

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

T★A★P★S[®]

Comfort and Support Since 1994

MAGAZINE

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



VOLUME 18 • ISSUE 1

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

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

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

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



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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**



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

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

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

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



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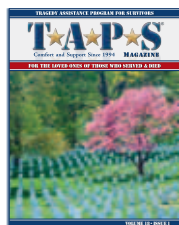
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COVER PHOTO BY
Robert Knudsen

Photo courtesy of Robert Knudsen from: A Living Treasure: Seasonal Photographs of Arlington National Cemetery, published by Potomac Books, Inc. www.potomacbooksinc.com



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. ✧



TAPS Resource Kit

Yesterday I received a wonderful box from TAPS. It came to me when I was at my weakest. My brother passed only three weeks ago, and it has been so very difficult on myself, our two sisters, and our parents. I am also an Army wife and live far from my family, so to receive your box made me feel not so alone. I look forward to getting very involved in your program in the near future. Thank you so much for what you do for families.

Jennifer Eilber, Kentucky
Surviving sister of
Sergeant James Lyons

TAPS Magazine

I really appreciate the past issues you sent me. They are especially comforting since I cannot get to a computer whenever I want. They are readily available at any time I have the need to find understanding, comfort, and support.

Lynda Browning, California
Surviving mom of
Sergeant David Arroyo

TAPS Thanksgiving Email Message

Thanks for the loving thoughts you have expressed and all the help and strength you have given me these past two years. May God bless you for all your work.

Mark H. Johnson, Colorado
Surviving father of
Sergeant David Johnson

National Seminar

2011 was a hard year for me, made so much easier by the love and concern of my TAPS family. My heart overflows with gratitude to you all. My 19 year old grandson was buried two days after Memorial Day in 2011. I feel a tremendous need to join my TAPS family for the 18th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar, Memorial Day weekend 2012. I owe TAPS a debt of gratitude for giving me continued support and an event of comfort, sharing the weekend with others who understand.

Hope Millan, California
Surviving grandmother of
PFC Ramon Mora, Jr.

TAPS Alaskan Retreat

When your husband, fiancé, or boyfriend dies, you feel alone. We walked into a state knowing no one. We spent a weekend with widows that we didn't know, but we loved. We did things we have always wanted to do, and we did things we didn't know we could do. We became stronger and we left with bonds that will never be forgotten. I didn't ask to be part of this family; I lost a lot to become part of it. But I am so grateful to have TAPS and these women.

Jennifer Hankins, California
Surviving fiancée of
Matthew Hicks

TAPS Magazine

This picture [Cover photo Fall 2011] caught my attention and captured my breath. It accurately depicts that TAPS is there for us during all times. They hold you while you cry. And they celebrate you when you find the strength to stand up, dust off, take all the love with you, and move forward.

Cindy Hooks Morrison, Florida
Surviving spouse of
Captain Franklin R. Hooks, II

Military Mentors

My Marines came back very humbled and in awe of the strength of the young people they were helping [Camp Pendleton Regional Good Grief Camp]. Their only question is when this will be held again so that they can volunteer.

SgtMaj W.C. Baldwin
Camp Pendleton, CA

We Are Family

My love for TAPS just continues to grow. It feels like a family to work with others that have been through the grief and loss process. The support and inspiration makes such a difference, and I am so very thankful to have found TAPS.

Meredith McMackin, Florida
Surviving mom of
Cpl. Julian McMackin Woodall



editor@taps.org

From the Peer Mentor Manager

Dear TAPS Family,

Spring is upon us and soon we will see the trees and flowers begin to blossom. We'll begin to see signs of new growth everywhere we look, and we will feel a noticeable difference between the seasons of winter and spring.

As I approach spring and the concept of new growth, I am immediately reminded of our team of TAPS peer mentors. As members of the TAPS family, mentors have experienced the loss of a precious loved one serving in the military. They have gone through the winter-like period in which nothing seems to blossom and life seems to stop. Now they find themselves in a season where life is more apparent and growth is not impossible.

TAPS peer mentors are survivors who are at least 18 months beyond their own loss. They have faced all of the firsts including the first anniversary of the death and the first holiday season without their loved one. When they feel they are at a place in their own grief journey to support another

survivor one-on-one, they complete a two part training process and volunteer to connect with a more newly bereaved survivor who has requested a mentor.

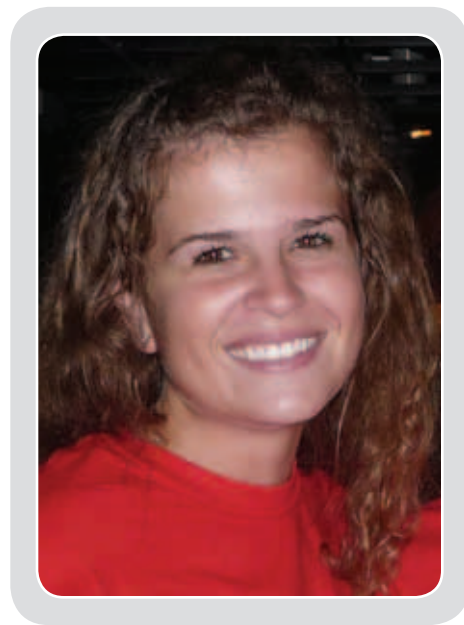
TAPS peer mentors are the embodiment of hope that each survivor who comes to TAPS seeks. They symbolize new life as they help guide newly bereaved survivors toward the path of remembering the love and celebrating the life of their loved one.

Could You Be A Mentor?

If you are interested in being a TAPS Peer Mentor, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I emotionally prepared to listen to another person's story without it reopening my own wounds?
- Have I reached a point in my own grief journey that being present for another survivor would further my own healing?
- Do I have the time in my schedule and the desire to build and nurture a relationship with a newly bereaved survivor?
- Would I be comfortable building and nurturing this peer relationship mostly over the phone and through email?

Above all, each peer mentor comes to TAPS in his or her own time. When the time is right for you, you can sign up for our peer mentor training. The two-fold training process includes online training as well as classroom training. The online training consists of eight parts covering topics like military grief and traumatic grief. A short exam follows. Classroom training goes hand in hand with the online training and covers additional topics like listening skills and appropriate communication. TAPS offers the in-person classroom instruction throughout the year at our Regional Survivor Seminars and annually at the National Military Survivor Seminar in Washington, DC.



Would You Like A Mentor?

Our peer support network is a circle of comfort, warmth, and understanding. If you would like to connect with another person who will reach out to you and offer companionship on this journey, you can request a TAPS peer mentor: someone who will listen and offer you their time, their experience, and their compassion. Mentors are matched one-on-one to new survivors based on a variety of factors related to their story and grief experience.

The ultimate goal of our Peer Support Network is to bring together survivors who have characteristics in common so that both survivors are comfortable and that it is a mutually healing connection. We also hope that these connections eventually blossom into lifelong friendships. *

Claire Hunter

★ Manager, Peer Mentor Program ★

**» FOR MORE INFO VISIT
www.taps.org or write to
info@taps.org**

Honor and Remember

By George Lutz ☆ Surviving father of Corporal George A. Lutz II

We've all heard the expression that freedom isn't free. That phrase became all too real to me on December 30, 2005. I got a knock on the door from two uniformed soldiers who spoke to me five simple words that changed my life forever: "We regret to inform you." My oldest son Tony had been killed the day before by a sniper's bullet while on patrol in Fallujah, Iraq.

The word "devastation" doesn't begin to describe the flood of emotion that moment brings to every family who hears those words and experiences the grieving that follows. My first thought when I heard them was that certainly they've come to the wrong house. Or maybe he was wounded and they just needed to tell me the details. But reality quickly set in and I knew I was never going to see Tony's face or hear his voice again. I wondered how I would continue to live. He was my best friend.

As I went through many levels of grief, I embarked on a journey of remembering. It began with a search of my house. Photographs, letters, emails, videotapes... I searched for anything that could take me to a happier time when Tony was alive. Fortunately, I had videotaped his life from when he was a child until he was a teenager, so I plowed through the closets to find and play the tapes. I later found a scrap of paper where he'd written out a grocery list and a couple of letters he'd actually hand written in basic training. Both finds meant the world to me. Of course, that process eventually came to an end because there were only so many drawers and so many closets to search.

Tony was 25 years old, married, and the father of two young children. He had made many friends through his work and social life and after he joined the Army in 2004.



CORPORAL GEORGE A. LUTZ II

I reached out to them for any pictures or stories they might be willing to share. I contacted those he trained, deployed, and served with, hoping to obtain some new nugget of remembrance. Perhaps they could add to my understanding of Tony's life as a soldier or tell me what happened that awful day.

In time, my journey took me in another direction. I began to think about the fact that Tony gave his life for his country, just like all of the other men and women who died in military service to America. That gave a new perspective to some things I

used to take for granted, as many of us do—things such as the freedoms we enjoy every day. Those freedoms truly come at a cost. They have been paid for with the blood of brave young people in conflicts dating back to the American Revolution. And that payment has left a permanent void in the lives of family members who must endure that loss forever.

As the months following Tony's death crawled by, I found myself searching for ways this country remembered his sacrifice. Of course, there are the many memorials that pay tribute to our fallen heroes in cities and towns throughout the USA. I saw lots of cars with "Support Our Troops" bumper stickers. On Memorial Day, many people took time to contemplate the price of freedom before firing up the backyard grill. And then there is my folded flag that covered his coffin and is now framed in a shadow box in my home.

