

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

T★A★P★S[®]

Comfort and Support Since 1994

MAGAZINE

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



VOLUME 19 • ISSUE 3

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

Publisher: TAPS, Inc.

Editor: Elisabeth Beard

Editorial Board:

Ellen Andrews, Bonnie Carroll,
Jill LaMorie, Ami Neiberger-Miller

Art Director: Jennifer Bonney

★ National Office ★

3033 Wilson Blvd., Suite 630
Arlington, VA 22201

Email: editor@taps.org

Website: www.taps.org

Please send subscription requests
and address changes to: info@taps.org

★ About TAPS Magazine ★

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national nonprofit 501(c)3 Veterans Service Organization which publishes TAPS Magazine in furtherance of its mission to provide support services to the survivors of service members who have died while serving.

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



Copyright © 2013 by TAPS, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part prohibited without authorization. All articles appearing in this magazine, unless copyrighted by others, remain copyrighted materials of TAPS.



TAPS

and **TAPS** are Registered U.S. Trademarks. All rights reserved.

Printed in the USA

TAPS®

Comfort and Support Since 1994

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

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

Call us at 800-959-TAPS
Or visit us at www.taps.org



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

PROVIDES the National Military Survivor Helpline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 800-959-TAPS (8277). Support is available from leading experts in the field of grief and trauma.

HOSTS the TAPS Online Community of survivors, providing secure chat rooms, message boards, blogs, peer group discussion sites, and an extensive website at www.taps.org.

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

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

FEATURES ★

- 6 Reaching Out to Others
Finding your way out of isolation
By Darcie Sims
- 8 What Not to Say to a Military Widow
Avoiding the worst pitfalls
By Jenna Grassbaugh
- 10 Love and Grief
Living as you were meant to live
By Alan Wolfelt
- 12 Gaining Strength on the Journey
Remembering, celebrating, and sharing
By Andy Weiss
- 14 Struggling to Reclaim My Faith
Questions for and about God
By Dennis Apple
- 16 Bringing Alex Home
A brother's loss during war
By Donleigh Gaunky



10



18



28

NEWS ★

- 18 Good Grief Camp Out
Vice President visits TAPS children
- 20 Run and Remember Team
Bethany Crudele's diary of a runner
- 22 Colorado Celebrity Classic
Eighth annual event puts focus on suicide
- 24 American/Israeli Good Grief Camp
Global connections
- 26 National Bereavement Study
Call to action

DEPARTMENTS ★

- 4 Letters to TAPS
Let us Hear From You
- 5 Letters from TAPS
From Suicide Postvention Programs
- 27 Resource Center
Webinars and Podcasts
- 28 Grief 101
The Year-Round School of Grief
By Betsy Beard
- 30 To Your Health
Nutrition and Stress
By Ruth Crocker
- 32 Book Shelf
Life After the Death of My Son
- 33 Volunteer Voices
Mardee McDaniel
- 34 Poetry Place
Love of My Life
By Meaghan Steele



COVER PHOTO BY
Steve Maloney

*Salina Jimenez and Jamie Seinko
displaying their Marine Corps Marathon medals*



Let Us Hear From You



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

Sibling Retreat

The TAPS Sibling Retreat was an amazing experience that was much more than I could ever have imagined. Sharing my story with other siblings and hearing about their experiences really helped me with my own life. After the retreat, I left feeling normal. I wasn't the only one who, back in my real life, feels that I have to put on my "game face" because talking about war and the casualties associated with war makes civilians very uncomfortable.

Sara Cox, California
Surviving sibling of
SGT Nathan Cox

Tennis, anyone?

Today my son and I had the amazing opportunity to participate at Arthur Ashe Kids Day at the US Open Tennis Championship with a fantastic group of people through TAPS. It wouldn't have been possible without this supportive group of friendly, caring people. There's nothing like the camaraderie of the US military's service members and families. Thank you for a positively memorable first TAPS event, with hopefully many more to come.

Allyson Jo Parla, New York
Surviving girlfriend of
SGT Joseph P. Bitet

TAPS Resource Kits

I want to thank the marvelous people with TAPS for the care box you sent out to me so quickly. It definitely brightened my day! All the items were so thoughtful. The words of hope and light you sent with the red, white, and blue candle were so touching, and I just couldn't hold back the tears. It means so much to be welcomed with so much kindness and generosity into this military TAPS family.

Diane Lippstock, California
Surviving mother of
SGT Delayon Lee Wilson

Fort Hood Regional Seminar

I just got back from the Fort Hood seminar Sunday evening. This was the first event I attended, and I was in tears by all the love that was shared there. I never met so many people with different stories of their departed loved ones in one place before. The Peer Mentors and TAPS staff are something I wished I knew about sooner than six and a half years down the road. I'm looking forward to attending more seminars all over the country and meeting more family that are TAPS survivors.

Carl Martin, Missouri
Surviving spouse of
LT Betty Martin (Ret.)

Message Boards

Reading the other replies to the question on attire and jewelry has brought me great comfort today. It was only five months ago that Caleb went to heaven—the day after his twenty-sixth birthday. Everything is pretty raw, and the roller coaster ride of emotions keeps me wondering who I am now. Reading the responses helped me. I hear the hearts of other mothers and spouses and know we have common ground. Thank you and thanks to TAPS for being so helpful and encouraging to me in this new, difficult journey.

Diane Homm, Colorado
Surviving mother of
SSGT Caleb Medley

Casework Assistance

Thank you for checking in on me. Actually, Sunday is Philip's birthday. It's the first without him, so this week has been tough. My daughter Kaitlyn and I are heading to Florida to get away from everything. We are going to set off 26 sky lanterns (since he would have been 26) and are asking friends and family to do something in his memory and post a picture to our Facebook pages. I'm dreading the day, of course, but look forward to spending the rest of the week on the beach to recuperate. Thanks so much for your thoughts and help with everything. It is so comforting to know that TAPS is there for me.

Teri Arias, Georgia
Surviving mother of
SR Airman Philip Arias



Reaching Out to Others

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

Grief can be so isolating.

We may find ourselves exhausted beyond our capabilities, hurt beyond endurance and lonely beyond belief. No one seems to know what to say or how to behave around us. Many of us have discovered we are grieving not just the death of our loved one, but the loss of friendships, self-esteem, and self-identity as well.

When our loved one died, we were surrounded by people, but the silence was deafening. Hardly anyone spoke. Maybe they were afraid that death was contagious or maybe they just didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to hear, either. As the months passed, it just grew darker and I began to wonder if we would ever know peace, hope, or love again.

Life, as we knew it, planned it, and dreamed it was gone. My days were filled with emptiness rather than the activities I had anticipated. I found myself unable to concentrate long enough to read or to watch a favorite TV program. I couldn't remember anything and I began to think I had not only lost my dearest love, but my sanity as well.



Each time we reach out across our own pain, to find another hand searching in the darkness, we begin to lighten our own darkness.

I couldn't imagine living very long and even began to pray for some type of relief. The pain was understandable. The silence, however, was unbearable.

Eventually, I managed to leave the house and then I began to run—as fast and as far as I could. I believed that if I kept busy, the grief wouldn't overwhelm me. I thought I could run away from the hurt, the pain, the awful silence. (I even tried joining the circus, but they told me I cried too much!) No one understood the depths of my pain, or so I thought.

Life became something to be endured. The days and months began to accumulate, all jumbled together in an endless, faceless stream of time spent. Nothing mattered anymore. I didn't care about the seasons, the news, the weather, what I ate, what I wore, who I lived with, or who I loved. Life had been reduced to blanks and I had nothing to fill them in with.

But one afternoon, I happened to be listening to a friend recount her troubles when I found myself thinking how nice it would be if someone would just listen to me. So, I began to really listen to her and for the next few hours,

I found myself immersed in her life, not mine. My own trials and tribulations took a back seat to her needs, and as she left, she hugged me and thanked me for being so kind. She said she felt so much better, what a magic touch I had. Magic touch? Hardly! I hadn't even touched her until we hugged good-bye. All I had done was listen.

I discovered something that afternoon. I not only discovered how simple it is to listen, but I also learned that listening to someone else helped me. As this friend thanked me for helping her, I found my





As we listen to each other, we begin to hear our own grief and we begin to build those support systems that will help us through the darkest night, in the most silent moments.

own burden a little easier to bear. It was as if I had been lifted slightly, unburdened for a moment. And I had been granted a few moments of breathing space. My own troubles, my own grief were still with me, but I had, for a moment, returned to being the caring, concerned human being I once had been. I hadn't lost myself after all. I could still care.

Each time we reach out across our own pain, to find another hand searching in the darkness, we begin to lighten our own darkness. Each time we send out a message of love or hope or simple presence, we receive back the same message. We are not alone when we reach out to others.

That's the secret to lessening the isolation: helping someone. We are always trying to find the right words to say, the right things to do. There are no words in any language that will make it all right that someone you loved has died. There are, however, actions that can make it less lonely. It is the gift of your presence that helps so much! You don't have to say anything. Just be there and the magic begins. We cannot take away the hurt, but we can make it less lonely for ourselves and others.

And that is the "magic" of TAPS and the wonderful experience of attending national or regional seminars, retreats, or other events! When you first arrive, you may feel you are in the wrong place, the wrong life.

There are so many others and some of them are talking, some hugging, some crying, some sitting quietly. Some are even laughing and smiling.

But all are listening...to each other and to themselves. As we listen to each other, we begin to hear our own grief and we begin to build those support systems that will help us through the darkest night, in the most silent moments.

Be careful, however, not to expect your own pain to disappear completely as you become involved with helping others. We each must still do our own grief work, and work it is! But never again do we have to be alone unless we choose to be. Be aware of your agenda, so that your caring for others does not become an excuse to postpone your own healing. Take good care of yourself as well. Healing begins from the inside out, and the best care you can give is to model your own healthy growth towards wholeness.

My own healing paralleled my involvement with others. As I continued to reach out, others reached toward me and the circle of healing expanded.

Together we will join hands and hearts across the earth and decorate the world with hope, healing, and laughter. We are forever linked through the love of our husbands and wives, partners, children, parents, siblings, grandparents, friends

and all of our loved ones who dance across the rainbows ahead of us.

Come join us at TAPS and discover that we are a family circle, broken by death, but mended by love. *

.....
 For more information about TAPS events, visit our website at www.taps.org and click on events in the tabs below the scrolling photographs.

