


TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

T★A★P★S[®]

Comfort and Support Since 1994

MAGAZINE

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



*Light a candle this holiday,
a candle in celebration of
a life well lived and loved.*

~ Darcie D. Sims ~

VOLUME 18 • ISSUE 4

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

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

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

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



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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

T*A*P*S

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

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

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

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

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



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Let Us Hear From You



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

National Bereavement Study

Thank you, TAPS, for your partnership on our landmark study of the impact of a service member's death on surviving military families. It is the first study designed to gain a better understanding of the grief and loss experiences of military survivors. With continued participation from the TAPS community, the voice of survivors will be heard. Eligible survivors include parents, spouses/ex-spouses/adult partners, children, and siblings of an active status service member who died by any circumstance of death on or after 9-11-2001. There are three ways eligible survivors can participate: complete the National Survivor Questionnaire, participate in individual family interviews, and join a focus group to tell us your story. For more information, please contact Jill.lamorie.ctr@usuhs.edu or visit www.militarysurvivorstudy.org

Dr. Jill Harrington-LaMorie
The National Military Family
Bereavement Study

Fort Campbell Regional Seminar

I attended my first TAPS seminar since my husband passed away on November 3rd, 2011. I took our six-year-old son with me so that he could be around kids who were just like him, because he had never met another child that had lost a parent. I was unaware of the impact that it would have on me as well. During the sessions, I experienced feelings that I didn't even

know were present, but with the supportive nature of the surroundings, I was able to talk them out. I would recommend going to a seminar to even the biggest of skeptics because it truly touched me in ways that I will never forget!

Kristi Rusnak, Georgia
Surviving spouse of
SGT Randell Rusnak

Parent Retreat

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to attend the [TAPS Parent] Retreat. I hadn't felt this alive since we lost Louis. Thanks to our organizers, the activities moved seamlessly from one to the other. Thanks also to TAPS staff for their help and friendship and a beautiful farewell ceremony. Most importantly, thanks to the participants. Yes, we had laughs and a lot of fun, but we also took the time to talk to each other about our sons' lives and accomplishments.

Bob Allen, New York
Surviving father of
1LT Louis Allen

TAPS Magazine

The magazine has been a huge help to me. Last year as my teenaged grandson was struggling in school (he has always lived with me and grew up with my son, so their relationship was more like brothers than uncle/nephew) I read an article about teen grief and was able to take copies to his

school teachers and administration. I don't know if it helped their limited understanding, but it really helped me. Thank you for all you do for us!

Deb Lafon, Oklahoma
Surviving mom of
SSG Zachary A Darras

TAPS Seminars

I was really amazed by the people at the TAPS seminars. They really know how to make a new person feel welcome. Thank you for your open arms. It was a great time and they are all great people for how they listen and don't judge anyone. They guide you in the direction you need to be in. Thank you all!

Brenda Otis, Missouri
Surviving spouse of
CPL George Otis

Saturday message

I just got to the one year mark of the loss of my only son. I made it through all of the "firsts" without him. An empty chair at the Thanksgiving and Christmas table, his birthday, the birth of his son two months after he died. TAPS has helped me more than anything through this past year. Reading the comments [of other survivors] helped me realize that I am not alone in this journey.

Paula Brown-Nichols, Texas
Surviving mom of
SPC Cory D. Brown



Special Events & Communications

Dear TAPS Family, ★★★

I first met Mike in the winter of 2005-2006. I had moved to Girdwood, Alaska, about an hour south of Fort Richardson and worked at Alyeska Resort—the only ski resort in the state. My rules were that I didn't date Army guys, but Mike's sister assured me he was a great person. He was sitting at a table with others and I liked his southern accent. We soon discovered that we had both lived in the same town in Georgia. He asked me out and for our first date, he showed up wearing shorts (in Alaska, in the winter!). He was protecting his new tattoo from rubbing on his clothing. After three weeks he told me he loved me.

We were together for the next seven months before he deployed to Iraq. In February, he came home for R&R and asked me to marry him. I was thrilled to be engaged to Army Staff Sergeant Michael Hullender. Two months later he was killed.

Our last memories together were made in the winter among the mountains of Alaska. Mike loved it there. In December, he had written, "I'm thinking about you...and the mountain. It is such a magical place for me, and I attribute the mountain to changing my life forever. If it weren't for that place I would not have met you and

experienced so much of what I hold important to my life. There is such a calming effect that takes over me when I am with you. The good is better and the bad is washed away..."

When we planned our first TAPS retreat for widows, widowers, fiancées, and girlfriends, I chose the town where Mike and I had met—overshadowed by the mountain he loved. I wanted to share the place that I loved most in the world with my new TAPS family. I wanted others to see Alaska the way I saw it and enjoy the spectacular scenery and the beauty of nature there.

The community was so supportive to me in the days after Mike was killed, and I was comfortable asking them to help others who had lost a loved one in military service. Many of those early supporters added their expertise and volunteered to help with the retreat. The small town that helped me has become a mainstay for TAPS retreats. The first two retreats were there, and we are planning two more next year.

Since our first event in Alaska, TAPS has expanded the retreat program. Erin Jacobson and Ashley Martin assist in coordinating and planning retreats across the country, and I am grateful to have them, since TAPS is scheduling ten retreats next year.



As winter approaches and the days grow shorter, I think of the time I spent with Mike in Alaska. When I lived there, the sun spent most of the winter just barely showing above the horizon. A sunny day was a special gift to us, because it happened only rarely. With each sunny day came unexpected joy; we laughed and it felt like we hadn't laughed in years.

Our grief can be like that, too...we are never sure when or if we will see the sunlight again. My hope for you is that TAPS Retreats will add a sunny day to your grief journey and bring you unexpected joy in the midst of sorrow. ★

With Warmth and Care,
Kyle Harper, MA

Director of Special Events
and Communications

For more information about TAPS Retreats, see the article on page 22 of this issue of TAPS Magazine.

Handling the Holidays

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

The holidays are coming and I'm not ready. Everything seems to sparkle and there is always so much to do! It is a festive time, filled with joyous occasions and family gatherings. But when your family circle has been broken by death, holidays and special days may only serve to remind you of the empty space at the table, the hole in your heart.

I am not sure if I will ever again be ready for the holidays. The world has simply gone mad and I, like you, have been caught in a horrible nightmare that seems as if it will never end. My own world twisted apart a long time ago, but you may be just starting on this path through the valley of despair. You may still be "frozen" in disbelief, and even though days and weeks have passed, you may still be numb and in shock.

Although your world may seem as though it has stopped, the calendar says it's holiday time, and you may be wondering what to do with the empty chair at the table and what there is to be thankful for this year. The holiday season is a time when the past and the present collide. We try to recapture what we once had or blot out bad memories. We try to ignore the empty chair.

As we set the dishes and count the silverware, we are acutely aware of the empty places at the family table. We try to find the holiday spirit, but when the family circle has been broken by death the only things that sparkle this season may be tears. We hold our breath and hope the holidays go quickly. We doubt we can endure too long. We sit in the dark, because we think we have lost the light.

Instead of bringing warmth, love, and excitement, the holiday season can be a painful reminder of the terrible hole in the family fabric. But there are some things you can do to help ease the footprints that



grief leaves on your soul. It is with a heavy heart and an outstretched helping hand that I offer these tips for getting through the upcoming holidays.

Give yourself the gift of individuality this holiday season. Claim your grief, become aware of it, acknowledge it, and create an action plan to cope with it. Be cautious in what you try, however. Use your common sense. You did not lose that, although it may seem that way (at least to others). You know what you need, so give yourself permission to grieve your way this holiday season. Do whatever works for you. Just be careful of drugs, alcohol, and high places. None of those work effectively and can lead to additional problems that you don't need right now (or ever).

Be tired. Be hurt. Be grieving. Your tears are a symbol of the love you shared. Let them flow in whatever way you need as you find your way through the pain and into the light of memories and love. Grief is an individual journey. No one can walk it for us. Each footprint must be our own.

Be patient with yourself. Know that hardly anyone is as happy as you think they might be. We all have our hurts to bear. Do what you can this season and let it be enough.

Be realistic. It will hurt, but don't try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Lay in a supply of tissues. (A roll of toilet paper is even more efficient!) Let those hurting moments come, deal with them, and let them go.

Be kind and gentle with yourself. Figure out what you should do, balance it with what you are capable of doing, and then compromise. Forgive yourself for living.

Plan ahead. Grieving people often experience a lack of concentration. Make lists. Prioritize everything. Decide what is really important to you.

Listen to yourself. As you become aware of your needs, tell family members and friends. Ask for help when you need it.

Take care of yourself physically. Eat right. Exercise—or at least watch someone else. Gift wrap some broccoli. If nothing else, jog your memory!

Change something. Everything has already changed so don't be afraid to change some traditions. But don't toss out everything this year. Keep some traditions. You choose which ones. Leave the word "ought" out of this holiday season.

Hold onto your wallet and charge cards. You can't buy away grief, but you might be tempted to try.

Don't deny yourself the gift of healing tears. Understand that heartaches will be unpacked as you sift through the decorations, but so, too, are the warm loving memories of each piece.

Share your holidays with someone, anyone! Ride the ferry, visit a soup kitchen or nursing home, spend an evening at the bus station. There are lots of lonely people who could use your love and caring.

Work at lifting depression. Take responsibility for yourself. We cannot wait for someone else to wrap up some joy and give it to us. We have to do that for ourselves. Think of things you enjoy and give yourself a treat. (Cookies can be therapeutic!)

Hang the stockings. Or place a wreath on the grave. Do whatever feels right for you and your family.

Light a special candle. Not in memory of a death, but in celebration of a life and a love shared.

Learn to look for joy in the moment. Get a pair of rose-colored glasses and change the way you look at things. Joy happens when we look for it.

Buy a gift for yourself. Wrap it, but don't hide it! Just when you think you are going off the deep end, open it up and enjoy.

