

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 16 • ISSUE 1

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

Publisher: TAPS, Inc.

Editor: Elisabeth Beard

Editorial Board:

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

Art Director: Jennifer Bonney

Graphic Designer: Anali Wills

Contributing Photographers:

Jackie Ross, Morgan McKenty,
Bill Pratt, Anita Letkemann,
Steve Maloney

★ **National Office** ★

1777 F Street NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20006

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 servicemembers who have died while serving.

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

Copyright © 2009 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.

Printed in the USA

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



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, volunteers who have also lost a loved one in the Armed Forces and are now standing by to reach out to others.

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

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

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

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



FEATURES ★

- 6** In Search of Joy
Finding your way through the darkness
By Darcie Sims
- 8** Over the Edge
Moving forward through grief and fear
By Michelle West
- 10** Parallel Universe
Living two realities at the same time
By Alison Lighthall
- 12** Living to Honor the Dead
Making meaning of the legacy of loss
By Carol Lane
- 14** Once Upon a Time
The healing power of storytelling
By Cathy Conheim
- 24** Survivors of Suicide
Healing after a loved one's suicide
By Mayo Clinic Staff

NEWS ★

- 16** Inside the TAPS Good Grief Camp
Learning to cope with death
- 18** National Military Survivor Seminar
Join us Memorial Day Weekend 2010
- 28** Spring Training
Join the TAPS Run & Remember Team
- 30** TAPS Peer Mentor Program
Find out how to become a peer mentor
- 34** Announcing TAPS First Book for Children
Klinger, a Story of Honor and Hope



8

»»» Training Tips »»»



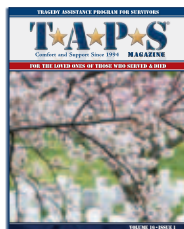
28



20

DEPARTMENTS ★

- 4** Letters to TAPS
Let us hear from you
- 5** Celebrity Spotlight
Actress Melora Hardin
- 20** Grief 101
Healing Your Traumatized Heart
- 22** To Your Health
Physical Reactions to Loss and Grief
- 27** Book Shelf
When a Brother or Sister Dies
- 32** Resources
Fry Scholarship for surviving military children
- 33** Poetry Place
Cocoon
- 34** Friends of TAPS
USO offers support through TAPS



COVER PHOTO BY

Andrea Pelletier
Springtime in Arlington National Cemetery



Letters To TAPS

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



Comfort

Thank you for the magazine. Reading your magazine helps me in my grieving. Every time I read TAPS it is uplifting and makes me realize I am not alone. The stories are so comforting to read sometimes it feels, when I read the stories, that I could have written them myself. I miss my son every minute. It is comforting to me that I receive this magazine even though I am living in the Netherlands. Thank you and keep up the good work!

Marleen Aalten, Netherlands
Surviving mom of
Specialist Sean McDonald

Support

As the mother of a fallen soldier I now consider TAPS my family also. All the love and support I have received from TAPS is just unbelievable. I have attended three of the seminars and each time have felt like I belong there. No one will ever take away the pain of losing your child, but TAPS has helped me when (on several occasions) I wanted to give up. I now can sometimes handle some of the pain and know that when I cry for my precious son I have someone to hold on to and share my grief with. Thank you TAPS. You are wonderful.

Phyllis Broomfield, Texas
Surviving mom of
Lieutenant Johnny Craver

Understanding

I became aware of TAPS shortly after my son's death but it took me a couple of months to pick up the phone and call. I wasn't sure if I belonged or if I would be accepted because my son committed suicide. When I did call I felt understanding and compassion immediately. I was referred to a place where I could get help locally which has helped tremendously. Most of all I want to thank TAPS for organizing the Suicide Survivor Seminar. My daughter and I attended this event and it was amazing. We met so many wonderful people and it helped us realize so many things. A few of the most important are: it's okay to still cry, it's okay to laugh and not feel guilty, and we never have to be alone with our thoughts; TAPS will be there for us. We look forward to attending future TAPS events.

Terence Madigan, New York
Surviving father of
Seaman Recruit Shawn Madigan

Acceptance

My brother was not killed in action and a lot of remembrance groups in my area do not count him because of this. The fact that TAPS accepts anyone that served in the military that has died means so much more than I could ever express.

Kristin Otto, Minnesota
Surviving sister of
Petty Officer 3rd Class Daniel Otto

Inspiration

I just received a copy of the Fall TAPS magazine. It was clear to me from the first issue I saw several years ago that your publication serves a vital role for so many families who have lost loved ones; this issue is no exception. Reading it from cover to cover, I was touched by the stories of inspiration and courage.

Jim Fraser, Virginia
TAPS Volunteer

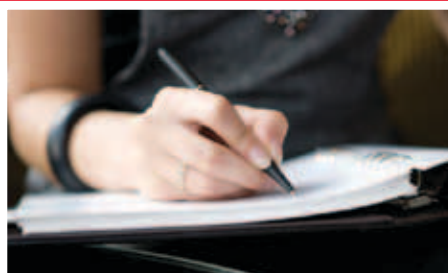
Sharing

Thank you so much for a wonderful experience this past weekend. [Marine Corps Marathon, 2009] It was truly one of the most memorable, life-changing moments I have had in my military career. I have worked very closely with many of the Fallen Angels' families over the years, but to be a part of the TAPS family for the weekend was amazing! The families I met and the stories they shared about their loved ones was something I will always remember.

Barbara Hutchens, North Carolina
10 K Runner, MCM 2009



editor@taps.org



Celebrity Spotlight

Melora Hardin

In a Hollywood career spanning three decades and including 85 television shows and movies, Melora Hardin has shown that she has what it takes to go the distance. She moves with ease from movies to television to Broadway and back again: acting, directing, singing, producing, and collecting awards as she goes. From roles as diverse as Mrs. Trudy Monk of TV series *Monk* to Jan Levinson of *The Office*, Melora has enriched our lives with laughter and delight.

Now she has touched our lives by portraying our heartache and despair through her tender direction of a film about being a survivor. The journey of grief and recovery from the loss of a loved one can make an intensely emotional story, one which Melora Hardin and husband Gildart Jackson created in their recent film titled simply, *YOU*.

TAPS held a private screening of *YOU* at our Washington D.C. headquarters in September, 2009. Local TAPS survivors and guests watched the film and shared an evening of reflection on life and loss with Melora and Gildart. The husband and wife team wrote, directed, and starred in the film, and said they were humbled to share their story with TAPS.



"*YOU* is a love story which highlights getting through the pain of loss, rather than getting over it," said Melora. "To have a community of people who lost someone watching the film, and to have them connect with us as film makers was very special."

After that meeting with TAPS families and staff, Melora and Gildart were hooked. "We wanted to do whatever we could to support TAPS and the families," she said. Within weeks Melora was able to lend her time to TAPS by hosting a fundraising

event in Malibu, California. At the Tory Burch fundraiser, Melora and Gildart shared their praise for TAPS with the shopping guests, and each of their purchases for the night gave 20 percent of the sale back to TAPS.

"I really feel connected to the TAPS families through the film and through Bonnie," said Melora. "You know, many people have their entire careers and they are successful and they make money, but they never make a difference."

Melora had a humble tone as she shared her parting thoughts on TAPS and the families who may be touched by her work. "I specifically wrote a song called 'Fading Away' that I think would resonate with TAPS families... It feels so good when your art speaks to people and offers healing," she said. "If I can lend my name and energy to helping support what you guys do... any time TAPS needs me, you just call and I'll be there."

TAPS families can stay connected with the multi-talented Melora through her film, *YOU*, and through her first nationally released CD, *All The Way To Mars*. *YOU* can be purchased at www.youthefilm.com, iTunes, or Amazon. The album is available for download on iTunes. *



YOU, the film

Melora at the Tory Burch fundraiser

The Office

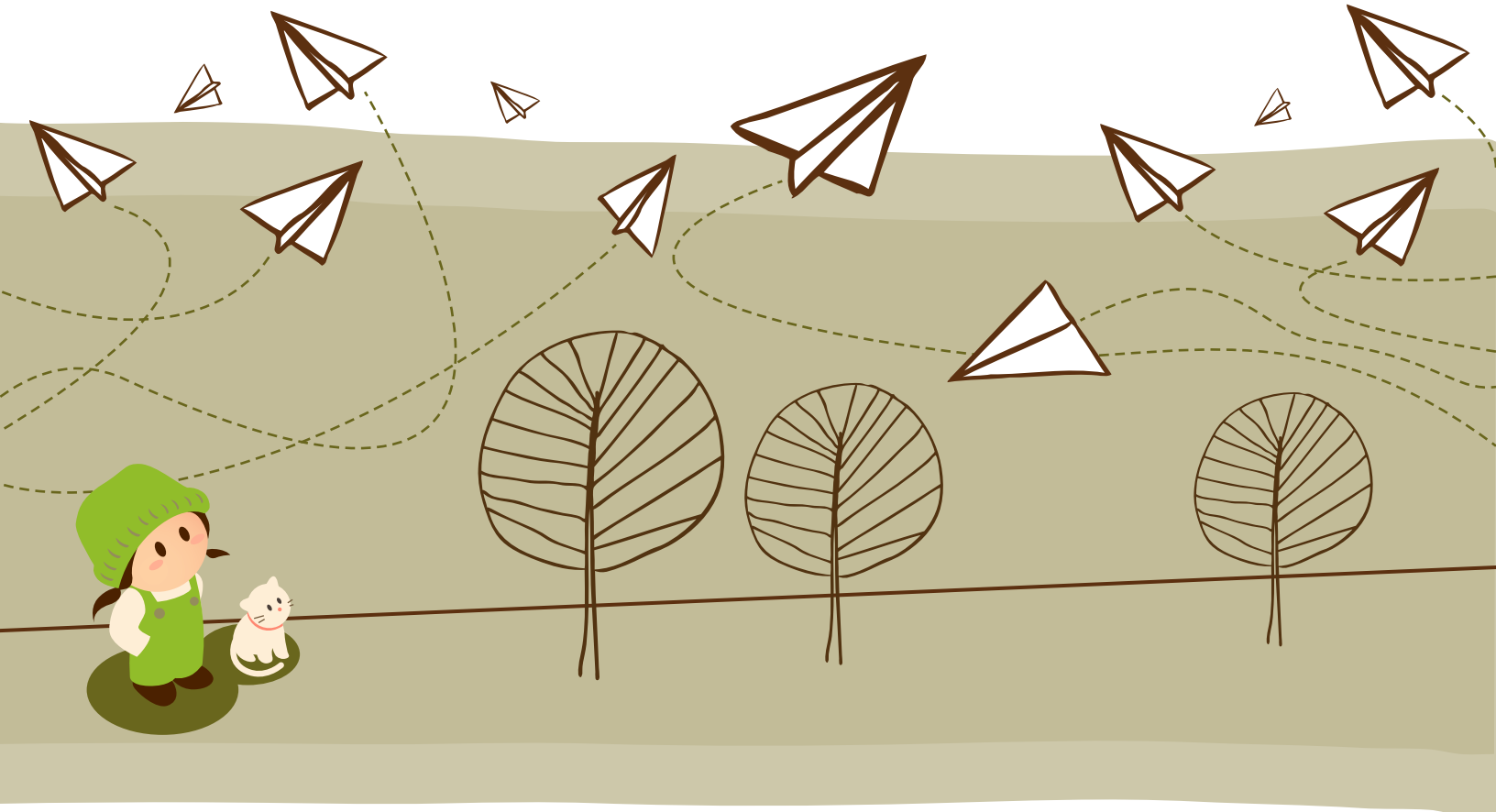
**Thank you, Melora,
for all you do in supporting
TAPS and raising awareness
of military survivors!**



In Search of Joy

Finding your way through the darkness

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



Do you know how long it took me to allow laughter and joy to return to my life? Do you know how far it is from this side of the page to your side? Do you know how difficult it is to write about death?