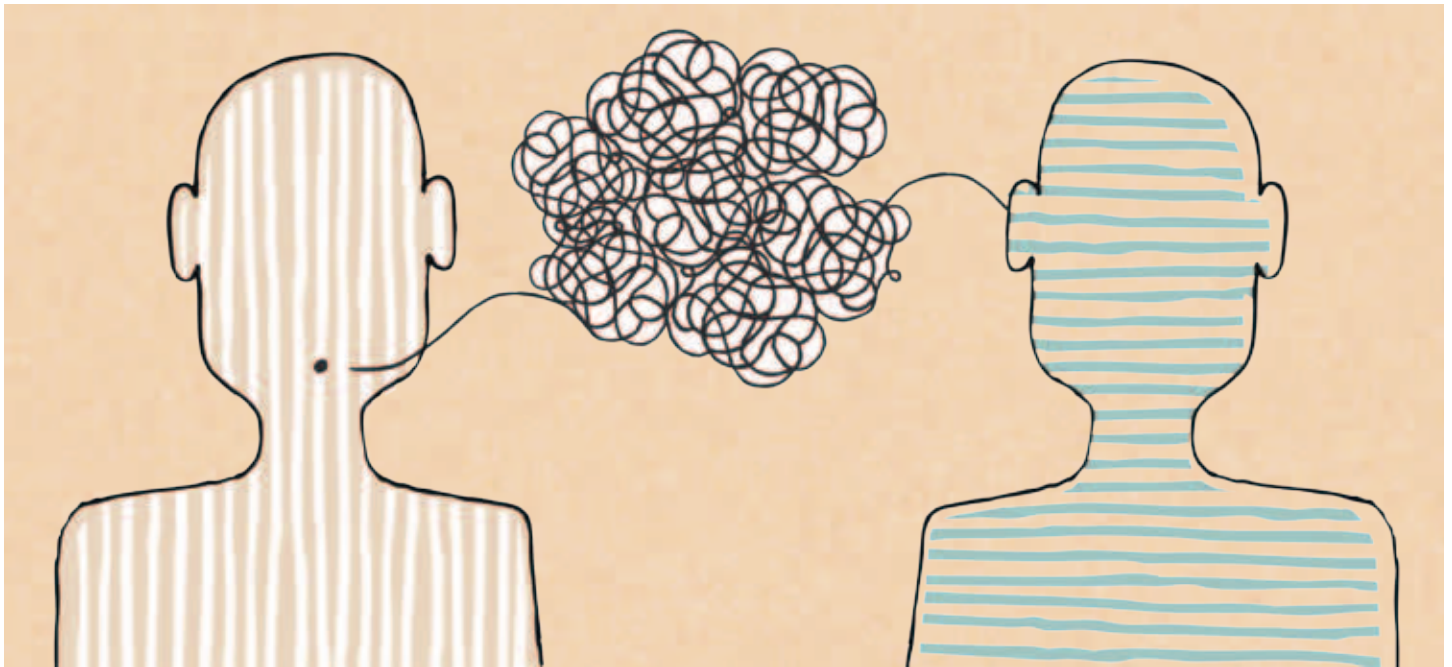
About the Author



Dr. Darcie Sims is a bereaved parent and child, nationally certified thanatologist, certified pastoral bereavement specialist, and licensed psychotherapist and hypnotherapist. She is the president and cofounder of Grief, Inc., a grief consulting business, and the Director of the American Grief Academy in Seattle, Washington. Darcie is an internationally recognized speaker and writer, having authored seven books and numerous articles. She currently serves as the Director of Training and Certification for TAPS. For more information and a complete listing of her books, visit www.griefinc.com.

What NOT to Say to a Military Widow

By Jenna Grassbaugh ★ Surviving spouse of Army CPT Jonathan Grassbaugh



"Death leaves a heartache no one can heal; love leaves a memory no one can steal."

~Author Unknown

When I first lost Jon, I didn't know how to let anyone help me. I retreated behind an emotional wall and kept almost everyone in my life at arm's length. The only person I wanted to talk with about how I was feeling was the one person I couldn't talk to ever again.

I didn't have the energy to get mad and tell people that nothing they said helped. Their words of comfort sounded stilted, cliché, even insulting to Jon's memory. They may have known or even loved him too, but he was my rock, my future, and that future was gone.

There wasn't anything people could say five years ago to make things better, and there is also little they can say now. But

there are some things no one should ever say to a military widow. These are a few of the big ones:

"You are so young... you'll move on and find someone new."

Okay, when is everyone going to get that I don't want someone new? It's not like getting a new pair of shoes when the old ones wear out! I want my husband. Case closed. And at this point, I speak from experience when I say I have serious doubts that anyone will ever measure up to Jon's caliber. Initially, I was open-minded. I didn't cling to the notion that I'd be a widow forever, and I gave relationships a try. Three relationships, three massive disappointments. So, in light of all that, forgive me if I don't really find

this whole "young" and "someone new" thing particularly comforting. I'd rather be alone for the rest of my life than settle for anything less than what Jon and I were lucky enough to share together. I'm young, yes. But I am still deeply in love with my husband and I miss him. Death didn't change that. Uncomfortable though it may be, the grieving doesn't stop when most people think or wish it would.

"You won't always think of yourself as a widow."

Really? Interesting...so how does that work exactly? After X number of years since Jon's death, I'm magically just "single" again versus "widowed"? I understand that our instinct as human beings is to package everything up with a pretty bow and a happy ending. But being a "widow"

isn't a sickness. It's not contagious; you can't catch it from me. There's no need to shrink away from the term "widow" just because it sounds scary or because I'm technically categorized by a term that is usually reserved for people 60 years my senior. Being a widow is a hard enough reality without people trying to minimize that title in order to make me—or maybe themselves—feel better. And denying me the credit for struggling through the heartache of losing my husband is actually more hurtful than it is helpful.

"At least you and your ex-husband didn't have kids."

There are so many things wrong with that statement. First of all "ex-husband" is a term reserved for divorce. Jon and I did not get divorced; at no time did we decide to end our relationship or terminate our marriage. In fact, there was no choice whatsoever in what happened, and that's what makes all of this so painstakingly difficult.

And not having kids? We didn't have the chance! It's certainly not because we didn't want them. By a cruel twist of fate, however, those children do not exist and Jon will never know the joys of old age. My widow friends have often told me that they don't know how they'd continue to get up out of bed every morning if it wasn't for their kids. I realize, of course, that raising children without a father is a type of heartbreak in and of itself. But I would literally do just about anything to still have a little piece of Jon here with me today.

"Don't worry, it will be okay; you are so strong! God only gives you as much as you can handle."

Never tell a widow that it's okay. It's never okay. It may be the hand I was dealt in life,

but it's not okay that my husband is gone. The fact is that what we can handle is simply unknown until we have no choice but to handle it. Grief is far from a nice, neat, linear process. The people who think I seem to be doing "okay" and say that I'm "strong" are not with me in my worst moments of heartache and loneliness. They only see what I let them see.

When people ask how I'm doing, I know they don't really want to know that I'm feeling really crappy today because I can hear the sound of my husband's contagious laughter in my head but I'll never hear it again in real life. They're not with me here at my house when I'm alone at night and all I have left of Jon are pictures and cards and letters and a wedding video that breaks my heart every time I see my husband smiling and walking around as though he's still right here with me. I especially hate when people tell me that they don't know how I do it and that they could never do it themselves. Well, it's not like I have many options.

"I understand exactly how you feel. I lost my [fill in the blank with a noun other than husband]."

At this point, I think the fact that most people just don't get it is probably pretty well established. But what really upsets me is when people try to reach out and relate in a way that adds insult to injury. My "favorite" is when losing a husband is lumped in the same category as losing a grandparent or an aunt or uncle or cousin or friend—pretty much anyone who doesn't represent a part of your day-to-day life, who doesn't constitute the other half of who you are, and who doesn't share your dreams in the present and hopes for the future.

Even among those of us who have lost our husbands, there are vast differences. We all have our own stories and can't truly understand certain specific aspects of each other's grief. One widow I know was

married for almost 20 years with two teenage daughters. Others were like me and thought they still had their whole lives ahead of them. Some women were separated from their husbands and had hopes of reconciling when their husbands returned home from deployment. I have found, however, that our experiences in dealing with the stupid things that people say are relatively uniform across the board.

Those of us who find ourselves in this unfortunate, unwanted position could probably sit and talk for hours about the lack of insight that even the most seemingly intelligent people exhibit at times. My widow friends and I have done just that, and I cherish those moments. It helps to know that you're not so alone and to laugh a little at shared sorrows. I have no doubt there will continue to be many more things people say for us to talk about together in the future.

Uncomfortable as it may be for others, we're here and we're proud beyond words of the men we lost. While we live, they live. And we're not going anywhere. *

About the Author



U.S. Army Captain Jenna Grassbaugh has served for six years and is currently attending Ohio State University's Moritz School of Law where she recently founded a veterans legal assistance project in Jon's name. For more information visit www.giveto.osu.edu/grassbaughveteransproject

Love and Grief

Living as You Were Meant to Live

By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

"We are all mirrors unto one another. Look into me and you will find something of yourself as I will of you."

WALTER RINDER

Love is a sacred partnership of communion with another human being. You take each other in, and even when you are apart, you are together. Wherever you go, you carry the person inside you. Communion means the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially on a spiritual level. When two people love one another, they are connected. They are entwined.

Communion of Lives

The word "communion" comes from the Old French *comuner*, which means "to hold in common." Note that this is different than "to have in common." You may have very little in common with another person, yet love them wholeheartedly. Instead, you hold things in common—that is, you consciously choose to share one another's lives, hopes, and dreams. You hold her heart, and she holds yours.

The absence of the person you love wounds your spirit, creates downward movement in your psyche, and transforms your heart.

This experience of taking another person inside your heart is beyond definition and defies analysis. It is part of the mystery of love. Love has its own way with us. It knocks on our hearts and invites itself in. It cannot be seen, but we realize it has happened. It cannot be touched, yet we feel it.

Communion of Grief

When someone we love dies, then, we feel a gaping hole inside us. I have companioned hundreds of mourners who have said to me, "When she died, I felt like part of me died, too." In what can feel like a very physical sense, something that was inside us now seems missing. We don't mourn those who die from the outside in; we mourn them from the inside out.

The absence of the person you love wounds your spirit, creates downward movement in your psyche, and transforms your heart. Yet even though you feel there is now a hole inside you, you will also come to know (if you haven't already) that those you love continue to live on in your heart. You remain in communion with those you love forever and are inextricably connected to them for eternity.

Yes, you will grieve the person's absence and need to express your feelings of grief. You must mourn. You must commune with your grief and take it into your heart, embracing your many thoughts and feelings. When you allow yourself to fully mourn, over time and with the support of others who care about you, you will come to find that the person you lost does indeed still live inside you.

Love abides in communion—during life and after death. And mourning is communion with your grief. With communion comes understanding, meaning, and a life of richness.



Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

“Accept the things to which fate binds you, and love the people with whom fate brings you together, but do so with all your heart.”

MARCUS AURELIUS

When you love another person, it can feel like one plus one equals three.

I'm sure you've heard the saying, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Love is like that. Two people can come together and form a partnership that enables each person to be “more” in so many ways.

Here's another way to think about this idea: Love is like an orchestra. You may be a clarinet—a strong, fine wind instrument all by yourself. But when you surround yourself with other instruments, each of which does the work of carrying its own part and practicing its own music, together as a group you can blow the doors off the place.

I much prefer this expansive concept of love over the long-held reductionist belief that two become one. If two become one, both participants in the relationship are diminished. Conversely, what truly feeds the soul of a loving relationship is expansion, mutual-nurturance, and growth.

Without doubt, being part of a synergistic, two-makes-three relationship requires a conscious commitment. Did your relationship with the person who died feel enhancing or diminishing? In synergistic relationships, there has to be space and encouragement to be real and authentic. Were you empowered to be your true self or disempowered to be something you were not? Did your two make three, or did your two make you less than one? If your two made less than one, perhaps you are now faced with mourning what you never had but wished you did. How human is that?

If, on the other hand, your relationship with the person who died made you greater than the sum of your parts, what happens now that one of you is gone?

When you trust in the process of grief and you surrender to the mystery, you will find that mourning, like love, is also greater than the sum of its parts.

You may feel diminished. You may feel empty. You may feel less than whole. Your self-identity may even seem to shrink as you struggle with your changing roles. If you are no longer a wife (or a mother or a sister or a daughter), what are you? If you are no longer a husband (or a father or a brother or a son), what are you?