Buy a gift for your loved one. Wrap it up and give it away to someone who might not otherwise have a gift. Pass on the love you shared together, and it will never die.

Live through the hurt so that joy can return to warm your heart. Our loved ones have died. We did not lose them or the love we share. Our loved ones are still, and always will be, a part of us. We cannot lose their love. Even though death comes, love never goes away.

Find the gifts of your loved one's life. Think of all the gifts that your loved one gave to you: joy, safety, laughter, companionship, compassion. List these gifts on strips of paper and keep them somewhere close to you. Put them in a gift box or place them in a

stocking. Decorate the tree with them or simply keep them in a memory book or in a secret place. Wherever you place them, know that these small strips of paper hold treasures far beyond our capacity to understand. They hold tangible evidence that someone lived. It is a reminder that we did exchange gifts and that we still have those gifts, even if our loved one has died.

May you find the gifts of joy and the memory of love given and received. These are the treasures of your life. May you rediscover them again and again. Whatever holidays these are for you, may they be manageable, and may love be what you remember the most. *



About the Author



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



Traveling with Wreaths Across America

By Jill Stephenson ★ Surviving mother of Corporal Benjamin Kopp



My only child, Corporal Benjamin Kopp, an Army Ranger, died on July 18, 2009 of wounds he suffered during his third deployment in 2009. In his final wishes, he requested that he be laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery. This made perfect sense to me, and although I live in Minnesota, I didn't hesitate to honor his wish.

Several months later, people began asking me if I was coming back to Arlington for Wreaths Across America (WAA). I had no idea what that was. Once I learned what the organization and the event were all about I quickly made arrangements to be there that first year. I hadn't been to Ben's resting place since his funeral in early August. Coming back in December would be my first time seeing his headstone and it brought comfort to know I wouldn't be there alone.

Wreaths Across America is an organization that began with a memorable trip to Washington DC by then twelve-year-old Morrill Worcester. Many years later, as the successful owner of Worcester Wreaths in Harrington, Maine, Morrill found himself in 1992 with an excess of 5,000 wreaths for the holiday season. His thoughts went

back to his boyhood trip as he pondered the idea that he owed his prosperity, in part, to the values of our country and the veterans who had laid their lives down to defend and protect them. He delivered the extra wreaths to a section of Arlington that had experienced declining visitors over the years.

This routine continued, virtually unnoticed, until 2005 when a photo of the rich green wreaths tied with red bows and lying against the headstones in the snow, went viral across the internet. Now, each year the second Saturday in December is recognized as Wreaths Across America day not just at Arlington, but at national and state cemeteries across the U.S.

When the 2009 wreath day arrived, I was touched by the number of people who had come to Arlington to honor and share such goodwill to all who are laid to rest in those hallowed grounds. From that day forward, I committed to being at Arlington for Wreaths Across America every year.

The next year a friend shared with me that Gold Star family members could travel from Maine to Washington, DC with the wreaths. What began as a quiet trek from Worcester Wreath Company in Maine to deliver wreaths to Arlington has become a week-long journey of remembering, honoring, and teaching communities along the way. My friend had done this herself and highly recommended the trip, assuring me it would be the trip of a lifetime. I



MORRILL & KAREN WORCESTER



was convinced and began making plans for 2011.

I arrived in Maine two days before the official convoy began. Three other surviving moms arrived the same day and we were escorted to the wreath headquarters. There we met Morrill and Karen Worcester.

Our driver was Lieutenant Colonel Wayne Merritt who served in the US Air Force during the Vietnam War and is Co-Director and Board Member of Wreaths Across America. I was highly impressed with the credentials these folks had, but above all, they were incredibly kind and made us feel special in their presence.

Wayne picked us up from our hotel the next morning and we headed out to the tip farm. "Tipping" the branches is the procedure used to obtain the material to make the wreaths. Morrill and Karen had made two dog tags with my son's name on them. One was for me to keep and the other was to attach to a tree of my choice. I was also given a patriotic ribbon to mark the tree as my very own in honor of Benjamin. Each tree is capable of producing wreaths for thirty years, meaning my son would be credited for continuing to give to his fallen comrades from his designated tree.

Before we left Maine, a handful of other Gold Star family members arrived. There was a father, a grandfather and several surviving wives who were set to ride along. Some of us would be riding in a bus and some of us would take



BENS TREE AT WORCESTER WREATH FARM

turns riding in semitrailers whose drivers had volunteered their time to deliver the wreaths. In addition to the Gold Star bus, there were state troopers, Patriot Guard Riders, and the numerous semis containing the wreaths.

We were a convoy! A real life convoy, like you see in the movies. There were eight semis being led by one of the Maine State Troopers, followed by an assortment of pickup trucks, cars, motorcycles, police cars, fire trucks, our Gold Star bus, and whoever else managed to slip in along the way. At any one time there were twenty or more vehicles. Seeing us all together on the highways and byways was pretty sensational.

The route was planned in advance and some of the stopping places were repeats from years past. Witnessing the honor and patriotism we were greeted with, I understood why. Our first stop was a sunrise ceremony at Quoddy Head State Park in Lubec, Maine, the eastern-most point in the continental United States. From there we went into Canada to exchange wreaths with a ninety-one-year-old gentleman who had served with the US and Canadian Special Forces.

In total the trek took us through eight states and allowed us to participate in two or more ceremonies every day. We visited elementary, middle and high schools, military and Christian academies, an Elks Lodge, fairgrounds, war memorials, and cemeteries. Although no two ceremonies were exactly the same, there were similarities. There were sidewalks lined with flag waving children and adults. There were enormous flags draped between the extended ladders of fire trucks. There were patriotic songs, cheering, and high fives, moments of silence, a sea of happy faces, and plenty of tears. They were not always tears of sadness, but tears of comfort and joy in feeling the love, support, and loyal patriotism from our fellow Americans.

When this wonderful journey concluded at Arlington, I reflected on the words of my friend telling me this would be the trip of a lifetime. She was right. I had spent the last seven days making friends, being embraced by strangers, and participating in events that made America shine bright as the sun.

Morrill and Karen Worcester are two of the kindest and most humble people I have met. Morrill will tell you he is just a wreath maker from Maine. I beg to differ. When you generously and willingly give back to the world, that makes you an angel in my book. I will never forget the angels I encountered during my Wreaths Across America trek all because a twelve-year-old boy never forgot what mattered to his heart. *

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Jill Stephenson lives in Minnesota and travels the country as an inspirational speaker and advocate for organ donation and veterans' issues. For more information about Wreaths Across America and this year's trip from Maine to Arlington, please visit www.wreathscrossamerica.org. The date for the event at Arlington this year is December 15th.
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Photos courtesy of Jill Stephenson



Coping with the Holidays

By Michelle Linn-Gust, PhD

We were lost the first holiday season after my sister Denise died. Seven months after her death in March 1993, my maternal grandmother died, leaving us without a family matriarch. That Christmas, not only were we without Denise, but all our usual plans with the relatives had dissipated without Grandma Zurawski.

I have two memories of that first Christmas. One was delivering gifts to two needy families with my sister Karen and her boss. Her office had collected funds and two families were selected for a pile of gifts each. On a day when we were sad and confused, giving back to someone else allowed us to do something when we felt like we had no control.

My other memory involves food. Because we weren't getting together with family, there was no set meal for the day. Mom bought a variety of foods although what I remember most is the pizza. Obviously,

Looking back over almost eighteen years of holiday seasons (and other assorted holidays and important days) without my sister, the biggest lesson I learned was to plan something to acknowledge the person who died.

because nothing was open on Christmas day, everything was ordered and bought the day before.

We were lost, we were sad, we didn't know what to do. It would take several years before new traditions would form. Many of them came about because we were welcoming new family members (spouses, partners, stepchildren, nieces, nephews, and dogs) as the years went by.

Looking back over almost eighteen years of holiday seasons (and other assorted holidays and important days) without my sister, the biggest lesson I learned was to plan something to acknowledge

the person who died. It doesn't have to be anything big, but in some way it must acknowledge that while the person isn't part of the family in the same way, he or she still is part of the family. Often, there is a lot of tension on holidays in families—there is a lot of tension in families without a family member dying—because each person has a unique perspective and is in a different place than the others on the grief journey.



Someone wants to talk about the person who died, but sometimes others are too sad, afraid they might break down if they begin to remember.

When I speak to people about suicide loss, I suggest they light a candle in acknowledgement of that person or go to the cemetery together—something small but meaningful that says, “Hey, this person isn’t here with us in the same way as before he or she died, but he or she is still part of the family.” I’ve had many people come back to me and tell me that it relieved the tension in the family.

While for some family members there is a lot of sadness in remembering the past holidays because there will be no new memories with the person, we are lucky to have the memories to take with us. The memories are ours to keep and no one can take them away from us. My best Christmas memories involve my sister—my birthday is in December and it’s always been a magical time for me. But because we were so close in age, it was with Denise that I found the Christmas presents in the basement closet (my Barbies had to know they were getting a new bathtub!) and it was with her that I waited for Santa Claus.

There are dozens of photos of us together opening our gifts on Christmas morning. My favorite photo is one that is framed on my guestroom wall where she is in her

For each of us, what we need on the holidays will be unique to us, to our families, and to the relationship we had with the person who died. But what’s most important is that we put some thought into what we will do that day because the anticipation almost always is worse than the day itself.

SUICIDE SURVIVORS: WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?

Many survivors struggle to understand the reasons for the suicide, asking themselves over and over again: “Why?” Many replay their loved ones’ last days, searching for clues, particularly if they didn’t see any signs that suicide was imminent.

Because suicide is often poorly understood, some survivors feel unfairly victimized by stigma. They may feel the suicide is somehow shameful, or that they or their family are somehow to blame for this tragedy.

However, 90 percent of all people who die by suicide have a diagnosable psy-

chiatric disorder at the time of their death (most often depression or bipolar disorder). Just as people can die of heart disease or cancer, people can die as a consequence of mental illness. Try to bear in mind that suicide is almost always complicated, resulting from a combination of painful suffering, desperate hopelessness, and underlying psychiatric illness.