It was a long journey. It took me thirty years to get from your side of this page to mine... a long time... actually a whole lifetime!

I liked my other life. In fact, I loved it! I hadn't intended to be here, in your life. But then, just as it happened in your life, a single moment changed everything, and here I am... with you now and forever. Thirty years ago, our son slipped away from his mom and dad and big sister.

We all know that emptiness that brings us here to these pages in search of something to ease the pain; in search of something to stop the tears; in search of something to dream about again.

At peace after a lifelong battle with a malignant brain tumor, he took with him all our hopes and dreams of being an average American family.

We had two children so that no one would have to share the window or ride on the hump in the middle of the backseat. We had two children because I had hundreds of recipes that served four. We had two children because we couldn't figure

out how to have the 1.6 children which is the national average. But something happened along the way to that dream, and in a moment our dreams were lost. The sounds of joy and laughter left our lives, perhaps as they seem to have left yours.

All of us know the quietness that comes when we realize we are the only source of sound in our house now. We all know that loss, that emptiness that brings us here to

these pages in search of something to ease the pain; in search of something to stop the tears; in search of something to dream about again.

I can't think of anything else I'd rather be doing right now than living. But that wasn't always true, especially after our child's death when there were days when all I could do was think about dying, to join him and to relieve my pain. But I lived through that, just as you are right now, by grasping every day and claiming it as my own. Each of us will, one day, rediscover whatever we cherish about life. Each of us will find the laughter that echoed throughout our life with our loved one... if we will look for it.

I'm here on this side of the page, not to tell you how to be happy, but to tell you that you deserve to be happy again. It's a different kind of happy, however. It's a happiness robbed of innocence, born out of fire, forged by a flame that has the power to destroy everything in its path – but only if we let it!

How did I do it? How did I get to now? I got to where I am today because of healing, with time and a commitment to rediscovering the joy in living. Must we dwell in the darkness forever? Can we begin to understand that our loved one's death was but a moment, a split second of horror? And can we remember, instead, our loved one's life? Is it possible that one day we will begin to understand that joy can return?

We cannot find words to soothe the hurt... there aren't any! We cannot shield ourselves from the twists and turns of living. We cannot protect ourselves from experiencing life. We can, however, build supports and safety nets. We can create cushions and pockets of comfort: places where we can rest, momentarily, gathering strength to re-enter the crashing tides. We can learn to smile again, maybe even giggle, and return laughter to our lives.

Cry all you want, but remember to laugh when you can. Your life with your loved one was filled with moments of laughter! Remember them, enjoy them again and

again. Between the tears, allow the joy to return. What I bring you in this article is a message with hope, a gift of remembrance, a love letter of laughter. Read this article as if we were sitting together, across the kitchen table, trying to help each other through the valley. Whether you are a bereaved parent, a widow or widower, a sibling, an adult bereaved child, a grandparent, friend, or simply someone who wants to know how to help, I hope you will find information, education, and support in these words. They are written from my heart to yours, each word carved out of experience as well as professional education.

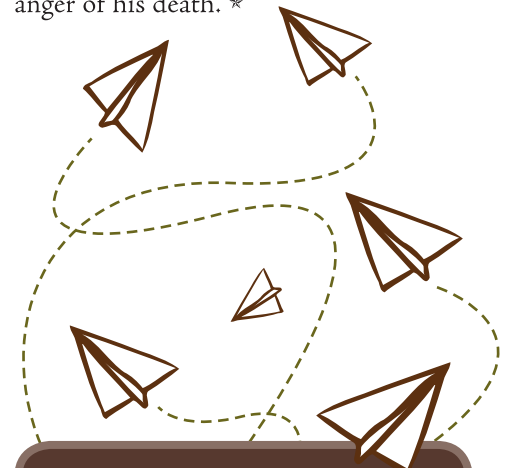
No one can tell you how to grieve or when to heal. I just want to let you know you can find hope and healing and you can find joy once again. Our loved ones lived and we loved them. We still do.

I am a psychotherapist and a grief management specialist by trade, a mother by choice, and a grieving person by chance. Our hearts speak the same language, the language of grief. We hold the same fear of never getting over this and forever having to live with the terrible pain of having someone we love dearly die. Come with me, across the stepping-stones of grief, finding your way through the darkness, reaching for each touchstone as you can.

There are no timetables for grief and no one right way to grieve. There are as many ways to grieve as there are people grieving. Know your pain is real and that you have the right to hurt and to ache and to continue loving your loved one. No one can tell you how to grieve or when to heal. I just want to let you know you can find hope and healing and you can find joy once again. Our loved ones lived and we loved them. We still do. But sometimes we cannot wait for fun and joy to be presented to us.

We must make it happen! Insist on joyfulness and silliness being a part of each day. What the world needs now is a paper airplane that carries our message of love and hope and laughter to friends, family, and everyone!

Become an aviator right now and run your own flying circus. Make your own "Happy Planes" to send everywhere: to your mother who is trying to understand (or just "trying"), to your best friend who hasn't spoken to you since the funeral, to the neighbor who didn't bring a tuna casserole (bless her), to a child who needs some fun, and to yourself— just BECAUSE! Sail these messages through the air mentally, verbally, and physically. Fold the paper airplane right now and let the joy of your loved one's life begin to take the place of the hurt and anger of his death. *



About the Author



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

For more information visit:
www.griefinc.com

What Finally Pushed Me OVER THE EDGE

By Michelle J. West, surviving spouse of SSG Laurent J. West

Ever since March 11, 2008, I have been teetering on the edge. On that day I received the heartbreaking news that my husband Staff Sergeant Laurent J. West was killed while serving in Iraq. The resulting days pushed me right to the edge, always balancing between keeping it together and falling apart.

The knock on the door that evening came one hour after I had received the news that my beloved grandmother had passed away. Grandma Whyte had been suffering from Alzheimer's and I saw her death as a comfort since she would no longer be in mental or physical pain. Little did I know that when she entered Heaven my young, healthy husband was there to greet her.

In the hour between learning about my grandmother's death and having the chaplain knock on my door, I emailed Laurent to inform him of the news. I reassured him not to worry about me since he would be home in a few weeks for R&R after nine long months of being deployed. Just as I finished, my sister called. I was sharing fond memories of our grandmother when I heard knocking on the front door.

As I peeked through the blinds to see the impolite intruder, all I could see was a piece of uniform. My first thought was that Laurent had come home early and wanted to surprise me. As I threw open the door I was struck with a sadness so fierce that nothing has been the same since. I knew the impossible had happened. The man who was larger than life was no longer alive.

The next twenty days included flying to Colorado and realizing I was not strong enough to attend my grandma's funeral,

*The resulting
days pushed me
right to the edge,
always balancing
between keeping
it together &
falling apart.*

trying to celebrate the success of our oldest daughter graduating from college, and then coming home for one day before flying to Washington D.C. for Laurent's funeral.

The following eleven months and eleven days would test me even further. I attribute my ability to get through the year to Laurent's strong hands keeping me up and his loving words reminding me I could get through this. The saying that God never gives you anything you can't handle had me convinced that God had me confused with someone else.

That year tested me with all of the firsts to be faced without my better half. Our wedding anniversary was the 4th of July. We had picked the date due to our love for our country. Laurent could never forget our special day, and we would always have fireworks for our anniversary. July 4, 2008 was the first time in my life I did not celebrate this wonderful day. No picnic, no parade, and no fireworks.

Thanksgiving was even harder because it was Laurent's favorite day. That man could eat! And he was always grateful for all we were blessed with. Though my age had never bothered me before, there was just something depressing about turning 40 and being a widow. Each holiday presented me with a reminder of all the days we wouldn't be sharing together.

The first year also brought challenges I never imagined. Green Ramp was one of the hardest. In Fort Bragg, Green Ramp is the airfield where returning soldiers come home from deployments. I decided to attend the homecoming, both to prove to myself that Laurent really wasn't coming home and to sincerely welcome all the soldiers who had made it back safely.

One test I didn't expect was being treated as if widowhood were contagious. Those who should have been there for me were often the cruelest, ignoring me at the PX or not returning my calls. It seemed as



though I had lost not only my husband but my support network as well.

I had the bittersweet joy of buying our first home, made possible because of the sacrifice Laurent made for all of us. I felt guilty anytime I was happy and tried my best not to cry, because I knew how much Laurent hated seeing me sad. Seeing his grave or calling myself a widow could make my heart stop. Giving up would have been easy but every time I was close to it, I would get a sign from Laurent that I should continue to stay strong.

By early December I started to think of how I would handle the first anniversary of Laurent's death. The options included going to Arlington and crying beside a cold stone, locking myself away from the world, or staying strong and being the woman Laurent loved. As a family, the girls and I decided that every March 11th would be "What Would Laurent Do Day." This would be a day to celebrate something Laurent would want to do.

Since 2009 would be the first annual celebration, I had to make sure it was spectacular. It occurred to me that I should jump out of an airplane. I figured it would be an amazing way to honor Laurent and the 82nd Airborne as well as doing something that my husband loved. One small problem: I was terrified of flying. Since Laurent's passing I had been on five different trips and always wore his first airborne wings with pride. They provided comfort and reassurance and actually had me enjoying flying. Still, jumping out of a perfectly good plane was something I swore I would never do, and I thought Laurent was crazy for enjoying it. I decided that participating in a tandem jump would be the perfect way to face my personal fear and celebrate my husband.

On March 11, 2009 in Raeford, North Carolina, the weather provided me with the perfect jump day. All day people kept

asking two questions, "Are you really going to jump?" and "Are you nervous?" Every time I would answer "Of course" and "Not at all." When I found out I had the honor of jumping with the Golden Knight who jumped with George Bush, Sr. on his 80th birthday, I had no doubt I was in good hands.

I received my jump instructions, signed the paperwork, and suited up. They told me to remember three things: breathe, arch, and have fun. I saw the tiny plane and all the seasoned jumpers, and I could feel the adrenaline pumping through my veins. We were the last to jump, and I had plenty of time to reconsider. I didn't though, because I was proudly wearing Laurent's wings.

Looking down 13,000 feet with my toes over the edge was the first time I got nervous. But at that moment I could hear Laurent telling me it was fine. This edge represented the love I have for Laurent and the love he has for me. This fall would not weaken me but bring me strength. This edge was not "giving up" but "moving forward." It was this thought (and a swift kick from Laurent) that finally pushed me over the edge.

The second I was out of the plane I had as many emotions going through me as the number of feet I was falling. I finally understood why Laurent loved being a paratrooper. What a rush of joy and fear all in one! The most important part was the empowerment I gained. That jump made me realize that there is nothing I cannot handle with Laurent's love motivating me. It was an incredible fall.