The experience of mourning can feel piecemeal—a cry here, a burst of anger there; a deep sadness today, a crush of guilt tomorrow. You might feel a sense of disorientation from the scattered and ever-changing nature of your grief.

But when you trust in the process of grief and you surrender to the mystery, you will find that mourning, like love, is also greater than the sum of its parts. Leaning into your grief and always erring on the side of expressing rather than inhibiting or ignoring your thoughts and feelings—no matter how random and disjointed they might seem some days—will bring you to a place of transformation. You will not just be different from the person you were before the death. You will be greater. Your experience of love and grief will create a changed you, a you who has not only survived but who has learned to thrive again in a new form and in a new way.

And just as love connects you to others, so should grief. You need the listening ears and open hearts of others as you express your thoughts and feelings about the death. You need the support of others as you mourn.

Yes, love and grief are both greater than the sum of their parts. The lesson I take from this is that whenever you engage fully and openly in life, experiencing both the joys and the sorrows head-on, you are living the life you were meant to live. *



About the Author



Dr. Alan Wolfelt is a respected author and educator on the topic of healing in grief. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is on the faculty at the University of Colorado Medical School's Department of Family Medicine. Dr. Wolfelt has written many compassionate, best-selling books designed to help people mourn well so they can continue to love and live well, including *Loving from the Outside In*, *Mourning from the Inside Out*, from which this article is excerpted. Visit www.centerforloss.com to learn more about the natural and necessary process of grief and mourning and to order Dr. Wolfelt's books.

Gaining Strength on the Journey

Remembering, Celebrating, and Sharing with TAPS

By Andy Weiss ★ Surviving father of 1LT Daniel Weiss

My family attended the 19th Annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar last May. It was an inspiring weekend with our fellow travelers in loss. I marvel at how far this river has swept me downstream from where I first fell in, drowning in my grief. How far I've gone and how changed I am!

I lost my son, Army First Lieutenant Danny Weiss, on March 4, 2012. I began a free fall that day into a thick fog over dark swirling waters. I could not breathe. I could not see. My son was dead? Impossible! This could not be happening. Not to us...

Impossible to imagine, but there they were in dress blue uniforms at my door. How could that be? Danny was stateside preparing for his 4th deployment. But wait, the 2/75th Ranger Regiment could be anywhere in the world in a matter of hours... What do they want? Was my son hurt?

Then chaos (and my free fall) began as I was told that nine years after Danny enlisted as a 17-year-old, he was dead—killed by suicide. My life's order was shattered. I fell to my knees and through the floor into my altered life.

Somehow, in the early weeks of my grieving, through clues I could barely see, I found the phone number and called TAPS. It was the first lifeline thrown down to me,

slowing my fall. I hung on to it, swinging in the darkness, slowly looking around. I was not alone. Then, another lifeline strapped onto me as Kim Ruocco, Director of TAPS Suicide Postvention Programs, called and administered loving care to my devastated family. Additional calls came to my surviving son, to my wife, and to me, tending to our horrible inner wounds.

San Diego Suicide Survivor Seminar

★ Remember the Love ★

I focused on getting us to the 2012 TAPS National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar that fall. It was being held at a place that used to be called Vacation Village, now termed Paradise Point. Our whole family had been there once, many years ago. But those words made absolutely no sense to me now. Vacation? Paradise? Nevertheless, I knew I had to get there, regardless of what the place was called. My wife, my surviving son, and I—we knew.

We suffered, each alone, from the stigma and default prejudices toward Danny's manner of death. I felt guilt, anger, confusion and much more as I learned that there were two types of gold stars awarded by the military: those given to families of service members killed in combat and those given

to families of service members who die in other circumstances. I dangled, swinging still in the darkness, because of my son's death by suicide.

So we went to San Diego. I went afraid. And arriving there, I found I was surrounded by hundreds of families who had lost a service member to suicide. We were not alone. My mourning and grief were shared.

I began to learn how to grieve from my fellow travelers in grief as we flowed to this spot on Mission Bay. I was swept toward other people, who have since become beacons of light in my life. They began showing me different ways to grieve. I stopped trying to find the old "me" that had died along with my son seven months earlier. I began to remember the love I had for my son and that he had for us.

Savannah Parents Retreat

★ Celebrate the Life ★

Eleven months after Danny's death, I began to celebrate his life with people I never imagined I'd meet. My wife and I had decided to sign up for the TAPS Parents Retreat in Savannah, Georgia. We had started climbing towards the new people we were to become. We were ready to share Danny's story more deeply and in more detail and to learn of other



San Diego Suicide Survivor Seminar 2012



San Diego Suicide Survivor Seminar 2012

parents' struggles with grief, depression, and horrible loss.

For the retreat, we prepared our emotional armor, because there would be both types of Gold Star families there. I had learned that conversations at Gold Star events could go like this: "My name is Mama X. My son was killed in action in Iraq. Where was your son killed?" We considered our TAPS experience at the suicide survivor seminar in San Diego and decided it was worth the extra layer of challenge.

At the retreat we were all at different distances from the deaths of our loved ones. Not once were we made to feel that our grief was any different than those families who lost loved ones on battlefields abroad. Never did we feel that the manner of Danny's death overshadowed his life of service. One dad shared with me that while his son was KIA (killed in action) and mine was KBA (killed by action), we both sure as hell missed our sons horribly. I was not alone, again. Together we shared the journey.

National Military Survivor Seminar

★ Share the Journey ★

So our decision to attend, for our first time, the 19th Annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar was with more strength acquired than I realized. I wanted to go to visit with old friends. I wanted

to go to help those just thrown into the raging river of their grief and loss. I wanted to continue to share the journey with my fellow travelers.

In Washington, DC, I was vastly rewarded with hugs every few feet. I could remember my son and others with stories and tears. Once again there was never any judgment, as we celebrated the lives of our sons, our daughters, our spouses, and brothers and sisters. We shared together and celebrated life by listening, by learning, by being among more than 2,000 others!

I shared the journey with new "old" friends who had been plunged into those same dark waters that I remember too well. The opportunity to share those painful early moments, that pain of the early journey, meant so much to me.

I will never forget my son, and I can celebrate his life of service just by being witness to and listening to these other fellow travelers on our shared journey. I can begin to be the lifeline for others.

This event, the 19th in a journey started by Bonnie Carroll out of her grief and kindness, reminded me of how much farther I have yet to go down these raging rivers. TAPS offers me a safe harbor and calm, shared waters. For this, I will be forever grateful.

And now once again, I am focused on getting myself and my family to our second National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar. This time we will gather in the mountains of Colorado where I will have new memories to make on this shared journey, where I can continue to learn about my son and his service to others.

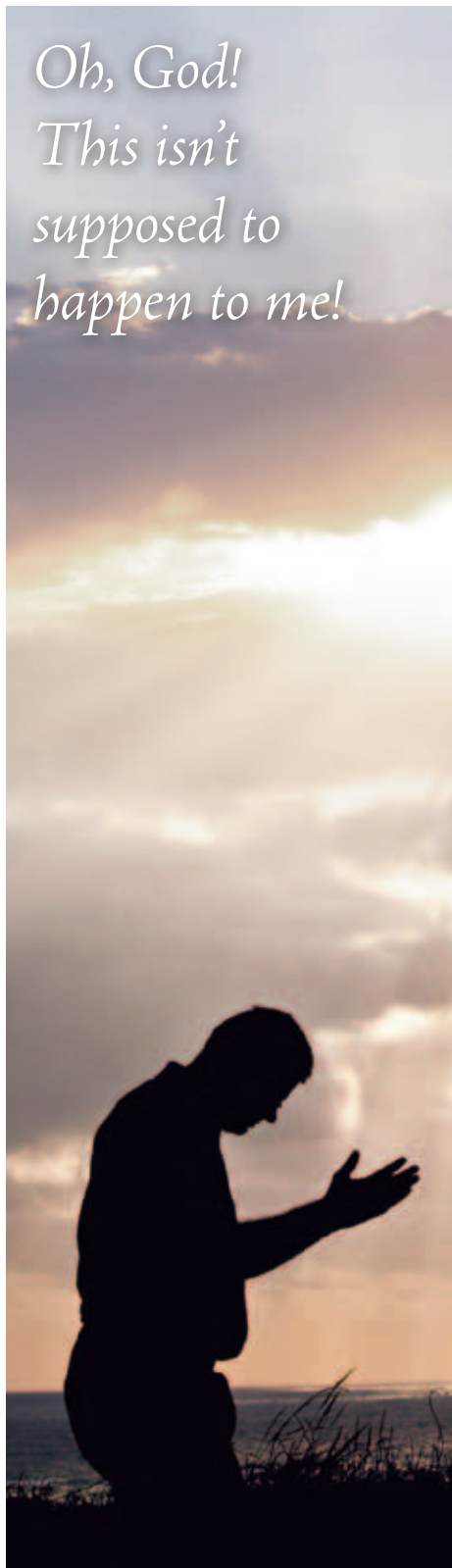
I've learned that it is not just for and of my son, but of and for so many others. I have much more to learn. But I now know, thanks to my peers at TAPS, that I can remember the love, celebrate the life, and share the journey. I look forward to more hugs in November. ★



Andy surrounded by parents in Savannah

Struggling To Reclaim My Faith

By Dennis Apple ★ Surviving father of Denny Apple



Oh, God!
This isn't
supposed to
happen to me!

My nightmare began on Wednesday, February 6, 1991, at 8:20 a.m. Denny, our eighteen-year-old son had been diagnosed with mononucleosis two days prior, and the doctor had sent us home with medications and orders to rest. However, something awful happened during the night, and the following morning I discovered he had died in his sleep. There is nothing I know of that compares to the horror and shock that comes to the heart of a parent when they learn of the death of their precious child.

We had knelt by Denny's bed and prayed for him to get well and to be out of the pain he was experiencing. He was very ill, and our prayers were sincere as we asked God to please help him. We had no idea of what was to come. Soon we would experience what no one wants to have happen, something that would challenge our faith.

I still recall the first words that came screaming out of my throat after I tried (and failed) to resuscitate Denny. "Oh, God! This isn't supposed to happen to me!" I had been a pastor in a protestant church for many years and, looking back, probably thought I had a "get out of jail free" card, and that I was exempt from tragedies such as this.

The people of our church rallied around our family as my wife Buelah, our son Andrew, and I numbly went through the visitation and funeral. We looked and felt like faceless robots as we staggered through those days, hoping we would wake up from our worst nightmare. Everything changed for the Apple family on that foggy morning in February.