> Excerpted from *Surviving a Suicide Loss: Resource and Healing Guide* from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. The complete guide is available at www.afsp.org

pajamas and her hair is mussed up. You can see the stack of gifts behind her and she has just opened a package of Barbie clothes hangers (these were for Barbie’s clothes, not for ours) that had her smiling as she looked at someone away from Mom who probably took the photo. While there are no new memories and I don’t have her to remember Christmases past with, I feel fortunate to have had those almost eighteen years with her, to build my childhood of memories with her.

For each of us, what we need on the holidays will be unique to us, to our families, and to the relationship we had with the person who died. But what’s most important is that we put some thought into what we will do that day because the anticipation almost always is worse than the day itself. Still, it’s painful to watch people shop for loved ones, knowing that our list is one shorter this year and always will be from here forward.

As we all are part of families (for better or worse), this also can be a difficult time because each person is grieving in a unique way. Somehow we have to reach a place where we all can agree on how to remember the past with our loved one and acknowledge that the person is still part of the family. *

About the Author



Dr. Michelle Linn-Gust, President of the American Association of Suicidology has spent the past nineteen years educating people worldwide about coping with loss and change following the suicide of her younger sister. She is the author of *Conversations with the Water: A Memoir of Cultivating Hope; Do They Have Bad Days in Heaven? Surviving the Suicide Loss of a Sibling; and Ginger's Gift: Hope and Healing Through Dog Companionship*. In 2011, her first two fiction novels were published, *Sisters: The Karma Twist*, and *The Australian Pen Pal*. Learn more about Michelle at www.inspirebymichelle.com.

A New Year Without My Loved One In It

By Betsy Beard ★ Surviving mother of SPC Bradley S. Beard

Once upon a time we were a happy, complete family that thrived on holiday traditions. Before Brad died, we approached the winter holidays with delight, reveling in the extra time together and enjoying the fresh sparkling snow and thoughts of the coming new year—a clean slate with no mistakes in it!

New Year's Eve parties were planned. We joyously stayed up late and allowed the kids the same latitude so that we could all

shout "Happy New Year" and run around the yard beating pots and pans and sharing the moment with the neighbors. In the days leading up to the end of the year, New Year's resolutions were contemplated and discussed and written down (if not always kept).

But the first New Year that I "celebrated" without Brad was painful and raw. As the days grew shorter and the year drew to a close, winter wrapped itself around me

and I felt frozen. I really didn't want to exist in the New Year let alone resolve to do anything different or better. We unwisely allowed ourselves to be convinced to go to a party at a neighbor's house, and as the Times Square New Year's Eve Ball dropped and the countdown began, all our un-bereaved friends were enjoying the moment, toasting, counting aloud, smiling, laughing, cheering.

I suddenly realized that within seconds I would be living and breathing in a year that Brad would never experience. It was crushing. I stumbled from the neighbor's house, feeling infinitely alone. And for every New Year's Eve since that first year of loss, I have steadfastly ignored the concept of celebrating the end of one year and the welcoming of a new one. It's easy if I make sure

I am in bed by 10:00 p.m.

However, in the eight years since Brad's death I have experienced a degree of healing, and this year I am able to contemplate a future that I might affect, a future that I actually want to impact. As I think through what might be appropriate as a resolution for a grieving person, I realize that my life no longer revolves solely around what I want to do for myself. I also want to bring Brad with me on this journey and integrate his thoughts and experiences into the new year as well. One way to do that is to care about the things he cared about and spend time doing the things he liked to do.

So as the ball drops in Times Square this year, I might still be awake, pondering my own countdown. Maybe you will find some ideas that will work for you, in case you stay up past midnight.

10. Honor and remember the sacrifices of those who put themselves in harm's way for others. I am continually grateful to our service members, both living and dead. Brad cared deeply about those he served with and I should do no less.

9. Share thoughts and feelings with family and friends so that they know when I am hurting. No one can read my mind, even after all these years, so it is my responsibility to openly express how I am feeling, especially when I am feeling vulnerable and sad.

8. Be gentle with myself and others. All of us who are grieving, and even those who are not, are better served with gentleness.

7. Allow expressions of grief. One of my best friends, another mom who lost a son in



Iraq, gets together with us each year on the same-day anniversary of our sons' deaths. One of the phrases she used years ago when we were feeling guilty about an action or emotion was, "We are so allowed!"

6. Allow joy. Again, whatever condition we find ourselves in on any given day, "we are so allowed."

5. Don't set false expectations. Our family and many others like ours have been able to avoid feeling extra pain when things don't go the way we expected by reminding ourselves, "It is what it is."

4. Resolve not to feel guilty. It is so easy to fall into the trap of thinking that we could have somehow done something to prevent our loved one's death. In most cases, we could not have foreseen, altered, or avoided what happened to them.

3. Take care of my health. Being in good physical condition was important to Brad. I think of him when I exercise, wondering if he would be proud of me.

2. Resolve that I won't find meaning as much as learn to make meaning of my new life. This one is harder... For a long time I thought that something would happen to me to suddenly bring fulfillment and meaning to a horrible situation. Now I realize that I have to take the circumstances and weave my own meaning around them.

1. Take a page from Brad's book: enjoy life, find the humor in every situation, tackle challenges, and live in the moment. I don't honestly know if I can do this, so I reserved it for the last of the resolution countdown. Perhaps by remembering what an awesome person he was, I will

be able to tap in to Brad's fun-loving zest for living.

Following resolutions has never been easy, but neither is learning to live without our special loved ones. The start of a new calendar year is a chance to realize once again that we are, in fact, still living. It certainly isn't the life we would have chosen. But even though the earthly lives of our loved ones have ended, we are still in the midst of our lives. We still have something to offer others and we still have the opportunity to share our loved ones' lives with others. I hope that we all continue to find ways in this coming year to follow in the footsteps of our loved ones who have gone before us. ☆

10. Honor and remember
9. Share thoughts and feelings
8. Be gentle
7. Allow expressions of grief
6. Allow joy
5. Don't set false expectations
4. Resolve not to feel guilty
3. Take care of my health
2. Resolve to make meaning of life
1. Take a page from Brad's book

About the Author



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

Losing Todd, A Mother's Journey

The Gift at the Water's Edge

By Jeanne Harris Weaver ★ Surviving mother of First Lieutenant Todd Weaver

Three days after our son 1LT Todd Weaver was killed, I walked the beach near our home, not knowing whether I had the physical strength to keep my legs moving or whether I would collapse onto the sand. I walked, searching for peace in my heart and some degree of comfort or understanding.

I thought, "Who can I turn to? Where do I turn?" That day, I reached the jetty at the far end of the beach, a mile from our home and turned around. My swollen, red-rimmed eyes caught sight of a little shell glistening on the wet sun swept sand, and I picked it up. It was rare to the beach, not the typical cockle or clam shell. I held it in my hand as I walked.

My thoughts turned to Todd's life—full, yet cut short. He touched so many people with his zest for life; their lives better just by knowing him. He lived with conviction and dignity. He knew friendship and he knew love of family, wife, and child. He knew disappointment, sadness, sorrow. He knew faith and love for God, understanding that our life here on earth leads to eternal life. His life was complete. He has eternal light.

I carried the shell home and researched its symbolism—a moon shell, simple, smooth, old, with a small hole at its apex showing its inner core. It symbolized life eternal. Later, I recorded my thoughts of that walk in the journal I began to keep.

Two days earlier, our family had witnessed the dignified transfer of Todd returning to American soil. It was a rainy, dreary morning as our family caravanned to Dover. Todd's flag draped coffin was carried out of

the transport area and I watched a general kneel to say a prayer at the coffin. At that moment, the sun broke through the dark,

grey clouds and I felt the comfort of a warm, brilliant light and a first sense of peace.

I recorded my experiences of that day in my journal. My writings included laments, letters to Todd, recordings of the day's events, inspirational statements by friends and family, quotes, anger, sorrow, and memories. I continue writing in it today, two years later.

As an artist of oil paintings, I work alone in my studio at home, but I had closed the studio when Todd was killed. Dried oil paint brushes sat upon their pallets. Unfinished canvases rested upon easels. I could not bear to even consider painting. My emotional state would not allow me to think about the typical seascapes I normally created. The studio remained dark. But subconsciously, I was building a portfolio in my journal and in my mind.

Four months after Todd was killed, I began to paint again. The first paintings were of his shoes—his little red baby shoes made of soft leather bought in Budapest, Hungary where we lived on a Foreign Service assignment with the U. S. State Department; his baseball cleats, all muddy with tattered shoe laces from the last game of baseball he would ever play; and a pair of Army boots returned from Afghanistan to his wife Emma. They completed a trilogy of Todd's life through his shoes.

As I painted, I listened to the music Todd's brother, Glenn, had recorded for the memorial service: inspirational music and patriotic country music which I remembered listening to with Todd and his family just before his



deployment to Afghanistan. Over and over the music played. While it played I painted, tears streaming down my face.

Why would I force myself to such levels of emotional turmoil? I had to reach the depths of that turmoil in order to dig myself out. I painted more than 40 hours a week, taking time away from the studio only for the family or for events related to nurturing Todd's memory. I would not allow anyone to view the paintings...They remained protected in my studio.

With artistic discipline and creative energy, I worked to develop strong compositions which captured my emotions and the light. The light shown in Todd's life, the light cast upon the little shell I had found on the beach, the brilliant warm light I had experienced at Dover the day after Todd was killed. I did not know what the end would bring. I only knew that each painting seemed to bring another, each one symbolizing words spoken, memories cherished.

With each painting completed, I captured Todd's life and his death. I began to feel strength and resolve. It took me close to a year to build up the courage to paint the female notifying officer at my door that morning of September 9, 2010. Memories had raced through my mind that morning

as I stood frozen in my tracks, alone in the house, unable to move forward to the door. The painting needed to encompass all of those raw emotions.