Upon landing I knew Laurent had been with me every second of the jump. And I now know that he will be with me as my guardian angel telling me to be strong (and giving me a swift kick when I need it) for the rest of my life. *



Parallel Universe

Living Two Realities at the Same Time

By Alison Lighthall, RN, MSN

Severe psychological trauma is a special kind of broken-heartedness. It takes up residency in you, sometimes making itself known in cruel ways and other times taking a quiet nap from which it can be quickly and easily aroused. It is a permanent condition that, on some rare and lucky occasions, eases with time or goes blessedly into dormancy but never actually ends.

Immediately after the initial traumatic moment, your world is ruled by huge emotional energy and your day is a series of wild emotional struggles. Over time (much time, if you're doing it all on your own) you come into an entirely new way of living. Instead of returning to normal, as you were always able to do in the past from life's usual trials, you find yourself

very much stuck in a universe that most others cannot see and do not understand, one which inflicts a deep, throbbing ache. You slowly realize that the hole in your heart will not heal, that this sadness is your new normal. Whenever you confront such a thought, you quickly push it out of your mind because it is an intolerable thought—to live the rest of your life haunted by anguish.

Somehow, inexplicably, the world around you continues. Time on the clock keeps passing, despite your being frozen back in that moment of excruciating pain when your world exploded. If you're lucky, over time you gradually learn more about what happened to you. You begin to organize the events a little better, your frontal lobe reopens communication with your limbic system, and you become fully conscious and in the moment once again.

You slowly release your grip on the reality that was, and you stop arguing with the universe about what is. Eventually you accept the chronic pain as a stubborn companion. And you resynchronize with the world's clock.

Smiling isn't always forced anymore. You learn to ignore the ache and sorrow enough to actually forget about it sometimes. Then one day a sound jumps out of you that, both familiar and forgotten, startles you: a mirthful laugh. You slowly, carefully pick up speed. A new home. A new pet. A new job. Some new friends. You decide to start living a little bit again.

For a while, even this small amount of happiness is intoxicating and all-consuming. Color is visible and



life has meaning to you again. A sense of purpose, for so long absent, is now palpable. You realize you're not dead after all.

The new life eventually becomes just life, a set of patterns that are comforting and familiar and no longer new. And it is at that point, when you think the mileage you've logged traveling from then to now has been enough to keep you away from that hurtful place forever, that sorrow reawakens without warning and the pain returns.

And then one day, you get it; you are simultaneously both happy and sad. You are both here and back there. You are living two realities at the same time!

At first you don't buy into its existence as being true. But that slumbering, noxious companion is now up and around and in need of attention after such a long nap. It parks itself in the middle of your no-longer-new life, waiting for you to acknowledge it. You look at it in astonishment for several days or even weeks. But slowly the truth dawns on you; it's not going anywhere. You're going to have to make room for this thing; you're going to have to name it. And after years of ignoring it, you may even have to talk to it.

And then one day, you get it; you are simultaneously both happy and sad. You are both here and back there. You are living two realities at the same time! These two universes exist for you, within you, at the same time. At the moment you are happy, there is still a profound sadness. And when you are lost in the pain of your traumatic sorrow, your other life—the good and happy life—still exists, waiting for you to re-engage in it.

The problem is that the world around you—the people who have not lived through what you have lived through and haven't suffered the terror, grief, and

agony that you have—only sees you in its own context. The people around you don't even know that your other universe exists, much less what it's like to live in its fire. They don't know that sometimes you're so overcome with sorrow that you curl up into a ball and sob inconsolably. They don't know about the night terrors or the depression that you plummet into at certain times of the year or whenever you hear a certain song. They think what you tell them to think: that you're "fine."

Finally you reach a breaking point and you share the details of your secret universe with someone. You tell them about your grief, the unwelcome companion that lives invisibly in your space. To your surprise, it can be a total stranger who is the first to hear of your true suffering: the father of a deployed soldier next to you on the plane, a social worker at a neighbor's barbeque. Afterwards, even if you are still vibrating from having relived your story, you're surprised to find that you actually do feel better for having told it to someone. You wonder if maybe sharing your truth with those who love you might not be such an ordeal after all. And maybe suffering in this hell all alone isn't necessary...

Knowing is a funny thing. It's different from sensing or suspecting or wondering. Once you know something, you can't un-know it. The act of speaking your truth helps you actually know your truth. It brings the pain, guilt, sorrow, remorse, anger, shock, loneliness, embarrassment, and bereavement into the light, and once in the light they can never again crawl back into the dark corners of your soul.

The only true antidote I have ever found for surviving the pain and anguish of living in these two parallel universes is the authentic, enduring loving-kindness of another human being—one who wishes nothing more than to climb inside my world with me to keep me company while I figure out what to do with my broken heart. Only then does life become bearable and the clock begins to move forward again. *



About the Author



Alison Lighthall has been a nurse for 30 years and holds a masters degree in psychiatric nursing from the University of Illinois, Chicago. She joined the Army Nurse Corps at the age of 46 and now serves as a Psychiatric Nurse Consultant at Evans Army Community Hospital in Fort Carson, Colorado.



Living to Honor the Dead

By Carol Lane

For many of us it is hard to open our hearts when our loved one has given the ultimate sacrifice to our nation and we remain behind. Yet we still have all the love to give that we have shared through the years and it doesn't stop with death. In the beginning, many of us can only try to get through each day and survive with the pain in our hearts that comes from such a great loss. Our hearts, out of necessity, close up as we try to deal with the pain. Gradually we begin to heal, and wonder how we can keep our loved one's name recognized and not forgotten.

~ Carol Lane in *Good Morning from TAPS* December 5, 2009

Ten years ago the picture I had of my future was focused on teaching elementary school for as long as I could, enjoying my grown children and their families, and taking an occasional trip to the beach. Events, however, can radically change the course of your life.

My life and my future changed on July 9, 2001. At the end of a critical week at school, the secretary came to my door to say that I needed to go home; there had been an accident. I drove home thinking, "Well, whatever it is, I can handle it. It is summer and I have more than enough time to help whichever child it is to recover from an injury." Our son Sergeant Bryon Lane was

a Marine who had just transferred to Camp Lejeune from the Presidential helicopter squad. Our daughter Bethany had just graduated from college and was considering looking for a job near her brother. Life was good.

I turned the corner of my street and there before me was the government car. My heart sank and I knew there was nothing my mothering skills could do to help the situation. How could this happen? We weren't at war. Bryon should be safe. Why were these Marines at my house? Although I knew there were military deaths in peacetime, it hadn't crossed my mind that it

could happen to us. While training for a night flight over the New River at Camp Lejeune, Bryon's helicopter had crashed into the river killing him and two other crew chiefs.

The hardest part for me in those early days was getting out of bed in the morning. After a wakeful night, I would finally fall asleep out of pure exhaustion and wake to realize that Bryon was no longer alive and that I wouldn't see him again on earth. It was a time of searching for a way to live in a world that kept moving on while I remained in a state of anguish. I couldn't sit in one place for long without crying.



Not long after the funeral I contacted an organization I had read about on a small brochure. I needed to find help with this overwhelming grief. That organization was TAPS and the person I found was Ellen Andrews. We talked on the phone, and I started attending the TAPS chat. She must have listened to my story a thousand times, but Ellen always showed me the respect and caring for which TAPS is known. Through TAPS, I found my way to start healing.

That first year I made a scrapbook and included some of the precious memories I hope others will read someday to know who Bryon was and what he stood for. I added cards I had saved over the years. One of them was a cute card from Bryon asking, "If you had it to do over, would you still be my mother? I hope that you would." At the time I thought that was a strange question to ask, but now I find it reflective. Knowing all that has taken place, would I do it all over again?

The answer is, "Yes, in a heartbeat!"

Despite the pain of losing Bryon, the thought of never knowing that special person and having him touch my life is something that I could never put aside. The years of watching him grow and the ideas and events that he introduced me to are awe-inspiring.

A year after Bryon's death my husband retired. I found I needed to be at work, teaching language arts, math, science, and social studies to 5th graders. Concentrating on my students gave a sense of purpose to my world that now seemed strangely remote from my community. I soon found, though, that it wasn't enough anymore just to teach. I needed to do something to honor my son.

In finding ways to honor my son, I began to think about what was important to Bryon. First of all, he was a Marine. He loved being a Marine and serving his country. He also liked to write and listen to people. Well, I couldn't become a Marine, but I could maintain the military connection by lis-

tening to others as they struggled with the death of a loved one in the military. Okay, that sounded good. Now I needed a place to start. I began in the TAPS chat room where I started listening more than talking.

Next I attended TAPS Peer Mentor Training at the National Military Survivor Seminar. I began to reach out to people who needed to hear from someone who was farther along the path. In time it became difficult to keep up with all of them in addition to my full-time teaching job. This led to the birth of my "Good Morning" Saturday Message for survivors, a weekly message inspired by questions survivors ask or ideas they send. Not only was I honoring Bryon's memory, but I was discovering a whole new group of friends who became family. We understood each other intuitively and were there to help one another through many of life's difficulties.

In the years since Bryon's death, I have also found a way to honor him in my workplace. Each November I organize a Veteran's Day Tea for the 5th graders at our school. We invite veterans who are connected to our students as well as those from the Vet Center, the Navy Reserve, the VFW, and the American Legion in our town. To open the tea, we say the Pledge of Allegiance, and the children sing our national anthem. The veterans bring pictures or anything they would like to share. Last year we had a Power Point Presentation from a soldier deploying to Afghanistan and a disarmed torpedo brought by a retired sailor! We feature a large map so the veterans can show the children where they were stationed. The 5th graders look forward to our time with the veterans and the event grows each year.

After more than eight years, there are still times when I feel I am not in the driver's seat of my life. I find that my anxiety increases when I am not giving myself enough time to sort through the feelings that come up as life happens. As time passes, events in my life may reopen the hole in my heart, and I find I need time to work through my feelings anew. I am sometimes forced to look at where I am in this process

and ask myself, "Can I handle this? What have I learned from the past?" I am the first to tell you that there are still some things that I don't wish to share with everyone yet. However when faced with someone who is hurting, those walls break down. Part of me knows that connecting to others is a way to start the healing process, and I reach out.

My volunteer work through TAPS has given me so much. I can channel the love I had for Bryon into helping others. In return I receive the gift of friendship and a feeling of great warmth to know I finally can care for others again. Through email messages and my travels to the TAPS seminars I find the strength that comes from opening my heart to others.

Now I have a glimpse of what Bryon found when he joined the military. We have a wonderfully diverse nation, and it is an honor to help those families who have given so much for our freedom. *

About the Author



Carol Lane is the surviving mom of Marine Sergeant Bryon Lane who died in an aviation accident in 2001.

To receive Carol's weekly Saturday morning email, go to www.taps.org. Register by clicking on the Online Community tab on the right side of the home page. Once you are registered, go to the TAPS Message Boards and click on Saturday Morning Newsletter. Click on the Subscribe button at the top."



Once Upon a Time...

The healing power of storytelling

By Cathy Conheim, MA, LCSW

Storytelling connects us to one another and to what is important in our lives. Using the voice of Henry, a three-legged cat, Cathy Conheim employs storytelling to help children and adults find new ways of coping with challenges and emotions. Henry teaches us that we are not defined by our circumstances and that each of us is capable of contribution, creativity, and the courage to be "Just Me."