After two weeks, I tried to return to my office and to my normal pastoral duties at the church, but it all felt so different, even fearful. At first, I felt a closeness to God. But within a few weeks, as the initial

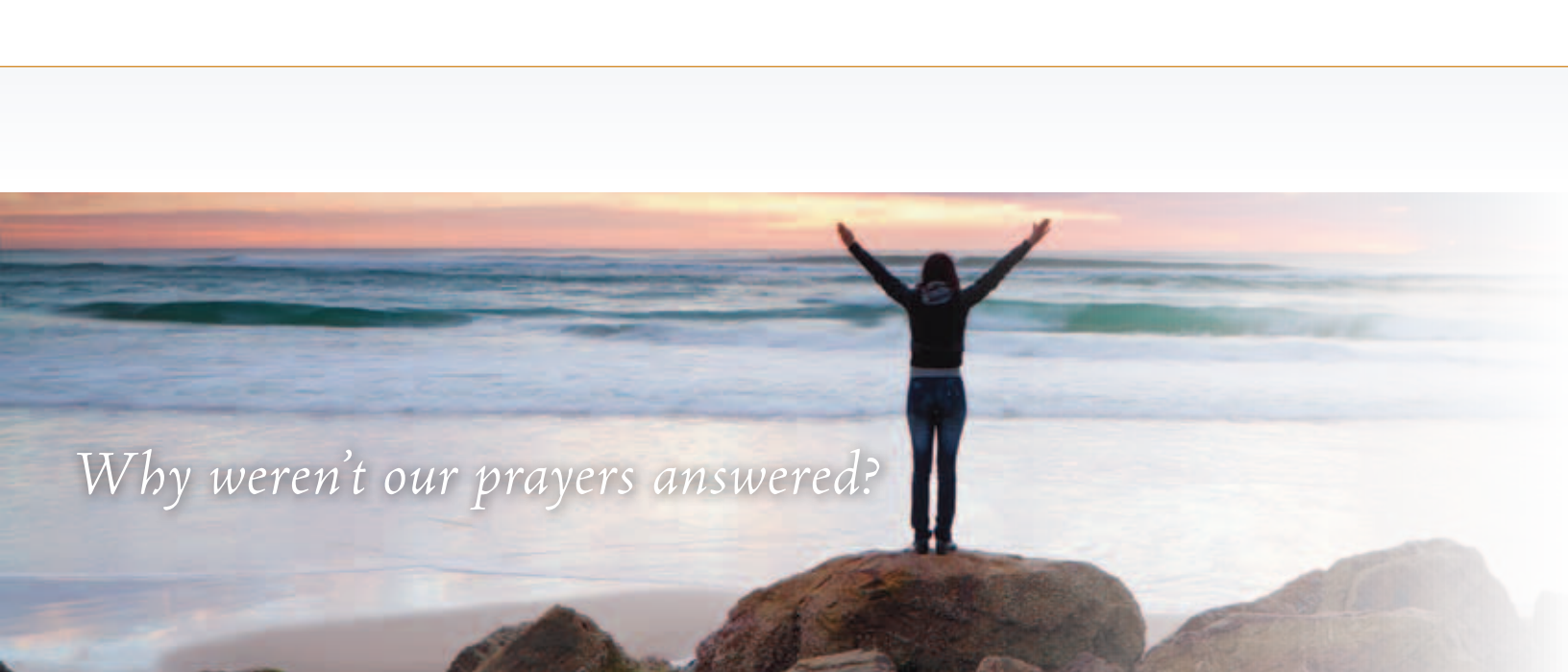
shock began to wear off, I became aware of my intense anger toward God.

I was surprised at the feelings that came over me when people shared stories of how their guardian angels had spared them from a horrible accident or death. As I listened to their stories, there was a haunting question that surfaced through the fog of my grief: where was Denny's guardian angel on that fateful night? I said nothing to those who offered such stories, but walked away gritting my teeth and clenching my fists as I silently asked, "Why weren't *our* prayers answered?"

I continued to conduct weddings, funerals, and all the other duties of a pastor. I recall several times walking out of a hospital room after praying for a seriously ill member of the congregation and thinking, "I might as well be praying to the Easter Bunny." In those days, I questioned if there really was a god. My usual spiritual practices were fading fast. I didn't read any religious or spiritual materials and had no desire to pray. Besides, my concentration was gone, and I was doing well to simply show up. Spiritually, I was running on empty.

At first, I told no one about the angry feelings I had toward God. Then one day I revealed these feelings to my grieving wife. She shared similar thoughts, and yet we felt we could not share this with anyone around here in the church. I'm certain our surviving son, Andrew, felt the same way. I still recall the moment soon after his brother's death when he said, "When Denny died, I lost my best friend!" I recall thinking, "Where do pastors and their families go, or who do they talk to, when they are mad at God?" I knew of no one in whom I could confide.

It is hard to admit this, but I continued in this state for many years, trudging through those dark days with a heaviness



Why weren't our prayers answered?

of heart that I thought would never end. There were times when I thought seriously about leaving the ministry. I felt like a small boy again, angry with my parent (God) and threatening to leave home. In my mind, I had my suitcase packed and was headed out the back door. But then I realized there was nowhere for me to go. So with suitcase in hand, I hung out near the back door of my faith.

I was mad at God, but I didn't know what to do or where to go. I felt caught between trusting in a God I did not understand... and nothingness. Looking back, I call these years my wilderness years. It seemed my wife and I were both in a hot, dry desert with no relief in sight. Or put another way, we felt as though we were on a death march with no destination. We both thought those days would never end and wished we could die. A fatal heart attack would have been welcomed by both of us.

It has been more than twenty-two years now, since our son Denny died, and I have come across hundreds of bereaved people who have confided similar experiences to those my wife and I experienced. I have discovered that my spiritual journey is much like others who have been traumatized by the death of their loved one. While some have reported they felt much closer to God, the vast majority of us feel as though we have been abandoned. And this feeling of abandonment continues much longer than I ever dreamed. For me, it took nearly

ten years before God and I were on good speaking terms again.

Looking back, there were two questions that gradually surfaced in my doubt stricken mind, questions that caused me to re-examine my faith in light of Denny's death. First, do I believe there is a sovereign God who sees all and is over all? Secondly, am I going to trust this God whom I do not always understand?

I pondered these questions for several years and finally came to the place where I admitted to myself that, yes, I did believe in a sovereign God. Gradually—ever so gradually—I started taking small steps back toward trusting in God once again.

My prayer life is different these days. Before Denny's death, my prayers were similar to purchasing a soft drink. You placed your coins in the slot, made your selection, pushed the button, and picked up the drink. Simple as one, two, three. These days I approach God with reverence and awe, but also aware that God is more interested in developing my character than He is in giving me what I ask for. I find myself asking for less and saying thank you a lot more at this stage of my journey.

Across the years, I have encouraged bereaved people to be patient with themselves, to allow room for spiritual struggling, and to seek out a friend who will be a good companion—one who will

not try to "fix," but who will patiently bear witness to the struggle. The fog of grief can leave us confused and bewildered. But I have discovered that God is okay with our struggling ...until we start to gain faith once again. *

About the Author



Dennis L. Apple is on the pastoral staff at College Church of the Nazarene in Olathe, Kansas, where he oversees recovery and support groups among other duties. He is the author of *Life After the Death of My Son: What I Am Learning*, and his story was featured recently on NPR StoryCorps. He also is a regular workshop leader for The Compassionate Friends (TCF). Dennis and Buelah's remaining adult son Andrew serves with the Army Reserve Medical Command and recently returned from Afghanistan. You may contact Dennis Apple at firstof1019@gmail.com.

Bringing Alex Home

A Brother's Loss During War

By Donleigh Gaunky ★ Surviving sibling of PFC Alex Gaunky

I am a man. I am a brother. I am a combat veteran. And I am a sibling survivor. Nowadays, there are not that many of us who have survived going to war and, at the same time, losing a family member to that same war. In the 1940s there were more of us. A visit to the Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor will give you a great example of the magnitude of this reality in just a single event. More than 30 sets of siblings were lost on that one ship alone on that day. What we find in today's wars is nothing near that.

In the HBO film *Taking Chance*, the Marine escorting Chance's remains meets an escort accompanying his own brother's body home, although that didn't actually happen in the original account. For those who think that Hollywood went too far, let me assure you that that is not the case. I would know. I was a soldier who escorted his own brother's body home from war.

Not long before my second deployment, after my youngest brother Alex had finished his leave and gone back to his unit for last minute preparations for deployment to Iraq,

I made my mother a promise. Like the stereotypical movie scene in which the more experienced soldier promises the soldier's mother that he will bring her son home, I told my mom that I would keep an eye on Alex and make sure he got home safely. It sounds so cliché to say that, but it's true. I said that. And when I didn't bring Alex home the way we had all hoped, the guilt that came with being the soldier who lost a comrade and the brother who lost a sibling seemed almost impossible to describe, even to my own family.

It was November, 2005. My parents were in the middle of a second round of deployments for their sons. Alex was on his first deployment. My older brother Dave and I were on our second. The previous fall my parents had displayed a Blue Star Service Flag with four stars emblazoned upon it. Now they were enjoying the luxury of having only three blue stars and, thankfully, no gold. That reality would not last.

The previous fall my parents had displayed a Blue Star Service Flag with four stars emblazoned upon it. Now they were enjoying the luxury of having only three blue stars. That reality would not last.

It was a Thursday morning, and I was getting off a twelve-hour shift on a Forward Operating Base on the west side of Baghdad. Dave was on a ship nearing port in the United Arab Emirates. Alex was 140 miles northwest of me in a city called Bayji. His team volunteered to go out to support another element in their company that was taking fire. But a civilian vehicle crossed the highway median and hit Alex's vehicle. It rolled and Alex was severely injured, transported to Germany that day.

Twelve hours later, I saw a report and emailed Alex, asking him to let me know he was okay. A response from him never came.



Photo by Brianne Zimny, courtesy of the USAF



ALEX AND DONLEIGH GAUNKY



THE GAUNKY BROTHERS

Instead I got an email from my dad, confirming that Alex was in bad shape. Before the end of the next day, I arrived in Germany, only to find out that Alex had not survived his injuries.

The following Wednesday I escorted my little brother's remains home. From the Mortuary Affairs office at Landstuhl Army Medical Center to Frankfurt Airport to Cincinnati to Milwaukee and then home, I only left his side for a few hours. During that period, I was caught and trapped in a dual role. A difficult role. I was not only the sibling of the fallen soldier; I was a representative of the military to the family of the fallen.

By the time the escort mission was complete, it was Thanksgiving Day. Dave arrived home from the United Arab Emirates in time for the wake and funeral. But within a few weeks, we were back with our respective units and back in the war. The nearly immediate return required us to put off that most important part of loss for those who are the family of the deceased. We put off, like any other service member, the mourning that we would one day have to deal with. For ten more months I remained in Iraq. Even then, after returning from war, it was hard for me to take the time to grieve.

In my experience, the mentality of men in general and the military in particular is

I know that sometimes when we are dealing with our grief and loss, the situation may seem insurmountable, but it is not. I am living proof of that.

to "suck it up and drive on." Mission and taking care of troops takes priority. Taking care of oneself is secondary. That mentality stuck with me far longer than it probably should have. It was easy to feel isolated. The military didn't really want to talk to me about my brother's death. And many in the survivor community didn't want to hear about my time of service.

This difficulty in connecting completely with people from either group was frustrating. I had to find my own way to survive the hard times: the holiday seasons, the birthdays that would never be, the thoughts of potential family I might have gained, the anniversary of the loss. All of this has taken me a long time to be able to handle.

To deal with these issues, I have found several things that helped. I have worked to reestablish family connections. I also worked with counselors (one at an Army hospital during service and two at the VA since leaving the military). They have helped me deal not only with my grief and guilt over my brother's death, but also on other issues due to my military service. About a year after that second

deployment, I found TAPS and made some connections that have helped me. Beyond that, I have tried to retain relationships with those with whom I have served, and I still try to bridge

the two distinct roles of my life: combat veteran and grieving brother.

Even in the solitude in which I have found myself—not being able to really relate to many people—I have strived to help carry the burdens of those who cannot speak of their own loneliness and sorrow. I have used my experience to help and give to others. I work to help other veterans in my area deal with their issues, and I work to support those who have suffered traumatic or sudden losses.

