healing and that she was in exactly the right place, dare we say, at the right time.

Another surviving spouse says her husband, Milton, was always a procrastinator. He installed a light on their staircase but it never worked. When Kim asked him about it he would always tell her, "I will get to it one day." When his personal effects were delivered to their home, she called her brother-in-law over to be with her. As he helped her carry some of the items upstairs, he flipped that same light switch. Immediately the light came on over the staircase. It still works to this day. She guesses he finally did "get to it one day."

I talked to a surviving daughter, Vivian, who loved stargazing with her dad. He bought her first telescope for her at Christmas when she was 10. During the last meteor shower in August, she wanted to go out and watch, but had to get up super early every day for work. The last night, she went out at midnight, which is early for the peak look at falling stars. She saw one and then not any more for another half hour. Finally, knowing she had to get up early, she said to herself, "Dad, if you're up there, send one more star so I know you love me and so I can go to bed." It didn't even take a minute before another star blazed down across the sky. She says she slept better than she had in months.

All of these stories are not to convince you to believe something that you have not perhaps experienced. It's not to force faith or the miracles of the heavens on anyone. It is to remind each person in the TAPS family that they are loved and that there are signs all around us that give us this affirmation and reassurance.

We spend so much time focused on finding meaning in our grief, forgetting that sometimes meaning and connection can



still reach out to find us. As you face the mix of emotions that flood our minds and hearts at the holidays, I hope you will take time to slow down your thinking and open your mind to the serendipity of the season. Whether touching, poignant, humorous or crystal clear, there are small reminders from our loved ones waiting this season to come softly and tap us on the shoulder and say, "I'm still here. I still love you. I'm still walking with you."



BY BEVIN LANDRUM
TAPS Magazine Editor
Surviving daughter of
Army Capt. Don Rutland

Bevin writes to honor all those who served and to keep the memories of our heroes alive in the pages of TAPS publications.

You're Not Alone

Connections Across the Seasons



Grief is not convenient or courteous. It has no problem making itself known during holidays or on the weekends. As we move forward into the season of holidays, closed businesses and inconsistent schedules, know that you can always count on TAPS to be standing by to wrap you in comfort and support.

Peer support can make all the difference in our lives and help us see we are not alone. We have countless TAPS family volunteers who we call Peer Mentors standing by to be matched with other survivors, to share the journey together.

The final pieces are coming together for amazing programming in the new year. There is always something to look forward to, a goal to achieve, and an opportunity to gather with your TAPS family. When the weather closes in, either literally or figuratively, we are just a phone call away. Our TAPS Care Groups continue to meet over the coming months, as do our online support groups. Our 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline staff is eager to take your call and be the listening ears that can make a dark day seem brighter.

There are things that can get in the way and make our journey more difficult. Often financial struggles can be unbearable or making our way through benefits paperwork can seem insurmountable. TAPS has a dedicated staff of casework experts who are available to help. We have built strong community partners in our rich 22-year history. It would be our honor to assist you in getting the support you deserve.

Peer support can make all the difference in our lives and help us see we are not alone.

We have countless TAPS family volunteers who we call Peer Mentors standing by to be matched with other survivors, to share the journey together. If you are interested in requesting a trained TAPS Peer Mentor, please call us. Those of us who have faced trauma and who might have a long history of loss and tribulation may need some extra support. TAPS Community Based Care program is standing by to ensure that you receive a warm connection to grief and trauma counseling in your community. We will vet the resource for you and get you the services that you so rightly deserve.

As we begin to set goals for the days ahead, won't you please turn to us at TAPS to help? Our programming includes TAPS Retreats and an Inner Warrior program. These afford military loss survivors the chance to find others whose grief resembles their own, and also to find strengths within themselves they may never have known existed.

During the winter months and those after, let us be a support for you and connect you to others who want to do the same. We are a family of survivors sharing this journey together. We are so sorry for what brought you to us but are indeed glad you have found us. You need never be alone.



BY ZANETA M. GILENO, LMSW, CT
Zaneta is the Director of Community Based Care for TAPS where she ensures TAPS survivors are connected to grief counseling and support groups. In addition, she oversees internal professional education and external professional development and is the TAPS Clinical Advisory Board liaison.

JOIN YOUR TAPS FAMILY

Connect ★ Reflect ★ Inspire

at the **23RD ANNUAL TAPS NATIONAL
MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR & GOOD GRIEF CAMP**

May 26 – 29, 2017 ★ Arlington, VA

The TAPS family is diverse, representing the tapestry of our nation. Connected through service and sacrifice, we are the living legacies of our heroes. Together we find strength and resilience. No day is more bonding for families of the fallen than Memorial Day. Though we all may share in it across the country, you will find the heart of your TAPS family in Washington, D.C., that weekend as we come together in remembrance and celebration at the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp.

The National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp connects over 2,000 surviving loved ones with professionals who can provide support and assistance. Surviving adults find a caring atmosphere where you

are able to speak about your loved one and share your grief among those who have the same experience of military loss. Younger survivors are cared for in Good Grief Camp by trained youth leaders and military mentors

The National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp connects over 2,000 surviving loved ones with professionals who can provide support and assistance.

who serve as companions for them while they participate in activities promoting healing and peer support.

The TAPS National Seminar offers a broad range of events appealing to the whole

TAPS family and each person's stage of grief. In addition to special ceremonies and tours such as the National Memorial Day Observance at Arlington National Cemetery, a VIP Pentagon Tour, and Evening Parade at the Marine Corps Barracks, attendees can also sign up to take part in outdoor activities that provide invigorating outlets for grief, such as kayaking and rock climbing. Workshops and sharing groups held throughout the seminar are staple, therapeutic components to survivor care.

With open arms we invite you to make plans now to join us for Memorial Day at the 23rd Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. Look soon for more information and registration online at www.taps.org/National.