Following Henry's example, children (and grown-ups) can learn to tell their own stories as they discover a new vocabulary for self-expression. As they become aware of the impact of emotions, they also learn how important it is to choose their responses to challenging experiences. We ask our military to be our heroes; Henry's story helps us recognize the hero within all of us.

It was a beautiful day! I was running around chasing leaves and dodging in and out around trees with my three sisters. Life was good. Suddenly there was a great THUD. I don't have much memory of what happened until I woke up. My left paw was dangling, and I couldn't walk when my human mom found me. Of course, she didn't know she would become my mom. She thought she hated cats! Fortunately, she had a tender heart and scooped me up and took me to a white coat person for animals.

My life was saved, but now I have only three legs.



Life has changed so much from what I expected it to be... I am no longer allowed to run free outdoors. My family says I might be eaten by a coyote or climb a tree and not be able to get down. Humans, they worry about so many things! We animals just go on with what we have, even though humans seem to notice what is missing. I've learned that hard things happen, but it's how we respond that really matters.

At first I was so overwhelmed by my new world that I hardly knew what to do. So, I asked my new mom if she would help me write my story and reach out to others who are hurting. I wrote my first letter in 2004; Mom sent it to 20 of her friends. They sent it on to lots of other people and soon I was getting letters from all over the world.

When I first got hurt, I just wanted to curl up and stay in a dark place by myself. But once I started telling my story, I made new friends. Now I want to help others tell their stories, share their feelings, and tell what their lives are about. None of us can manage things we can't mention, so I talk about all sorts of things. Animals and humans write back and tell me their stories.



"Everyone's life deserves a book and each of us should be the leading character in our own story." ~Henry~

I now have thousands of friends and paw pals. In the last four years, I have answered almost 40,000 letters. Through my letters, I can take different journeys than my legs used to take me on. My friends have told me much about their challenges and their losses, and some have even said I am a good role model for them. I have learned that none of us is defined by our circumstances, and each of us can contribute to the lives of others.

Some of the people who write to me are military families. They have told me of their brave humans who sometimes go halfway around the world to fight for the freedom of other people. I learned that humans don't always get along and they have big things called wars to try to settle their differences. When the brave people go off to this thing called war, families are left behind waiting for someone to come home.



The littlest soldiers, the children, hurt the most. Like me, they don't understand why their mother or father or sister or brother has to go so far away.

The hardest thing I have learned is that some humans in the military don't ever come home again. They don't get a second chance like I did. They go over the rainbow bridge where things are more peaceful, but their family is left on this side to cope with all the sadness, confusion, and pain. The families have to find a way to keep going when there is a big hole in all of their hearts, and they have to find a way to live in this new world they find themselves in.

With the help of my mom, I've written a book called *What's the Matter with Henry, the True Tale of a Three-Legged Cat*. I went to Camp Pendleton and other bases and took my books to the families of our service people. There were five really important things that I wanted to tell them:

1) Hard things happen. It is not the events of our lives that cause us to be who we become; it is our responses to those events. WE get to choose our responses.

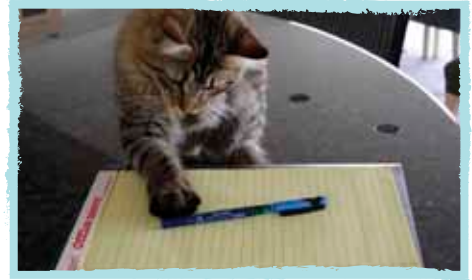
2) Hate is learned. It is easy to hate what we do not know. Hate keeps us from getting acquainted with potential friends. When we come to know someone, human or animal, it's hard to hold on to hate.

3) Be true to who you are. Be proud. Do not let others make you into anything you are not. Know when to listen and how to listen to your inner voice. Be just you!

4) Play the hand you are dealt. No "ifs, ands, or buts!" No "if onlys" and no blame. Play the hand life gives you no matter what challenges come your way.

5) Connect with what you care about. You cannot do everything but you can do something that makes a difference to somebody, and you can connect with others who care about the same things that you do.

The most important thing I've learned is that every person's life deserves a story. It's important to connect with others who have suffered loss, too. When we tell our stories, others get to see how we survive. And we never know what part of our story gives people the courage to go on in their own lives. It doesn't really matter whether the story becomes a published book. What matters is that we learn about the lives of those who share this planet with us.



Henry, JM reporting for duty (JM does not stand for Junior Marine, although I would be proud to be one... it is Just Me!) Paws up!

P.S. I have been thinking of starting my Dear Tabby advice column and decided the very best people I could help are our TAPS families. Little people can write and also big people who are hurting and have questions. Address your questions about grief and loss to me, but send them to editor@taps.org. TAPS will make sure I get them and I can write answers to your questions in future issues. To honor their courage in starting a new journey, I will send a gift of my book to the first fifty people who submit questions for my column. *

Your story is important. The person that you have lost is important. Perhaps you will write their story and it will become part of your story. You can send your stories out in the world the way I did and see what comes back to you. People will not know about your world unless you tell them. You can find out about me and also write to me at www.henrysworld.org. Take a risk, put paw to paper, voice to recorder, and tell your very own story. You never know what will happen when you do!



About the Author



Cathy Conheim is an author, public speaker, radio talk show host, and psychotherapist. Whatever "hat" she wears, she basically is a catalyst for change. Blending compassion with decades of experience, she listens well and responds creatively with usable information for children and adults. Through the innocent voices of animals, she helps humans turn obstacles into opportunities and in the process, develop an emotional vocabulary for improved health. You'll find her at Henrysworld.org.



A Sneak Peek Inside the T★A★P★S Good Grief Camp

By Heather Campagna, MA, EdS, CT
National Good Grief Camp Director



Many people wonder just what takes place within the borders of a TAPS Good Grief Camp... and adult survivors have often said it looks like more fun to be on the kid's side of our national gathering! Undeniably, the Good Grief Camp involves events that can lighten young hearts, but all of our activities are also specially selected to offer a safe place for each child to "just be" wherever they are in their grief. That can have a very different meaning for each child depending on their personal journey and their developmental age. Nevertheless, whether the child is four or fourteen, the focus of the Good Grief Camp is to share feelings, learn coping skills, and share memories of loved ones, just like the adult National Military Survivor Seminar...we just use different methods to get there!

Part of what makes the TAPS National Good Grief Camp unique are the hundreds of trained mentors who volunteer for this special weekend, most of them active duty military personnel. Each is paired with a surviving child to act as a big brother

or sister throughout the weekend. This shows the TAPS child that there are people who are there for them, that they are not forgotten, and that they are still a part of the military family. Within groups of approximately 20 same-age children or teens, there are 20 mentors and two group leaders. One leader has a professional mental health/education background and the other is a seasoned military mentor. The bonds that are formed over this very healing weekend can be life changing for all involved.

Some of the traditional fun activities at the TAPS National Good Grief Camp are field trips, art projects, and our annual GGC party. We visit the memorials around D.C. to show each child how the country honors their loved one's sacrifice. The children make a wreath to lay at the Tomb of the Unknowns. Constructed of red, white, and blue cut-outs in the shape of each child's hand, each piece carries a message to the children's loved ones. Despite all of the beautiful flowers laid at the tomb, this

wreath is often the one that gets the most attention. On Saturday night we have an incredible time at our traditional Good Grief Camp Bash, where the mission is to "just have fun and be a kid."

In between field trips and other activities, we spend time helping kids and teens learn to cope with grief, which is always our primary focus. Our grief work sessions typically involve Circle Time where each child and teen understands that they are able to talk freely about concerns, fears, and their deepest feelings. They know that what they share during our sacred circle time won't leave the room. This is time when a young survivor, often for the first time, is able to talk about the loss openly with people who truly understand because they have been there themselves. Although participants are encouraged to speak freely, it is never forced. At the TAPS Good Grief Camp participants learn that they don't have to be strong for their remaining parent or loved ones, that they don't have to make excuses for why they feel sad, and

that they don't have to try to act normal when they have emotions that don't make sense to anyone else. They are accepted for who they are, the way they are.

At the close of each TAPS Good Grief Camp each participant launches a balloon with an attached note. This is a special opportunity to tell their loved ones something they may not have had the chance to say or a reminder that they will always be loved. (Note: All balloons are biodegradable.)

The TAPS Good Grief Camp gives children and teens a chance to understand that they are not alone in their grief. They learn that there are others who understand and will accompany them through their journey. They are also reminded that their loved ones were an integral part of the military family and that neither they, nor their loved ones, will ever be forgotten.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Children aged four to nineteen are eligible for Good Grief Camp. For survivors who are less than four years old, daycare is lovingly provided by a team that has been with the TAPS National Good Grief Camp for the last five years. A new option this year for those teens 16 and older who have been to TAPS for two years is to become a mentor for younger survivors. If you have any questions about the TAPS Good Grief Camp, please call Heather at 1-800-959-TAPS or email her at heather@taps.org.



Here's what they say about the GGC!

I thought it was going to be a one-time weekend thing. But that weekend completely changed my life forever! Since that first weekend I have become involved in the lives of hundreds of children across the country. Being a mentor is the most gratifying and peaceful part of my life. I count the days until I can see all of my friends in the TAPS family again. In the end that is what we all are to each other, just an extended version of our own families.

~ **US Army Staff Sergeant Shawn Callan, GGC Mentor since 2005**

I was 14 years old when I joined the TAPS family and was very reluctant to come to Washington D.C. for Good Grief Camp. I was angry, sad, hesitant, and most of all, scared. I felt like I didn't need any help with my grieving; I was fine. It seemed hokey and unnecessary. As time went on our group loosened up. We shared experiences together that meant more because we had all been through similar circumstances. We all saw it through similar eyes. We also did the thing I feared most: shared our feelings. Through this we built a connection. We formed some sort of bond that was protective and sibling-like toward each other. Though it was never said, it was understood that we looked out for one another. Thank you TAPS, for welcoming me even though I wasn't completely accepting. Not only do you help to heal the hearts of individuals and form bonds that can never really be broken, you teach life lessons that can't be taught or received quite like they are in this environment.

~ **Jena Greene, Good Grief Camp Participant**

TAPS has been a great thing for my kids, especially my two teenagers. After my husband died we moved back to Michigan. The girls felt alone with no one to truly understand their feelings. We attended the national seminar and it was an amazing experience. We found that face-to-face connection with others going through similar situations. We weren't alone! It wasn't only our fellow survivors who helped us. The military mentors have been a tremendous help with all my kids, especially my nine year old son. We are part of a much bigger family now and have made lifelong friends that make a difference in our lives.

~ **Debbie Wert, Parent of Camp Participants**

About the Author



Heather Campagna is a military wife who has worked with TAPS since 2005. She is a School Psychologist by training and obtained her Education Specialist and Masters Degrees from The Citadel. She has worked in the school setting with preschool children to college level students, as well as the clinical setting at The Medical University of South Carolina. Heather's husband presently serves full-time in the Army National Guard.



You are warmly invited to attend
T * A * P * S 16th Annual

NATIONAL Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Memorial Day Weekend

May 28 - 31, 2010

Washington, DC

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

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



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

Logistics & Registration

It's not too late to attend the 16th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar! Register online today at www.taps.org. From our home page, click on Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp for more information and link to registration.