Frankly, I found myself wrestling with the nagging, exasperating realization that most of our nation will never see those tributes. Then I thought, *It isn't enough! How do we get the attention of the entire country?* I didn't care how self-centered that feeling might seem to others. I felt that the families of the fallen deserved more.

As the war casualties continued to occur, I began attending military funerals in my area. My hope was to bring some measure of comfort to families like mine by reminding them that they weren't alone in their grief and that families all over America understood the terrible loss they were experiencing. Through various veterans' organizations, I was able to make contact with families who had lost loved ones from many generations, including the Gulf War, Vietnam, Korea, and even World War II.

As different as these conflicts were, there was a common plea from the family members who lost a son or daughter, father or mother, husband or wife, brother or sister. They had two requests for their fellow countrymen regarding their loved ones: please don't let their death be in vain and please don't let them be forgotten. It occurred to me that we needed a symbol that specifically honors and remembers the sacrifices throughout our history that have kept America strong and free.

As a Gold Star parent, I had received many cards and gifts, but I needed to move past my numbness. I needed to do something. I needed to give back. My thought was that public recognition would be a way to get this country to acknowledge and appreciate the sacrifice of our brave men and women and their families every day. I wondered, *Why not a flag?*

We are a nation that loves flags. In addition to our Stars and Stripes, states and cities have their own flags. Institutions of higher learning have individual flags. Every branch of the military has a flag, as do individual units in the Army and every ship in the Navy. Furthermore, every veteran's organization has a unique flag or symbol. Yet try as I might to find a specific symbol for those who died for the right to fly all of those others, I found nothing. That realization led me on a new journey to create such an emblem to

be flown in gratitude to every family whose loved one has died in military service.

On May 26, 2008, the Honor and Remember Flag was unveiled publicly. It was established to be a national public symbol of remembrance, recognizing all those who died while serving our country in the military or as a result of serving, regardless of the cause of death.

The symbolism represented on the flag is derived from various icons with military and universal significance:

★ The red field represents the blood spilled by brave men and women in the military throughout our history, who willingly gave their lives so that we all would remain free.

★ The blue star represents active service in the military. This symbol originated with World War I, but on this flag it signifies service through all generations from the American Revolution to present day.

★ The gold star superimposed on the blue star signifies the ultimate sacrifice of a warrior in active service who will not return home. Gold reflects the value of the life that was given.

★ The white border surrounding the gold star recognizes the purity of sacrifice. There is no greater price an American can pay than to give his or her life in service to our country.

★ The flame is a reminder of the eternal spirit that has departed this life yet burns on in the memory of all who knew and loved the fallen hero.

★ The folded flag signifies the final tribute to an individual life that was sacrificed and given to the nation.

★ The words "Honor and Remember" declare that we will always honor their selfless sacrifice and remember them individually by name.

Beyond working to establish the flag as an official symbol in all 50 states, the Honor and Remember organization seeks to present one personalized flag to each family that has lost a loved one while serving or as a result of serving. ★

»» The flag, along with pins, shirts, and hats are for sale on the Honor and Remember website. Donations and profits from sales go to furthering the national mission and to pay for the personalized flags presented to surviving families. For more information or to request a flag, visit:

www.honorandremember.org

Photos courtesy of George A. Lutz II



Pedaling Fast, Headed Nowhere

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

I was riding my new exercise bike this morning, making good on a new year's resolution, when I got to thinking. Here I am, pedaling fast and getting nowhere. It's hard work.

Riding an exercise bike is a lot like grieving. We seem to be pedaling fast and sometimes, it seems as if we are going nowhere. Grief just seems to become an endless ribbon of concrete, stretching far past my limits of endurance. It never seems to end, no matter how long I ride, no matter how hard I pedal.

There is always something in the way. Just when I think I have found the rhythm that just might work, grief hits me in another way. It catches me off guard and throws me a curve I wasn't expecting. Sometimes I grow weary of the journey and simply wish for whatever the world calls "closure."

When will grief end or does it just keep on keeping on?

Even though the calendar says it's nearly spring, I don't feel very spring-like inside. The scene I'm passing every day on my exercise bike isn't changing very fast, and I think I might be getting depressed. I don't want to pedal to *nowhere* anymore.

So many people get upset when we dare express that sentiment. They can't stand to see us glum! It's as if our emotional state is a direct result of their actions and an insult to their intentions. There are some real reasons for my gloom—some are weather-related, some are circumstance-related, and some are just plain human-related.

Depressed people are not fun. We don't sparkle at dinner parties. We don't radiate charm and warmth. We are not good conversationalists, and we tend to eat more or less than we

should. We are not the first choice for an evening's companionship.

Sometimes we stare at the television for long periods of time without really seeing the program; sometimes we are unable to follow a conversation. Sometimes we seem distracted. Sometimes we cannot concentrate, and we forget who we are or where we put the car keys. Sometimes we spend hours looking through scrapbooks and use inordinate amounts of tissue.

But whatever else we may be, we are functioning through this situational depression (as opposed to a clinical depression with accompanying chemical changes in the brain). And although it looks and feels uncomfortable, a period of depression during the journey through grief is as normal and natural as the periods of anger, guilt, fear, and hurt. It's just that depression is such a difficult emotional state and one that is hard to define and even harder to endure.

➡ Riding an exercise bike is a lot like grieving. We seem to be pedaling fast and sometimes, it seems as if we are going nowhere.



► We are working our way through our grief, not looking to get over it. Keep pedaling. Hope is on its way.

Grieving people often become the target for loving and concerned family and friends who simply cannot stand to see us down. We become their mission. They become almost possessed with the task of lifting us up out of the gloom. Plans are made—we must not be left alone; we must be cheered up, entertained, helped to snap out of it. We do appreciate the kind and loving gestures of concern. But, perhaps if we all understood that a certain amount of depression is appropriate, and maybe even necessary to the grief process, then we could all relax a bit about this mysterious emotional state.

Depression that is a part of the journey of grief is truly a natural and normal part of the process. One day, the grieving person realizes that even the pain of grief has disappeared. Where once there existed a searing pain somewhere near the heart, now there is *nothing*. Memories that used to bring tears and tightness to the throat now don't even float past the mind. It is as if we have fallen into a vast nothingness, a void where not only have the painful feelings left, but we have seemingly lost the good memories as well.

We begin to believe we have lost the sound of our loved one's voice, the special scent that spoke his name. We think we have lost the visual pictures we carry with us, and we cannot remember everything we once thought we knew about our loved one. Gone are not only the painful thoughts, but those thoughts that used to bring us comfort, too. We are cast into the gloom of emptiness—truly a most difficult part of grief!

Yet I have learned that this vast emptiness is really quite a "busy" time for those of us who are struggling through grief. Though we may appear to be quite listless and may even seem to hibernate for a time, this period of situational depression has its purposes as clearly as do the other emotions of grief.

If we could think of this depressive period as a gathering time, perhaps it would be easier to understand. When we tumble into the nothingness of grief, we really are busy searching for clues to the question of "Who am I now?"

When we have lost the framework of our personal identification, we must search for new identities, and part of the grieving process is just such a search. Am I still a mother if there is no one to tuck in at night? Am I still a dad if there is no one to loan the car keys to? Am I still a husband or wife if there is no one sleeping in the other half of the bed? Am I still a sister, a brother, a friend...? Who am I now that my loved one has died?

It is a painful yet necessary question, and during this time, we become busy picking up the scattered pieces of our self-identity. We are gathering in all the pieces and trying to create a new picture of ourselves, a new identity, a new "me."

It is an important and solitary job. No one can help us create the new identity we must find in order to continue our journey. We must each take the steps to seek out a new and different us—not necessarily a stronger or better person than we were, but definitely a different person than we were before our loved one died.

So, if you begin to feel grief's gloom creep inside you, or you begin to notice a growing silence and a slowness to your walk, acknowledge the emotion and be gentle in your expectations.

Depression that is a part of grief can become a more serious condition if not acknowledged, understood, and addressed. If the depression seems to be totally debilitating or lasts far longer than even you are comfortable with, or if it seems to include thoughts of self-destruction rather than self-identification, further assistance may be required.



But first, explore the gloom. Be patient with yourself, and remember that this may be the gathering time for you as you travel through grief. Maybe this resting and gathering time will result in brighter blooms come spring. Maybe it's okay to wonder "Who am I now?" and begin to search for new ways to answer.

Don't lose hope just because you seem to be pedaling hard and spinning your wheels. If you will just keep pedaling, you will eventually find the right direction. We are working our way through our grief, not looking to get over it. Keep pedaling. Hope is on its way. *

About the Author



Darcie Sims is a bereaved parent and child, long time friend and keynote speaker for TAPS, author, thanatologist, pastoral bereavement specialist, licensed psychotherapist, and president and co-founder of GRIEF, Inc. For more information visit: www.griefinc.com



How Writing Helped Me Heal

By Julie Schrock ☆ Surviving mom of Corporal Max Donahue



*Missing Max:
Finding Hope After My Marine Son's Death*

Had I any previous vision of that title, I would have been overcome with fear. And now, knowing that I authored such a book, I'm just overcome.

On August 4, 2010, we received word that our son, Marine Corporal Max Donahue, had been hit by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). He was serving as a working dog handler in Afghanistan. Max lost both legs and his right arm in the explosion, and two days later he succumbed to his wounds.

Writing was the outlet that forced me to take the time to collect my thoughts and let the anxiousness and anger flow out of my fingers and onto the page.



The days and months that followed would now be a murky memory had I not started writing down the events. My capacity to mentally retain anything was greatly diminished as I slogged through the days of funeral planning, burial, and aftermath.