Exactly one year after Todd was killed, fourteen paintings entitled "Losing Todd, A Mother's Journey" went on exhibition through the Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. The series was not yet complete, but it was important to me to share what I had created at the college which had rallied together in support of the loss of a great student, citizen, soldier, loving husband, father, son, brother, and uncle.

I continued to paint full time until I reached painting # 21, the moon shell symbolizing eternal life which I had found three days after Todd's death. It was my first gift and it came from the sea. This was important to me, spiritually, as it was found at the edge of the cleansing water and has led me on an awesome journey which brought, and continues to bring me, grace and peace. Each of us finds their own will to go on. This was mine and I cannot imagine where I would be today if I had looked past that little shell. When I finished its painting, the series was complete.

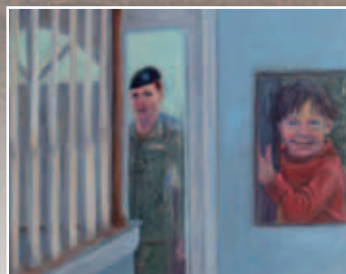
Losing a loved one is always hard. The journey through grief is personal. It is lonely. I chose to contend with my grief through my painting. It allowed me the emotional stream to endure reality. Throughout the journey, I have learned that I can share it with others.

Todd died defending his soldiers, his family, and his country. I honor and share his sacrifice and the sacrifice of those families whose loved ones have made the ultimate sacrifice. I hope my series of paintings is of some help to those who have witnessed similar grief. I hope the paintings also offer witness to our country of all those brave men and women who have given their lives in defense of our freedoms.

The 21 paintings hang in our home in memory and tribute to Todd and will continue to be a part of our family's heritage. I am always willing to share the series so that others may begin to understand the national treasure our country has lost in the lives of our loved ones. ★

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To experience all of Jeanne's paintings, visit www.jeanneweaverartist.com

*Each of us finds their own will to go on.
This was mine and I cannot imagine where
I would be today if I had looked past that little shell.*



Support Yourself & Your Children Through the Holidays

By Andrea Hug, MaPC, MPS, LCPC

The holidays are here... As a parent who is grieving, thinking about the holidays may seem ludicrous, and yet your children will not let them pass without celebration. Children naturally need to find the joy in the season. But it is an overwhelming time with demands that might cause unmanageable stress. It's helpful to consider how you can ease the demands of the season and still honor your missing loved one. Below are some suggestions about how to manage your holidays.

CREATE A PLAN

Keeping your child in mind, think about ways that moving through special events might stir up grief. Parties, concerts, and family gatherings often have memories attached to them, which can make events more difficult for you and your child. Make decisions that will honor your loved one, your children, and yourself.

GET PROPER SLEEP AND GOOD NUTRITION

Your health, as well as your child's health, is affected by grief. Good nutrition and proper sleep help you maintain balance and stay healthy. If you notice a change in your child's sleeping or eating habits, look at grief as a possible explanation. It may be resolved by simply allowing your child to talk about his or her feelings.

EXERCISE

Natural endorphins are released when you exercise. Exercise helps clear your mind and restore energy.

Children do well to get out and play in the fresh air; so do parents!

EVALUATE TRADITIONS

It may be too much to do things the way you "always did things" before. This is a good time to remember that you can change traditions now and still change them back later if you want to. Ask your children what they remember and would like to change or keep. Share with them your thoughts and find a way to incorporate a plan that works for everyone. Your children may have ideas about what they think the holidays should be. If you give them the opportunity to be creative, they might surprise you with the perfect way to move through a difficult time.

INCORPORATE RITUAL INTO YOUR HOLIDAY

Rituals offer comfort and hope. Through ritual, you can honor your desire for healing, name what has changed, and envision a new future. Your children can help you create a special time that gives voice to what is missing for all of you. Lighting a candle at the table, setting a place for your loved one, or mentioning them in stories honors their legacy and eases your heart.

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO SAY NO

Some days are better than others, and even in the best moment, you may not feel like attending an event. Agree with your child that it's okay to say no, even at the last minute. Agree to talk about why the plan might need to change. Your open communication may ease your sorrow and help you understand one another. By talking it through, you just might find that you've shared your feelings enough to manage the event after all.

ASK FOR AND ACCEPT HELP

You may not be able to do all the things your children may want you to do. Look around and see if there is someone—a family member, a neighbor, a friend, a church community—who might be able to help you and your children. Give them an opportunity to be generous to you during this season.

INFORM A FRIEND

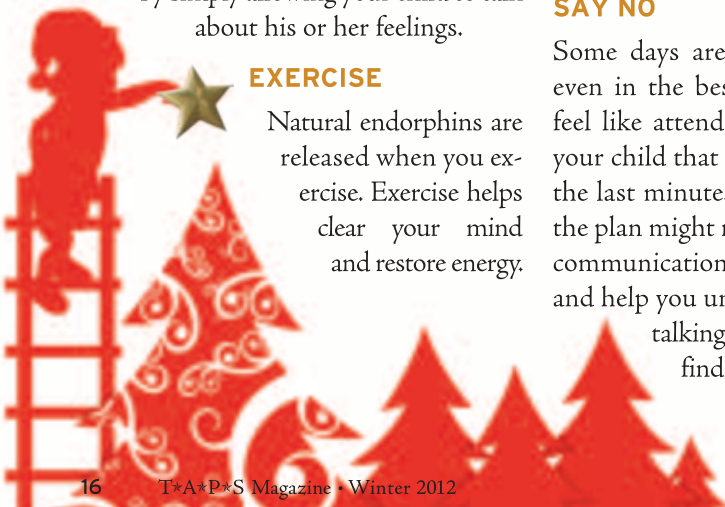
Tell a close friend about how you are really doing. Or call your TAPS peer mentor or the TAPS help and information line at 800-959-TAPS. Getting your worries, grief, and concerns off your chest might help you find relief.

LOVE YOUR CHILDREN AND LET THEM LOVE YOU

Kind expressions of affection and love go a long way toward helping us during difficult times. Sharing hugs restores us in ways we cannot measure. And isn't it, truly, all about the love? ★

About the Author

Andrea Hug is the surviving spouse of Lieutenant Christian A. Hug, USNR, a search and rescue helicopter pilot who died in 1993. She holds master's degrees in both Pastoral Counseling and Pastoral Studies from Loyola University in Chicago, and is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor. She worked for two years with TAPS Adult Survivor Care Team, having spent the previous six years working in hospice with young surviving widows and children.





You Are Cordially Invited to Attend



**TAPS 19th Annual
NATIONAL
Military Survivor Seminar
&
Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors**

Memorial Day Weekend
May 24 to 27, 2013
Washington, DC

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

Remember the Love ☆ Celebrate the Life ☆ Share the Journey



2013 National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Please Join Us

Please join us as we Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey.

TAPS extends a warm invitation for you to experience a weekend that will touch your heart and strengthen your spirit. Since our first national seminar in 1995, TAPS has welcomed all who are grieving the loss of a loved one who died while serving in the military, providing a full weekend of events for adults and children alike. At the seminar you can connect with others who have suffered a similar loss, learn coping strategies, and hear how others find the strength to live again.

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

For anyone faced with the loss of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces, TAPS offers comfort and healing, while making time for us to honor our loved ones during the Memorial Day weekend. In Washington, DC, we are surrounded by the monuments of our nation that honor the service and sacrifice of our loved ones and remind everyone that freedom is not free.

Start planning now to join us for a powerful time of support, care, and hope. Whether this is your first TAPS event or you are returning for our annual "family reunion," a friendly smile, an understanding heart, and open arms await you. Join us as we Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey together.

★ REGISTRATION ★

Your registration fee assists TAPS in covering the cost of selected meals, workshop materials, TAPS shirt and tote bag, and ground transportation to all special events during the four day conference. The registration fee for children attending the Good Grief Camp assists with the costs of meals, transportation, two Good Grief Camp shirts, a TAPS backpack, and other camp materials.

Along with these tangible items, you will take home the priceless experiences of the weekend and join with others to form vital connections that last a lifetime. This single investment in yourself provides dividends long after you depart. The time we spend with each other and the memories we take home are important as we face each new day and take each new step in our own personal journeys of grief.



★ ACTIVITIES ★

WORKSHOPS FOR SURVIVORS & PROFESSIONALS

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

SPECIAL EVENTS

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

PEER MENTOR TRAINING

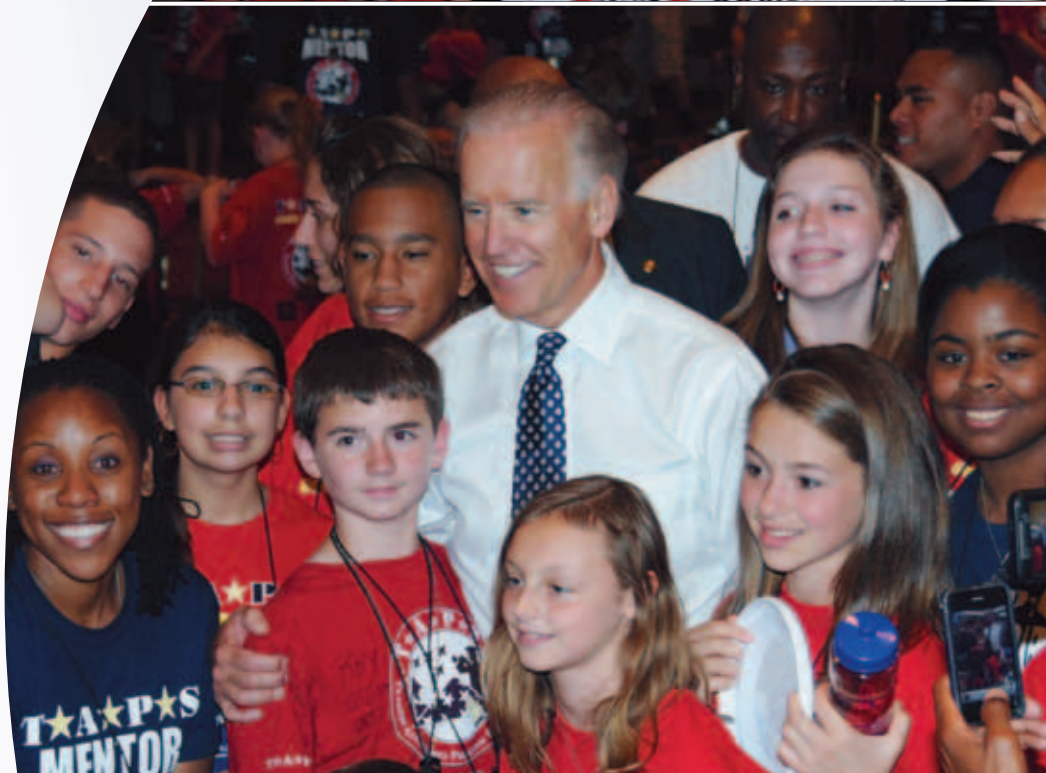
If you are 18 months beyond your own loss and ready to be there for others, we offer a full day of training on Thursday, May 23, 2013. You will learn more about grief and trauma, gain basic helping skills, and become part of our TAPS Peer Mentor Team. Register for the Peer Mentor Training as part of the general registration.