2016 TAPS CHANGES LIVES





TAPS Holiday Store

Ditch the stress this holiday season and shop from home while helping support TAPS. Our Online Store offers a no-hassle shopping experience and helps TAPS continue our mission to support grieving families and loved ones. We offer items for loved ones of all ages including the comfy, practical and fun ideas that will make your shopping easy. Visit www.taps.org/shop to start adding items to your cart.

TAPS is also pleased to announce that we will be offering the first official TAPS Christmas ornaments available for sale starting in early December. Pricing and final design are still in the works, but you can see a sneak peek here. Check the online store and your inbox for more information.

TAPS Ornament Preview
Available in early December! ➔



A



A. Women's Purple Heart Shirt

"May love be what you remember most" is one of our favorite Darcie Sims quotes. Hold your loved one's memory close when you wear this soft, loose cut shirt with quote on front and logo on back.

\$25.00

B. Men's Outdoors Shirt

This breathable all-purpose outdoors shirt is perfect for active men who spend time fishing, hiking or camping.

\$40.00

C



C. Youth Born Brave Shirt

This cotton t-shirt is available in olive green and blue for the Captain America fan in your household. What better message for our youth than that they were born brave and can overcome grief with their TAPS super powers.

\$20.00

D



D. Women's Slouch Sweatshirt

Cozy up for warm winter days in this super soft, slouchy sweatshirt that you won't want to take off as you proclaim the TAPS mission of bringing hope and healing to the grieving.

\$20.00

E



E. Afghan Bracelets

Genuine lapis lazuli beaded bracelet handmade in Kabul, Afghanistan and sent with care and hope to TAPS. 100% of the proceeds will go directly to support TAPS ongoing partnership to provide emotional and economic hope to grieving women in Afghanistan.

\$39.99

F



F. Klinger Book with Plush Animal

Klinger proudly serves with the Old Guard in Arlington, bearing our fallen heroes to their final resting place. His award winning story will capture the hearts of your whole family.

\$20.00/set

SOLITUDE

KNOWING WHEN TO REACH OUT

Coping with grief and loss is one of life's greatest challenges. Sometimes the task is so monumental that it feels impossible, and yet here we are doing the impossible, surviving the loss of someone who is inextricably a part of our heart, existence and routine. During the holidays, the loss is illuminated as we witness people making plans with their families, buying gifts, or engaging in long-standing traditions. In the midst of millions of people giving thanks for another year with their families, we are still left with the reality that this holiday will be different for us, if we observe it at all.

Some of us have endured this season without our loved one for many years and have developed strategies for coping through this time. For others, this will be our first holiday without the person who has always been an integral part of our holiday memories. Some may feel lost or struggle with indecision about how to mark the season. The change being thrust upon you can be disorienting and can create inner conflict as we may have competing demands — our own need to reflect and find how this loss has changed the way we do holidays, and the needs others have to engage with them at a time of year when people come together to celebrate. This can be difficult to balance, especially when "celebration" is not in our current vocabulary. The conflicting needs or demands, along with our own holiday disorientation, can lead to a need for reflection. Taking time for solitude may be the best gift you give yourself this year.

When we are grieving, there is often concern when we choose to be alone. Family, friends and others may be concerned this is unhealthy, especially at the holidays — and yet there may be times when you feel the need to have solitude as a respite from the bustling activity of the season. Solitude can offer a time of reflection that allows us to explore our thoughts and synthesize information, provides a time for rest, and can allow for growth as we still ourselves. While solitude can be refreshing, too much time alone can lead to social isolation and feelings of loneliness. When we become isolated, the walls can begin to close in on us, feeling more like a prison as we avoid others.

Like many things in life, striking a balance is important. Whether choosing a temporary period of solitude or struggling with isolation, reflections are likely to cause a mix of emotions as we engage memories of our loved one and "feel the feels." While solitude may be preferable for certain periods, surrounding ourselves at various times with others can provide a different kind of respite from our grief. Engaging with family, friends, coworkers and neighbors can bring feelings of social connectedness, which can yield a greater sense of well-being and have positive health effects, all of which are important to offset the effects of grief on our minds and bodies.

If your time of quiet solitude has turned to social avoidance, feelings of loneliness and isolation, and is draining you of energy instead of restoring you, it is time to reach

out for support. Reach out to the person or people who have been helpful and encouraging during this season of your life. If it is difficult to identify who that might be, there are actions you can take to develop helpful supports for your journey: join a care group in your local community, reach out to your faith community, re-engage with others in an activity you have set aside, explore ways to honor your loved one during the holiday season, and reach out to your TAPS family. The Survivor Care Team is always here to help you explore your supports and encourage you on your journey.



BY AUDRI BEUGELSDIJK

Surviving spouse of

Navy Seaman Jason Clay Springer

Audri is a Navy veteran herself who has completed Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Psychology, in addition to advanced training in death, dying and bereavement through the Center for Loss & Life Transition, as well as the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC). She currently serves as the TAPS Survivor Care Team Director.

Holiday Art Therapy

Practical Activities for Healing

It's no wonder that the holidays sometimes find us staring dazedly at holiday cards, half-decorated trees, and difficult wish lists (sparkle unicorns, rockets, removal of pesky siblings). The tasks and expectations that fall between November and the New Year are monumental even for families who aren't living in the aftermath of tragic grief. For those of us tenderly coping with the loss of a loved one, the final weeks of the year are even more stressful.

Creative holiday art projects are a great way to channel energy into positive tasks instead of the chaos of the holiday. If the kids are particularly grumpy, help them deal with feelings of sadness with glitter and glue. It is hard to sprinkle gold glitter and not get a little sparkle on yourself.

Creative holiday art projects are a great way to channel energy into positive tasks instead of the chaos of the holiday. If the kids are particularly grumpy, help them deal with feelings of sadness with glitter and glue.