At the time of Max's death I worked as an insurance broker. Since my job required the skill to analyze information and make decisions, I felt I had to pull back from work. Any ability to concentrate or recall data was gone. That's when the writing began. It gave a sense of purpose to my day; a reason to get out of bed and into the world.

Initially, I wanted to have a record to share with my other son Ryan and his future children. They would never know the powerful presence of their Uncle Max, and writing would be one way to acquaint them with him.

But there was more going on than just wanting to document Max's story for his future nephews and/or nieces. I began to realize that, even though I was experiencing the heart-wrenching, gut-punching grief

that comes with the loss of a child, I was actually getting through those days in a way that was healthier than I would ever have imagined. What was it that was propelling me forward instead of dragging me under?

I started reflecting on the components that contributed to my being what I call "okay-plus." Okay-plus is a little better than "just okay" which, given the circumstances, I thought was very good! The major factors (in addition to my writing) that allowed me to be okay-plus were my faith, family, and friends. I realize that's a "trifecta formula" and not everyone has those three resources active in their lives. But what is available to most everyone is the ability to write. No one else is needed for that.

Writing was the outlet that forced me to take the time to collect my thoughts and let the anxiousness and anger flow out of my fingers and onto the page. I had control over what I wrote and how I wrote during a time that was otherwise out of control. The process of writing provided needed relief.

Since I didn't feel capable of working, the writing gave me something to focus on; something to give meaning to a day that otherwise could have easily been spent crying in bed. It was important for me to get out, be seen, and let people around me know that I was functioning, that I was mourning but still moving. It was important for me to think it as well!

The process of writing was wonderfully isolating. The physical act of documenting a personal story such as mine did not require anyone else's input or talents. It was just me, my recollection, my computer, and my tears! When the tears started flowing I would just shut the door and let my fingers fly.

Writing also helped alleviate my fear of forgetting events and emotions surrounding those days. By recalling the moments while they were still fresh in my mind, especially knowing how unreliable my memory was,

I was able to find comfort in knowing that I had an accurate and reliable record to read and remember. I did not want to forget what took place or the order in which those events occurred.

As I wrote, there were times when I felt more like a bystander to the situations being described instead of one of the main characters. Writing allowed me, in a way, to separate myself from real life and let me focus on this “other mother” and her Marine son. I think it blessed me with brief periods of time when all “this” wasn’t happening to me, it was just part of a story that I was documenting. Unfortunately, this story is non-fiction. Had it been fiction, the ending would have played out very differently!

I’m often asked if the process of writing the book was therapeutic. I don’t think I realized it at the time, but it was much more healing than I knew, especially when I was in the throes of writing it. My mental state was very fragile at the time. Now I look



back and can see how the writing gave me something to concentrate on in addition to my grief. It gave me the space to privately pour out my emotions without family and friends being witness to my heartache.

Writing also forced me to take the time to confront the reality of all that was happening inside me: what was I feeling, who was I blaming, where could I dump the unfairness of it all? Taking pen to paper or actually pounding it out on the computer made me read thoughts that I might have otherwise buried. Thoughts that, left unattended, could have grown and overwhelmed what was left of my spirit.

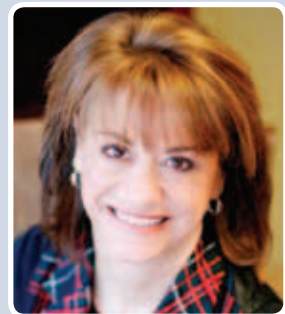
And then, there was the moment I now see as a turning point in my grief. It happened when I wrote the words that I wanted Max to read, as if he were the only audience. I wanted him to be as proud of me as I was of him. I wanted him to see that the love I have for him surpassed even his death and

I wanted him to see that the love I have for him surpassed even his death and that I would live a life that would honor him and not destroy me. That moment came while writing, and I’m grateful for it.

that I would live a life that would honor him and not destroy me. That moment came while writing, and I’m grateful for it.

Am I glad I wrote the book? Yes. Would I suggest it to others? Absolutely. You don’t have to take it to the extent of publishing a book, but there are very few exercises that are as available and eye-opening as writing. And anything that helps a person deal with a struggle as personal as grief over a lost loved one is certainly worth a try. ★

About the Author



Julie Burget Schrock is the author of *Missing Max: Finding Hope After My Marine Son’s Death*. She writes of moving through the grieving process and, through her faith and the love of family and friends, beginning the healing process and going forward with her life. To read an excerpt or to order copies of the book go to www.MissingMax2011.com.

Julie can be emailed at MissingMax2011@gmail.com.



Photo courtesy of Julie Schrock

Expressing Your Grief Healing Through Writing

By Stephanie Frogge, MTS

Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break. ~William Shakespeare

Going public—sharing one's letters, poems, or other written thoughts—is an intensely personal and potentially risky experience. But not all writing has to be widely read to be valuable. Keeping a diary or writing a letter that no one but you will ever read can have a significant positive impact on the healing journey following the traumatic death of a loved one.

The idea of writing as a positive aid to healing is not a new one, but recent research has helped to confirm its value. There is an abundance of scientific evidence that suggests a link between therapeutic writing and the successful management of traumatic experiences. Less clear is exactly why scriptotherapy (the fancy word for therapeutic writing) benefits those who practice it.

Mental health experts have suggested a variety of reasons why writing may be so helpful. One theory suggests that writing may bring troubling issues from the subconscious to the conscious enabling us to manage them better. Others suggest that by labeling and describing events the writer is able to gain more control over them.

As one TAPS survivor described it, writing “helped me to catalog and classify the pain; not that it took the pain away, but it was my way of wrestling it to the ground.”

Yet another explanation for the value of therapeutic writing lies in the concept of reframing—looking at an issue or problem in another way or from another angle. Just the experience of writing about a problem, according to some researchers, provides a different point of view from talking about the problem. Using her computer's cut and paste features, one survivor found writing to be more effective than thinking or talking about her feelings. “Writing was the only way to get it all out, and by using the computer, I was also able to arrange and rearrange my thoughts to make them more coherent.”

Some proponents of scriptotherapy affirm something many of us know first-hand: the repression of grief and trauma can actually harm the body. The opposite of repression is expression, and by expressing ourselves through writing, we may actually be helping ourselves physically. Some very interesting research on therapeutic writing has noted that writing before bedtime may serve as a sleep aid for some people.

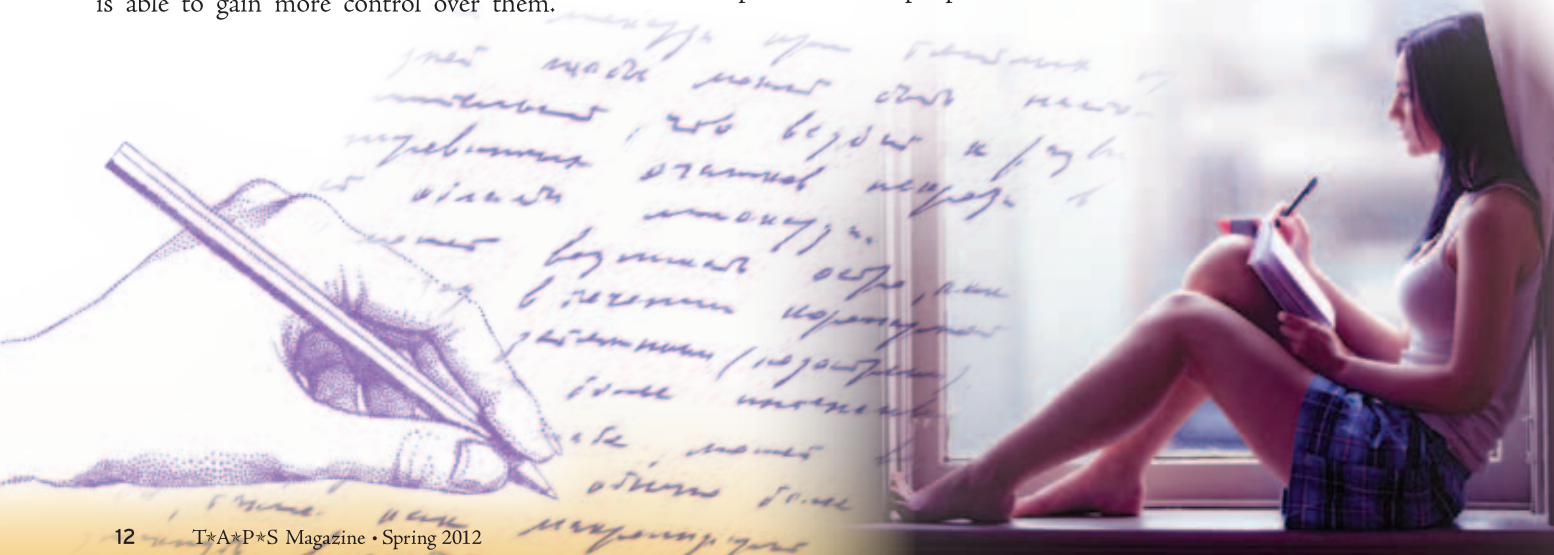
◆ Getting Started ◆

Unlike the work of professionals, our writing does not have to be good to be good for us. Since no one is going to see it except you, forget about spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The following are some writing ideas that may help you get started if writing is not something that comes easily.

One caution, however: Therapeutic writing can be enormously helpful but does not replace the skill and training of a professional trauma specialist. Whether or not you choose to incorporate your therapeutic writing into your work with a good counselor is between the two of you, but please don't let any of the following ideas serve as a replacement for other types of care you need.