- ★ All events and workshops take place in (or depart from) the Crystal Gateway Marriott on Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington, VA.
- ★ The hotel offers complimentary airport shuttle service to Ronald Reagan National Airport. (Flights into Dulles or BWI require transportation by taxi or SuperShuttle with fares ranging from \$45 to \$65.)
- ★ The Crystal Gateway boasts two restaurants, fitness center, pool, and access to the Crystal City Shops and eateries.
- ★ The seminar registration fee of \$185.00 includes selected meals, workshop materials, ground transportation to special events, and a TAPS shirt and tote bag.
- ★ The Good Grief Camp registration fee of \$50.00 per child assists in paying for selected meals, transportation for field trips and events, two Good Grief Camp shirts, TAPS backpack, and other camp materials.
- ★ A limited number of scholarships are available if you are facing financial challenges. Please call TAPS at 800-959-TAPS (8277) for more information.
- ★ To make your hotel reservation, sign up as soon as possible. Visit the seminar webpage at www.taps.org to get our special conference rate of \$119.00 per night.
- ★ Events begin with registration on Friday morning, so plan to arrive before noon on Friday, May 28 for opening session. Departures should be scheduled after 3 p.m. on Monday, May 31, to allow for our return from Arlington National Cemetery. Should your plans require that you return home to participate in local Memorial Day ceremonies, you may wish to schedule departure Sunday evening, May 30, after our last session ends at 4 p.m. *





Healing Your Traumatized Heart

Seeking Safety, Understanding, and Peace, Part One

By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Someone you love has died a sudden, traumatic death.

If you are in the early days of your grief journey, you are likely still feeling numbed by shock and disbelief. This is a normal and necessary step, for it is nature's way of protecting you from the full force of the loss all at once. You will embrace the reality, in doses and over time, as you are ready. If you have journeyed longer and further into the wilderness of your grief, you may be struggling with profound anger, despair, and other emotions. These feelings, too, are normal and necessary. In fact, whatever you are feeling, and no matter where you are in your grief journey, your feelings are not right or wrong—they simply are. Embracing them and expressing them are your tasks on the path that leads to healing.

You may have found that you are struggling with both the traumatic nature of the death and your grief over this overwhelming loss. For purposes of this article, trauma can be defined as an event of such intensity, brutality, or magnitude of horror that it would overwhelm any human being's capacity to cope. You have been traumatized, which is essentially a normal response to an extreme event.

Trauma: *An injury; something hurtful. The wounding of your emotions, your spirit, your beliefs about yourself and the world, your will to live, your dignity, your sense of security.*

Naturally, traumatized mourners often find themselves replaying and reconsidering over and over the circumstances of the death. This is both normal and necessary. Such replay helps you begin to acknowledge the reality of the death and integrate it into your life. It is as if your mind needs to devote time and energy to comprehending the circumstances of the death before it can move on to confronting the fact that someone you love has died and will never be present to you again.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is a term used to describe the psychological condition that survivors of sudden, violent death sometimes experience. People with

PTSD often have nightmares or scary thoughts about the terrible experience they or their loved one went through. They try to stay away from anything that reminds them of the frightening experience. They often feel angry and are unable to care about or trust other people. They are often on the lookout for danger and get very upset when something happens without warning. Their anxiety level is continually high. The more you learn about trauma and PTSD, the more you will have some sense of control at a time when you naturally feel out of control. Knowledge is one of the best antidotes to anxiety, fear and depression.



If you think you may be experiencing PTSD, talk to your family doctor or a compassionate grief counselor. You may need counseling and/or medication for a time to help you feel safer and cope with your day-to-day life. You will need to get help for your PTSD before you can deal with grief and mourning.

It may be helpful for you to know that your response to trauma and the potential onset of PTSD symptoms has more to do with the intensity and duration of the stressful event in your life than with your personality. Don't think you are "weak" because this traumatic event and its repercussions have overwhelmed your coping resources. Don't feel ashamed if you need professional help. Often it is in acknowledging our helplessness that we ultimately become helpful to ourselves.

But many of you are traumatized without having full-blown PTSD. You may have anxiety and anger. You may think about the circumstances of the death a lot. You may be in great pain. But if you are still able to function in your daily life and interact lovingly with others, you may not have the actual disorder called PTSD. Still, you are traumatized and in need of special care and consideration, both from yourself and from others.

Psychic numbing or acute after-shock: *Diminished or absent capacity to feel; a form of heightened shock that should be perceived as a healthy response to overwhelming stress. Provides insulation from self and the outside world. This is a normal response to an abnormal event.*

The traumatic nature of the death and your thoughts and feelings about it will color every aspect of your grief. It is part of your grief. But it is not the totality of your grief. Other factors that contribute to your grief include the nature of the relationship you had with the person who died, your unique personality, your religious and cultural backgrounds, your gender, your age, your previous experiences with loss, as well as others. Your grief is a complicated blend of thoughts and emotions, most of which stem from your love for the person who died. Over time you will come to find that your grief is as much or more about the life than it is about the death.

Know this: If you are able to muster the courage to actively mourn, you will heal. And you will eventually love and live again. Remember, you are not alone, and there are no rewards for speed. Millions of others have not only survived the traumatic death of a loved one, they've chosen to truly live. Find ways to reach out to these people. Find ways to share your experience. Find ways to make connections. *

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In Part Two of this article, I will present several ideas to help you mourn and journey toward healing. In the meantime, God bless you. I hope we meet one day.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

About the Author



Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., C.T. is an internationally noted author, educator, and grief counselor. 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. Recipient of the Association of Death Education and Counseling's Death Educator Award, Alan is committed to helping people mourn well so they can live well and love well. Among his many books on healing is *Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart*. For more information on Dr. Wolfelt and his books and seminars, visit:

www.centerforloss.com





Physical Reactions to Loss & Grief

It Isn't All in Your Head (or Your Heart)

By Susan R. Blankenship MS, BSN, RN, CCM & Rebecca I. Porter, Ph.D., ABPP, LTC US Army

"Sometimes I feel like I'm floating, like this just can't be real. Am I losing my mind?"

"My hands feel freezing cold, like they're in a bucket of ice water. I've never had this kind of feeling before."

"My skin has been a mess for the past month. I haven't had acne like this since I was in high school. What's happening to me?"



After the sudden and unexpected loss of a loved one, we are not really sure what to expect. We are not surprised to feel sad, tearful, or even occasionally guilty for getting on with our daily lives. What we may not expect, however, is the physical reaction our body has to such a traumatic loss. It can be surprising and disheartening to have our body "betray" us when we feel we are most vulnerable.

In fact, our body is only doing what years of evolution and survival have proved to be the best for us: preparing for the natural response of fight or flight in the face of a threat. While it is true our physical safety may not be at risk after the death of a loved one, certainly our emotional well-being can feel threatened. Our body reacts to the threat by thrusting the autonomic nervous system into overdrive. Far from betraying us, our body is trying to protect us.

THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

The human body is truly amazing. The systems within the body function together which allows for an immediate and continuous response to changes in the environment and within the body itself. When sensing danger, the body responds by secreting hormones that will assist in reacting to

the danger. The goal is to get blood and oxygen to the parts of the body where it is needed most. The heart and large muscles of the legs need oxygen in case you need to run. The brain and sensory organs need it so you can get as much information as possible and then react to the danger.

One response of the body during times of physical or emotional stress is to secrete catecholamines (hormones released into the bloodstream by the adrenal glands, which sit on top of the kidneys). The major catecholamines are dopamine, norepinephrine, and epinephrine (also known as adrenalin). The result is an increase in heart rate and blood pressure, the diversion of blood to muscle tissue, an increase in breathing rate, and a slowdown in digestion. This gets the energy you need where it is most needed. Even the pupils dilate so you can take in more information about the possible threat.

Another response to perceived danger is the secretion of corticosteroids, or stress hormones. These hormones increase your access to the energy stored in your body, inhibit antibody formation, and regulate sodium retention. The body is making energy available for use and focusing on the danger at hand, rather than fighting

disease for the long term. In other words, the body's response to an imminent threat leaves us vulnerable, compromising the immune system and disrupting normal functions.

These responses make sense from a survival perspective, but may not serve us well in the long term, especially if we have just lost a loved one. Rather than being adaptive, this response can have effects on the body that are not beneficial.

EFFECTS ON THE BODY'S FUNCTIONING

The disruptions to normal bodily functions may present various physical symptoms: numbness and emptiness or a "hollow feeling, a constant ache where my heart was supposed to be" as one mourner described, fatigue, "an elephant sitting on my chest" as mentioned by another, sleep and appetite disturbances, aches and pains, and trouble concentrating.

Digestive disturbances can be explained as the result of blood being shunted away from the stomach and intestines, as it is directed to the major survival organs: the brain, heart, sensory organs, and large muscles of the legs.



Circulation can also be affected by the flight or fight response. There may be decreased circulation to the extremities (the fingers and toes) while blood is shunted to the larger muscles. The result is feeling like your hands and feet are freezing cold. Another result of the circulatory system reacting to stress is migraine headaches. These headaches – which can be recognized by vision disturbances, sensitivity to light and sound, and even nausea – can be experienced when you finally get an opportunity to relax! The thinking is that if our circulatory system reacts to stress for long periods of time, the body rebounds when we finally relax, and our blood vessels dilate too much. This causes pressure on surrounding tissue and results in the throbbing pain.

It isn't always the circulatory system that reacts most strongly to the stress of losing a loved one. Some people react by breathing in a shallow manner. In other words, they hyperventilate. It might not even be perceptible to others, but taking in too little oxygen with each breath can result in a sensation of floating, a tingling feeling in our lips, fingers, and toes, and even light-headedness. Many people, when they notice signs of hyperventilation, will get anxious and breathe even more rapidly and shallowly, thus making the sensations worse! One way to tell we are doing this is to notice if we often catch ourselves

sighing. This is our body's way of trying to ward off the effects of hyperventilating.

Another reaction may be increased muscle tension. This can be thought of as the body's way of bracing against the threat and emotional pain. Muscle tension can result in headaches and increased sensitivity to pain. To understand how muscle tension can result in more pain, imagine holding a telephone book at arm's length for more than a minute. Even something like statically holding your arm out can become painful. Now imagine tension over an extended period of time and the effect it can have on your body.

Not to be overlooked is the decreased immune function that can result from the ongoing stress of having lost a loved one. Remember, the increased secretion of corticosteroids inhibits the immune system. This means we might experience more head colds and skin break-outs, or simply feel run down.

These are just a few examples of how the body reacts physically to the stress of losing a loved one. People react differently, but the effects of loss can be felt throughout our muscular, circulatory, respiratory, and even immune systems. It is really NOT all in your head.

HOW TO HELP YOUR BODY HELP YOU

There are any numbers of ways to counteract the flight or fight response and help us get through this scary and unsettling time. Some useful techniques are:

Diaphragmatic breathing: Imagine a string pulling you straight up from your abdomen as you slowly inhale through the nose, and slowly exhale through the mouth.

Biofeedback training: Learn to control involuntary body responses such as heart rate and blood pressure.

Dedicated Worry Time: Set a timer for a specific period of time to worry; when the buzzer sounds, get up and do something positive for yourself.

Regular exercise: Make exercise a priority, especially aerobic exercise or brisk walking, just to get your body moving.

Appreciation of nature: Lie in the sun and feel the warmth, walk among the leaves, make a snowman.