SUPPORT GROUPS

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

GOOD GRIEF CAMP

The TAPS Good Grief Camp for children and teens is America's first established program for children who have lost a parent, sibling, or loved one in military service to America. Our youth have a chance to share, heal, and have fun in a loving, supportive environment. The Good Grief Camp allows your child to be surrounded by others of a similar age who have experienced a comparable loss. Childcare is offered for those under four years old.



Register Online at
WWW.TAPS.ORG



2013 National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Start Planning



Start planning now to attend TAPS 19th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar. Online registration opens on December 15, 2012. Go to www.taps.org and click on the Calendar of Events tab on the left side. Then select the National Survivor Seminar for more information and the link to registration.

★ LOGISTICS ★

- All events and workshops for the 2013 seminar take place in (or depart from) the comfortable and inviting Crystal Gateway Marriott on Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington, Virginia. Additional rooms will be available at the adjacent Crystal City Marriott which is connected by an underground walkway.
- Both hotels offer complimentary airport shuttle service to Ronald Reagan National Airport. (Flights into Dulles or BWI require transportation by taxi or SuperShuttle with fares ranging from \$45 to \$65.)
- Each hotel offers an on-site restaurant in addition to a fitness center, indoor pool, and access to the Crystal City Shops and eateries. Room amenities include TV, telephone, clock radio, hair dryer, iron and ironing board, and coffeemaker/tea service.
- For information about free airfare through Fisher House Foundation's Hero Miles program, please check the seminar information pages on the TAPS website.
- The seminar registration fee of \$195.00 includes selected meals, workshop materials, ground transportation to all special events, and a TAPS shirt and tote bag.
- The Good Grief Camp registration fee of \$75.00 per child assists in paying for selected meals, transportation for field trips and events, two Good Grief Camp shirts, a TAPS backpack, and other camp materials.
- A limited number of scholarships are available if you are facing financial challenges. Please call TAPS at 800-959-TAPS(8277) for more information.
- To make your hotel reservation, sign up as soon as possible. Visit the seminar webpage at www.taps.org to get our special conference rate of \$129.00 per night.
- Events begin with registration on Friday morning, so plan to arrive before noon on Friday, May 24 for attendance at the opening session. Departures should be scheduled after 3 p.m. on Monday, May 27, 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 your departure Sunday evening, May 26, after our last session ends at 4 p.m. *





Silent Winds

By Robert Longley

*The winter winds are silent.
The days are short and gray.
Alone we sit and wonder
What awaits another day.*

*The dreams have run their cycle.
The days are short on light.
The coming solstice greets us
On days most made of night.*

*Some will see the ending.
Others see the start:
A perfect new beginning
For dreams within your heart.*

*Soon the winds are blowing.
The sun will soon return
To bring forth some new knowledge
And lessons soon to learn.*

About the Author

Robert Longley would be happy to provide a unique poem, free of charge, to any family member whose loved one died in service to America. You can see more of his work and prints at www.sacredpoems.com.

A New Year

By Robert Longley

*The day does offer promise,
A chance for something new,
Time for new direction
To make a change or two.*

*This burst of inspiration
Does come but once a year,
A time for something different
And hope that change is near.*

*How will you use this moment?
What will you choose to change?
What aspect of your story
Are you poised to rearrange?*

*In truth it's just illusion;
It's not about the day.
It's how you view the future
And challenges in your way... **



Give yourself the gift of a TAPS Retreat



If you have not yet explored one of TAPS' newest programs, perhaps it is time to think about joining us on a retreat in the coming year. You may already know a little bit about the TAPS family if you have attended a survivor seminar in the past. But retreats differ from seminars

in several ways. While seminars are structured with educational workshops and support groups, retreats offer a three to four day event that combines the healing element of nature along with activities that provide safe places to explore, connect with others, and enjoy some much-needed and much-deserved respite from grief.



"Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, Share the Journey—that's what our time in New York was all about. I am blessed and grateful that I had the opportunity to attend."

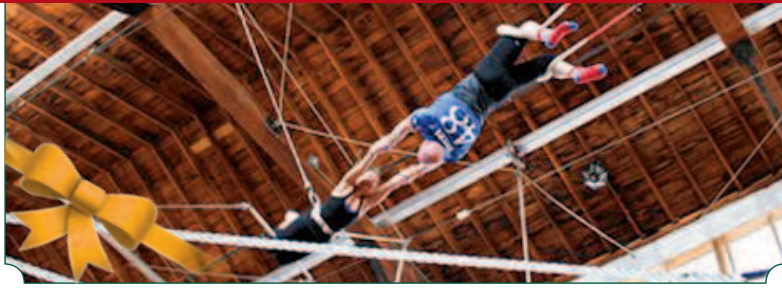
Unlike seminars, retreats are for adults only and are geared to include those who share similar relationships with their loved ones. Currently, retreats are scheduled for three major groupings of survivors: parents of the service member; siblings; and surviving widows, fiancées, and significant others.

Retreats also contain an element of trying out a new activity that you may never have imagined yourself doing, whether it is kayaking, horseback riding, skydiving, or surfing. TAPS retreats are more than simply engaging in outdoor activities; they also allow survivors to connect with others on a parallel journey by scheduling enough free time to get to know others, relax in nature, and dine with your new friends.

Being surrounded by the beauty of nature gives us the opportunity to breathe deeply and discover new wonders about the world, others, and ourselves. Sharing these

"Thank you to all of ya'll for making this week so wonderful! I think it truly has been the best Sibling Retreat ever! I absolutely cannot wait to do it again!"





Photos, TAPS Archives

experiences gives us a sense of community and allows us to forge friendships that can last a lifetime. When our hearts are grieving, it is especially important to find time for relaxation and connection.

As explained by TAPS Special Events and Communications Director Kyle Harper, "It's okay to smile and it's okay to laugh. It is even okay to have fun!"

Thanks to generous donor support, TAPS is able to pay the costs of lodging, activities, and selected meals at our retreat events. Participants need to secure their own transportation to and from the event as well as pay for one meal each day.

Due to the limited space available for retreat activities, only 40 to 60 survivors will be able to attend each event. Since the purpose of a retreat is to help survivors focus on their own healing journeys, retreats are not open to additional extended family members, and childcare is not provided.

Registration will be first come, first served. Preference for each event in 2013 will be given to those who have not yet attended a retreat, but registration will be open to all.

"It was a wonderful time. Every time I go to a TAPS event, I meet wonderful people. This one was top notch and a lot of fun along with the sharing."

"Thank you all! This was definitely an amazing experience. I enjoyed hearing everyone's journey and admire the strength, diversity, and love that has brought us all together."

Be sure to visit our website at www.taps.org and click on the Calendar of Events tab on the left side. From there select Upcoming TAPS Retreats. If you would like to receive an email registration reminder for retreats, click on "Join" in the banner on the TAPS home page at www.taps.org. Then use the dropdown menu to select "I am a survivor" and click on "Get information about upcoming TAPS events."

Gift yourself this year with a wonderful opportunity for spending time with your TAPS family, sharing an experience, and creating memories that will find a special place in your heart. Join us as we journey together, lifting each other up and honoring the legacy of our heroes. You might even surprise yourself with the ability to excel at something new and different! *

"I want to thank the wonderful ladies of TAPS for making me smile again. Each and every woman I met at the retreat was such an inspiration and encouragement."





TAPS®

Run & Remember Team

Remembering Windy25

On April 6, 2005 a U.S. Army helicopter crashed near Ghazni, Afghanistan killing all five crew members along with 11 passengers. The call-sign of the CH-47 Chinook helicopter was Windy25, one of the aircraft belonging to F Company, 159th Aviation Regiment, "Big Windy."

Each year since the crash, members of the unit have gathered to honor their battle buddies and memorialize the loss. In the first years, the unofficial get-together happened in various places, and included any non-deployed Big Windy alumni who could attend. In 2009, the anniversary was marked by a reunion trip to Germany where a memorial park was dedicated.

In the meantime, some of the surviving family members had begun to attend TAPS events. The commander of the unit at the time of the crash, Major Craig Wilhelm, attended the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar in 2007 in support of surviving family members. "It was an incredible, positive forum for children and spouses to meet others," he said of the event.

Several years later and after the unit had dedicated the monument in Germany, the idea of creating a memorial fundraiser was born at an informal gathering of the battle buddies. The Big Windy alumni formed a 501(c)3 charity, the Windy25 Memorial Fund, and planned an annual fundraising 5K race to honor their fallen. Las Vegas, Nevada was selected as the venue due to its significant military presence, its reputation as a fun and energetic destination city, and its easy access from most cities across the United States.