Your TAPS family offers these simple projects as a way for you or the whole family to redirect your thoughts to simple but meaningful activities.

Want to save some money on wrapping gifts? Recycle brown paper bags and use festive stamps or stickers to create your own holiday pattern. You can also use magazines, newspaper or cloth and embellish with your own paint, sparkly trim or accents. If you are making the effort to give any gifts, your recipients should already feel special at this difficult time, but this added touch might be what you need. There is more to giving than receiving, as they say.

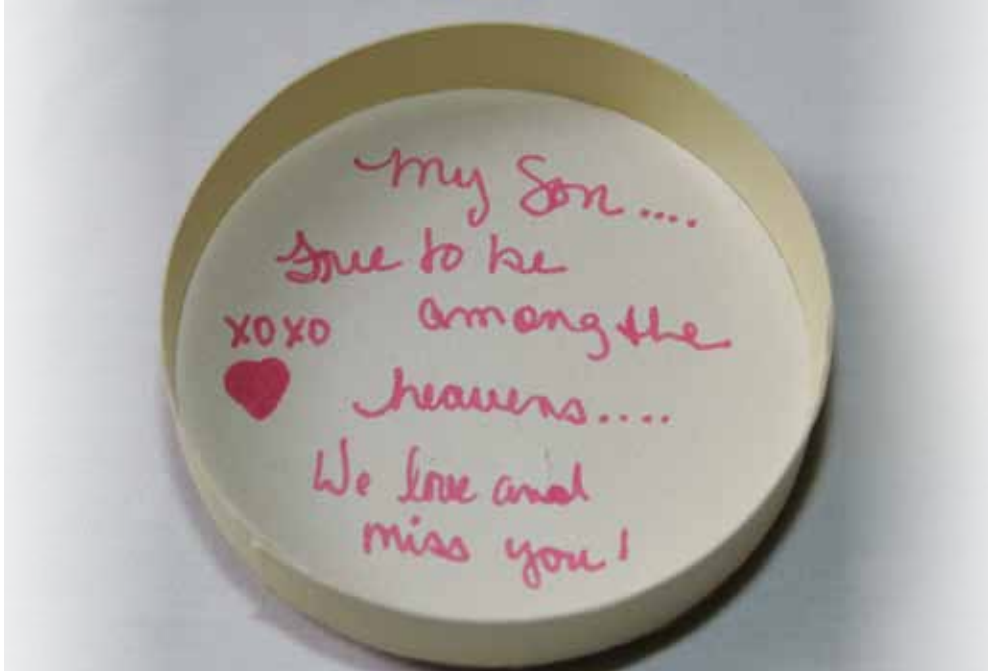
Holiday cards on your list and you just aren't ready to send out a family photo without your loved one? That's perfectly OK, but consider taking old cards you have received and collaging them together into new cards. You can also use cardstock, stamps, glitter pens and magazine cutouts to make your own set of new holiday cards. This idea can translate to holiday art displays by using old cards to make larger collages that can be framed or used as gifts.

A special way to include your loved one in new memories is to make a unique ornament that celebrates your loved one. This can be as simple as taking one of your favorite photos and modge-podging it onto a uniform ornament ball or wooden piece. If you want to make something more elaborate, you can buy empty, fillable clear acrylic ornaments and fill a series of them with themed items that our loved one particularly enjoyed. You could have a baseball ornament with team colors and stickers, a Star Wars ornament with a mini lightsaber inside (yes there is such a thing) or make a snowglobe of their favorite winter scene.

If you aren't ready for decorating a tree or ornaments, you can still be creative with how you make and decorate holiday cookies. We aren't here to judge your eating habits, so if you need to bake off some



Hold them close to your heart with rich memories to warm your season. Set aside some quiet time to reflect on past holidays, but allow yourself the energy to focus on a few small projects to bring small cheer to the end of the year and beyond.



stress, then get to cooking. Cookie decorating can be very intricate. In the process of following a pattern and design, your thoughts will naturally focus in the moment and offer relief from the worries on your mind. There are tons of cookie design examples and patterns online and many types of decorating materials in the baking section of most craft stores. Don't limit yourself by what you have baked in the past. Open yourself up to new possibilities just as you have to find your way ahead in a forever changed world.

Not everyone is good at crafts or baking or thinks they are ready to handle so much detail when they are still struggling to brush their teeth or cook dinner. One idea that can be very relaxing is creating a holiday playlist. Bring in a few songs from the past, but the relaxing part is clicking through different music options on iTunes, Pandora or Spotify. If the first few lyrics and notes don't make you smile—move on to something else. Try new musical genres or look for recommendations from your TAPS family on the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors Songs of Love and Remembrance playlist on Spotify. An upcoming question in the TAPS Saturday Morning Message will ask survivors to share meaningful songs at the holidays.

The worst part of the holidays is often missing our loved ones and the lack of their presence in all the traditional things we do. Hold them close to your heart with rich memories to warm your season. Set aside some quiet time to reflect on past holidays, but allow yourself the energy to focus on a few small projects to bring small cheer to the end of the year and beyond.



Holiday Healing for the Body, Mind and Spirit

The holidays have arrived. Normally they are a time for family fun and celebration but when you are grieving the loss of someone who has died, the season is different: it is painful.

Grieving is a long process. It takes time to heal from the loss of a loved one. When we are grieving, we can feel completely overwhelmed with sadness, overwhelmed with missing the beloved person who has gone. We long for them. We think we will not survive. So we ask ourselves, "How can I make it through these days?"

Here are some thoughts that have helped me. Maybe they can help you.