Relaxation: Use tapes or CDs to enhance relaxation.

WHEN TO GET ADDITIONAL HELP

Everyone grieves in their own way, and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. We simply need to listen to our bodies and try different techniques to help us get through this period. In order for any of the techniques to be effective, we need to ensure we are getting adequate rest and nutrition. When prolonged sleeping difficulties and physical problems continue to disrupt daily functioning, it may signify that it is time to talk to a professional.

There is comfort in knowing that the way you are feeling isn't all in your head. The physical symptoms are normal reactions during times of stress or grief. Left untreated, high levels of stress can lead to more serious health concerns. Although seeking professional guidance will not guarantee immediate resolution of the body's response, it will allow us to start on the road to recovery by using additional therapeutic activities. *



About the Author

Susan R. Blankenship is a registered nurse and certified case manager and works in Clinical Operations at the Joint Task Force National Capital Region Medical Headquarters, Bethesda, Maryland.

Lieutenant Colonel Rebecca Porter is a board certified Clinical Health Psychologist and serves as the Behavioral Health Officer at the Joint Task Force National Capital Region Medical Headquarters.



Survivors of Suicide

Healing after a loved one's suicide

By Mayo Clinic Staff Used with permission from MayoClinic.com. All Rights Reserved.

A loved one's suicide can be emotionally devastating. Reaching out to others or getting professional help may ease your pain, although it may never fully go away.

The death of a loved one is heart-wrenching and painful. But when the death is because of suicide, those left behind face even more difficult challenges in coping and healing.

Suicide can affect partners, children, parents, siblings, friends, colleagues, and medical providers. As a survivor of suicide, overwhelming emotions can leave you reeling. It may seem like your support system has vanished. And you may be consumed by guilt, wondering if there's something you could have done to prevent your loved one's death.

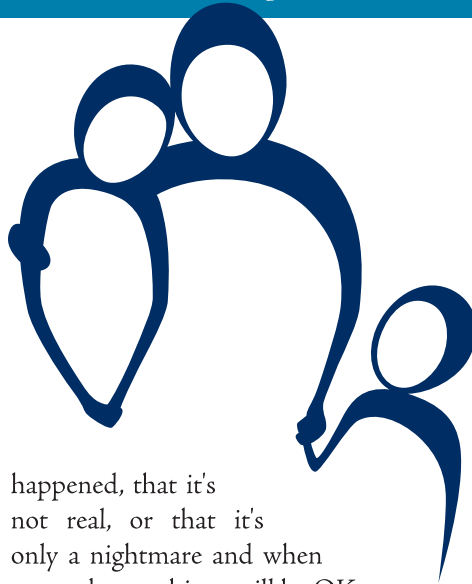
Bereavement after a loved one has taken his or her own life is often more complicated, intense and prolonged than it is with a death from natural causes. Although as a survivor of suicide you may never fully recover and always feel a loss, you can learn how to cope better and eventually move forward in a way that's healthy.

Brace for powerful emotions after a suicide

It's common for a wave of powerful emotions to wash over you when you first learn of a loved one's death by suicide.

The immediate emotional response after a suicide often includes:

»»» **Shock.** Disbelief and emotional numbness may set in. It's hard to accept a sudden and traumatic death, even if it may have been preceded by suicidal behavior or talk. You may think that this couldn't have



happened, that it's not real, or that it's only a nightmare and when you wake up, things will be OK.

»»» **Confusion.** You may not understand why your loved one died this way. Some people who take their own life don't offer any signs that they're considering suicide, so you may find it hard to reconcile the person you knew with the actions he or she took. You may repeatedly ask, "Why?"

»»» **Anger.** It's natural to feel anger about many different things after a suicide. People who were in contact with your loved one near the time of the suicide — doctors, police, emergency workers, therapists, friends or family — can become objects of your anger or rage. You may feel that they let your loved one down, missed clues about suicidal intentions, or could have prevented the death. You may direct your anger at yourself, too. And you may also become angry with your loved one, feeling cheated, abandoned or left with a legacy of suffering and inconsolable grief.

»»» **Despair.** Sadness, depression and a sense of defeat or hopelessness can grip you. You may even consider suicide yourself.

»»» *The death of a loved one is heart-wrenching and painful. But when the death is because of suicide, those left behind face even more difficult challenges in coping and healing.*

»»» **Grief.** Sorrow and anguish run deep as you mourn the loss of your loved one's life, and mourn for yourself, as well.

»»» **Guilt.** Survivors often initially think they could have done something to prevent a suicide. You may replay "what if" and "if only" scenarios in your mind, blaming yourself for your loved one's death. You may also feel guilty about your interactions with your loved one, regretting an angry phone call, long-ago childhood teasing or postponed get-togethers. You may also feel embarrassed and ashamed that a loved one has committed suicide.

Physical reactions after a suicide

Along with the intense emotions can come a variety of physical or behavioral reactions to news of a loved one's suicide. These perfectly normal reactions may include:

- »»» Crying
- »»» Screaming
- »»» Angry outbursts
- »»» Physical collapse

Emotions in the weeks after a suicide

You may continue to experience intense reactions in the weeks and months after a loved one's suicide. Sometimes these reactions may even resemble symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These reactions may be especially intense if you witnessed the suicide or found your loved one. These reactions may include:

- >>> Nightmares
- >>> Flashbacks
- >>> Social withdrawal
- >>> Avoidance of people who remind you of your loved one
- >>> Repeated visual images of your loved one
- >>> Sleep problems
- >>> Concentration difficulties
- >>> Lack of motivation
- >>> Loss of interest in daily activities or hobbies
- >>> Family conflicts
- >>> Denial of emotional pain

If you try to ignore your feelings, deny yourself the opportunity to mourn, or you don't find the support you want and need, your emotional wounds may not improve, and other problems related to grief and complicated grief can develop. Suicide survivors are at higher risk of depression and suicide, for instance. And families that don't find healthy ways to cope can be torn apart by unresolved issues, finger pointing or a breakdown in communication.

Finding support and treatment after a suicide

The physical and emotional aftermath of a loved one's suicide can wear you down physically and emotionally. Family, friends, and even support groups for survivors of suicide may be sources of comfort, understanding, and healing.

Some bereavement groups are specifically intended for survivors of suicide.

Because stigma—perceived or actual—can accompany suicide or mental illness, you may find it easier to share your experiences with others in a support group who are struggling with the same issues. You're less likely to feel shame, embarrassment or a need to hide the truth. You may benefit from the empathy, understanding, and guidance that support groups offer. And you may find purpose or strength in reaching out to others trying to cope with their own loss.

But if the tragedy of your loved one's death causes intense or unrelenting anguish or physical problems, consider asking your doctor or mental health provider for help, especially if you have thoughts of suicide yourself or symptoms of depression. Unresolved grief can turn into complicated grief, where painful emotions are so long lasting and severe that you have trouble accepting the death and resuming your own life.

Both psychotherapy and medications can help you cope. You may only need short-term treatment to get you through the worst of the crisis. Therapy can help even if the death was years ago. Family therapy with children or your partner can help if normal functioning and interaction have been displaced by blame and withdrawal.

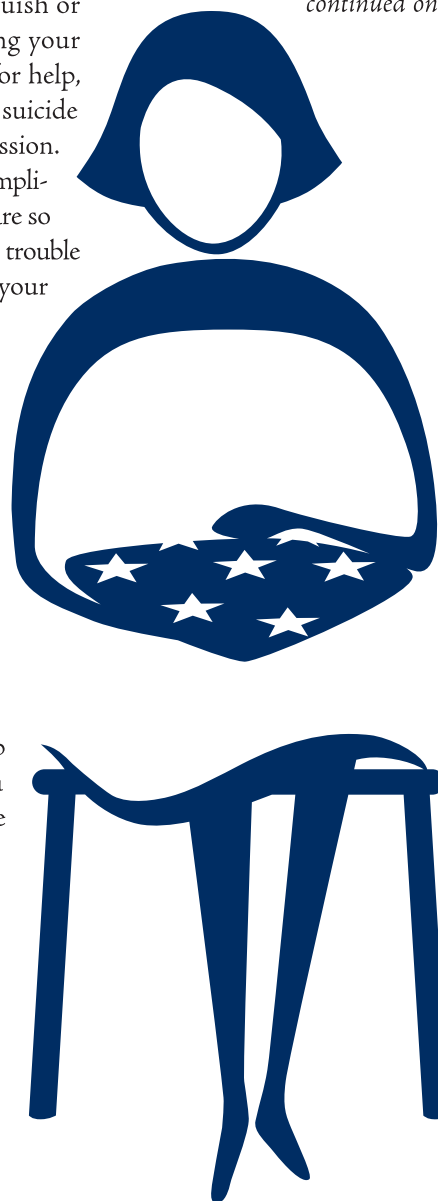
There are many resources to help you cope with the tragedy of a loved one's suicide. You don't have to go through it alone.

Healthy coping strategies after a suicide

A suicide can be devastating. In addition to reaching out to family, friends, support groups and professional help, these strategies can help you get through it in a way that safeguards your own mental and physical well-being:

>>>> **Keep in touch.** Your inclination may be to withdraw into isolation. Avoidance may seem easier than confronting painful emotions, reminders or situations.

continued on next page...



>>>> *There are many resources to help you cope with the tragedy of a loved one's suicide. You don't have to go through it alone.*



But the support of family, friends, spiritual leaders or your faith community can soothe your distress and even offer a healthy distraction.

»»» **Share your story.** Talking about your experience in the safe and comfortable environment of a support group first can make it easier to tell others about your loved one's death later. You may initially struggle with what or how much to reveal. Do what's comfortable for you. Many survivors of suicide find it easiest to be forthright and honest, simply stating that their loved one died by suicide, while others choose to keep it private. You may encounter people who don't know what to say to you—they might not even mention your loved one's name, for instance. Or they may seem to avoid you. But that's usually because they don't want to risk saying something inappropriate and wounding you further. Decide whether you want to take the initiative and share your feelings.

»»» **Do what's right for you.** Grieve in your own way, not someone else's. You may find it too painful to visit your loved one's gravesite, for instance, while someone else may want to go every day.

»»» **Be prepared for painful reminders.** Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and other occasions you normally would celebrate can become painful reminders of your loss.

»»» *It's okay to start enjoying your life again, to find laughter in funny movies or in a child's antics. Pursuing hobbies, socializing and having fun aren't a betrayal of your loved one's memory. They're a sign of your healing.*

This is a normal reaction, so don't chide yourself for being sad or mournful. If it helps, change or suspend family traditions that are too painful to continue.

»»» **Don't rush yourself.** Losing someone to suicide is a tremendous blow, and healing must occur at its own pace. You may, for instance, want to take more time off work than a standard bereavement leave allows. And don't be hurried by a friend's expectations that it's been "long enough."

»»» **Expect setbacks.** Some days will be better than others. And some days, when you thought things were improving, you may find yourself overwhelmed by powerful emotions once again. The death of another loved one even years later may reawaken memories of the suicide, for example. But know that healing doesn't often happen in a straight line. There'll be bumps, and your coping strategies will help you get over them.

It's okay to start enjoying your life again, to find laughter in funny movies or in a child's antics. Pursuing hobbies, socializing and having fun aren't a betrayal of your loved one's memory. They're a sign of your healing.