◆ Letter Writing ◆

Write a letter to your loved one telling him or her how much you miss them. Write a letter to the president describing to the best of your knowledge exactly how your loved one died. Write a letter to the actor you think would do the best job



portraying your loved one in a movie of their life. Remember, you're not going to send the letter so don't hold back.

Following her son's death in a helicopter crash, one mother wrote a letter to introduce her deceased grandmother to her son. "My grandma never knew my son—she died years before he was born—but it was important for me to believe that they were meeting in heaven. I know it sounds crazy, but it really helped me, and it was the first thing I did that focused on his life rather than his death."

◆ Poetry and Psalms ◆

Poetry, perhaps because of the creative element involved, is believed to be especially suited for tapping into the subconscious. While not everyone can sit down and dash off publishable poetry, the following are a couple of ideas to help you put pen to paper. First of all, forget about trying to make everything rhyme; this is a free verse experience. Start with a feeling word such as "sadness" or "devastation" or "horror," and explain why it means something to you. Try an alphabet poem. Write each letter of the alphabet down the side of your paper, then start writing.

A memory of my

Boy is one that I

Cherish. I hold it close and

Dare others to

Explain "why."

Keep creating until you've used all the letters.

Psalm writing offers another structured way of creating poetry and incorporates a conversation with God. A full one-third of psalms are considered lament psalms—poems of extraordinary grief and rage. Lament psalms follow a specific formula: an address to God, the complaint, an affirmation of trust, a petition or request for intervention, and finally, a blessing. Try writing your own psalm. Just as the psalmists did, be specific in your complaint. Make it as graphic as you are comfortable with. If you

are unable to bless God, simply acknowledge that you are not able to do so at this time.

◆ Journal Writing ◆

The words "journal" and "journey" come from the same root word that means "day." Our grief journeys are characterized by constant change—some days better, some worse, some familiar, some utterly unexpected. I encourage you to record that journey in some form. No matter how long you've been on this road, make this the day you begin to write.

Putting our feelings on paper and then going back and reading the words shifts our experience with the trauma to one of thinking about it instead of just feeling about it. When we are able to think about and study something we are able to process it in a different way.

◆ Capturing Memories ◆

Although most of us will never be published, making a point to capture special memories and stories not only serves as a therapeutic writing technique but also reassures us that important memories will not be forgotten. "How we met" stories are almost always significant to surviving spouses, and "what he/she was like as a child" are a rich source for siblings and parents. Start jotting those special memories down and you won't have to worry about forgetting.

◆ Responding to Quotes ◆

Although there are no "rules" in therapeutic writing, there are still some people who aren't confident about their writing or find it hard to just begin. A useful technique for the "writing-challenged" among us is to react to quotes about a particular topic. Although quotes are easy to find on the internet, here are some you might want to try:

**Death leaves a heartache no one can heal;
love leaves a memory no one can steal.**
~Irish headstone

**A hero is no braver than an ordinary man,
but he is braver five minutes longer.**
~Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Given a choice between grief and nothing,
I'd choose grief.** ~William Faulkner

◆ A Final Thought ◆

One consistent theme among those who shared their own stories about therapeutic writing was the sensation that their loved one "knew" what had been written. We know that writing to our deceased loved ones can be cathartic but perhaps there is value in the belief that somehow our loved ones are able to receive the messages that come from our deepest places and represent our profoundest feelings.

Poet Sheila Bender says that we write because something inside us says we must and we can no longer ignore that voice. Whether you pick up pen or put fingers to a keyboard, don't ignore that voice anymore. Begin to write! *

About the Author



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



You Doin' OK?

By Barb Christie ★ Surviving spouse of Colonel Rick Christie

It was an uncharacteristically beautiful, blue-sky, warm day in Brussels, February 2001, as I surveyed the back yard of our home. Our beloved chocolate Lab, Carrie, was sniffing around the grass, and my Marine husband was attending to household tasks.

I was the luckiest woman in the world—our sons were both out of college and gainfully employed, we were “livin’ the dream” in the middle of Europe, and I was convinced I had absolutely the most loving and attentive husband in the world! Yet a wave of foreboding swept over me, and tears began to run down my face. I was afraid, and I didn’t know why.

Within the next four months, my husband’s step-father died, my work-out buddy at the gym was murdered, our niece’s fiancé was killed in a motorcycle accident, my father passed away; and on top of everything else, Rick’s constant companion, our Carrie, was diagnosed with cancer and also died. We couldn’t seem to catch a break.

That fall, Rick experienced a series of aggravating minor health issues. By early spring, we were making frequent trips to Landstuhl Army Hospital trying to get all his inconvenient little maladies sorted out. Following an all-day exhaustive battery of

tests, however, we got the call: “You have a mass in your abdomen. I’m sorry, but it has all the earmarks of being malignant.”

The words hit us like a snow shovel across our faces. Rick was stoic, calm, and in control. I disintegrated. All night I alternated between clutching him and throwing up, afraid to sleep, unwilling to miss a single precious minute with him. How many more would there be?

We had suddenly been thrown into an overwhelming, all-encompassing, and terrifying Great Unknown. The world was upside down, but Rick took me by the shoulders and firmly declared, “Three rules! We’ll cross no bridge before we come to it; we’ll make all decisions together; and we’re going to beat this thing! Understand?”

APRIL 19TH: “Last night, Rick was diagnosed with cancer...” I wrote in an email to our friends and family. It would be the first of many such emails.

Two days later, we arrived at Bethesda Naval Hospital—dirty dishes left in the sink, no time to say good-bye to anyone, our worldly possessions left behind for friends to pack up and ship.

After weeks of tests, we finally had a label and a plan. Rick had adrenal cortical cancer—

a cancer that strikes only one in two million, carrying with it an average life expectancy of two months. The combination of symptoms he’d been experiencing over the previous eight months pointed directly to this diagnosis, if only someone had put it all together. The plan was to attack it surgically the following week, and we moved to Walter Reed Hospital.

MAY 14TH: “Rick is in stable condition after 14 hours of surgery and 50 units of blood. The tumor was described as roughly the size of a basketball...”

Hospitals, surgeries, pain, prayerful hope, and demoralizing disappointment dominated our lives over the next seven months. Cancer cells made their way throughout his body in an unrelenting march, growing new tumors in his lungs, spine, and blood vessels. Each time he survived another major surgery (six, in all) or acute, life-threatening crisis (four), hopes soared! Yet, if there was as little as a one percent risk of something going wrong, it did. Throughout it all, Rick retained his unique sense of humor—and my mass update emails to friends reflected his optimism.

In early fall, Rick had been transferred to Mount Sinai Hospital in New York under the care of a world-renowned neurologic

We had suddenly been thrown into an overwhelming, all-encompassing, and terrifying Great Unknown. The world was upside down.



oncologist. It was here he underwent his last three surgeries. We'd hoped to be home in time for Christmas, but his wounds refused to heal. Despite it all, at some point each day, Rick would ask, "You doin' okay?"

In mid-January, Rick's doctors called me into a small conference room. They had done all they could do for my soul mate. It was time to go home. We bid a tearful good-bye and headed south. As the day wore on, I sensed something was wrong, but we waited until arriving at Walter Reed (where I needed to drop off medical records) for him to get out and stretch inside the warm hospital.

A passing doctor insisted that Rick go to the ER and get his vitals checked. Really? We were only 45 minutes from home! But Rick complied, and all was not well. They were adamant that he spend the night. As night crept into early morning, a sudden flurry of activity erupted around Rick's bed. I could barely see him for all the medical personnel. One doctor was straddling his body, rhythmically pounding on his chest, and imploring, "Colonel! Can you hear me? Come on, now, stay with us!" How could this be? We were almost home! I experienced tunnel vision as my peripheral field narrowed.

Miraculously, Rick's heart began beating, and he took a breath. Moved to CCU, he was in and out of consciousness over the next ten days. Two very special Marine Corps generals came to his bedside, pinned two medals on his hospital gown, and retired him from active duty. It's referred to as "medical retirement, death imminent." But he was aware of none of it.

FEBRUARY 5TH: "Today, we finally made it back to our quarters in Quantico...but under hospice care. We have a hospital room set up in an airy corner of our quarters..."

I stayed with Rick 24 hours a day, except to shower and change clothes. Each time he came around or awoke from a nap, he'd ask me, "You doin' okay?"

On February 20th, he'd been out of it all day until Quantico's commanding general stopped by to see him, Rick sat up ramrod straight in the bed and, to our amazement, clearly said, "Good evening, General." A Marine to the end...

FEBRUARY 21ST: "Rick peacefully passed from this life today..."

It was ten months, to the day, from the first time we walked into Bethesda Naval Hospital. I remember looking into the mirror and thinking, "So this is what a widow looks like . . ."

How could this possibly have happened? Each time over the past ten months, when the thought of Rick not making it dared to enter my mind, I had pushed it back. No! Not possible! Not only could I not bear the thought of losing him, but more importantly, I never wanted him to think I'd given up—not for a nanosecond.

At one point, Rick had said to me, "If this doesn't turn out the way we want it to, I want you to be happy." My answer to him was, "I'll be just as happy as you would be

if the situation were reversed." I'd made my point, and neither one of us ever broached the subject again.

In the end, it was the survivor's guilt I found most difficult to deal with. Why Rick? Why not me? He had so much to offer: the family needed him, the Marine Corps needed him, his country needed him. Sometimes, the reasons are not ours to know in this life.