I also try to bridge the gap between those of us who have fought or have lost a loved one, with those who don't yet understand our loss and grief. In some way, that seems to be the only thing that I can do that in any way makes up for the grief and the guilt that I have experienced. I know that sometimes when we are dealing with our grief and loss, the situation may seem insurmountable, but it is not. I am living proof of that. And I know that all of us can start our own individual journeys on the road to healing as well. *

Photos on this page courtesy of Donleigh Gaunkey

Good Grief Camp Out Vice President Visits TAPS Children

By Corporal Michael Iams



MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CAMP PENDLETON

United States Vice President Joe Biden visited more than 40 children with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors at hanger 6 of the air station here during their 4-day Good Grief Camp Out at Palomar Mountain, June 14, 2013.

TAPS is a program that brings children who have lost loved ones in military service together in an environment where everyone understands what each other is going through and learn healthy coping skills to help manage the stress and grief of losing a loved one.

“This camp allows the children to get together and see that they are not alone in their grief,” said Bonnie Carroll, president and founder of TAPS. “Here (the children) are able to have fun and be around other children who have experienced the same feelings of loss.”

During their camp, the children and their Marine mentors visited the air station where they viewed aircraft like the CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter, the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Packbot, and reconnaissance gear.

“We volunteer to help these children cope with the pain of their loss,” said Lance Cpl. Omar Hawkins, a warehouseman with Headquarters and Support Battalion and TAPS mentor. “Most of us have also lost a loved one and understand how they feel as we help them through their time of need.”

The children and mentors received a surprise visit from Vice President Joe Biden and his family as they landed at Camp Pendleton in Air Force 2.

“I just want to say how honored we are to be here,” said Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden. “I have a son in the Army National Guard who went to Iraq,



so I have some idea of how tough it is to have a loved one in the war.”

The Bidens spoke to the children about losing a family member and stressed the importance of finding someone to help them through the difficult times.

“It’s important to be around people who understand what you’re going through,” the vice president said to the children. “I hope that is what you find out here at this camp. I hope you find that there are a lot of kids who understand and will be there for you.”

Biden sat with the kids and answered their questions while they all ate ice cream.

“I asked the vice president how many states he has been to,” said Lily Blish, an 8-year-old who lost her father to cancer seven years ago. “I would like to travel a lot like he does.”

After talking with Biden, the children were able to take a photo with him and get a tour of Air Force 2.

“This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the children to be able to meet with the vice president and ask him any question they want,” said Brad Gallup, a team grief facilitator with TAPS. “This also let (the children) know they are still connected to the military community and how important they are.” ✪



TAPS is proud to partner with the USO for USO/TAPS Good Grief Camp Outs. If your children have found help, hope, and healing in our national and regional Good Grief Camps, you might want to consider one of the USO/TAPS Good Grief Camp Outs next summer.

The overnight camps are designed for surviving children between the ages of six and eighteen who have lost a parent or sibling who was serving in the Armed Forces. The overnight camp experience is filled with traditional and military-themed camp activities, grief education, and emotional support. Campers find comfort in knowing that there are other children who understand what they are feeling and experiencing.

“We are so happy to offer this additional resource for our TAPS children,” said Heather Campagna, TAPS National Director of Youth Programs. “The campout is a unique experience, and the overnight component increases confidence in children and helps them overcome their fears while being surrounded by support from TAPS staff and military mentors.”

Last summer TAPS conducted Good Grief Camp Outs near Fort Bragg, Fort Hood, Fort Carson, and Camp Pendleton. Start planning now for next year’s camps. There is no charge for the camp, other than your transportation to and from camp. All lodging and meals are provided.

Photos courtesy of the U.S. Marine Corps



Run and Remember Team

Diary of a Runner

By Bethany Crudele

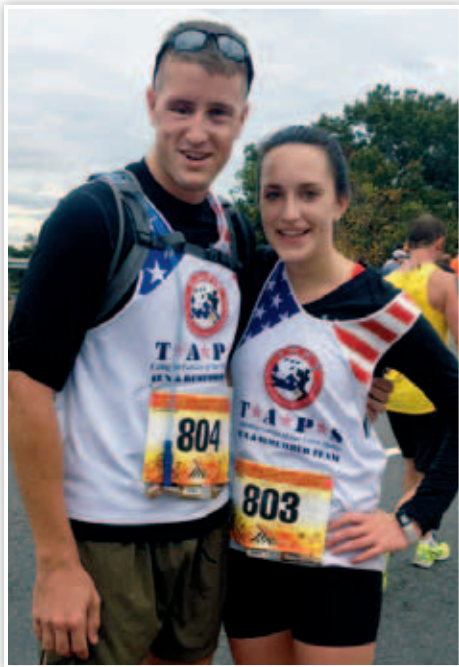


Photo courtesy of Bethany Crudele

★ September 13, 2012

This year, I am running the Marine Corps Marathon as a member of Team “Doc” Almazan. While I never met Army Sergeant David Almazan, a combat medic killed in Iraq in 2006, I’ve run several races in memory of him and in support of his surviving wife, Salina Jimenez, whom I met during the 2010 Marine Corps Marathon.

My running mate is Staff Sergeant Jeremy Boutwell, who medically retired from the Marine Corps in July. Despite his injuries, Boutwell has committed to pounding pavement for 26.2 miles. In addition to running for Almazan, Boutwell is also running in memory of several friends he lost during his deployments to Iraq, including Pfc. Ricky Morris, Pfc. Brandon Smith, and Lance Cpl. Nicholas Perez.

On Sunday, Boutwell and I will participate in the inaugural Navy-Air Force Half Marathon in Washington, DC, as part of our

training. I’ll be wearing my TAPS singlet with Almazan’s photograph on the back.

★ September 21, 2012

Last weekend Jeremy flew in from Texas and after a well-balanced meal of spaghetti, Oreos, and Gatorade Saturday night, we felt ready to run 13.1 miles. Before crossing the start line, we had a chance to mingle with other TAPS Run and Remember teammates. After the race, Jeremy said, “We really couldn’t have asked for a better day to run that race.”

We still have a lot of training to do, including an 18-mile training run this weekend. It will be the longest either of us has run during our preparation for the marathon and, of course, we won’t be able to pump each other up with words of encouragement as the trail gets tough.

But we couldn’t be more confident that we’ll both be ready for Marine Corps Marathon after last weekend’s race. We were able to validate a pace and pin down how long we’ll spend at each water stop. And while Jeremy is nervous for how his body will respond to running 26.2 miles, we’ll both be ready to take it one mile at a time.

“I’m not running for me,” Jeremy said. “I’m running it for Marines who are no longer with us. I’m going to do anything I absolutely have to do, up to and including crawling my way across that finish line.”

★ September 28, 2012

Marine Corps Marathon is exactly one month away. With just a few weeks left to embrace the blisters, multi-hour training runs and insatiable cravings for carbohydrates that accompany marathon prep, we have encountered a number of challenges.

Last weekend Jeremy and I both missed one of the longest training runs on our schedule. I got hit with a sinus infection that kept me in bed for a couple of days and Jeremy wrestled with a fever and increased pain in his lower back following a cortisone shot that was intended to relieve the pain.

Catching a cold during marathon prep is one of the most frustrating parts of training. Most runners I know get sick mid-season due to a change in seasons and overall exhaustion. We were no exceptions. But we’re both back on our feet and planning to clock some serious mileage this weekend.

We realized how much easier long training runs can be when we run together. “Doing the long runs is no fun without a partner,” Jeremy said. I suppose the easy solution would be to grab a friend to run with, but the problem isn’t finding someone who can run long distances; it’s finding someone who actually wants to run 18 miles.

Carrying a sustainable water supply can be a pain. There’s no shortage of funky water bottles, waist bands, and hydration packs available on the market, but when you’re running long distances the gear can often rub the wrong way. That’s a perk of doing an organized race during training season — the guarantee of having a water stop to replenish every two or three miles.

★ October 10, 2012

The marathon is now just around the corner. With less than three weeks until the race, we each completed a solid and steady 19-mile run over the weekend. We both finished in about three hours, causing us to slash our goal in the actual marathon by 45 minutes, from 5 hours down to 4 hours, 15 minutes.

All things considered, we're each feeling strong. Not too sore, just a little more hungry than usual from all the calories we've been burning. Jeremy said he "felt like a million bucks" and experienced little to no pain during or after his run. I'd say I felt more like a quarter of a million bucks. I think we're both doing surprisingly well. As Jeremy pointed out, the anticipation of a 19-mile run was worse than actually running it.

We also got our bib numbers this week. I'm number 803 and Jeremy is number 804.

We've found some new ways to keep each other motivated and even exchanged surprise training gifts. Jeremy sent me a pink CamelBak as a response to one of my previous posts about how I haven't found a hydration pack that I like. It's lightweight, rides high on my back, and fits perfectly.

I sent Jeremy a pair of neon yellow laces. One of the first times we spoke he mentioned that he's generally restricted to one type of sneaker (which usually only comes in grey). Jeremy has to have a cobbler build up one of his shoes exactly one inch in order to compensate for a shorter left leg from his combat injury. I thought the yellow laces would spice up his sneakers...I'm not so sure he's as thrilled with my gift as I was with his.

We've also been in touch with Salina, Doc's widow. She told us, "When someone on the route shouts out a 'Hooah,' it's worth the training, the mileage, and the drive to live for our fallen hero."

Photo by Morgan McKenty

Staying motivated in these final weeks can be tough, but encouragement and communication with teammates around the country seems to be getting the job done.

★ *October 28, 2012*

Eighteen weeks of training and 26.2 miles later, we made it to the finish line of the 37th Marine Corps Marathon. Despite incoming Hurricane Sandy, we ran alongside some 30,000 runners from every state and 54 countries. The turnout was the largest participation in the event's 37-year history.

Jeremy and I finished the race in 4 hours and 25 minutes. We ran a little slower than we anticipated (due in part to a few too many pit stops and windy weather) but still crossed the finish line well under our original goal of five hours.

For those last five miles, rather than thinking about crossing the finish line, our strategy became focused on making it to the next water station. Two miles from the finish, the idea of completing the race started to feel real. We could hear the crowds cheering at the Iwo Jima Memorial, and the words of a passing runner helped us regain our momentum and pick up some speed after we stopped to walk.

"Doc would be proud," the runner said.

When we crossed the finish line, as Marines and thousands of spectators cheered, we couldn't have felt better. It was an emotional moment and I felt humbled and proud to be a part of it. ★

.....
Excerpted from Marine Corps Times' Battle Rattle blog and reprinted with permission www.marinecorpstimes.com
.....

We realized how much easier long training runs can be when we run together. "Doing the long runs is no fun without a partner," Jeremy said.



Colorado Celebrity Classic Eighth Annual Event Puts Focus on Suicide

By Christine Burt

People don't like to talk about suicide, and the topic itself could put a damper on a festive event to raise money for military families. But, perhaps because suicide and its aftermath is such a sobering reminder about the effects of war, the sponsors and guests of the Colorado Celebrity Classic were generous as always toward the military families of fallen heroes.

The eighth annual event, held in Denver in June, netted nearly \$300,000 for TAPS, "There's honor in dying in battle, but when a soldier dies by suicide, it's horrible for the families. It's much harder on them because there's no closure and there's guilt. Thankfully, TAPS is there for these families," said Lynne Cottrell, co-director with her husband, Bo Cottrell, of the Colorado Celebrity Classic to benefit TAPS.

Steve and Marla Grove again donated the use of the dustless show arena at their gorgeous Ranch at Cherry Creek for Friday's festivities. The best-ever prime rib barbeque was fire pit roasted by the Amarillo, Texas-based Coors Cowboy Club "Chuckwagon Crew." Tony David and WildeFire set toes tapping for an up-tempo mood during dinner.