The future after your loved one's suicide

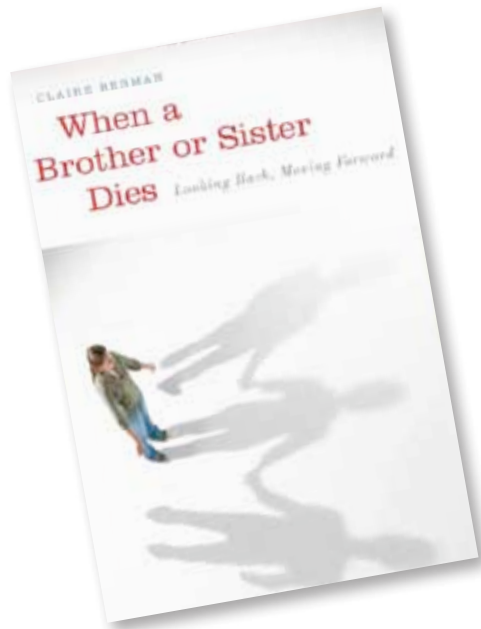
In the aftermath of a loved one's suicide, you may feel like you can't go on or that you'll never enjoy life again. In truth, you may never completely get over the loss. You may always wonder why it happened, and reminders may trigger painful feelings even years later.

But eventually, the raw intensity will fade. The tragedy of the suicide won't dominate your days and nights. Perhaps you'll find meaning and purpose in activism, or you'll begin recalling moments from happier times and smile to yourself. Understanding the complicated legacy of suicide and how to cope with palpable grief can help you reach inner peace and healing, without forgetting your loved one. *



When a Brother or Sister Dies: Looking Back, Moving Forward

By Claire Berman ★ Reviewed by BillieJo Alexander



“There is no other loss in adult life that appears to be so neglected as the death of a brother or sister,” says bereavement specialist and psychologist, Therese Rando. Rando is one of many specialists who was interviewed in the book, *When a Brother or Sister Dies: Looking Back, Moving Forward* by Claire Berman.

I received the book two days before I traveled to Texas for the second anniversary of my brother Thomas's death. I didn't pick it up to read, though, until the eight hour ride back home. After an emotionally long and exhausting weekend, I wasn't sure how, or if, I could handle any more... even if it meant a book that could help me heal.

To my amazement this book was a quick and easy read. The author, Claire Berman, interviewed psychologists, bereavement specialists, and siblings who have suffered the loss of a brother or sister. She herself is a surviving sibling.

When a Brother or Sister Dies is so much more than a self-help book. It's a journey of self reflection and healing. As I traveled through the different stories ranging from death by illness, accident, suicide, and so on, I found myself saying “Yes that's it! That's how I feel. Oh my! I'm not crazy or alone. I'm actually normal in dealing with the loss of Thomas.” As odd as it may seem, I actually felt excited that this book had come to me! Throughout the weekend, people had told me I had to be strong for my parents. People had asked how they were doing without inquiring how I was doing. After feeling totally isolated and burying my hurt so deeply, I had this book that just GOT IT!

I appreciated that this book never really said “you have to do this” and “don't do that.” It isn't your typical self-help book. Instead, it's a compilation of interviews which illustrate that everyone takes their own path, and that's okay! Many of us who have lost a loved one hate the term “moving on.” I know I do. Move on, really? I lost my best friend, my sidekick, the other half that was going to help me when my

parents were older. And you want me to just move on! Is that even possible?

When a Brother or Sister Dies gave me the inner strength to realize that it's okay to move forward. Forward is the key, not “move on,” but move forward. As stated by Phyllis Silverman in chapter 12, “I don't know what it means to resolve a death. I think people make accommodations. They find a way of living with their pain, with their angst.”

In addition to the many personal stories, this book presents ideas on how to honor and remember our loved ones and includes a list of wonderful resources in the back. It is a great read whether two days or ten years have passed since the death of your sibling. It helps with the new overwhelming pain and fury of emotions you have. You get to see a glimpse of the light at the end of a very long and lonely tunnel.

At the end, I felt recognition and validation for my sibling grief. These two things were stated early in the introduction of the book as its main goal. I suggest that after you read this book you scan it and highlight the areas that speak about you. Then pass it on to someone close to you who may not understand. This will give them insight into your daily struggle as a sibling survivor. *

It helps with the new overwhelming pain and fury of emotions you have. You get to see a glimpse of the light at the end of a very long and lonely tunnel.





Spring Training

for the T★A★P★S Run & Remember Team

By Marie Campbell and Jim Fraser



CAMPBELL

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the TAPS Run and Remember Team, and what an amazing adventure these past 10 years have been! We have grown from a two-person team in the Marine Corps Marathon to a team of hundreds—including children. We have participated in events as far away as the Marine Corps Marathon Forward and the Honolulu Marathon Forward, both held in Iraq. We recently formed our first team of runners for the annual Army 10 Miler, and that event is continuing to grow for us each year.

Our Run and Remember Team members have found rewarding moments as they run and honor our fallen heroes, and they have also raised well over half a million dollars to support the TAPS mission in providing programs for our military survivors.

The TAPS Run and Remember Team has a wide variety of runners. We aren't all experts. Many of our participants are novices. Some run, some walk, and some do both. >>>



"Running the marathon in support of TAPS was the most awe-inspiring, life-changing event for me to date. Having the opportunity to see firsthand how the money you've raised goes to amazing programs to aid the families of the fallen and then to meet these brave families, all while running side by side as a team, is a feeling I will never forget," writes Traci Thomas, TAPS Runner and Supporter since 2008.

Many times over the years, I have heard people say, "I would really like to participate in one of your events, but I don't know if I can." My response to most folks is, "Yes, you can!" The TAPS Run and Remember Team has a wide variety of runners. We aren't all experts. Many of our participants are novices. Some run, some walk, and some do both.

This is the perfect time of year to get started on a training program and ready yourself for a fall event. Set yourself a goal, read our training tips from Coach Jim Fraser on the facing page, and lace up your running shoes.

We will support you with monthly training articles, a monthly chat session just for our participants, and an online forum where you can Ask the Coach.

In 2010 we will continue to participate in our premiere Washington, DC events in October: the Army 10 Miler, the Marine Corps Marathon, the Marine Corps 10k, and the One Mile Healthy Kids Fun Run.

We know that not everyone can come to our nation's capital. So we have expanded our team to other areas in the country. We will be going to Dallas, Fredericksburg, San Diego, Virginia Beach, San Antonio, and Honolulu. If you don't see an event near you, but find an event in your city or town that you would like to participate in while raising funds for TAPS, we can accommodate that as well.



>>> Participating with the TAPS Run and Remember Team is truly a rewarding experience. Join us in 2010. For more information about the TAPS Run and Remember Team and all of our running events, please visit www.taps.org, email us at HonorCorps@taps.org, or call us at 800-959-TAPS (8277).

»»» Training Tips »»»

From T*A*P*S Run & Remember Team Coach, Jim Fraser

Whether your goal is to complete a marathon, half marathon, 10-mile race, or a 10K race, there is no better way to do it than with the TAPS Run and Remember Team. In addition to reaching an incredible personal milestone, you'll also be supporting the tremendously important work of TAPS. What more could you ask for?

The best way to get started in any endurance program, especially if you're taking on a challenge like this for the first time, is to set realistic expectations from the very beginning. Don't try to do too much too quickly; that's an easy way to get discouraged and to risk some type of injury. Ideally you need a minimum of four months to properly prepare for the marathon or half marathon distances. A shorter training period is fine for the 10K or Ten-Miler. The type of training plan you take on will certainly depend on your current fitness level and running experience. Check with your physician first.



If you're beginning an endurance training program for the first time, you may want to start by mixing in periodic "walk breaks" with your running even if your ultimate goal is to run the entire race.

★ **For the first week, consider a brisk walk for the entire time/distance.**

★ **In the second week, you can transition from a walk to the run/walk method. For example, try a running to walking ratio of two minutes running to one minute walking.**

★ **As your fitness level improves in subsequent weeks, you can reduce the time in your walk breaks or lengthen the ratio of your running to walking.**

★ **Progress comfortably at your own pace.**

When sorting through your choices, remember that there are certain elements in any good training plan that you should look for. Whether you decide to run your event or follow a run/walk method, the guiding principles are the same. For novice endurance athletes, a good schedule could include four days of running, one day of cross-training, and two days of rest.



The long run is the cornerstone of an endurance training program. The day following the long run should be for recovery and could be based on time, not distance. This should be at a relatively easy pace. During the week, your schedule should provide some variety. Don't always run the same course at the same pace. This will help keep your training from getting stale and routine.

While I can't say that training for an endurance event is easy, I can promise you that you'll have the experience of a lifetime with the TAPS Run and Remember Team. We sincerely hope that you'll make the decision to join us for one of our events in 2010. *





T★A★P★S Peer Mentor Program

By Debbie Dey, LCSW

TAPS Peer Mentor Program Manager



*Giving time, listening with an open heart,
sharing stories, and simply being there for
another person gives purpose to our lives.*

The heart of TAPS is its network of loving, caring, military survivors who have volunteered their time and their compassionate care to be TAPS Peer Mentors. Mentoring does not require an academic credential; it requires something much more personal: the shared tragedy of losing a loved one serving in our Armed Forces. Peers aren't counselors or advisors. They are new friends who will commit to listening empathetically and helping direct new survivors to resources when they have questions.

Although each of our TAPS Peer Mentors has lived through a separate and distinct tragedy, they want to use their common experience of loss and their compassion to help others walk the road of grief and begin to heal. They share additional characteristics as well. TAPS Peer Mentors are those who have successfully completed Peer Mentor Certification Training, are available at reasonable times to offer telephone and/or email grief support, are at least one year beyond their own losses, and have made a commitment to a minimum of one year of service.

The TAPS Peer Mentor Program provides education, information, and support for all its Peer Mentors.

Partnering with The American Grief Academy TAPS provides certification for our Peer Mentors in two steps. The first step is to complete the online Peer Mentor training module. The second is to attend a full day of classroom instruction taught by TAPS Director of Training and Certification, Darcie D. Sims.

"Our Peer Mentors get the best training available and add their own personal experiences to bring the gift of hope and healing to our grieving families. Being a Peer Mentor is a two-way street. When we reach out across our own pain and grief, we also continue our own growth and healing. We truly are a family, walking through grief side by side," says Darcie.

Classes are offered annually at the National Military Survivor Seminar and throughout the year at various regional events. Through the online coursework and classroom training, TAPS mentors learn about grief and trauma, gain basic helping skills, and become part of our TAPS Peer Mentor Team.

Because TAPS Peer Mentors are certified through the American Grief Academy, they are required to complete four hours of

continuing education per year. The important thing to remember is that the TAPS Peer Mentor Program provides ongoing education, information, and support. Online networks, chats, newsletters, and training opportunities are available to support the mentors throughout the year.

Peer Mentors are matched to new survivors by relationship, branch of service, and circumstances of death. Our goal is to bring two persons of similar circumstances together for comfort and support.

Each Peer Mentor comes to TAPS in his or her own time. If you feel you are ready to help others who are traveling a similar grief journey, write to info@TAPS.org for further information.