I'm sure I was told about TAPS in those early days but it took several years before I came across the brochure and decided to give the national seminar a look-see. What a contrast to the community grief groups I had tried, none of which I'd found helpful. TAPS was exactly what I needed, and I credit the organization with giving me a significant boost in effectively dealing with my "new normal."

Loss through cancer presents its own brand of pain. Sometimes it's quick; sometimes it's prolonged; every time it rips your heart out while taunting you with hope; and never is it a warrior's death—not in the traditional sense, anyway.

But it is the way Rick lived his life and faced his illness—with unending faith, optimism, humor, dignity, and even professionalism—that I carry with me. Every day I try to live my life in a manner worthy of the love of this exceptional human being.

Every day I try to live my life in a manner worthy of the love of this exceptional human being. And that's really what binds all of us military survivors together, isn't it?

And that's really what binds all of us military survivors together, isn't it?

As for me . . . yeah, I'm doin' okay. *



.....
»»» This is an abridged version of Barb's article. To read the entire article, go to www.taps.org and click on TAPS Magazine.



Friends of T★A★P★S

Prudential Financial, Inc.

By Ami Neiberger-Miller, APR ★ TAPS Public Affairs Officer

Prudential Financial, Inc. will contribute \$6.2 million in grant money over the next two years to 10 nonprofit groups that help U.S. military veterans and their families. Of the \$6.2 million, TAPS is the recipient of a \$1.62 million gift to support services and programs helping the families of our fallen military. It is the largest single gift by a corporation to the nonprofit organization in its 17-year history.

Lori High, president of Prudential Group Insurance and executive sponsor of Prudential's Veterans Initiative said, "Our contributions support nonprofit organizations that provide not just professional development but also a broad mix of services veterans critically need."

From the donation, \$1.2 million will support evidence-based programs including the TAPS survivor care support team, casework assistance, community based grief support, grief and trauma resources, local area support groups, and the TAPS 24/7 helpline.

"When someone calls TAPS and reaches out for support, they are talking to a member of our team trained in bereavement support who is also a bereaved military family member," said Bonnie Carroll, founder and president of TAPS. "We fill a need that is most appropriately met by peer professionals."

A critical part of the donation will support the 800-959-TAPS (8277) Helpline which is open and available 24 hours a day 365 days a year providing comfort and care from peer professionals. Approximately \$400,000 from the donation will be used for a



This funding from Prudential Financial will help TAPS further benchmark standards in care for military survivors and will provide comfort to many who are not sure they can make it through the night. ~ Bonnie Carroll

partnership between TAPS and the University Behavioral HealthCare at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey to create the nation's first peer professional helpline for surviving military families and friends.

While TAPS has had a call center in continuous operation since October 1994, the number of calls and the acute nature of the crises facing surviving families have increased dramatically in the last year. The TAPS Call Center received 10,864 phone calls from survivors in 2010, and saw a 24 percent increase through November 2011.

More than 80% of deaths in the U.S. military in 2010 were traumatic, unexpected, and violent in nature. The families left behind must cope with grief, insomnia, short-term memory loss, and depression. TAPS is there to help families find the support they need, and the funding from Prudential Financial, Inc. will ensure that support services are in place and sustainable.

"The critical situation with surviving families makes it imperative that we increase

capacity for the TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline," said Carroll. "This funding from Prudential Financial, will help TAPS further benchmark standards in care for military survivors, and will provide comfort to many who are not sure they can make it through the night."

As demand for TAPS services has increased over the last ten years, more than 15,000 survivors have contacted TAPS seeking care and support. Financial needs of the organization have likewise increased. Over the next five to ten years, Carroll sees TAPS growing, becoming stronger,

and providing enhanced services. And she believes that donors like Prudential Financial, Inc. will continue to help TAPS and honor the families who have sacrificed for freedom.

Supported entirely by the generosity of the American people, TAPS receives no government funds and efficiently uses financial donations to help anyone grieving the death of a loved one serving in the military. TAPS raises its annual budget of \$4.9 million each year through contributions, grants, and fundraising. For excellence in financial management, TAPS has received a seal of approval from the Independent Charities of America.

"As we have reached out to America and explained the needs, companies, individuals, and foundations are stepping up to help us meet those needs," said Carroll. "We are so grateful to Prudential for their care and support for the families of America's fallen military heroes. Their donation will make a critical difference and improve quality of care for survivors."



You are cordially invited to attend
T*AP*S 18th Annual

**NATIONAL
 Military Survivor Seminar &
 Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors**

Memorial Day Weekend

May 25 to 28, 2012

Washington, DC

Please join us in the 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™



2012 National Military Survivor Seminar
& Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Please Join us

Please join us for our 18th year of bringing survivors and caregivers together to “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 traumatic 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 it is your first visit 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 for Young Survivors 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 to us as we face each new day and take each new step in our own personal journey 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 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 24, 2012. 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 their own age who have experienced a similar loss. Childcare is offered for those under four years old.

Photos, TAPS Archives



Register Online at
WWW.TAPS.ORG



2012 National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors



Register Now

Register now to attend TAPS 18th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. Seminar registration closes May 7, 2012. Camp registration closes May 7, 2012 OR when camp registrants exceed 450 children. Don't wait until it's too late!

★ LOGISTICS ★

- All events and workshops for the 2012 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 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.
- To make your hotel reservations visit www.taps.org and click on the seminar button. Sign up as soon as possible to get our special conference rate of \$125.00 per night.
- 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 clock radio, TV, telephone, 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. Deadline for the flight assistance program is April 1, 2012.
- 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. For more information call TAPS at 800-959-TAPS(8277).
- Events begin with registration on Friday morning, so plan to arrive before noon on Friday, May 25 for attendance at the opening session. Departures should be scheduled after 3 p.m. on Monday, May 28, 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 27, after our last session ends at 4 p.m. *

Go to www.taps.org and click on National Survivor Seminar to register today.





Memorandums of Agreement

Partnering with the Marines, Navy, and Air Force

Since our founding in 1994, TAPS has forged working relationships with the casualty offices of the various branches of the military. In February 2010, TAPS entered into a formal Memorandum of Agreement with the United States Marine Corps. This document gave a more defined path

for support to be delivered by TAPS to next of kin following the death of a service member, ensuring that families are given the opportunity to fully connect to grief support services and resources.

After a casualty, family members are given the opportunity to release their contact information directly to TAPS so they can begin to receive immediate and long-term support services. If consent is given, the Marine Corps shares information with TAPS, and immediate outreach is made to the families. The TAPS Survivor Resource Kit is mailed, which includes general grief information and materials, an outline of TAPS services, and other items, including a handwritten, personal note.



TAPS IS THE CLOSING LINK THAT WE'VE BEEN MISSING TO HAVE OUR COMPLETE CHAIN OF CASUALTY CARE

~Commander Kevin Sutton ★ Navy Casualty and Mortuary Affairs acting director

In a few weeks, TAPS makes a personal phone call to the family, offering care and connection to services.

In May 2011, TAPS signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the US Navy, paving the way for surviving Navy families to have immediate access to grief support and connection to other survivors. Bonnie Carroll, TAPS founder, stated, "We have had the opportunity to pilot and prove what works best, how families respond to the support offered, and how it works most efficiently for the Casualty Assistance Calls Officer to connect with the family. I think the Navy will benefit now by benchmarking that proven protocol."

With these agreements, TAPS becomes a true partner with the casualty branches in reaching out and providing support and information to grieving families. These partnerships bring families together with TAPS early in the grief process, connecting them with resources and information to help them cope with their loss. They also can take comfort in knowing that support will be there for as long as they need it.

"TAPS is the closing link that we've been missing to have our complete chain of casualty care," said Commander Kevin Sutton, Navy Casualty and Mortuary Affairs acting director. "My office provides immediate assistance to families, financial benefits, travel to funerals, that sort of thing. But unfortunately once the benefits process is done, we're not equipped or manned to do long-term care for the families and that we're getting now, courtesy of TAPS."

TAPS is currently in the process of implementing a Memorandum of Agreement with the Air Force, signed in October 2011, and is in preliminary discussion with the National Guard. These expansions of outreach will ensure that survivors are aware of vital support services as early as possible.

Through gentle personal contact, TAPS is able to share information and provide compassionate care directly to survivors with greater speed. Survivors, through the partnership between TAPS and the service casualty offices, learn there is a network of support and gain comfort in knowing they are not alone. ★



Sibling Survivors of Suicide

By Michelle, Linn-Gust, PhD

Sibling survivors are often called the forgotten mourners. When a sibling dies, those siblings left behind, no matter their ages, are considered secondary mourners to the parents and/or the spouse and children of the loved one who died. For those siblings still living at home, they will “lose” their parents for some time as the parents grieve the death of the deceased child. Parents can become so engrossed in their grief that they forget their living children still need reassurance that they are loved and wanted.

*When a sibling dies,
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one who died.*



Because of the suicide, the surviving siblings' roles in the family are altered. They might feel the need to parent their parents or protect them from anything else happening. The opposite could also happen; the parents could try to shield the living children, afraid of losing them, too.

People forget the importance of siblings in our lives. Listed below are some characteristics of the sibling bond:

★ It's the longest relationship we'll have in our lives. We are typically only a few years apart in age. We usually know them longer than our parents, spouses and children.

★ We witness more life events and life changes with our siblings than anyone else.

★ We share a sense of family, belonging, and culture.

★ They teach us how to function in society and communicate with others.

★ The time spent together in our early years is greater than the time spent with our parents.