The first Windy25 Memorial 5K was held in March 2011 and raised funds to help TAPS. According to Wilhelm,



"TAPS was a great support to the families of Windy25," so a partnership with TAPS was a natural fit. More than \$36,000 was raised by the 300 participants. The second year saw an increase to 500 runners and now, the Windy25 Memorial Fund has become a three-star TAPS partner, having raised more than \$82,000 to date.

The Windy25 Memorial Fund and its annual Windy25 Memorial 5K is dedicated to the memory of the flight crew, and pays tribute to all our fallen service members while raising funds through TAPS to help surviving military families. All proceeds go directly to TAPS with the Windy25 Memorial Fund as a conduit.

"While the loss of members of our Armed Forces often no longer grabs the front pages of our newspapers, we should not forget that many have paid the ultimate sacrifice in

service to our country, including the families they leave behind," said Wilhelm, founder and Board President of the Windy25 Memorial Fund.

"For the families of our fallen heroes, dealing with their grief is hard to imagine. That's why we are so grateful to support TAPS."

Next year on April 6, 2013 members of the unit, surviving families, friends, supporters, and anyone else who wants to run will participate in the 3rd Annual Windy25 Memorial 5K in Las Vegas. The race will mark the 8th anniversary of the deaths of Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Clint Prather, Chief Warrant Officer 2 David Ayala, Staff Sergeant Charles "Chuck" Sanders, Specialist Michael Spivey, Specialist Pendelton Sykes II, and their 11 passengers.

For the third year in a row the Cosmopolitan hotel will host and sponsor the event. One of the newest hotels on the strip, the Cosmopolitan works with Windy25 Memorial 5K to recognize military sacrifice. The race will begin and end at the Cosmopolitan on the famed Las Vegas strip.

"We invite anyone to participate in this epic event by running, walking, or donating," said Wilhelm.

"The commitment and excitement from the team organizing the Windy25 Memorial 5K is phenomenal and inspiring," said Marie Campbell, director of the TAPS Run and Remember Team. "We are deeply grateful for their support."

»» For more information, visit Windy25 Memorial 5K on Facebook. If you would like to participate on April 6, 2013, contact Marie Campbell at run@taps.org.*



Photos courtesy of Craig Wilhelm

TAPS®

Run & Remember Team

Running in Memory of America's Fallen Heroes

The Run and Remember Team pays tribute to the sacrifices made by our men and women in service to America, while raising funds to create awareness and support TAPS programs.

UPCOMING EVENTS FOR 2013

- »» **Disney Tinker Bell Half Marathon and Never Land Family 5K**
Disneyland, CA ~ January 18-20, 2013
- »» **Great Aloha Run (8 mile run)**
Honolulu, HI ~ February 18, 2013
- »» **Disney Princess Half Marathon and Royal Family 5K**
Disney World, FL ~ February 22-24, 2013
- »» **Dallas Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon**
Dallas, TX ~ March 24, 2013
- »» **Windy25 Memorial 5K**
Las Vegas, NV ~ April 6, 2013
- »» **Fargo Marathon, Half Marathon, 10K, 5K, & Kids Run**
Fargo, ND ~ May 17-18, 2013
- »» **Marine Corps Historic Half Marathon and Semper Fred 5K**
Fredericksburg, VA ~ May 19, 2013
- »» **Five Trials Half Marathon and 10K**
Leavenworth, KS ~ May 19, 2013
- »» **San Diego Rock 'n' Roll Marathon and Half Marathon**
San Diego, CA ~ June 2, 2013
- »» **Seattle Rock 'n' Roll Marathon and Half Marathon**
Seattle, WA ~ June 22, 2013
- »» **Big Wild Life Runs, Marathon, Half Marathon, Relay Marathon, 5K, and Kids Run**
Anchorage, AK ~ August 17-18, 2013
- »» **Virginia Beach Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon, Relay, and Mini Marathon**
Virginia Beach, VA ~ September 1, 2013
- »» **Navy 5 Miler and Navy-Air Force Half Marathon**
Washington, DC ~ September 2013
- »» **Air Force Marathon, Half Marathon, 10K and 5K**
Dayton, OH ~ September 20-21, 2013
- »» **Army Ten Miler**
Washington, DC ~ October 20, 2013
- »» **Marine Corps Marathon, 10K, and Healthy Kids Fun Run**
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TAPS Suicide Survivor Seminar

A place of healing and support

By Rebecca Morrison ☆ Surviving spouse of Army Captain Ian Morrison

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My New Family

Thursday morning I bounced out of bed early and yelled "Oh my gosh!" I never get up on time and certainly never bounce. But this morning I knew that I would be headed to California for the TAPS seminar. I went to work and taught my lessons, but couldn't hide my excitement over my pending trip. So at noon Texas time I darn near bolted out of the elementary school and ran home to grab my suitcase.



Rebecca Morrison

It may seem strange to have been so excited to be headed to a suicide survivor seminar, but it felt like going to a family reunion. Once I arrived in San Diego, I grabbed a taxi and headed out to the hotel.

Then it hit me. I've flown across the country alone, a widow, and no one I know is here yet. I told myself: "You're strong, you've come so far, you can do this; Ian will help you get through this."

I made it through the hotel check-in. As I was sitting in the hotel golf cart heading to my room and about to answer the "Why am I here?" question, I heard a scream. My fear instantly vanished when I saw the precious face of Petra Patterson, a fellow survivor and panelist from June's Defense Department/VA Suicide Prevention Conference. She was jumping up and down and yelling at the driver to stop. I jumped from the golf cart (it was still moving!) and ran to hug her. I instantly felt safe and at home. This is what TAPS is all about.



Arrivals greeted by Kim Ruocco

As I type this I am sitting in my hotel room feeling content, comforted, and peaceful. It has been an incredibly painful and terrifying six-month journey getting here, and I struggle daily to understand how to live this life without my Ian. Yet I am still standing, due to the love and support of my God, family, friends, and heroes at TAPS.

My connection with TAPS was made the night before my husband's unit memorial. I had survived discovering his body, attending his funeral, and burying him. I was feeling like I could not face another service, and was looking for support from someone who "got it." TAPS' phone number had been sitting on my nightstand for two weeks. Somehow I felt that if I called them, it would all be real.



Kim Ruocco & Bonnie Carroll

Still, I choked back the fear and tears and made the call. TAPS founder Bonnie Carroll answered the phone. I flooded her with my story and she listened, empathized, and reassured me. Then told me about Kim Ruocco. Kim's husband, also a helicopter pilot, had died by suicide and Kim would want to talk to me. I hung up and awaited Kim's call.

Then she called. I struggle to put this into words because our connection was so other-worldly.

She listened to my awful story, shared her own story, and promised me that I would survive this. Kim pulled me from a dark and lonely place and inspired me to face another day. That was day one. Six months later she has kept her promise. She has supported me more than I ever imagined, as well as introducing me to other TAPS heroes along the way.

My respect and love for this organization goes beyond words. They are incredible people and true heroes. I feel so blessed to be here for this memorable weekend.

That's What Friends Are For

Saturday night was our "family dinner." TAPS provided us with fried chicken (I was one happy Texan!) and several other comfort foods. We sat with friends both new and old, and everyone had the same precious look on their faces—exhausted yet grateful. I was feeling tired, emotionally stretched, excited, comforted, and thrilled to hear our key note speaker Marine Corps Sergeant Major Brian Battaglia, the senior enlisted adviser to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In that role, his mission is to keep the nation's top military officer keenly aware of how the nation's young men and women in uniform are faring and feeling. It's a vital job after 11 straight years of war.

I first met Sergeant Major Battaglia in June at the Department of Defense/VA Suicide Prevention Conference. He sat in the front row during our panel of survivors' stories, and served as a grounding force for me while I poured my heart out. I had no idea who he was, but was compelled to thank him for giving me an encouraging smile when I struggled to grasp words. I soon learned that he played a very important role within our military, specifically working on suicide prevention.

You can imagine my delight when I found out he would be speaking at the TAPS Suicide Survivor Seminar. He encouraged us to continue sharing our stories. He honored our loved ones and affirmed what I, too, believe: they all died heroes. He spoke of the support we all now have in TAPS and of his personal appreciation and awe of such a passionate and precious organization.

Lastly, he addressed the fiercest survivors among us, the children. As a teacher, I was incredibly moved by what came next. Sergeant Major Battaglia invited the children to come to the stage. He told them that they were safe among their new TAPS family, and that they had a new set of friends who would do anything to help them.

Then, he led the group of tiny heroes in song. They sang "That's What Friends Are For," and brought the audience to tears. Hearing this giant of the military community sing to those children and promise his support touched me. It opened my eyes to a new kind of military, one that recognizes the problem and is working to solve it.

After I lost my husband, I felt that

I had no support within the military, that his death would go unnoticed, and that others would join him. I feared that the only people trying to change the suicide rate among our troops were those on the outside of the military. After tonight, I can testify that this is not true. We have a friend, an ally, and a warrior within the military named Sergeant Major Brian Battaglia.

TAPS constantly works cooperatively with the military to find solutions to frustrating and devastating issues, including, but not limited to, military suicide. That is both powerful and amazing.

I was encouraged and inspired by the night's events. I want to speak to those who may be feeling like no one cares about the suicide loss of your loved one. I would like to offer you the promise of hope. You have the TAPS community, ably reinforced by Sergeant Major Battaglia and his team, working unrelentingly on behalf of you and your loved one. That's what I learned Saturday night.

continued on next page...





My Kayak

As I type this I am sitting in the San Diego airport preparing to head home to Dallas. The TAPS weekend seminar is over and I am filled with a powerful sense of faith. I am not sure what I was hoping to get from this weekend, but I am aware that above all things, my faith has been strengthened. TAPS helped me to fully believe that there is life for me after Ian's death. I firmly believe that God is guiding me on this journey and that He placed my TAPS family in my life so that I will never feel alone.