FOR YOUR BODY

Rest: your body has experienced loss. It is exhausted. Take a nap when you can. Walking in the sunshine every day, even for just 15 minutes, will help to elevate endorphins. Take some baths instead of quick showers. Eat nourishing foods, like a delicious soup and a slice of warm whole-grained bread. Limit your sugar, caffeine and alcohol; they affect mood. Drink generous quantities of water; it restores energy. Get a back massage; it lessens the stress lodged in your muscles. Get and give as many hugs as you can; touch heals. Stroke your pet; it calms the body. Pray, meditate, breathe deeply, practice yoga, and exercise; it brings you home to yourself.

FOR YOUR MIND

Start a new tradition. If you don't have small children to attend to, simplify the decorations. An aromatic wreath on your front door and bakery purchased cookies are more than enough. Keep these days simple and peaceful. If you have always prepared a big sit-down meal, have a little brunch instead. Carve out some time for yourself, an overnight to the beach or the mountains with your prayers, your journal, your favorite inspirational books, and your music. I browse the shelves of our local library; it is calming for me. If being around other people helps, seek them. People like to be asked for help; it makes them feel useful when they don't know what to do. Watch any movie that makes you laugh; you need to help your process along. Lastly, find a person to share your sorrow with, whether a friend, a spouse, a minister, a priest, a rabbi, a clergyman or a counselor.

FOR YOUR SPIRIT

First, give compassion to yourself. Remind yourself that you did a good job loving the departed person and trust they are now safe and free. Second, be around those people whom you love and who love you; they will soothe your weary soul. But remember, you are vulnerable now and a remark from an insensitive person will injure you as never before.

Attend church, or synagogue, or temple, and pray for the departed, for yourself and your family. Pray for peace, pray for faith, pray for grace, pray for forgiveness. Have a small ritual that not only acknowledges the continued spiritual presence of the deceased but a ritual that you know would make them happy, too. An idea to celebrate the person that you have lost would be to get every member of the family together and bake their favorite cake, pie, or cookies. Then sit down with tea or hot chocolate or cold milk and share happy holiday memories. Maybe family photos or mementos could be brought out. Tears may come but let them; they open up the gates for laughter and hope. In our family, we talk about our Katie with our three precious grandchildren so that they have a chance to know her through our remembrances. She is their Aunt Katie in heaven with God now. Katie loved the magic that children bring and she would love how we have opened our hearts to this chapter in our lives.

When we remember that no one's spirit ever dies, we will feel the light of confidence and direction shift in our souls. Yes, we acknowledge that our lives are not the same without the person who has died, and we know that we will miss them forever. But we are grateful, so very grateful, for having had the blessing of them in our lives. We honor our deceased by loving those still in our lives and by making every day matter.



BY MARY JANE HURLEY BRANT,
MS, CGP

Mary Jane is a practicing psychotherapist for 34 years who specializes in grief. She is author of, "When Every Day Matters: A Mother's Memoir of Love, Loss and Life." She is the founder of Mothers Finding Meaning Again. Mary Jane can be reached through her website www.MaryJaneHurleyBrant.com.



After the Holidays

Surviving the Mid-Winter Gloom

Why does January seem so empty? Just as the world is stiff and frozen outside my window, I feel dead and cold and scattered inside myself. I managed to make it through the holiday season, though the “how” of that feat is truly beyond my recollection. I can't even remember eating the holiday meals.

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

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

Am I still a mother if there is no child to tuck in at night? Am I still a dad if there is no one to loan the car keys to? Am I still a wife if there is no one to snuggle up to in my bed? Am I still a husband if there is no one waiting at home for me at the end of the day? Am I still a sister or a brother if there is no one to tease? Am I still a child if my parent has died? Am I still a human being, capable of loving and being loved, if the one person I loved more than anything has become frozen in time?

Why can't January be warm and gentle—especially after the struggle of the holidays? I need some sunshine, some warmth, some help in turning over the puzzle pieces and putting them back together. I need some springtime. But springtime is a way off and I must somehow get through these days. If you're feeling like I am, perhaps these five suggestions will help you find the pieces to your new puzzle.

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



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

- Set small goals first. Accomplish them. Then, set bigger goals. Try starting with getting the garbage out on the right day. Then, open the closet . . . the drawers . . . the heart. Try going out. The next time you

might be able to get farther than the driveway. Take your time. It's a long way to the beach. You'll get there again . . . someday.

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

- Don't forget how to dream, how to laugh, how to dance. The music is different but so is the season. The room may be empty, but the heart is not. One day at a time is OK if you can manage it, but know that some days all you can manage is one minute at a time. But minutes add up to years, eventually.

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



BY DARCIE SIMS, PH.D., CHT, CT, GMS
Darcie was a bereaved parent and child who shared her wealth of training and experience with TAPS families for many years. She was beloved by all. Almost three years later, we miss her greatly.

Tips for Scholarship Season

Emily McClimans first came to TAPS through Good Grief Camp after her father, Army Capt. Joshua McClimans, was killed in action in Afghanistan in 2011. While she dreamed of attending Texas Christian University, Emily wasn't sure how to realize her hopes of attending an expensive private school.

Then, at the 2015 National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp, she attended a TAPS Education Support Services session for teens and learned about a variety of benefits that are available to her as a surviving daughter of a military service member. With the information from that session, Emily realized that she could afford an education at TCU thanks to both private and federal scholarships and grants available to most TAPS children and surviving spouses.

Emily connected with TAPS over the summer and we helped walk her through the process of applying for the necessary financial aid to allow her to attend TCU. The first step involved ensuring that she gathered all the necessary paperwork very early on to apply for scholarships. There can be some specific forms and requirements that may take time and starting early is vital. Emily also wanted to get an overview at this point of how much scholarship money she would need for the schools on her wish list. In the fall, she focused on college applications, specifically to her dream school of TCU.

"TAPS equipped me with the knowledge and resources to come out of college and conquer life's challenges, since a financial burden is no longer a worry for me," Emily said. "TAPS gave me so much hope in such a stressful time, and each day, I am able to proudly attend the university of my dreams without worry that I won't have proper finances to cover it. I am eternally grateful for the dedication of TAPS to my education and my future."