It is estimated that 80 percent of children in the United States and Europe grow up with siblings. By approximating 1.85 children in each U.S. Household (using U.S. Census statistics) and 31,000 suicides per year,

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 psychiatric 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.

As psychologists Bob Baugher and Jack Jordan explain in *After Suicide Loss: Coping with Your Grief*, “Medical research is also demonstrating that major psychiatric disorders involve changes in the functioning of the brain that can severely alter the thinking, mood, and behavior of someone suffering from the disorder. This means that while stress, social problems, and other environmental factors can contribute to the development of a psychiatric disorder, the illness produces biological changes in the individual that create the emotional and physical pain (depression, inability to take pleasure in things, hopelessness, etc.) which contribute to almost all suicides.”

› 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

then 24,800 people become sibling survivors of suicide yearly. That means that in the past 25 years, at least 620,000 Americans became sibling survivors of suicide.

Through the life span, losing our sibling to suicide sets up complicated grief. As suicide grief is already difficult, adding in the factors relating to sibling loss reminds us of the uniqueness of the sibling bond.

Childhood: Much of children's reactions to a sibling suicide will relate to their view of death. Some people believe children don't grieve. That's not true. Children have shorter attention spans so their grief will appear in brief periods.

The grief might also manifest itself as physical pain (stomach aches, headaches, etc.) because children have underdeveloped coping skills and might not know how to express their feelings.

Adolescence: At this time, the siblings are trying to find their role in society. Each day they look in the mirror, they aren't sure who they see because they are changing so rapidly. They believe they are immortal because they don't face much death at this age. Also, adolescents are trying to separate themselves from their families but the suicide death will throw a loop in that. They will struggle with pulling away and still wanting to be hugged by their parents. At school, they might deny their grief feelings because it's easier to fit in that way.

Young Adulthood: During our early 20s to mid-40s, we continue to set our identities and carve out our lives and careers. We have lots of hope and if we lose our sibling at this time, we learn the hard way that life does not hold unlimited promises. We also experience anger that our sibling is not there for important life events like

graduations, marriages and the births of our children.

Middle Adulthood: In our mid-40s to 50s, our sacrifices become rewards as we slow down to enjoy what we have worked hard for. If our sibling dies by suicide, we might start questioning our definition of happiness and wondering if we completed what we really wanted out of life. At this time, our parents might die. If we also lose our sibling to suicide and there were unresolved issues (like disagreeing on the care of a now deceased parent, etc.), we will have to find a way to work through them alone.

Late Adulthood:

After we reach our 60s, our sibling might be the only family member alive with whom we can share memories of early life. If we lose our sibling to suicide, it will either enhance the feeling that our time to die is coming or we

might not grieve because we believe we are going to die soon, too.

Typically, siblings will carry this loss through a large portion of life. We will want a way to memorialize our sibling. No one ever gets over a death; it becomes a part of us and we take it with us throughout life. Some ways we can remember our siblings include involvement in the Lifekeeper Faces of Suicide quilts, writing about our loved one, or getting involved with suicide prevention. There are many possibilities and each of us will come up with what we want to do when we are ready. *

› This article first appeared on Legacy Connect, an online grief support community. For more information, articles, and resources, go to at www.connect.legacy.com.

*Through the life span,
losing our sibling to suicide
sets up complicated grief.
As suicide grief is already
difficult, adding in the
factors relating to
sibling loss reminds us
of the uniqueness of
the sibling bond.*



About the Author



Michelle Linn-Gust, PhD, is an international speaker and author on suicide prevention and postvention issues. A survivor of her younger sister's suicide, she is the author of *Do They Have Bad Days in Heaven? Surviving the Suicide Loss of a Sibling* and *Ginger's Gift: Hope and Healing Through Dog Companionship*. She is the president-elect of the American Association of Suicidology. To learn more about Michelle and coping with a loved one's suicide, visit:

www.siblingsurvivors.com &
www.bereavedbysuicide.com



The Spiritual Path to Healing

Part 1 ☆ By Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

EDITOR'S NOTE: The death of a loved one challenges us in many areas including our religious and spiritual beliefs. While spirituality and religious tradition help many who are grieving, TAPS does not endorse any one spiritual belief or religion over another.

After the death of someone loved, you are “torn apart” and have some very unique needs. Among these needs is to nurture yourself in five important areas: physically, emotionally, cognitively, socially, and spiritually.

When someone we love dies, it is like a deep hole implodes inside of us. It's as if the hole penetrates us and leaves us gasping for air. I have always said we mourn life losses from the inside out. In my experience, it is only when we are spiritually nurtured (inside and outside) that we discover the courage to mourn openly and honestly.

To integrate spiritual practices into your life demands a reminder that:

- ◆ Spirituality invites you to slow down and turn inward.
- ◆ Spirituality invites you to feel deeply and to believe passionately.

- ◆ Spirituality invites you to get to know your authentic self.

- ◆ Spirituality invites you to celebrate diversity.

- ◆ Spirituality invites you to be open to the mystery.

To practice spiritual self-care doesn't mean you are feeling sorry for yourself. Rather, it means you are allowing yourself to have the courage to pay attention to your special needs. For it is in spiritually nurturing ourselves, in allowing ourselves the time and loving attention we need to journey through our grief, that we find meaning in our continued living. That is why, if I could, I would encourage all of us when we are in the midst of grief to put down “Nurture my spirit” first on our daily to-do list.

Express Your Spirituality

Above all, mourning is a spiritual journey of the heart and soul. Grief and loss invite you to consider why people live, why people die, and what gives life meaning and purpose. These are the most spiritual questions we have language to form.

You can discover spiritual understanding in many ways and through many practices—prayer, worship, and meditation among them. You can nurture your spirituality in many places—nature, church, temple, mosque, monastery, retreat center, kitchen table among them. No one can “give” you spirituality from the outside in. Even when you gain spiritual understanding from a specific faith tradition, the understanding is yours alone, discovered through self-examination, reflection, and spiritual transformation.

Mourning invites you down a spiritual path at once similar to that of others yet simultaneously your own. Sometimes this

Mourning is a spiritual journey of the heart and soul. Grief and loss invite you to consider why people live, why people die, and what gives life meaning and purpose.





happens within a faith tradition through its scriptures, community of believers, and teachers. Other times a book is just what you need to support and gently guide you in ways that bring comfort and hope.

The Mosaic World We Live In

Perhaps you have noticed that our world has gotten much smaller religiously in the last fifty years. Eastern religions and spiritual practices arrived in the United States and Canada a little more than 150 years ago. Then, in the 1960s, we saw books, lectures, and workshops from folks like Thich Nhat Hanh and Ram Dass, who invited us Westerners to explore Eastern spiritual practices.

While our differences still define us, our potential to borrow meaningful spiritual practices from each other unites us. The great equalizer—death—invites us to be enriched by learning from each other.

As you read this article, while I encourage you to nurture yourself spiritually, I recognize that spirituality and religiosity are not synonymous. In some people's lives they overlap completely; their religious life is their spiritual life. Other people have a rich spiritual life with few or no ties to an organized religion. Obviously, each of us needs to define our own spirituality in the depths of our own hearts and minds. The paths we choose will be our own: discovered through self-examination, reflection, and spiritual transformation.

My Personal Journey and the "Switch"

When grief and loss have touched my life, I have discovered that my own personal source of spirituality anchors me, allowing me to put my life into perspective. For me, spirituality involves a sense of connection to all things in nature, God, and the world at large.

Someone with some wisdom once observed, "Spirituality is like a switch. Everybody has one; it's just that not everyone has it turned on." Sometimes, experiences of

grief and loss can turn off our switches. We are human and sometimes our switches feel stuck, or worse yet, nonexistent. Our divine spark—that which gives life meaning and purpose—feels like it has been muted.

My switch is turned on when I live from a desire to see a loving God in the everyday. In the midst of grief, I can still befriend hope, and the most ordinary moment can feed my soul. Spirituality is anchored in faith, which is expecting goodness even in the worst of times. It is not about fear, which is expecting the worst even in the best of times.

Spirituality reminds you to understand that you can and will integrate losses into your life, see the goodness in others, and know that there are many pathways to peace.

The Openness of a Child

If you have doubt about your capacity to connect with God and the world around you, try to approach the world with the openness of a child. Embrace the pleasure that comes from the simple sights, smells, and sounds that greet your senses.

I truly believe that acknowledging your heart is broken is the beginning of your healing. As you experience the pain of your loss—gently opening, acknowledging, and allowing—the suffering it has wrought diminishes but never completely vanishes. In fact, the resistance to the pain can potentially be more painful than the pain itself. As difficult as it is, we must relinquish ourselves to the pain of grief. As Helen Keller said, "The only way to the other side is through."

Yet, going through the pain of loss is not in and of itself the goal in our grief journey. Instead, it is rediscovering life in ways that give us reason to get our feet out of bed and to make life matter. I'm certain you realize that the death of someone precious to you is not something you will ever "overcome" or "let go of." The death of someone we have given love to and received love from doesn't call out to be "resolved" or "explained," but to be experienced.

I grew up in a traditional faith community; I watched and learned from a variety of people whose "switches" appeared to be in the on position. I have come to appreciate what some might term more "traditional" practices, as well as some "non-traditional" practices. I have observed the simple yet lovely ways different people connect with the Divine. I have tried to integrate into my daily life those practices that seem to really connect for me.