The star-studded "Saluting Our Fallen Heroes" dinner show included pro-bono performances by the legendary Michael Martin Murphey and his band, Grammy-award winner Gary Morris, songwriters Darryl Worley and Brett Jones, comedian Gary Mule Deer, and the inspiring Legacy Quartet.

The Colorado Celebrity Classic has become a national model for fundraising—and fun-raising. From the thoughtful details of valet parking to complimentary wine courtesy of Banfi Vintners, the estimated 600 guests felt welcomed and appreciated. They responded by buying an additional \$121,800 in silent auction and live auction gifts, thanks to auctioneer extraordinaire, Roger Sierens.



EVENT CHAIRS
ERIC AND SUSAN SIPP



COORS CHUCKWAGON
COWBOY CLUB



MICHAEL MARTIN MURPHEY AND
TAPS FOUNDER BONNIE CARROLL





PHOTOS BY DAVE GILL PHOTOGRAPHY AND BLACK TIE COLORADO

The esteemed and exclusive Eisenhower Golf Club at the U.S. Air Force Academy was the site of the tournament on Saturday where 21 teams, each with a celebrity, played. The Air Force team won the military competition. Awards winners were feted after the game at the Burgers & Braggin' Rights party.

The Colorado Celebrity Classic is a success because the Cottrells keep costs low—almost everything is donated—and



BONNIE CARROLL, BO AND LYNNE COTTRELL, GENERAL MIKE AND PAULA GOULD, SUPERINTENDENT OF THE AIR FORCE

because of the dedication to the cause by several patriotic corporate sponsors. AIMCO has served as a Title Sponsor for six years. Other major sponsors included co-chairmen Eric and Susan Sipf, and American Furniture Warehouse, Greiner Electric, MillerCoors, Gordon & Kaja Burr, Tom and Mary Dyk, Pete and Marilyn Coors, Conley Equipment/Marshall-Rodeno, and Taylor Oil. The Red Lion Hotel Denver Southeast donated

rooms for celebrities. Production Services International donated the stage and lights. WizBang Solutions donated printing of the programs. Summit Steakhouse hosted a kick-off event for the Fund-raising Committee.

Over the years, the Colorado Celebrity Classic's 66 volunteers have become "family." We hope you'll join us next year in Colorado, so save the date: June 13-14, 2014. ★



AIMCO TITLE SPONSOR, MILES CORTEZ AND WIFE JAN



DARRYL WORLEY AND BRETT JONES



GENERAL MARK AND CAROL GRAHAM AND EVENT BOARD MEMBERS GENERAL GENE & JILL RENUART



TAPS is grateful for the time and energy that the Cottrells and their team of volunteers put forth each year for the annual TAPS Celebrity Classic.

We are humbled by their dedication and thankful for their support.



American/Israeli Good Grief Camp Global Connections



On Sunday, August 11, 2013, TAPS welcomed 15 U.S. children of fallen service members for a special Good Grief Camp with 44 children from the Israel Defense Forces Widows and Orphans Organization (IDFWO). The tweens and teens attending the camp in Washington, D.C., bonded quickly over their shared experiences. The young people were able to learn that in spite of their differences in culture and language, the bond of losing a parent in the military was a strong connection.

horse and were treated to a demonstration by the U.S. Air Force Honor Guard Drill Team. Following a kosher picnic lunch, the group visited the Arlington National Cemetery amphitheater for the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns and a wreath-laying ceremony.

Camp participants had created a memorial wreath made of their individual handprints by tracing their hands on paper and



“We were able to reinforce that even across the ocean and the countries that divide us, our children are not alone in their grief and there are others who understand,” said Heather Campagna, TAPS Director of Youth Programs.

The TAPS/IDFWO Good Grief Camp was planned to include activities that highlighted similarities while encouraging uniqueness in culture that allowed the children to learn from each other. During the three-day, two-night event, camp participants visited Fort Myer, Arlington National Cemetery, and the Israeli Embassy.



On Monday, the 59 kids met with members of the Old Guard at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. There the group enjoyed a visit from Klinger the caisson



writing messages to their loved ones to put on the wreath. Zacharian Schade, of Spring Lake, North Carolina, and TAPS mentor USMC Captain Aaron Burciaga represented TAPS at the wreath-laying.

They were joined by IDFWO representatives Asaf Amitai and Army First Sergeant Shane Tordjman of Israel.

“It was an honor to participate in the ceremony...very personal,” said Tordjman, whose own father died while serving on active duty in Israel when Tordjman was four years old.

After some grief work in which the children worked on collages to symbolize their grief, the group visited The Embassy of Israel to the United States on International Drive. Ambassador Michael Oren and his wife

Sally welcomed the children to “Israeli soil” and hosted dinner. The young survivors learned about different cultural approaches to grieving a military loss and they forged friendships through peer and support connections.

“I had the extraordinary opportunity to host children of fallen IDF and American soldiers at the Embassy,” said Ambassador Oren. “Their strength and resolve are truly inspiring.”

Next on the schedule was a night tour of Washington’s memorials to learn how the U.S. honors all who serve and die in the armed forces. After viewing the monuments, the group went to the World War II monument for a memorable candlelight ceremony in which IDFWO shared

(in English and Hebrew) how America came to their aid during World War II. It was an emotional and somber celebration of lives lived, followed by singing of both the American and Israeli national anthems. We concluded the event later at the hotel with a disc jockey, dancing, and snacks—a language all young people seem to speak.

“Although each and every TAPS event holds a special place in my heart, this event was life changing and one of the most powerful events I have had the privilege to be involved with,” said Campagna. “The way it allowed children to get out of their comfort zones and communicate with children like them in so many ways, despite their language barriers, was a lesson for us all.” *

Photos courtesy of the U.S. Army and The Embassy of Israel to the United States



We Need to Hear Your Voice

The National Military Family Bereavement Study

The death of a family member is a life-changing event for the entire family. Whether anticipated or unanticipated, death forever changes the world of surviving families. Many of us have experienced unique characteristics of grieving a military death that are unlike those experienced in the civilian population. Until now, no one has actually studied the effect this has on military families.

The National Military Family Bereavement Study (NMFBS) is the first nationwide scientific project exploring the impact of a U.S. service member death on surviving families. The overall goals of the study are to best understand military surviving families in an effort to support their short-term and long-term needs as well as provide a broad-based education for caregivers who support them. The research is being conducted by Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Bethesda, Maryland.



How Can You Participate?

- ✦ Take the National Survivor Questionnaire: If you are an eligible family member 18 years and older you can take the National Survivor Questionnaire online at www.militarysurvivorstudy.org.
- ✦ Sign up to participate in a family interview: When two or more eligible family members take part in the National Survivor Questionnaire and are interested in the family interview, a member of the NMFBS field research team will interview each family member separately three times over the course of two years. Children six years and older can participate with their assent and their parent's consent. Parents need to discuss this with their children and contact NMFBS directly to participate in the family interview.
- ✦ Join a focus group: Focus groups are being conducted around the country in collaboration with TAPS Seminars and other events. They are grouped by relationship to the service member (parent, spouse, sibling, or child). Guided questions to participants help inform researchers

about specific aspects of a group's experience. Current emphasis is on surviving children and siblings. NMFBS is seeking children (ages 11 to 14 or ages 15 to 17) who would like to volunteer an hour to participate in focus groups. Groups are currently being sought to be coordinated in Washington, DC; San Diego, CA; Fayetteville, NC; and Austin, TX.

To date since enrollment opened in September 2012, more than 1,100 survivors have taken the National Survivor Questionnaire. Two hundred families have participated in the family interviews and 20 focus groups have been conducted throughout the U.S. The NMFBS goals are 3,000 survivors to take the National Survivor Questionnaire, 500 families to participate in family interviews, and 40 focus groups.

In order for the caregivers to best understand surviving military families, NMFBS needs to hear your voice. *

.....
 Visit www.militarysurvivorstudy.org or contact Dr. Jill Harrington-LaMorie, at jill.lamorie.ctr@usuhs.edu for more information about NMFBS.

Who Can Participate in this Study?

Families of service members who have died by any circumstance of death on active duty status in the United States armed forces (Active, Guard, and Reserve Components of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard) on or after September 11, 2001, including: parents/step-parents/adoptive/legal guardians; siblings/step-siblings; spouses/ex-spouses/adult partners; and children/step-children.

Webinars and Podcasts

We all seem to realize early on that grief can be isolating. Often our friends seem to disappear, and we struggle to find our way to new support. We also discover that grieving can be a 24/7 process. In the early months of mourning, we have trouble sleeping and sometimes find ourselves wandering the house or glued to our computer monitors in the middle of the night.

As long as you are awake anyway, you can tap into some of the support available on the internet. In addition to checking out the TAPS website at www.taps.org, you can connect with grief experts and other survivors through podcasts, radio shows, and even television programs about grief. You can find help, hope, and healing any time of the night or day.

Good Mourning: The Many Faces of Grief

www.webtalkradio.net

TAPS keynote speaker and long-time friend, Dr. Darcie Sims, now has a weekly podcast titled *Good Mourning: The Many Faces of Grief*. You can join Darcie, bereaved parent (and child) and internationally recognized speaker and author, as she explores the journey through grief.

"We talk about all kinds of grief on the show," said Darcie. "We talk about homicide, suicide, sudden death, traumatic death, long-term illness, and disability. We explore topics such as after-death communications, signs, meditation, the healing power of music and art, the physiology of grief, and all the different emotions of grief."

Each Monday Darcie hosts a different guest and discusses a new topic. The shows are archived, so you can select the topic you are interested in at any given time. Previous shows include topics such as how humor and grief are connected, tips on how to survive multiple losses, and what to do with accumulated loss and stress. There is also a show about the history of TAPS and one about Arlington National Cemetery. Future shows will include finding your own coping style, getting through the holidays, and choice points in grief.

Each *Good Mourning* show contains a segment for "Dumb Things People Have Said to the Bereaved," balanced by another short segment for "Wonderful Things That People Have Said to the Bereaved."

You can hear the podcasts or download them by visiting webtalkradio.net and typing

Good Mourning into the site search. If you would like to send topic suggestions, be a guest on the show, or share dumb things (or wonderful things) people have said to you, contact Darcie at radio@griefinc.com.

Open to Hope Foundation

www.opentohope.com

Another internet resource is the Open to Hope Foundation, co-founded by Dr. Gloria Horsley and her daughter Dr. Heidi Horsley. Both are internationally known grief experts, authors, and bereaved family members of their son and brother Scott.

"Our mission is simple: helping all people find hope after loss," said Dr. Gloria. "The internet is the perfect place to give a voice to grief; empower the bereaved; educate; and give family, friends, and communities information on how they can help."

In 2005, at the request of The Compassionate Friends, the Horsleys hosted internet radio show, *Healing the Grieving Heart*. The show was to run for 13 weeks, but after ten weeks, an email saying "You are my life-line" moved Gloria to continue production. Two years later, *The Grief Blog* was launched as an interactive website to complement the radio show. In August of 2012, the mother-daughter team co-hosted their first television talk show, *Grief Relief*.

All of these resources have been consolidated under one umbrella as the Open to Hope Foundation website. You can visit it at www.opentohope.com. There you will find more than 5,000 articles by 400 writers, 350 radio shows, 200 original YouTube videos, forums, and an international calendar.