Winter in the busiest time of all for our TAPS families as application deadlines for most scholarships occur in the first months of the year.

TAPS Education Support Services has helped more than 1,000 surviving family members and plans to continue offer-

ing support to thousands more. Since scholarship season is kicking off this month, we want to share important deadlines for private scholarship organizations. Remember that TAPS Education Support Services is available to help you throughout the college and scholarship application process. You can reach us by calling 800-959-8277 or emailing education@taps.org.



Winter is the busiest time of all for our TAPS families as application deadlines for most scholarships occur in the first months of the year. Emily applied for VA Education Benefits and filled out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) during this time, but she also applied for private scholarships. One year at TCU costs nearly \$56,000 and VA benefits only cover a portion of that. TAPS Education Support Services was able to advise her on additional scholarships she should prioritize and how to make the \$35,000 gap disappear.

The scholarship letters and acceptance letters started rolling in during the spring. Thanks to the generosity of Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation, Folds of Honor Foundation, Fisher House Foundation, the Folded Flag Foundation and many others, Emily is now a freshman at TCU and will graduate completely debt free.



BY ASHLYNNE HAYCOCK
Surviving daughter of

Army Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey Haycock and Air Force Senior Airman Nichole Haycock
Ashlynn is the Education Services Coordinator for TAPS where she works with hundreds of survivors of military loss to connect them to education benefits and resources to further their goals. She received a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from the American University in 2013.

Scholarship Highlights for Spring 2017

Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation

- Children of those who died in the line of duty or a service-connected disability
- Up to \$6,250 per year
- **Rolling applications**

Fisher House Foundation

- Children of those who died on active duty post-9/11
- Up to \$5,000 per year
- Applications available **Jan. 1, 2017 - March 17, 2017**

Folded Flag Foundation

- Children and spouses of those who died from service in Iraq or Afghanistan
- Up to \$6,000 per year
- Applications available **March 1, 2017- May 15, 2017**
- Can be used for K-12 private schooling

Folds of Honor Foundation

- Children and spouses of those who died in the line of duty or from a service-connected disability
- Up to \$5,000 per year
- Can be used for K-12 private schooling
- Applications available **Feb. 1, 2017- March 31, 2017**

Matthew Freeman Project

- Siblings of those killed in action or who died by suicide
- \$1,000 per year
- Applications available **Jan. 19, 2017**

Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation

- Children of Marines or Navy Corpsman
- Up to \$7,500 per year
- Applications available **Jan. 1, 2017- March 1, 2017**

National Military Family Association

- Spouses of those who died in the line of duty or from a service-connected injury post-9/11
- Up to \$1,000 per year
- Applications available **Oct. 1, 2016- Jan. 15, 2017** and **May 1, 2017- June 30, 2017**

Pat Tillman Foundation

- Surviving spouses
- No maximum amount
- Applications available **Feb. 1, 2017- March 1, 2017**



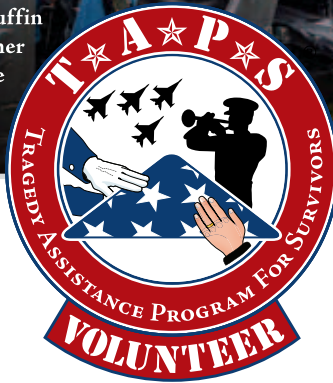
Moments Captured Forever

By Paige Williams ★ Volunteer Coordinator

Lenzy Ruffin has been a volunteer with TAPS since the 2016 National Military Survivor Seminar. He took amazing photos during the weekend event to capture the meaning and connection of the TAPS family. Since then, he also covered the Army Ten-Miler for Team TAPS in October. Before becoming a professional photographer, Lenzy served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army. TAPS is so grateful for Lenzy's service to our country; and willingness to share his talent as a photographer to help TAPS tell our story through images. Please read an excerpt from his blog below, in which he describes his first experience with TAPS families.



Photographer Lenzy Ruffin finds himself on the other end of the camera at the Army Ten-Miler Expo in October.



Thank you,
Lenzy Ruffin!

"I've never seen anything like it. The TAPS seminar really is just a big family gathering. You can't be involved and not become a part of the family. Normally, as a photographer, I'm detached from the event I'm covering because I'm focused on capturing the images I was commissioned to get. I don't endeavor to be detached, I just get focused on my task of capturing moments, which generally disallows experiencing the moment.

But that wasn't the case with TAPS. I realized that when the closing dinner was winding down and I was sad that the weekend was over. Normally, I'm happy the event is over so I can go home. I thought about the stories that parents had told me about how much the kids look forward to the TAPS seminar every year so they can go see all their TAPS friends. I totally get it. I know how sad those kids must be that the weekend is over

because their sadness is mine. And I don't even know any of those people. I was there for only two days and those people are now family to me. That's just how incredible this event is. It's magical. All these people come together to heal and some magic happens and then something way beyond healing goes on. I went there not for healing, but to volunteer, and ended up leaving enriched in a way that I am honestly having a real challenge to describe. I don't think my words are conveying how I feel about what I experienced this weekend. TAPS is just incredible. In-cre-di-ble."

To learn more about Lenzy and his work, visit his website at <http://www.lenzyruffin.com/>



Photos by Lenzy Ruffin

Grief Resources for Parents and Kids

The holiday season can be magical and stressful. Add grief to that mix, especially for families who are in the first year of loss, and it can become overwhelming.

In 2009, the TAPS Magazine ran an article by Ami Neiberger-Miller that still rings true today. I've summarized it below and you can find the full article in our magazine archives on the web at www.taps.org/magazine.