In the next issue, I will share with you a number of spiritual practices that may help you heal your grieving heart. As you explore the practices in search of those that might be helpful to you in your grief journey, ask yourself: what broadens my perspective and deepens my faith? What brings me some peace and calms my fears? What deepens my connection with other people, to God, to the world, and to my essential self? ★

About the Author



This article is excerpted from Dr. Alan Wolfelt's book, *Healing Your Grieving Soul: 100 Spiritual Practices for Those Who Mourn*, available at bookstores and at Dr. Wolfelt's website, www.centerforloss.com. Dr. Wolfelt is an internationally noted author, teacher, and grief counselor. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is an educational consultant to funeral homes, hospices, hospitals, schools, and a variety of community agencies across North America.



T★A★P★S Retreats

A Place to Relax and Heal

Being surrounded by the beauty of nature can instill calmness and peace. It provides us an opportunity to breathe deeply and discover new wonders about the world, others, and ourselves. Sharing these experiences with others gives us a sense of community, forging connections that last a lifetime. Finding this calmness and connection is especially important when our hearts are grieving the loss of a loved one.

This type of experience is just what TAPS had in mind a few years ago when we developed a new outreach program of retreats for survivors. The schedule of retreats is now expanding, giving survivors more opportunities to join together for fellowship.

Whereas the TAPS regional seminars are more structured with grief workshops and support groups, retreats offer a three to four day adventure that is a combination of the healing element of nature along with activities that provide a safe place to explore grief, connect with others, and have fun!

Previous retreats have found sibling survivors enjoying a day at a cattle ranch in Nevada and exploring Las Vegas; widows, widowers

and significant others enjoying the spectacular scenery of Alaska while attending the historic Iditarod Dog Sled Race; and parents enjoying time together under the stars in Fort Worth, Texas.

But retreats are more than simply engaging in outdoor activities; they allow survivors to connect with others on a parallel journey. 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!"

This year our goal is to host nine retreats: three for siblings; three for surviving spouses, fiancées and significant others; and three for parents.

Retreats will vary by location as well as by activities offered, and each retreat will also include an element of memorialization. For example, last year's retreat in Alaska allowed TAPS survivors to participate in a 5K race in honor of their loved ones. Future retreats

will offer similar activities, providing a special time of remembrance to celebrate the lives of our special loved ones.

Thanks to generous donor support, TAPS will be able to pay the costs of lodging, activities, and selected meals at our retreat events. Participants need only to provide transportation to and from the event as well as one meal per day.

The nature of the retreat activities results in limited space being available; only 40 to 60 survivors will be able to attend each event. Because the purpose of a retreat is to help bereaved survivors focus on their



"I love going to the sibling retreat. I like sharing stories with other siblings; I can connect with them. It helps me deal with my grief and it makes my life easier, to talk about my feelings."



"I cannot tell you how much the widow retreat helped me. I was not sure of what to expect, but left with more than I could ever want. To meet other women like me, to talk with them and hear their stories, might have been the best part of it all."



own healing journeys, away from the demands of childcare, jobs, schoolwork, and other needs, retreats are not open to additional family members. Childcare will not be provided.

Registration alerts for the retreats will be announced by email. Registration will be first come, first served. Preference for each event in 2012 will be given to those who have not yet attended a retreat this year.

This is 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. We walk along this journey together, lifting each other up, sharing our time and our thoughts, and honoring the legacy of our heroes. We warmly invite you to take an active part in our adventures! ☆

› Be sure to visit our website for event details and registration. Go to www.taps.org and click on Upcoming TAPS Retreats!

Photos, TAPS Archives

TAPS RETREATS FOR 2012

› **Widows, widowers, and significant others:** Events will feature skydiving with the US Army's Golden Knights in Southern Florida, a Glamour Getaway in California this summer, and Winter Wonderland in Montana.

› **Parents:** Retreats include springtime kayaking, sailing aboard a pirate ship, and participating in a 5K race in Tampa, Florida; a summer getaway titled Tranquility in New England; and a fall Water and Wilderness retreat in Seattle.

› **Siblings:** Retreats will feature exploring the Pacific Northwest, whale watching, and visiting Seattle's famous Space Needle, as well as an autumn time of Southern Fun on the East Coast.



Suggested Books for Grieving Adults

By Jonnie Chandler ☆ Surviving mom of Captain Jeremy A. Chandler

EDITOR'S NOTE: Our last issue featured books for children, and the issue before that listed books for teens. This article features books for adults. Some of them are specific to parental grief, while others are more general and incorporate all losses.

I now tell time by *before* and *after*. *Before* two Army Captains knocked on my door on August 11, 2005, I was an avid reader. I loved having the words of events, locations, and characters dancing in my head. I always had a stack of books to read, and I read for hours. *After* my son was killed, I was unable to concentrate. I was extremely restless and could only sit for a few minutes.

I did not think of reading—my mind was frozen, I was depressed, and all I wanted to do was sleep. My mind filled with unanswered questions. I didn't question why—I know there is no answer to the tragedy of my son's death. I questioned how I can live with the agony, the incomprehensible loss of my only son. I depended on my husband, friends, and my VA counselor to help me find the strength to live with the

inordinate loss and pain. But I knew that to gain strength I had to dig myself out of my deep, dark hole of grief.

So I reached for one of the two books that the 3rd Special Forces Group Chaplain had given me. It took me six weeks to read the first one, *I Wasn't Ready to Say Good-bye* by Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair, PhD. My long-lost passion for reading was replaced by a need-to-read when I saw the words, "It has been said that after losing a child, we embark on a lifelong healing process." Reading these words convinced me that to begin healing, I must continue my self-help reading.

I wish I could assure you that one of the following books will heal your tattered heart, comfort your ravaged soul, and answer all your questions. Unfortunately, I have not discovered that miracle book, but I have gotten comfort from each book. Sometimes only one sentence "speaks" to me, but I embrace all comfort, no matter how small.

I hope you find at least one book from this list that gives you support and comfort. ☆

A Grief Like No Other

BY KATHLEEN O'HARA, MA

O'Hara writes of her personal loss as well as accounts from her professional counseling. She offers practical and supportive steps to those grieving a loss from a violent death. She refers to the tidal wave of emotions and physical pain associated from guilt, anger, and anxiety. She offers practical suggestions and exercises to manage these powerful feelings.

After the Death of a Child

BY ANN K. FINKBEINER

Interviews of parents whose children died five or more years previously form the backbone of this book. Finkbeiner, whose only child died in 1987, leads the reader through the inconsistency of emotions, arriving at the awareness that in order to survive the parents must let go, not of the child, but of the pain in a way that honors the child.

A Time to Grieve, Meditations for Healing After the Death of a Loved One

BY CAROL STAUDACHER

A helpful and strengthening book of meditations. The author honors the "Grief Dance" (one step forward, three steps back) with a guide through the many facets of grief. Facing the most profound emotional experience possible, the reader is taught that grief is a process of releasing emotions, discovering personal strengths, and healing.

Confessions of a Grieving Christian

BY ZIG ZIGLAR

Sharing his Christian belief, the author writes of his daughter's death and the strength he received from God. He encourages releasing emotions with tears and gaining strength from prayer. He talks of the miracles that come from reaching out to others who are suffering. Mr. Ziglar believes that we will have bodies in Heaven, and we will be recognized, hugged, and held by our loved ones.

When the Bough Breaks, Forever After the Death of a Son or Daughter

BY JUDITH R. BERNSTEIN, PHD

Dr. Bernstein explains dramatic changes in the life and attitude of grieving parents. She describes the bone crushing intensity of a grief that will never end. As a result of interviews, the author states that a parent does not "recover" from the loss of a child, but rather must adapt, altering all aspects of life to ensure meaning and purpose.



The Courage to Grieve
BY JUDY TATELBAUM, LCSW

An excellent book to read when “stuck” in working through grief. The author addresses obstacles and resistance in facing deep emotions and fears. She offers straightforward advice to bolster self-support toward healing.

*How to Go on Living
When Someone You Love Dies*
BY THERESE A. RANDO, PHD

Dr. Rando uses simple layman’s terms to describe confusing and frightening emotions. She recommends establishing realistic expectations by acknowledging loss and learning to live again.

Letter to a Grieving Heart
BY BILLY SPRAGUE
& JOHN MACMURRAY

A lovely book with calming pictures, poetry, and scriptures. The author writes a sensitive account of his grief and describes how acts of kindness from friends and God’s love helped guide him through his numbing grief and heartache.

Living When a Loved One Has Died
BY EARL A. GROLLMAN

A tough-love compassionate approach. Rabbi Grollman helps confront loss by sorting through feelings and advice toward building a new life. He encourages saying the four letter words (died and dead) we artfully avoid as a step toward facing reality and mental health.