"Grief recovery is a long-term process and the internet allows for many voices, as well as being a constant resource through the many years of grief and recovery," said Dr. Gloria. "We can listen to a healing voice, write on a forum, or watch a YouTube video: all saying that we are not alone." *



School's In

The Year-Round School of Grief

By Betsy Beard ★ Surviving mom of Army Specialist Bradley S. Beard

In most towns and cities across America, children start the school year in September and are released from the grind in the beginning of June. The long, blessed relief of summer stretches before them—golden days and magical nights, carefree times of daydreaming, perhaps a trip to the beach or the mountains just for fun.

But where I live, some of the schools have adopted a year-round schedule: school for nine weeks and “track out” for three weeks. Repeat four times, and then enter the next grade. There is no long, summer respite for weary students. Just the three-week track outs scattered throughout the year.

In the early months and years of grieving, I discovered that there was no months-long vacation from the pain. Each month seemed to be populated with special anniversaries, holidays, memories, and triggers that tore at my heart. You may have discovered this as well. Somehow, when our special loved ones died, we all got enrolled in the year-round school of grief.

Because it is so difficult those first few years, there will likely be no long, refreshing

vacation from grief. But it is important to try to track out even if it is only for a few days. Somewhere in your calendar, you may be able to schedule some time when you can allow yourself some respite from the hard work of daily grieving. I have been told that one hour of intense grieving can be as physically exhausting as eight hours of manual labor. I believe it. I remember those early days of overwhelming pain and exhaustion.

One thing you can do is evaluate your calendar. It is good to know where the grueling not-so-final “exams” are located so that you can plan around them for times of respite. In some respects our calendars will be similar, due to religious holidays and national holidays. Military surviving families can have more events to plan around than the civilian population, because we

can be deeply affected by patriotic holidays and military remembrances in addition to the holidays and special days our family observes. Each family's calendar will be different, however, because any given month can contain days that are particular to that family.

Our family's calendar looks like this:

In **SEPTEMBER**, Labor Day starts the month with what most people view as a last-fling-of-summer day. But we remember the times we spent in the past with our family around us—our whole family. For us, Brad's birthday is next, but without Brad here to celebrate.

OCTOBER is the month of the anniversary of his death. As soon as the days start growing shorter and the temperature begins to drop, the memories come flooding in.

One thing you can do is evaluate your calendar. It is good to know where the grueling not-so-final “exams” are located so that you can plan around them for times of respite.



The anniversary of the death is perhaps the hardest day of the year for survivors. Halloween can also be difficult with its own memories of past enjoyment.

NOVEMBER holds Veterans Day and Thanksgiving. Veterans Day brings an ache for what might have been—a living veteran. And for Thanksgiving it's hard to muster the energy for cooking, watching parades, feasting, and cheering our favorite football team. It's supposed to be a family get-together, for the whole family...

DECEMBER brings more holidays, parties, and special celebrations—all of them reminding us of our loss. Advertisements show happy intact couples and families. The prolonged build-up in the stores and malls can start in September and last until New Year's Eve. We flip the calendar and a whole new year is revealed—still without our special loved one.

JANUARY is a cold, dark, winter month, but in the early years of grief it felt like my first chance to come up for air—my first track out. Martin Luther King Day is observed in January, and this is a holiday I can identify with. No picnics, no gaudy displays, just the reverent memorializing of a man who changed the history of America. Like our loved ones, he did not live to see his dreams fulfilled.

In **FEBRUARY** our family is back full time in the school of grief with Valentine's Day followed by my birthday. It's a shock to keep acknowledging birthdays, adding year after year as I continue to get older, but Brad does not.

MARCH is the beginning of spring, and although the days are getting warmer and brighter, we are tasked with observing another family birthday. Once we get past that day, we can track out again. We can make an effort to enjoy the milder weather.

APRIL usually brings Easter, and each year I wonder why my son wasn't raised from the dead. Again, it's a holiday that many families observe, and includes memories of Easter egg hunts, special outfits, and religious observances.

Although we share some common triggers, we all have those special days, specific holidays, and remembrances that relate to our own private family celebrations.

But **MAY** is the killer month for many of us. In the early years of grieving, Mother's Day, Armed Forces Day, and Memorial Day could create a perfect storm of sadness and grief. Our family has an additional birthday to add to the mix. Each of these observances seems to point out our loss more acutely than the one before. The saving grace in May is the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar over Memorial Day weekend. With TAPS we have a new circle of friends to support us, as we observe the true meaning of Memorial Day—a day set aside specifically to honor those who die while serving in the Armed Forces. The relief of being with others who understand completely can make the day lighter.

JUNE represents, for us, the last time we saw Brad alive. The first few days are filled with memories of his last leave. The month moves forward to Flag Day, a holiday that reminds me of the flag-draped casket that held our son's remains. And then the end of the month is our wedding anniversary.

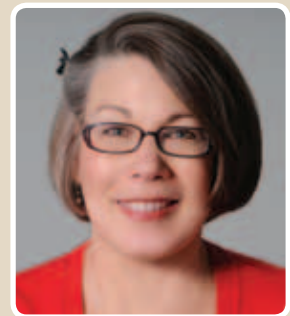
JULY hosts Independence Day. On that day, Americans celebrate the birth of our nation with picnics, parades, the national anthem, and "bombs bursting in air." It is hard to forget our loss, knowing that our freedom is ever and always purchased with the lives of the men and women of our Armed Forces. But after July 4th we can track out.

AUGUST is another respite for our family. Like many other months, there are birthdays for members of the extended family. But we live far enough away and are rarely called upon to be present for the blowing out of candles and the making of wishes.

It is probably painful to see a reflection of your own family in my family's calendar. Although we share some common triggers, we all have those special days, specific holidays, and remembrances that relate to our own private family celebrations: birthdays, anniversaries, the first day we met, the last day we saw them, the day we passed the age that they had attained. Some months are worse than others. But I hope that somewhere along the line you can track out for a few grief-free holidays.

If you are just starting your grief journey, you may feel overwhelmed with the ferocity of the emotional flashbacks on your family's special dates. You may start dreading them weeks before the actual date. But there is hope. As the years unwind and you begin to heal, the intensity ebbs, so that it is easier to live and breathe. As I complete my "eighth grade" in the school of grief, some of my holiday joy has even returned. And I look forward to the time when the track outs will grow into months-long vacations from grief. *

About the Author



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

Nutrition and Stress

Finding Strength for Your Grieving Body

By Ruth W. Crocker, PhD ★ Surviving spouse of CPT David R. Crocker, Jr.

Naomi appeared lean and fit, although a bit pale, when she arrived at her appointment in the Nutrition Clinic at Massachusetts General Hospital. At first glance, before taking her history, I thought she might be a long-distance runner, an ice skater, or a gymnast.

Many people don't realize that learning terrible news—being suddenly and powerfully aggrieved—triggers an automatic physical response. It's not a sign of weakness or inability to handle emotion; it is the body's way of trying to stay safe.

beat faster and raising the blood pressure. It also takes away appetite, giving us the impression that we don't need food. The physical effects of adrenalin are felt in the area of the heart and chest, the same place where the heart feels broken.

I had counseled many elite athletes over the years. They usually wanted to know what kind of foods would enhance their performance, and if it was true that some nutrients or supplements made it easier to build muscle. Sometimes they had an eating disorder brought on by the constant competition to be strong, but look thin. As soon as Naomi began to speak, I realized that her nutritional challenge was completely different.

"My mother thought I should see someone," she said, her eyes welling up with tears. "I can't eat—I have no desire to eat. In fact I feel full all the time, but also empty."

Naomi described a feeling of heaviness in her chest, lack of concentration, restlessness, difficulty sleeping, and frequent tears. Further conversation revealed the source of her emotional and physical state. Three months before, her fiancé had been killed in Iraq.

Many people don't realize that learning terrible news—being suddenly and powerfully aggrieved—triggers an automatic physical response. It's not a sign of weakness or inability to handle emotion; it is the body's way of trying to stay safe.

The emotional stress of a sudden tragedy creates a physical reaction in the body. As we battle to survive, stress hormones are released from the adrenal glands located just above the kidneys. As these hormones surge throughout the body, they enable us to feel as if we can run, fight, or overcome an obstacle. These important and natural substances might enable a runner to complete a torturous marathon, but for someone experiencing grief following the sudden death of a loved one, the result of the same hormonal outpouring can affect appetite, hunger, and eating habits.

Adrenalin, the "fight or flight" hormone, increases metabolic rate making the heart

Cortisol, another hormone secreted during reaction to stress, facilitates the use of carbohydrates stored in the body for quick energy. This first immediate source of energy (glycogen) is packed in the muscles like tiny firecrackers. When glycogen is gone, the body starts to use its supplies of fat and muscle, and weight loss begins if calories are not taken in. Without adequate nutrition, a body working fast and hard in reaction to either physical or emotional stress eventually begins to show other signs of stress such as sleeplessness, depression, panic disorder, malnutrition, and weakened immunity.

Naomi described that she had eaten very little since she had received the news of her fiancé's death. She suffered with the normal reaction that it wasn't real—it didn't actually happen. She was forgetful and preoccupied. She kept expecting to receive a letter, a package, or an e-mail from her





Returning to a healthy balance after a shock such as the loss of a loved one takes time and loving concern for both body and mind.

beloved. She had lost fifteen pounds and was still losing.

What is the best way to help the body and mind deal with an unpreventable stress? A reaction caused by incomprehensible and shocking news that we have no power to change. Sharing thoughts about the tragedy with a trusted listener is the first step, accompanied by baby steps to replenish the nutrients, energy stores, and fluids lost during the body's hard work to cope and survive.

The best approach is to eat wholesome foods in small quantities: whatever is appealing. Choose fresh vegetables and fruits; whole grains; easily digestible proteins like eggs, fish, and poultry; nuts and seeds; low-fat dairy products; and water.

Nourish your body with good food and loving thoughts, and you will gain the strength to travel to a different place, both psychologically and physically.

It's okay in the beginning to imagine that you are eating for the one you have lost. You might even begin with the foods that you know they liked. It's not unusual to assume the mannerisms or traits of the loved one. The goal is to regain the pleasure of eating and restore a healthy appetite.

As hunger and appetite return, there can also be a tendency to prefer soft, sweet, comfort foods (like cakes, puddings, and ice cream) that might be high in fats and simple carbohydrates. The return of appetite is a message from the body that energy is needed, but the preference for comfort foods can result in a rapid rebound in body weight by storing fat rather than replacing lost muscle. These cravings can be intensified by lack of protein and fiber in the diet. Choose protein, vegetables, and complex carbohydrates like whole grains first. Then enjoy a small amount of sweetness, preferably something like a baked apple or a fruit custard made with low-fat milk. Eat slowly and mindfully, thinking of nourishment rather than the need to fill an empty place in the heart.

Low-intensity exercise like walking is another important component of recovery. Walking at a modest pace of two or three miles per hour increases the process of the breakdown of fat and enhances the feeling of wellness. You can keep fat stores under control and improve well-being simply by moderate walking each day. If you increase the intensity of exercise too much, the body begins to need those immediate stores of glucose, and the craving for high calorie foods (usually high in fat and sugar) increases. Walking is also a way to free the mind and find peace.

Returning to a healthy balance after a shock such as the loss of a loved one takes time and loving concern for both body and mind.

I asked Naomi to treat herself with kindness and to remember that her fiancé would want her to take care of herself and become whole and healthy again.