I am deeply inspired by the survivors I met this weekend; a family six months out who still manages to find happiness after losing their son and brother, an eight year old girl whose light still shines after the passing of her daddy, the brother who

has dedicated his life to building up others after his loss, and the beautiful widow who has found strength to let love into her life again. These people are such blessings and fountains of hope to my soul.

When Ian took his life I felt that he had taken me with him. It seemed that I was drowning in an ocean of grief and would never learn to swim. My grief therapist often points out that I use the metaphor of water when explaining my pain to her. When we started, prior to attending any TAPS events, I told her of my ocean. Slowly I have been learning to float through the sorrow, yet have been struggling to stay above water.

This all changed Sunday. During lunch that last day I decided to do my own self-care and go out on the ocean. I rented a kayak from the hotel dock and took a two hour mental health break. While I was paddling around enjoying the sunshine and time to think, my grief metaphor became tangible. I became aware that I was moving through the water, my grief, with ease. I was able to think about Ian, feel the loss, grieve it, and still notice the beauty of life surrounding me. I realized that TAPS was and is my metaphorical kayak.

They have provided me with a constant source of hope and faith. This past weekend was unimaginably inspiring and for the first time in six awful months I am floating above water. I know that my grief ocean is



unpredictable and that I am certain to be tossed and turned by large waves, but I feel safe clinging to my fortified faith. I believe that Ian is cheering me on and that there is a divine purpose for my life; a purpose that Kim and my TAPS family are helping me to faithfully trust and follow.

I cannot fully explain the peace, hope, and faith that now reside within my soul, but I hope others can tell that I was deeply touched by my weekend with TAPS. If your heart is aching after a loss of a loved one in the military and you are feeling broken, please reach out. There is an unending amount of love, faith, support, hope, and family awaiting you with open arms at TAPS.

Surviving this unimaginable loss, as horrible as it has been, is possible and oddly inspiring with the assistance of my precious kayak. *



Photos by Susan Thrumston

Rebecca Morrison is one of two widows *TIME Magazine* featured in its July cover story on the surge in Army suicides.



Books for the Holidays

The holidays are traditionally a time of getting together with family. When an important person is missing from all the festivities and social gatherings, our hearts seem more vulnerable. Rather than feeling the joy of the season, we may be feeling the loss more keenly. How will we get through the days ahead, filled with reminders of what we no longer have? Here are a few books recommended by TAPS survivors that may be just what you need for extra support at this time of year.

Open to Hope: Inspirational Stories for Handling the Holidays After Loss

By DR. GLORIA HORSLEY AND
DR. HEIDI HORSLEY AND THE OPEN
TO HOPE CONTRIBUTORS

You will find plenty of practical advice and encouragement from the stories and articles contributed by the writers at the Open to Hope Foundation. Divided into four parts, this book covers rethinking holiday traditions, gathering at Thanksgiving, finding your way back to Christmas, and embracing the New Year with hope. Articles are written by bereaved people representing different relationships and causes of death, and a detailed contents page allows you to zero in on the article you feel will be most helpful at any particular

point in time. Grab a cup of tea or hot cocoa and see what ideas come forth to help you through the season. All proceeds go to the Open to Hope Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people find hope after loss.

The Empty Chair: Handling Grief on Holidays and Special Occasions

By SUSAN J. ZONNEBELT-SMEENGE AND
ROBERT C. DE VRIES

This book offers tips and meditations to help grieving families cope with holidays and special occasions. Following the deaths of their spouses, the authors wrote this book together, blending their approach from their respective backgrounds as clinical psychologist and ordained minister. Each section of the book contains reflections on aspects of the journey of grief, practical suggestions, and lastly a meditation and prayer using a Christian-based faith perspective. The authors suggest creating new traditions for holidays and offer ideas to help grieving families deal with their emotions as they approach these special days. The book offers meditations, prayers for reflection, and quotes the Bible.

How to Survive the Holidays When Someone You Love Has Died

By SUSAN L. FULLER

This short Kindle e-book may be just what you need to start planning what you are able to do this holiday season. The author, a licensed mental health counselor, notes that as tempting as it may be to pull the covers up over your head and just wait for it to be over, there is no way of truly avoiding this time of year. Her good news is that

with a little bit of planning it is possible to navigate your way through without totally falling apart, whether you decide to do things completely differently, exactly the same, or something in between.

A Decembered Grief: Living with Loss while Others Are Celebrating

By HAROLD IVAN SMITH

Harold Ivan Smith coaches you on how to alter traditions instead of abandoning them, appreciate the grief styles of others, and befriend your grief instead of dreading it. Using more than 47 sources, Smith starts each short section with several quotes, ranging from Mark Twain and Will Rogers to respected grief professionals and the Bible. The quotes are followed up with text that shares a thought and offers insight. Topic headings include suggestions like Journal Your Grief, Create Ornaments, and something as simple as Nap! The encouragement to continue on is clearly and gently given. *



What do you say?

(When someone asks how you are feeling)

No matter what the season, answering the question of how we are doing is just plain difficult. There is no right or wrong way to respond, but following are some ideas from TAPS survivors. Perhaps their thoughts will help you to formulate your own response when you are asked how you are doing.

From Carolyn Cagle ★ Surviving mother of Lance Corporal John Cagle

The end of the first year of his death is closing in on me and I am feeling the old intense feelings that I felt the first month of his death. So, what do I say to people when they ask how I am doing? I tell them

the truth - I am having a very hard time reconciling with our family's loss but I am functioning positively and meeting life's expectations. I tell them I have some happy times and I have some bad times. I thank them for caring enough to ask and I ask them to pray for us. Most people can handle that answer and they know it is probably the truth. And, it isn't Pollyanna!

From Jean Uffalussy ★ Surviving mother of Staff Sergeant Patrick Dolphin

When someone asks me how I am feeling, my response depends on who is asking. If it is a good friend and they want the truth, I would tell them I am doing as well

as can be expected. Even though one year has passed, I am sick and tired of feeling like I can't control my emotions. I cry for the smallest reasons. I am sick of not being in control of my emotions, and also feel guilty and selfish whenever the emotions get the best of me. I miss my son terribly. I would have given my life for his, if it could have saved him, but I wasn't asked. If the person asking is just being polite, my response is "I am doing my best in the worst situation. That's all that can be expected. Thank you for asking."

From Frank Casson ★ Surviving father of SNS 3rd Class Joseph Casson

I wonder if the person is really interested in my feelings. Or is it a perfunctory question, like "How is the weather?" I sometimes feel okay and other times I feel terrible. I would like people to know that asking the question also requires a response. Are they ready to listen? I try not to unload a burden, but it would be nice to say how I truly feel. I want to say thank you for your concern. Then talk about what I am feeling. Maybe people who have never felt the loss as deeply as we have will understand the depth of our despair or our desire to heal. The road to recovery in my mind is the ability to get rid of the grief and express my feelings. They may be good or bad. I hope the listener is ready to really lend an ear.

No matter what the season, answering the question of how we are doing is just plain difficult.



**From Leslie Blei ★ Surviving mother
of CTTP 3 Eugene Aaron Bonacci III**

When people ask me, I just tell them I am fine and busy with my music and family. They don't want to hear how you really are. They want to hear an answer to that question that doesn't involve them conversing about it. If you have really amazing friends then you can tell them the truth - you feel like crap and miss your loved one; your heart has a hole in it that is not repairable. Our hearts ache and it doesn't get lessened by time. It just becomes easier to move the hurt around so you can function.

**From Shanette Booker ★ Surviving
spouse of SSG Andre Booker**

I tell them the truth - a true friend won't mind hearing exactly how you feel - but keep it simple. Although they are our friends and want to be there for us to help us with our healing process, telling them too much detail about how we feel can make them very uncomfortable and leave them feeling even more helpless than they already do. No one likes to see their friend hurting or feeling sad, so I say tell them how you feel, but limit how much you say. Allow them to try and comfort you through their words, their actions, and in some cases just their silence as they sit there listening to you express your feelings to them.

**From Pat Mena ★ Surviving mother
of Senior Airman Anthony Mena**

I tell people the truth. I tell them I wish I could say I am fine, but I know I will never feel the same again. I have good days and I have days that I miss Tony so much... And there are days when I laugh and enjoy doing things around the house or being out with a friend. Friends get tired of hearing about how much I am hurting. If someone is sarcastic to me, and tells me to move on with my life, I ask them "How would you feel if your son or daughter died?" That usually quiets them.



**From Deb Bonn ★ Surviving mother of
Ensign Elizabeth Ann Bonn**

Being six years out from the loss of our daughter, I hear this question a lot. We tell people we are coping. Beth was and is a big part of our lives. We wouldn't have traded a minute of those almost 24 years to have less pain. We understand that it hurts because we love. We explain to people that losing a child is like an endless hole in your heart. Nothing can fill the hole but you learn to keep living with it.

**From Rebecca Pollino ★ Surviving
mother of Sergeant Griffin Prentice**

Over the past four years with my son in heaven, when someone asks me how I feel I am truthful about how much I miss Griff and how life is empty and without purpose. Most days are sad days. I also tell them how I hibernate a lot and let them know they are welcome to stop by anytime. Please don't feel guilty about sorrow and missing your loved one. You are allowed to be honest about your feelings. If someone insensitive expects you to answer "Fine," then they are just that... insensitive and uncaring.

**From Donn Weaver ★ Surviving
father of First Lieutenant Todd Weaver**

It has been almost two years since our son was killed. In the first few months, that question was frequently asked, usually after expressions of how sorry the person was for our loss. In the next six to eight months, we found the question was either not asked or people tried to skirt the question and avoid any conversation related to our loss because it likely made them very sad or uncomfortable. During the second year that question was almost never asked, perhaps because people thought by now we had moved on. Somehow, that is the easiest thing to believe when you are not the survivor. It is not true and there have been many times we wish the question had been asked. By their caring and asking, we would then know how the people still remember and honor our son. When we are asked, we always try to give an upbeat response such as "We will always miss him, always think of him with sadness, but also pride. We hope that you will remember his life and sacrifice. Thank you for caring." In that response, we try to make it more about him than us. And in that process we almost always feel better. ★



John Wood, CEO of Telos

Partnering with TAPS to help grieving military families since 2009



Supporting survivors of tragic loss is a key philanthropic focus for technology and information security leader John B. Wood of Telos Corporation. Wood recently joined the Board of Directors for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) and is the new chairman of the board.