Giving time, listening with an open heart, sharing stories, and simply being there for another person gives purpose to our lives. It is an opportunity to honor our loved ones and keep their memories alive. In sharing our hearts with new survivors, we not only assist them, but also help ourselves heal. *





Here are a few personal stories from our Peer Mentors. We are incredibly grateful for their courage and care to reach out to others.

Being a peer mentor has been a huge part of my own healing process. Every time I make a call and spend time listening to another grieving mother, I reconnect to the feelings they are describing. It is so encouraging to know that I am not alone, and that whatever I am thinking or feeling is normal. Grief can be so isolating, but the Peer Mentor Program offers a comforting connection to others who truly understand each other. For the mentor, it also provides a measuring stick for our own grief progress. When we make the connection with a newly bereaved person, we initially remember how things were for us at the beginning. Then it's easier for us to see that our lives are moving forward, sometimes in exciting new directions.

Connie Scott

** Surviving mother of Brian Williams **

I attended the TAPS Peer Mentor training at the Sibling Retreat in Las Vegas this fall. When I got to the training I was nervous, but everyone was so welcoming and so inviting it was, like most of my TAPS experiences, a family gathering almost immediately. We went through different communication techniques and different methods of handling situations. We were introduced to TAPS resources that I didn't know about completely. Darcie was fantastic! She made us work and made us think, but at the same time she made it incredibly fun. Having gone through the training I am confident that I was doing the right thing for myself in becoming a

peer mentor. I am even more geared up to help anyone on their crazy journey through our new "normal." Whether it is your first year or 20th year, whether you yourself are a Peer Mentor or not, we all need someone to talk to and someone who will listen to us. TAPS Peer Mentor Program provides that link to all survivors.

Kristin Otto

** Surviving sister of Daniel Otto **

After the day-long training in May, I wasn't sure I was ready to turn off my talking self to become my listening self even though it was 2 years from the date I lost my son. My "mentee" was a stranger, but once we started talking on the phone it was easy. We've become very good and genuine friends. I think there are lots of moms out there who could use a mentor but don't know to ask for one. It's important to know there's someone out there who is willing and able to be there, to listen, to share, to cry with...

Nancy Pfander Powell

** Surviving mother of Kyle Powell **

The love and compassion that we show to one another is what counts most in the world and continues to give our loved ones' lives meaning. In the big scheme of things we are only on this earth for a short time. Being a friend that someone can lean on to help them through life's journey means more to me than you will ever know.

Ray Burke

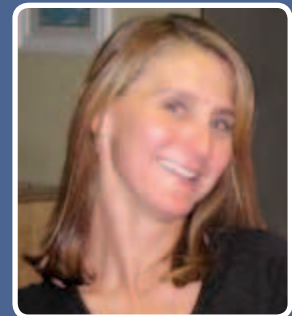
** Surviving father of Raymond Burke **

Mentors offer support in many cases just by listening. The training course covered the guidelines for clear communication which involves listening, being honest, assuming nothing, and staying focused in the here and now. The ingredients of helping are trust, confidentiality, patience, and hope. All of these certainly build better relationships in the world whether in grief or simply in life.

Roma Anderson

** Surviving mom of Joseph McCloud **

About the Author



Debbie Dey earned her master's degree in Clinical Social Work at Norfolk State University in 1998. She comes to TAPS as the Peer Mentor Program Manager and is a survivor herself in addition to being a mental health professional. Debbie's husband, Navy pilot Lieutenant William Dey, died in an aviation accident in June of 2000.



Fry Scholarship

New provision for surviving military children

A provision to the final 2009 Supplemental Appropriations legislation, honoring a Marine killed in Iraq, expands the current GI Bill education benefit to include children of fallen U.S. servicemembers. The provision, authored by Congressman Chet Edwards of Texas, was signed into law in June 2009 and covers the full cost of a college education for all children of service members who have died on active duty since September 11, 2001.

The new benefit, known as the "Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry" scholarship, honors the life and service of the fallen hero and father of three young children from Edwards' district.

"This legislation is as meaningful to me as any legislation I've ever passed," said Edwards, Chairman of the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. "If a parent gives their life in service to country, their surviving family members shouldn't be forced to choose which child gets to go to college."

One such parent was Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry of Lorena, Texas, a dedicated Marine who saved countless lives by disarming numerous bombs, including one of the largest car bombs found in Fallujah. On March 8, 2006 after being cleared to return home, Fry volunteered to defuse one more explosive device in Anbar province, Iraq. He found three bombs that night and defused all of them, but the insurgents had hidden a fourth bomb. It exploded and this brave Marine who had saved so many lives finally gave his own life.

The congressman met Fry's surviving spouse Malia and their three small children, Kathryn, Gideon, and C.L. at events honoring their father's life beginning with a Veterans Day memorial in 2007. Deeply moved by the depth of their sacrifice and prompted by Malia's concern about college education for her children, Edwards was inspired to author the legislation.

"I have always thought of my husband as wonderful, and now everyone will know his story," said Malia. "After he died I just wanted him to be remembered and to be proud of me. I think he is."

The Fry Scholarship

- ★ Amends the 9-11 GI Bill so that children of active duty service members who have died on active duty since September 11, 2001 qualify for the education benefit
- ★ Awards the full benefit to each dependent child and does not impose a minimum service requirement to qualify
- ★ Immediately allows all children of fallen soldiers to receive the maximum benefit under the GI Bill
- ★ Expires 15 years after the 18th birthday of a surviving military child
- ★ Covers tuition and fees of up to the maximum in-state tuition and fees at a public institution in your state
- ★ Includes a monthly housing allowance at the location of the school, based on the Basic Allowance for Housing for an E-5 with dependents
- ★ Allows an annual books and supplies stipend of up to \$1,000

The program will be administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Under the new legislation, the VA will begin accepting applications for this benefit May 1, 2010, and will begin issuing payments to eligible children no later than August 1, 2010. This includes retroactive payments for eligible children enrolled in college during the period of August 1, 2009, through July 31, 2010. *

To find out more about the program go to: www.gibill.va.gov or call 888-442-4551.



John reads to the children

GySgt Fry



Cocoon

By Betsy Beard

Deep within the tightly woven thread,
Protected from the forces that assail,
The caterpillar sleeps as though long dead
And for a time is dormant, lifeless, frail.

Without a skin, he weaves his silken shroud
And hangs suspended, trusting in his nest.
He doesn't know what form will be endowed,
Or even if he'll waken from his rest.

The world remains, but all within is changed.
And even though impossible to see
The caterpillar's life is rearranged ~
Completely different ~ irreversibly.

He struggles softly from his makeshift home,
Unsteady now, until his wings can dry.
Old nature gone, new form, with skills unknown
He lifts his wings and finds that he can fly. *

© March 25, 2006

About the Author

Betsy Beard is the surviving mom of SPC Bradley S. Beard who died on October 14, 2004 in Ar Ramadi, Iraq.





USO Offers Surviving Families Support Through T★A★P★S

Families calling TAPS for care and comfort after the death of a loved one who served in the Armed Forces will be getting newly-designed and improved TAPS Survivor Resource Kits, thanks to the generous support of the USO.

Support for TAPS is a natural fit for the USO. "The USO was created in 1941 to unify the efforts of charitable organizations during the lead up to World War II. Nearly 69 years later, the USO continues to partner with other military support groups to ensure

that a network of support from across the country is available to our military and their families," said Sloan D. Gibson, President and CEO, USO.

"We are honored to be affiliated with TAPS and the noble work they do to care for the families of the fallen," said Gibson. USO's flagship magazine, *On Patrol*, featured TAPS in a 2009 feature article and donated advertising space to let others know about TAPS. The USO also recognized TAPS during a screening at the GI Film Festival for *Taking Chance*.

TAPS is working closely with the USO to train staff who will be supporting newly-bereaved families arriving at Dover Air Force Base to view the dignified transfer when a loved one's remains return to home soil from abroad.

TAPS and the USO look forward to partnering together on future projects.



www.uso.org

NEWS



ANNOUNCING... T★A★P★S' First Book for Children Coming soon: a heartwarming story of devotion for TAPS kids.

Years ago the Good Grief Camp began its tradition of visiting the stables at Fort Myers during our national seminar on Memorial Day weekend. We fell in love with Klinger, one of the largest and gentlest Caisson horses stationed there. This year at the National Military Survivor Seminar in Washington D.C., we are planning an unveiling of our soon-to-be-published children's book about Klinger, written by Betsy Beard and illustrated by Shelley Johannes. We hope you will join us as we introduce the book that was inspired by this mellow member of the Caisson Platoon.

Klinger, A Story of Honor and Hope: Klinger is a young horse dreaming of fame as a racehorse, but his life is disrupted when he must leave his parents and start a new life. He discovers that fame is not required for significance in his new life of honoring soldiers and comforting their families.

"*Klinger* is a beautiful touching story, and written so simply, yet it manages to capture the sadness, the pride, the honor - and more. Every American should read this book."

Deborah Mullen

* Wife of Admiral Mike Mullen,
Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff *





Thank You

Our Sponsors



*Ben Stein
and Alexandra Denman*



**Dolphin Management
III, LLC**



HUMANA MILITARY[®]
HEALTHCARE SERVICES
★★★★★

Thank you to the Friends of TAPS whose personal gifts, memorial tributes, grants, event sponsorships and planned gifts continue to uplift, comfort, and care for the loved ones of those who served and died.



★ **Achelis & Bodman Foundations**

★ **Ashton Tiffany, LLC**

★ **CACI International, Inc.**

★ **Ed and Carole McVaney**

★ **EOD Technology, Inc.**

★ **Green Beans Coffee**

★ **Jana Bartlit**

★ **Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation**

★ **Michael and Susan Dell Foundation Fund**

★ **The Mechanic Group, Inc.**

★ **The USAA Educational Foundation**

1st Lt Travis L Manion USMC Memorial Fund ★ A Little Hope ★ AAI Corporation ★ Aetna Inc. ★ Alder Foods, Inc. ★ Blackwater Worldwide Charles and Mildred Schnurmacher Foundation ★ Darrell Spence ★ DRS Technologies Charitable Foundation, Inc. ★ Estate Evelyn B. Aiken NASCO ★ FMB Bancshares, Inc. ★ Ford Farm Acct. ★ Frontier Airlines ★ Honeywell International ★ IntelliDyne ★ InterMedia Outdoors James F. Newport ★ Jokari ★ Mayer Brown ★ Products for Good ★ QinetiQ North America ★ Republican Party of Alaska Robert R. Holloman ★ SAIC ★ The Capital Group Companies ★ The New York Times Company ★ The Sandi Group The Sunshine Chapter of AUSA ★ Thomas Chisholm ★ Van Scoyoc Associates ★ Veteran's Advantage ★ Warehouse Pool Supply, Inc.



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

1777 F Street NW, Suite 600

Washington, DC 20006

Phone 24 hours a day: 800.959.TAPS (8277)



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

NONPROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
Stevens Point, WI
PERMIT #193



Saluting Military Families

TriWest applauds TAPS for its support of families who have lost a loved one in military service to our nation.

We are proud to be a steadfast partner of TAPS and support its programs, including:

- ★ Annual TAPS Honor Guard Gala
- ★ Survivor Seminars and Good Grief Camps
- ★ Suicide Survivor Seminar
- ★ Annual Celebrity Golf Tournament
- ★ Dedicated TAPS/TriWest Liaison