"Think of your body as a temple that needs maintenance in order to hold the memory of him," I suggested. "Imagine that you are an athlete embarking on a slow and challenging journey. Nourish your body with good food and loving thoughts, and you will gain the strength to travel to a different place, both psychologically and physically. He'll always be in your heart and soul, even when you get better."

Having been in Naomi's shoes many years ago during the Vietnam War, I understood the terrible pit of her grief. There is no real solace or cure except the offer of enough nurturance to decide to survive this moment and the next. *

.....
Visit www.ruthwcrocker.com for more thoughts on nourishment, nutrition, writing, resilience, and mindfulness.
.....

About the Author



Ruth W. Crocker received a PhD in Nutrition and worked in many aspects of health care including counseling and Nursing Home Administration. A desire to write about her life experiences led her back to school where she earned an MFA in Creative Writing. Her essays have appeared in magazines and literary journals. She recently completed a memoir about her experience with the Vietnam War. She serves on the National Board of the Gold Star Wives and lives and writes in Mystic, CT. Contact her at www.ruthwcrocker.com.

Life After the Death of My Son: What I'm Learning

By Dennis L. Apple ★ Reviewed by Randy Beard

I am a man. So is Dennis Apple. I am a bereaved father. So is Dennis Apple. I am a Christian. So is Dennis Apple. Maybe that's why his book resonated with me when I read it a few years after the death of my only son. Early in the book Dennis writes, "Time is important, but time alone will not heal a broken heart. In my journey, it has taken time and the company of others who acknowledged my pain and hopelessness." I feel like Dennis is one of those "others" for me and for many who have followed in his footsteps in their journey of grief. He acknowledged my pain by sharing his own.

Beginning right after the sudden death (from mononucleosis) of his 18-year-old son, Dennis Apple began journaling his soul-searing questions, his frustrations with friends and family, his anger and disappointment with God, and his emotional and spiritual battles. Each time he filled one journal he would add it to the stack in the storage closet. From these journals, Dennis chose the top ten lessons he had learned in his journey of grief and wrote *Life After the Death of My Son: What I'm Learning*.

These lessons became chapters: Will it always hurt this much? Will our marriage survive this? Am I losing my mind? Where is God? I don't want him to be forgotten. His birthday is coming. I love my church—but sometimes it hurts to be there. I didn't cry this morning. I'm beginning to live again. A wounded healer?

As you can see from the chapter titles, the book touches on the human connections

and the challenges that result from the death of a child. In addition, Dennis delves into his strained connection with God following the death. This was very comforting to me, because Dennis had the same struggles in that area that I was having, despite the fact that he was a protestant minister.

Life After the Death of My Son is refreshingly honest and presents an unvarnished account of Dennis's grief journey, while offering hope, validation, and connection. He has a way of writing that is engaging and truthful. His vulnerability is palpable. Dennis's transparency as he reveals his anger with God and the questions he had regarding his faith are comforting just because of the way he exposes his personal internal battles.

Those who have walked the grief journey and felt that their faith was shattered know that the questions outnumber the answers. And the answers are not the same for everyone. The book offers a Christian perspective, but not in a way that would deter those of other faiths.

Parents, in particular, will identify with many of the thoughts Dennis shares, but I certainly would recommend this book to anyone who is struggling with their faith after the death of someone close.

Many will have their own struggles validated as they relate to the shared processing of sorrow and questioning of faith. In addition to having aspects of their own emotional and spiritual journeys validated, I believe readers will find comfort in realizing that they are not the lone traveler on this path.

Grief counselors, extended family of the bereaved, or anyone who wants to—or should—understand the pain after the loss of a child would also benefit. ★



"His book saved my life after my son was killed in Afghanistan. A friend of mine gave me Mr. Apple's book, and my first thought was 'Another someone with all the answers to healing and how to get through this catastrophe.' But as I thumbed through the book I saw 'short term memory loss' and knew that I had to read the book. Mr. Apple laid out everything you go through and every thought you have when you lose a child. He flat out put it on the line and didn't try to gloss over one thing."

Jo Seitsinger ★ Mother of SGT Kyle Seitsinger

Spotlight on Service

★ Mardee McDaniel ★

Volunteers are a very important part of the TAPS family. We are grateful for the countless hours they donate and the part they play in supporting the TAPS mission. Volunteers, we salute you!

What motivates someone to volunteer for TAPS year after year? The reasons are different for each individual, but often it all comes back to the people we serve. It's the number one reason for many of our volunteers. One such volunteer, who has been coming back for 14 years, is Mardee McDaniel: California native, ex-software programmer, and mother of two sons, 18-year-old Matt and 15-year-old Ryan.

Mardee first came to TAPS in 1999 through a friend who is a TAPS survivor. Although Mardee had no direct association with the military, she became a volunteer that year at the National Military Survivor Seminar in Washington, DC. Like many who care about military family issues, Mardee easily connected with the TAPS mission. However, it was the survivors who left a lasting impression. Mardee felt that TAPS was where she belonged.

Mardee has a clear view as to why she has dedicated her Memorial Day weekends to TAPS. For her, spending Memorial Day weekend with those who are grieving a family member who died while serving our country exemplifies the true meaning of the day.

"When explaining to people why I go back every year," she shared, "I always tell them, 'Once you spend Memorial Day weekend in DC with people who have lost a military loved one, you just can't imagine spending it any other way.'"

By her second year, Mardee found her niche creating the photo buttons that each survivor receives when attending a TAPS event. Seeing how much these small mementos meant to the survivors got her hooked on this task. At that time, the photo buttons were made on site, but it



Thank You Mardee!

became increasingly difficult as the TAPS family grew. Because of the exponential increase in survivors following September 11, 2001, Mardee was asked what TAPS could do to facilitate the process.

"There is always room for improvement, and that's one of the many things that impresses me about TAPS," said Mardee. "They are willing to do whatever they need to, to improve the services they provide."

Mardee's first suggestion was to find a way to make buttons ahead of time. "That's when TAPS started sending me the necessary equipment and supplies, so I could do

them at home in the months preceding the seminar." Often friends come over to help, and her family pitches in as well. Starting in February, Mardee sets up the equipment so that friends and family can make a few when they have some extra time.

TAPS has taken priority during Memorial Day weekend each year for Mardee, taking her away from her family and responsibilities at home. This year, however, part of "home" came with her to DC in the form of her son Matt.

"As long as my boys can remember," said Mardee, "I've never been around for Memorial Day weekend, which makes it all the more special that Matt joined me this year."

As a senior in high school this year, Matt was able to miss his last few days of school to volunteer. Among other duties, he helped set up and man the button table at registration, which allowed him to see for himself what the buttons mean to TAPS survivors. It's important to Mardee that her sons understand why she has spent so many years with TAPS.

"Volunteering for TAPS is my way of saying thank you to the families and honoring the sacrifice their loved ones made serving our country," Mardee said. She feels privileged to be a part of the TAPS family, and the TAPS family is thankful for the years she has dedicated to serving the families of the fallen. *

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
TAPS welcomes new volunteers. Email us at volunteer@taps.org or visit us at www.taps.org. Click on Support TAPS and then click on Volunteer to explore, sign up, and take our training course.

Love of My Life

By Meaghan Steele ★ Surviving spouse of 1st Lieutenant Timothy J. Steele



*Your tags aside my mirror,
Your Bible by my bed,
Your folded flag on top the shelf,
Your voice inside my head.*

*“Bring my soldier home to me
Safely,” was my prayer.
You welcoming me home instead
Really isn't fair.*

*Maybe if it's possible,
Send a sign to me.
Just a token of the peace
That now has set you free.*

*If I must be without you,
Please help me find my smiles.
I'm sure that all the love we shared
Can reach across the miles.*

*Whatever distance that it is
Between here and where you are,
Please share with me the grace you've found
So I'll know you're not that far.*

*They tell me that I am doing well.
They don't know what they'd do.
I don't feel like I have much choice
Than to be brave, like you.*

*I'll tell our daughter every day,
I swear to you I will,
How you loved her so much then,
How much you love her still.*

*I'm given many titles now:
Army Widow, Gold Star Wife.
The one that means the most to me
Is Love of Your Life.*

©2012

Thank You to Our Donors & Sponsors

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

HERO

eBay Giving Works
Fisher House Foundation
The Hartwell Foundation

New York Life Foundation
Prudential Financial, Inc.

Telos Corporation
USO

PATRIOT

AIMCO
BAE Systems
DynCorp International
Estate of Robert L. Spence
Hasbro

Land of the Free Foundation
Oshkosh Corporation
SAIC
Skydex
TriWest Healthcare Alliance

UnitedHealthcare Military
& Veterans
Washington Capitals

EAGLE

Alcoa
American Bus Association
American Legion Child Welfare
Foundation
Ben Stein & Alexandra Denman
Booz Allen Hamilton
Citibank
DRS Technologies
DuPont
EADS North America
Express Scripts

Fluor
Health Net Federal Services
The Hill
Jim Koons Automotive Companies
The Kemmerer Family Foundation
Linda Parker Hudson Charity Fund
Lisa Zavota
Lockheed Martin
Mark Grier
Microsoft Corporation

Motorola Solutions Foundation
National Christian Foundation
Northrop Grumman Corporation
Ray Group International
SunTrust Bank
Thomas J. Chisholm
Travis Manion Foundation
United Concordia/Highmark
USAA Federal Savings Bank
Windy25 Memorial Fund

LIBERTY

Alfred Phillips Foundation
Anna Goldie Charitable Trust
Applied Information Sciences
Ashton Tiffany, LLC
Association of Military Banks of America
AUSA Fort Hood Chapter
Austin Community Foundation
Banfi Vintners Foundation
Blue Cross BlueShield of South Carolina
Boeing Company
Deloitte LLP
Dolphin Management Company III
Donald Graham
Elbit Systems of America
Ernst & Young LLP
Fort Myer Thrift Shop
Gary Sinise Foundation
GE Aviation
Gordon & Kaja Burr

Humana Military Healthcare Services
Huntington Ingalls Industries
JP Morgan Chase
KPMG LLP
L-3 Communications
The Leslie Peter Foundation
The Lewis Mark Kling Trust
Michael Loudon, Kim Cirka & Ronald Ray
Michelin America Truck Tires
Molly's Cockles & Mussels
National Association of Beverage Importers
National Beef Packing Company
Neall Family Charitable Trust
Pete & Marilyn Coors
PGBA Finance
Puget Sound Area USO
PwC
QinetiQ

Randall Taylor, Taylor Oil Properties
Raytheon Company
Richard and Carla Scudellari
Robert Holloman
Rolls-Royce North America
Stephen and Marla Grove
Sterling Global Operations
Textron
Tom & Mary Dyk
Triple Canopy
TyL Foundation
Tysons Regional Chamber of Commerce 5K
United Technologies Corporation
Van Scoyoc Associates
Veterans Advantage
Viecore FSD
Walter A. Bloedorn Foundation
Wounded Warriors Family Support



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS
3033 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 630
Arlington, VA 22201
800.959.TAPS (8277) * www.TAPS.org



TAPS is a participant organization in the
Combined Federal Campaign, No. 11309

NONPROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
Stevens Point, WI
PERMIT #272

TAPS is a proud participant in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), the world's largest and most successful annual workplace giving program.* Pledges made by Federal civilian, postal, and military donors during the campaign season (September 1st to December 15th) can support TAPS programs throughout the year.



By choosing **CFC #11309** you will directly impact the TAPS mission of compassionate care.

**If you are not a federal employee but would like to use your workplace giving program to benefit TAPS, simply specify Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors for your United Way payroll deductions.*