Wood and Telos have been supporting TAPS since 2009 when Telos became a sponsor for the TAPS Honor Guard Gala. They had recently learned from one of their employees how TAPS was helping local area survivors rebuild their lives following the death of a loved one in the Armed Forces.

With a philanthropic interest in aiding survivors of tragic loss, Wood and Telos reached out to learn more about the organization and how they could support TAPS' efforts. Over time, their involvement expanded to include the TAPS Run and Remember Team, TAPS Honor Guard Gala, in-kind assistance with technology support, and public education events about the nature of traumatic loss and its impact on the survivors left behind.

Wood recently attended his first meeting with the TAPS Board of Directors. "It is critical that the families who have suffered a terrible tragedy are able get back on their feet, move forward and see hope—hope that TAPS provides," said Wood. "I believe

• Thank You For Your Care & Support •

strongly in TAPS' mission to bring comfort and support to those loved by our fallen heroes and I am proud to be a part of this remarkable organization."

It takes an average of five to seven years for people experiencing a traumatic loss to reach a "new normal." TAPS is there for the long haul, providing peer-based emotional support, grief and trauma resources, seminars for adults, good grief camps for children, casework assistance, connections to community resources and a 24/7 resource and information helpline.

"The TAPS Board of Directors plays a critical role in ensuring that TAPS meets its mission to care for the families of our fallen military," said Bonnie Carroll, founder and president of TAPS. "John Wood brings incredible insight and support for our work to help grieving military families and we appreciate his willingness to step into this important role."

Wood also serves as treasurer and member of the board of directors for Project Rebirth, a nonprofit organization documenting the strength of the human spirit in coping with the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001 at the

World Trade Center. A time-lapsed film of the rebuilding of Ground Zero frames the year-by-year development of the lives of ten 9/11 survivors. Project Rebirth is the only living record of the minute-by-minute development of the site, and will be a component of the WTC Memorial Museum and archived in the Library of Congress.

Wood is chief executive officer, chairman of the board and director for Telos Corporation. As CEO, he orchestrates the company's support of the federal government in the critical areas of cyber operations and defense, secure messaging, and identity management solutions.

Wood joined the company in 1992 as executive vice president and chief operating officer, and in 1994 was named president and chief executive officer. He is also an active member of the business community, championing the concept of civic entrepreneurship as the founding chairman of the Loudoun County CEO Cabinet and former chairman of Loudoun County's Economic Development Commission. *



Photo, TAPS Archives



Gratitude as the Antidote to Grief

By Joanne Cacciatore, PhD, LMSW, FT

Grief is a potpourri of paradoxes. In brokenness, there can be wholeness. In the darkness, there can be light. In egoism, there can be selflessness. In despair, there can be hope. In ungratefulness, there can eventually be gratitude.

This isn't just psychobabble; for many, it is their survivalist reality. It is the only way that so many bereaved have moved beyond mere suspension. Those who allow themselves to experience gratitude are often able to transcend their former place in the world. They not only become whole again, but they have reached a threshold of completeness they would never have known had it not been for their loss.

These are individuals who, despite incapacitating trauma and turmoil, manage to find gratitude for the goodness in their lives. This is not a magical moment of epiphany for many of them. Rather, it evolves over time and with intense cognitive effort. I believe that finding gratitude - even crumbs or morsels at first - requires emotional maturity, practice, and mindfulness.

It requires us to first focus on the self, to take personal responsibility for our own suffering: to acknowledge it, to tell and retell our story, to know ourselves well. It requires us to acknowledge that there is healing in our suffering. It requires that we silence our minds, respect our body's response to the grief, and be gentle with ourselves.

We must recognize the acts of kindness, courage, and sacrifice that others have offered along our journey, and extend that droplet of hope to another.

It commands patience, intentionality, and commitment to the insufferable pain that radiates from the tips of our hair to the tips of our toes... the agony that causes every cell in our bodies to ache. It requires that we reach out for help from others, sometimes strangers, and that we accept the outreached hand with grace.

Then, when we are ready, we must move beyond the self. We must see the suffering of others. We must acknowledge the other's pain without the fear of losing or diminishing our own suffering. We must widen our circle of compassion for all beings' sufferings. We must see the world through others' eyes. We must recognize the acts of kindness, courage, and sacrifice that others have offered along our journey, and extend that droplet of hope to another.

We must seek gratitude daily, even for the small things in life, like a dandelion dancing on the warm breeze, shadows playing in the park, or a fiery sun setting against a mountainous silhouette, or perhaps, a simple kind word of support from a friend.

Like threads in a garment, grief runs in and out of our daily lives from the instant of death, one moment often indistinguishable from the next for many days and months. There is a time for this. Yet gratitude

can truly help us to heal from our suffering when the time is right to reconvene our lives. And when that time comes, consider your complaints and revisit your expectations. Take the time to fill your heart with gratitude. You can be grateful for what you have without taking away from that which you have lost.

So, tell someone who has helped you how grateful you are for their presence in your life. Hug someone you love and tell them three things you admire about them. Write a letter or send a card to someone who is making a difference in your community. Leave an anonymous gift for a teacher, doctor, or other "career." Reach out to another person in mourning. Let gratitude hang in the shadows, parallel to your grief. It is not magic, but it is transformative.

When we allow the experience of gratitude, the heart may still be broken but the heart is also most full, most whole, and most complete. Mendel of Kotzk said, "Where is God to be found? In the place where He is given entry." Where is gratitude to be found? It can be found in the very place where you have also given it entry. *

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About the Author

Dr. Joanne Cacciatore is an expert in traumatic loss and child death in families. She is also a bereaved parent, researcher, and professor at Arizona State University. Her work has been featured in major media sources such as People Magazine, The New York Times, Boston Globe, CNN, National Public Radio, and The Los Angeles Times. She can be reached through her website www.missfoundation.org.





TAPS VOLUNTEER

★ Charlene Miseli ★

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

Charlene Miseli is a military spouse, mother, and volunteer who has been helping TAPS for years. She refers to herself as a proud wife, daughter, sister, niece, and granddaughter of a family in which every member is married to, currently serving, or retired active duty. She understands the danger inherent in the military and has a heartfelt compassion for surviving families.

Charlene's first introduction to TAPS came when the organization provided support for one of her best friends from college whose fiancé was killed in Iraq in January 2004. Her friend was scheduled to be married in June of that year, and TAPS was the only organization that welcomed and supported her. Charlene was thrilled that there was a group for her friend that included all relationships. At the time the Miselis lived in Atlanta and began to support TAPS with workplace giving through the Combined Federal Campaign.

When Charlene moved to the DC area in 2010, she plugged into TAPS by joining the Run and Remember Team. "I decided to run for TAPS in the Army Ten Miler and that's when I met some of the staff in Washington DC," said Charlene.

A few weeks later Run and Remember Team Director Marie Campbell asked Charlene if she could assist in getting families of the fallen from the hotel to the starting point for the Marine Corps Marathon. Knowing her way around DC made Charlene the perfect choice. She also took charge of the runners' belongings and made sure they got them back at the end of the race.

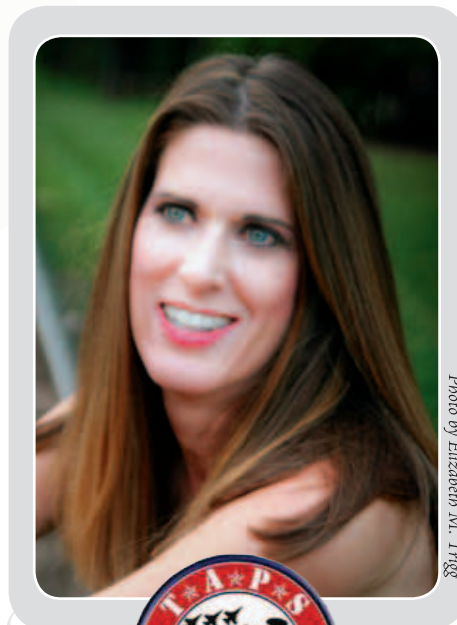


Photo by Elizabeth M. Trigg



Thank You Charlene!

Charlene lived in the DC area for two years and helped with Run and Remember events as well as recruiting other runners and raising money to support TAPS programs. But in February of 2012 she moved to Fort Hood, Texas, when her husband, Lieutenant Colonel Jason A. Miseli, became the commander of 1-7 Cavalry at Fort Hood. Charlene found a replacement volunteer in DC, so that families who attended the race events there would still be well cared for.

Now Charlene volunteers weekly in the TAPS Fort Hood office. It is from this office that all regional seminars are planned.

"Since she moved to Fort Hood she comes in every week," said Tina Saari, director of Survivor Seminar Programs and Military Installations Support. "Charlene makes the name tags and photo buttons that are sent around the country for all of our seminars and retreats. She has worked our Fort Hood events and when we need her, she works extra hours and recruits friends to come into the office and get the job done."

Giving a button to a family member and seeing that, for some, the sight of their loved one still takes their breath away is as meaningful to Charlene as watching families working through grief and using it to push them through an actual marathon.

"Knowing that this is an organization making a difference to so many every single day" is what keeps Charlene coming back, as well as understanding that each family member she meets has given so much. "I also love the gals in the Fort Hood office, and I love going in and seeing them each week," said Charlene.

"Mostly I wish I could convey to the families of TAPS that when I do something like make a button for a seminar, it matters to me," said Charlene. "Their family matters to me. Their lost loved one matters to me." ★

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



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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.



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NATIONAL
Military Survivor Seminar &
Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Memorial Day Weekend
May 24 to 27, 2013
Washington, DC



Photos, TAPS Archives