The most important point: talk to your kids about the upcoming holiday season. Remember that kids grieve on their own timeline, which will be different from yours. Some kids might want to do holiday activities the very same way they've always been done; some might want to change up all the family traditions.

Laughter, play and joy are good for children (and teens). Make holiday plans that include fun activities. Being happy is not an escape from grief. Being happy actually helps children process grief.

Encourage your children to attend holiday functions, especially if those functions include supportive family and friends.

The most important point: talk to your kids about the upcoming holiday season. Remember that kids grieve on their own timeline, which will be different from yours.

Connections with other family members can help your child feel comforted, loved and safe. These family connections can also help you cope with the holidays. And always remember, if the event proves overwhelming, you can slip out early, and trust the host to understand.

Check in with your child. Something that you may think would be comforting may prove to be triggering for them. That's OK. Triggers are often great opportunities for honest conversation. Comfort items that remind the child of the loved one may help. Allowing your child to sleep in a favorite shirt or carry a special item that reminds

him of the person who died can provide a sense of connection. Prominent placement of a special photograph of a holiday celebration from years past may also help.

Regressive behaviors, acting out and nightmares may be indications that your child is struggling. Check to make sure they are sleeping well, eating well and getting enough water. Most of all, be patient and understand they do not have the same perspectives from which to understand loss.

Don't pretend that your family hasn't suffered a loss. Tell your child that you don't like the fact that things can't be the way they were before the person died. Children may need to hear this in order to feel it is permissible to discuss their own feelings.

Allow your child to remember a lost loved one through a tribute. Light a candle together at dinnertime to remember the person who died. Make a wreath with pictures and items that represent the things the lost loved one cared about. Hang an ornament on the tree that reminds the child of the loved one. Donate to a favorite charity. Stick to daily routines when possible.

There is no one way for parents to share loss and healing with their children. What works in one family may not quite be right for another. But TAPS hopes you are able to work together to find the comfort and hope we so richly wish for your family during this season.



BY JONATHAN KIRKENDALL, MA, LPC
Youth Programs Manager

The son of missionaries, Jonathan grew up in Beirut, Tehran and Bangalore. A graduate of Wake Forest University and Narapo University's Masters in Counseling Psychology, he has over 20 years experience in working with children, teens and adults, and, outside of TAPS, manages a small private practice in Washington, D.C.

Hope in the Heavens

It has been said that people are equals at birth and death. Birth is typically celebrated as a joyous occasion, while death is a topic some cultures avoid due to the reality of its accompanying grief. Social convention and our own sense of duty can draw our focus toward tending to the deceased, and away from giving attention our own grief and healing. Death, like birth, is completely out of our control, and yet we wish we could script our loved one's death differently. It is painful to realize how much we cannot control in this world, yet remarkable to see how tragedy can shape us for the better. Like clay on a potter's wheel, we are continually sculpted into a work of art through our life experiences, including our grief journey. The wake of loss from a death can be crippling, and we are sometimes left with unanswered questions serving to further augment the pain. Tragedy can make people question their beliefs and also question where their loved ones reside eternally. Our crushed souls thirst for answers, and some look for hope in the heavens. We long for a safe place to open our hearts.

At TAPS, survivors are free to call us regardless of where they may be struggling in their grief journey. We are dedicated to life-giving hospitality, genuine respect and

providing a loving ear, especially when those you depend on most have failed you. TAPS offers a safe place where hard questions can be explored comfortably and without judgment. If the words cannot be formed to express the depth of your pain, you will experience a caring presence who can be with you in the silence. We are survivors, too, capable of sharing in the commonalities of grief and the struggle to take that very next and lifesaving breath. We can journey alongside you and connect you with local resources that may help you as you move toward healing.

Tragedy can bring about three responses for the bereaved: they will find strength and comfort in their faith, they will wrestle with faith in an effort to find answers, or they will feel betrayed and abandon their faith. There are, on occasion, some without any faith foundation who seek reasonable spiritual explanations for consolation. Without question, cultures around the world hold to religious and faith traditions to seek purpose and meaning to life. Conversely, those with faith paradigms can still sometimes be ill-equipped to deal with grief or provide needed care to the bereaved.

If you are one who finds strength and comfort in your faith, then you know your faith is unshakeable. It is a belief mixed with unwelcome pain. A strong faith is not devoid of sorrow, nor is it perfect. It is a faith that can navigate through the depths of sorrow with comfort and peace, despite not having answers. You have been given the gift of viewing tragedy through the spiritual lens of your faith. Miraculously, you are experiencing tears filled with an assurance of hope that is impossible to articulate. It is an invisible yet very tangible experience. It is not a "hope" that is synonymous with "maybe." It is a hope laid in your rock-solid foundation of faith. You have refuge in the storm. You would do well to continue surrounding yourself with others who share your faith. They are a reinforcement to you. Additionally, as ordained moments permit, allow yourself to give hope to others.

If you are the one who is wrestling with your faith, then you are not alone. It has been said that conflict builds character, however you would prefer to be the potter fashioning the clay while it

spins on the wheel since you could do a much better job. If you are like me, you have rolled up your sleeves, clenched your fist and challenged your God to a boxing match! Maybe you have temporarily shelved your sacred writings and allowed equal amounts of dust to collect on your spirit, while attempting to connect the dots of the perpetual "why?" Your tears beg for comfort and answers. Your prayers are different now, a little shallow and laced with doubt because you are fighting the very thing you need.

Going toe-to-toe with faith is different than being enveloped by it. Quite possibly, your place of worship has not seen you for some time and you wonder if they even care about you. Somewhere down the line you may have been sold some bad teaching. I call this teaching "prosperity cotton candy." It tastes so good at the time, but it quickly disappears and has no spiritual nutrition. Sadly, we can sometimes be taught and believe that nothing bad will happen to us in this world. I am not speaking for everyone when I say this, but doesn't it sometimes seem that when everything is good, God is also good? And conversely, when everything is bad, God is also bad? Or, when life is both good and bad, God is not fair? When life doesn't make sense, God is not there?

I am encouraged when you wrestle with your faith and religious traditions. At least you are engaged and growing, even though you may not realize it. What you need is someone of similar faith who will not judge you and is willing to journey with you. You need someone who will tolerate your doubts and frustrations. I recommend someone who has grown through tragedy and/or one who has been gifted to be present with you in loss. You need someone who can help lead and will not attempt to fix things for you. With bruised faith, it helps to have a patient friend. You also may need to consider forgiving yourself for being angry with your faith and religious tradition. After all, if you have been endowed with complex emotions, I suspect you will not be judged for exercising them.

If you are the one who has chosen to abandon your faith tradition in the wake of tragedy, then you are human, too. You are experiencing a very real response to a very real

tragedy. You have taken the clay and the potter's wheel and smashed it with a sledgehammer. You have completely skipped the idea of wrestling with your faith and have tossed it in the trashcan. Your mission now is to take control of an out-of-control world. Life may fall apart around you, but your life has boundaries and the two shall not cross!

It is like a precious vase sitting atop the mantle, secured and out of reach, but it has fallen and smashed into pieces — impossible to rebuild. You now reject matters of faith and religion and rage against it. I do not blame you, nor do I judge you. You are the very one I search for and desire to spend time with the most. Family and friends may have rejected you for your decision to abandon faith and religion, but TAPS will stand faithfully by your side. I welcome your anger, questions and frustrations. I want you to express raw, unbridled emotions. You will not offend me. We can still talk about the bottomless pit of grief in a sacred place where unintelligible and unimaginable laments can safely be expressed. It is not that survivors of great faith, or those who wrestle with faith do not experience pain, but it is necessary for you to have someone who is willing to stand with you in the fire as well. You will resist faith and religion and it never has to be discussed until you are ready. I understand that, but I know that you will gladly welcome the hands and feet of those who bring comfort and peace. Until you find faith and religion, at least have faith in an ambassador of it.

Richard Dawkins, English ethologist, evolutionary biologist and author said, "The idea of an afterlife where you can be reunited with loved ones can be immensely consoling — though not to me." He also said, "When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion it is called Religion." While Richard Dawkins may not be a specialist in the field of bereavement care, to a smaller population he may offer some comfort through secular humanism. I am certain that he experiences sorrows associated with the death of a loved one, whether this very real emotion is God-given or a byproduct of evolution. To his defense, even though I do not hold to his beliefs, it can be harmful to tell people what you want them to hear in an effort to soothe or erase their pain. The world is filled with armchair theologians, of all religious backgrounds, attempting to provide hollow answers that only serve to reinforce personal opinions and beliefs.

TAPS refrains from political and religious persuasions, but we promote healthy healing and wellness in the wake of tragedy. This is a hallmark of our mission, and we are committed to the healing of bereaved military survivors. Moreover, we recognize that survivors come from a multitude of religious and faith backgrounds and encourage them to connect with their place of worship to help understand life, death and tragedy. If part of your journey toward healing includes faith and religion, then by all means pursue it without hesitation. Exhaust it until you have received answers. I have found in my work at TAPS and as a military chaplain that discussions on faith, grief and God are rewarding and life-changing. Without a doubt, I routinely witness miraculous healing taking place in survivors of faith. Contrary to Richard Dawkins' claims, I do not find them to be insane or delusional at all. Rather, I find the shared nature of our loss to be the tie that binds us together as TAPS family.



BY DOUG WINDLEY, MDV

Doug graduated from Western Carolina University with a B.S. in Business Administration. He received his M.A. in Theological Studies and M.Div. in Biblical Studies from Carolina Graduate School of Theology, and Clinical Pastoral Education from the Durham VA Hospital. In addition to working with TAPS, Doug is a Chaplain in the Army National Guard. He lives in North Carolina with his wife and three children and enjoys speaking at events and churches where he shares his passion for his faith, his love for military service members and veterans, and his heart for families of the fallen.



Holiday Wish List for the Grieving

"Happy Hanukkah," they say. "Merry Christmas," they repeat. "Joyous Kwanza," they wish. But for some of us, happy and merry and joy are the remotest emotions of our heart. Especially during this season. Too many memories. Too many traditions. Too much pain. The empty chair at the dinner table. The one less present under the tree. The voice that filled the room with laughter now silent. While some sing that "It's the most wonderful time of the year," we feel conflicted because it seems to be not so wonderful for us.

If you are looking to this magazine for the magic solution for finding happiness and merriness in this season, you won't find it. There is no magic solution. To get through the pain, you have to go through the pain. As the children's song says, you can't go over it, around it, or under it. You have to go through it. But even though there is no magic solution, there are five wishes that I have for you this holiday season. Though you may not have happy holidays, at the very least I wish that you will experience healthy holidays when it comes to grief.

HOLIDAY WISH #1:

**I WISH FOR YOU TO BE AUTHENTIC
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.**

When it seems like the whole world is joyful, allow yourself to experience the pain of your loss. With all of your power, resist the temptation to feel guilty for not being happy. Simply embrace the pain. Don't try to squelch it. Don't try to repress it. Don't try to forget about it. Embrace it. You have experienced a very painful event and you have every right in the world to be sad, no matter what season it is.

HOLIDAY WISH #2:

**I WISH FOR YOU TO BE CONGRUENT
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.**

There is, as you know, a huge temptation to put on a happy face during this season. It's the time to be jolly, after all, and no one wants to be like the Grinch. You are

supposed to be happy during the holidays, you tell yourself. You don't want to be a wet blanket on other's holidays, you exhort yourself. So you wrestle with the temptation to smile on the outside though you're crying on the inside. My wish for you is to be congruent — to be the same on the outside as you are on the inside. If you don't feel like smiling, don't smile. If you don't feel like laughing, don't laugh. But on the other hand, if you do feel like smiling, then by all means smile and laugh. Be who you are. Don't fake it.

HOLIDAY WISH #3:

**I WISH FOR YOU TO BE GRACIOUS
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.**

Sometimes, those who are grieving feel a sense of anger rush through their veins when watching others who are not grieving. Sometimes watching others who are happy can just downright make us mad. "How can they be happy when they know I am sad?" "It's not fair that they get to have their loved one this holiday season and I don't." "Why do they get to be so blessed and I'm not!" Anger is very common for the grieving, especially during the holidays. Anger, however, is a secondary emotion. It always has its roots in another emotion such as fear, hurt, shame, loneliness and many others. So my wish for you is to be gracious with yourself as you identify why you are angry and then to be gracious with others to let them authentically and congruently experience what they are experiencing. In the end, you already know that the anger you have really isn't hurting them anyway. It is only hurting you. So give yourself the gift of graciousness.

HOLIDAY WISH #4:

**I WISH FOR YOU A FRUITFUL MEMORY
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.**

The tendency, I know, is to try to forget because of all of the painful feelings that flood our soul when we remember. Yet as painful as they may be, memories are amazing healers. They remind us of how

thankful we are for the times that we have had and keep us connected in relationship with our loved one. So instead of acting as if the events of the past never happened, honor the past by allowing your memories to run rampant. Some suggestions I have heard for this are: make an ornament with your loved one's picture, cook your loved one's favorite meal in their honor, donate money in your loved one's name to a cause in which they believed, create a scrapbook of holiday pictures of you and your loved one, read a poem or prayer in your loved one's honor, light a candle for your loved one, watch your loved one's favorite movie, volunteer at a soup kitchen or other charity, etc. Whatever you do, let your memory be fruitful as you honor your loved one and what they mean to you.

HOLIDAY WISH #5:

**I WISH FOR YOU HEALTH
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.**

Obviously, I hope that you won't get sick this season, but it's not physical health that I am talking about here. It is mental health. If you are really struggling, I hope you will reach out for help. Especially if you are having thoughts about harming yourself or another, using alcohol or non-prescribed medications to ease your troubled emotions, isolating yourself from all relationships. If you suspect you might be experiencing mental illness, or you don't have a support system to help you along in your grief journey be aware that it is OK to seek help.

If any of these apply to you, I strongly encourage you to reach out for help by calling your doctor and/or setting up an appointment with a counselor. If you need help during the time that your doctor or counselor are not in, go to the nearest emergency room. Whatever you do, get the help you need when you need it. As always, TAPS is here 24/7 during the emotional holiday roller coaster. You can call the Helpline night or day to talk to your TAPS family for support and caring.

TOO MANY MEMORIES.
TOO MANY TRADITIONS.
TOO MUCH PAIN.
THE EMPTY CHAIR AT
THE DINNER TABLE.
THE ONE LESS PRESENT
UNDER THE TREE.
THE VOICE THAT FILLED
THE ROOM WITH LAUGHTER
NOW SILENT. WHILE SOME
SING THAT “IT’S THE MOST
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BY JEFF BROOKSHIRE, MDV

Jeff is the Lead Bereavement Coordinator for LHC Group Hospice and is responsible for resourcing bereavement coordinators in over 60 Hospices across the nation. He is a graduate of Purdue University with a bachelor’s degree in Secondary Education and Duke University with a Masters of Divinity. Before working in Hospice for the last nine years, he served as a pastor for 17 years. Originally from Indiana, he lives with his wife of 31 years in Jefferson, Georgia.



USAA Serves Giving Campaign

For the first time ever, USAA opened their annual employee giving campaign to three charities instead of one, including TAPS, United Way and Junior Achievers among the designated nonprofits eligible for employee charitable contributions. This is a recognition of the growing relationship that TAPS has with USAA through their support of emergency funding and casework assistance, as well as the annual TAPS Honor Guard Gala. In addition to their foundation grant, USAA employees can now pledge individual funds through the spring bowl-a-thon campaign and as part of the fall USAA Serves Giving Campaign.

TAPS staff and survivors were invited to nine USAA site rallies across the country in October to participate in a joint service project with employees. The project focused on creating messages of gratitude in a leaf motif to be featured at the 2017 National Military Survivor Seminar on a specially dedicated Tree of Hope to honor our survivors and their courageous journey toward healing. USAA employees were invited to write messages of hope, favorite quotes, draw inspirational images — whatever uplifting message the staff chose to share with TAPS survivors.

The project saw hundreds of employees stop by to write messages, draw leaves and share personal stories of those they know who lost a military loved one in service to America. Many veteran employees also shared memories and stories of fallen battle buddies they honor. The engagement created an inspiring moment to reflect on the sacrifices of so many military families and the culture of support USAA is creating by partnering with organizations like TAPS.

Different teams of TAPS staff used the site rallies to highlight USAA employee opportunities for personal volunteerism, financial support and fitness challenge involvement with Team TAPS. Our own personal stories of loss and triumph set the stage for continuing project involvement and TAPS mission

awareness. TAPS is grateful to USAA and their 20,000 dedicated employees for opening their hearts to the TAPS family. Their generous grants, donations and pledges are expected to exceed \$2 million over the next year which will allow TAPS to hold our families close with care for years to come.



TAPS Partners Make the Difference





TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS
3033 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 630
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800.959.TAPS (8277) * www.TAPS.org



TAPS is a participant organization in the
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*"Sometimes I'll read a treasured card you had given me
And each word's special meaning makes me see,
The precious gift of love I was fortunate to receive,
And I realize you'd never want to see me grieve."*

— EXCERPT FROM SEASONS OF GRIEF BY BELINDA STOTLER —