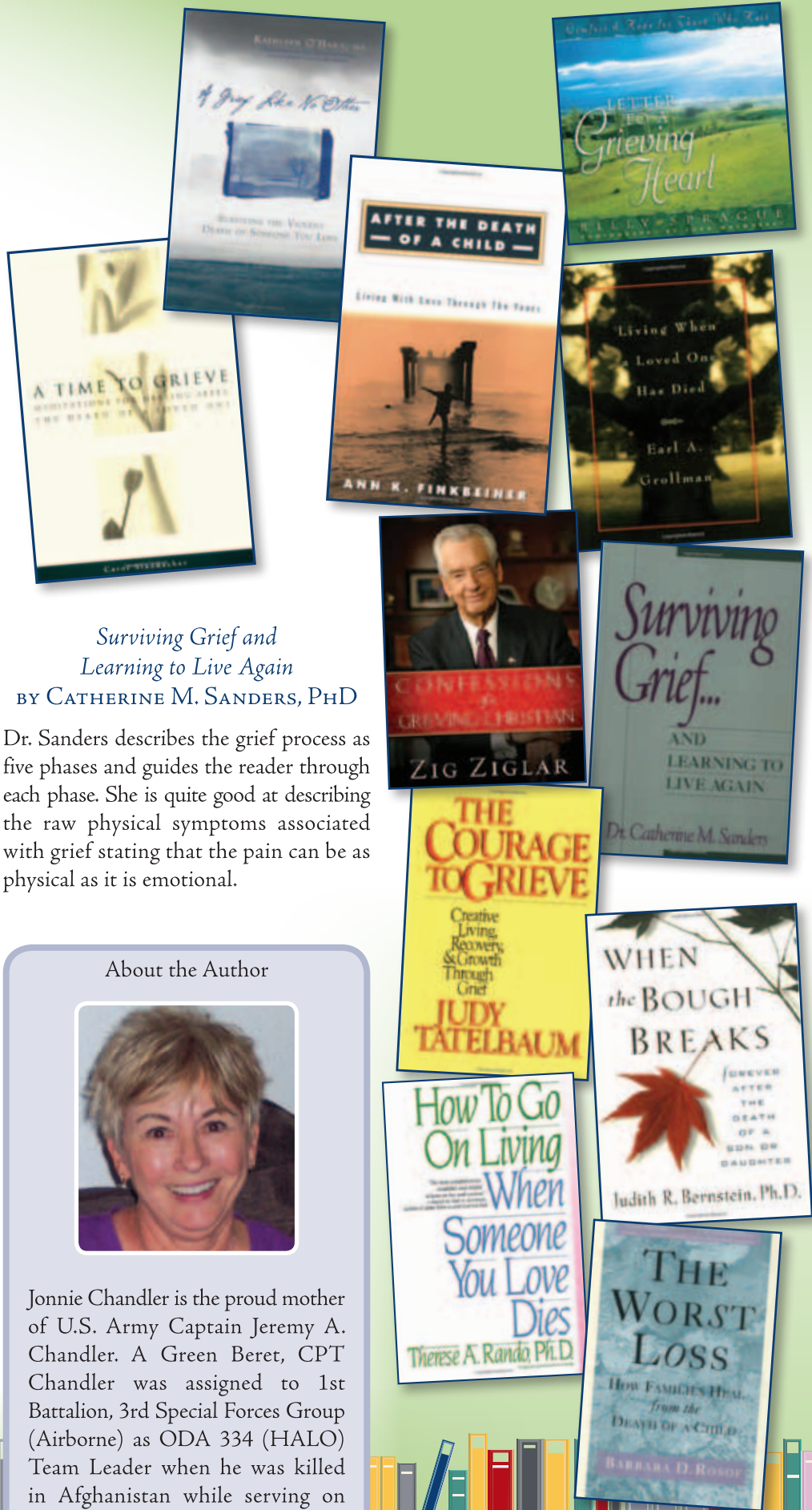
*Surviving Grief and
Learning to Live Again*
BY CATHERINE M. SANDERS, PHD

Dr. Sanders describes the grief process as five phases and guides the reader through each phase. She is quite good at describing the raw physical symptoms associated with grief stating that the pain can be as physical as it is emotional.

About the Author



Jonnie Chandler is the proud mother of U.S. Army Captain Jeremy A. Chandler. A Green Beret, CPT Chandler was assigned to 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) as ODA 334 (HALO) Team Leader when he was killed in Afghanistan while serving on his 4th deployment.





TAPS Run & Remember Team

A Year to Celebrate

2011 was an incredible and inspirational year as the TAPS Run and Remember Team came together in various places around the country to run, remember, and celebrate the lives of our beloved fallen heroes.

Marie Campbell, team director and an avid runner herself, said, "My heart is so overwhelmingly full when I think of all of our team members, and I can't thank them enough for their hard work and commitment in supporting the TAPS mission. This was our most successful year in the TAPS Run and Remember Team's eleven year history."

The success of the team can be measured in many concrete ways. First and foremost, the number of team members expanded to include 1,043 members. These dedicated runners and walkers participated in 46 different races in 17 states and two foreign countries: China and Afghanistan. The total amount raised in 2011 was an unprecedented \$418,661.

It is harder to quantify the success of the team in terms of emotional and physical well-being. Many members of the team are survivors themselves. In the midst of their own grief, they find healing not only in exercising but also in supporting others who have walked, are walking, or will walk in their shoes. Said Marie, "I know some days it is hard enough to get out of bed, let alone train for a marathon, half marathon, 10 miler, 10K, or 5K. Yet, they did it—along with raising funds and awareness for TAPS. They are indeed my heroes, too."

Others don't have their own fallen hero to run in memory of, but choose to be matched with a surviving military family. They make contact with these families and let them know that their loved one's sacrifice will never be forgotten. This is meaningful for both the runner and the family, supporting the TAPS mission of providing comfort and care.

Some runners are battle buddies and comrades who choose to run with TAPS while honoring the life of their fellow service member. TAPS realizes they are survivors, too, and we thank them for their invaluable service to our nation, as well.

We are grateful to all our Run and Remember Team members, who consistently go the "extra mile" for us as they run in memory and celebrate the life of a fallen hero while raising funds for TAPS.

»» For more information about the TAPS Run and Remember Team and all of our running events, please visit www.taps.org or visit us at TAPS Run and Remember Team on Facebook.



UPCOMING EVENTS FOR 2012

»» **Gasparilla Half Marathon**
15K , 8K , Ultra Challenge, and Light Challenge
Tampa, Florida • Saturday, March 3, 2012 to Sunday, March 4 2012

»» **Rock 'n' Roll USA Marathon and Half Marathon**
Washington DC • Saturday, March 17, 2012

»» **Dallas Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon and Relay**
Sunday, March 25, 2012

»» **2nd Annual Windy 25 Memorial 5K**
Las Vegas • Saturday, April 7 2012

»» **Fargo Marathon, Half Marathon, 10K ,5K, Kid's Fun Run**
Thursday, May 17, 2012 to Saturday, May 19, 2012

»» **Five Trails Half Marathon**
Leavenworth, Kansas • Sunday, May 20, 2012

»» **Marine Corps Historic Half Marathon and Semper Fred 5K**
Fredericksburg, Virginia • Sunday, May 20, 2012

»» **San Diego Rock 'n' Roll Marathon and Half Marathon**
Sunday, June 3, 2012

»» **Seattle Rock 'n' Roll Marathon and Half Marathon**
Saturday, June 23, 2012

»» **Anchorage Big Wildlife Runs, Marathon, Half Marathon,
Relay Marathon, 5K , and Kid's Fun Run**
Sunday, August 19, 2012

»» **Virginia Beach Rock 'n' Roll Marathon and Half Marathon**
Sunday, September 2, 2012

»» **Air Force Marathon, Half Marathon, 10K, and 5K**
Dayton, Ohio Saturday, September 15, 2012

»» **Navy 5 Miler**
Sunday, September 23, 2012

»» **Army Ten Miler**
Sunday, October 21, 2012

»» **Marine Corps Marathon, Marine Corps 10K,
and One Mile Kids Healthy Fun Run**
Saturday, October 27, 2012 to Sunday, October 28, 2012

»» **San Antonio Rock 'n' Roll Marathon
and Half Marathon**
Sunday, November 11, 2012





TAPS Volunteer

★ Geoff Ball ★

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!

If the term “frat boy” conjures up images of National Lampoon’s Animal House, think again. Geoffrey Ball is not your typical frat boy. His passion for military families and veterans is just about the first thing you’ll notice about him. Right after his infectious smile, that is.

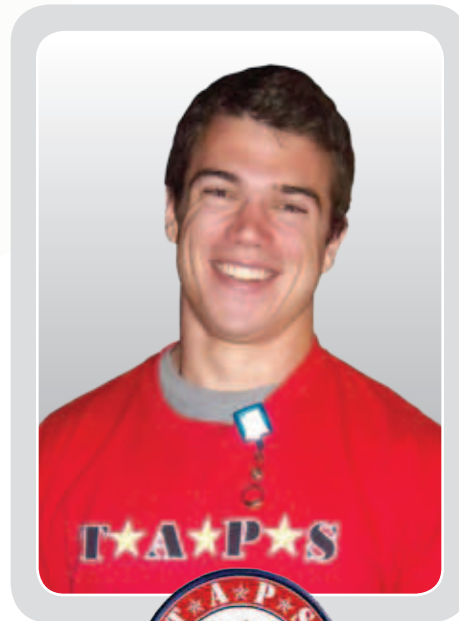
In the summer of 2009, Geoff took a casework job in the office of Colorado senator Mark Udall. During his tenure there, his involvement with military families planted the seeds of interest that would later blossom into a series of life choices centered on the military.

When he moved to DC to complete his studies, Geoff joined the Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity. He fit in well with this group of young men who have a long, proud tradition of philanthropy. It was through his work with “Phi Psi for G.I.s” that Geoff first came to TAPS.

“I had already heard about TAPS when I became Phi Psi’s Philanthropy Chair,” he explains. “I was excited about the challenge of raising money for TAPS and providing volunteers to support surviving families.”

But Geoff Ball did much more than that. He became a true champion of TAPS families, working at more than a dozen events, including last year’s National Military Survivor Seminar.

While studying to earn a Bachelor of Arts in both International Relations and Russian studies (he graduates this May), Geoff also managed to find time to serve as fundraising coordinator for a veterans charity. He currently works at George Washington University’s Office of Veteran Services. As the director of the university’s



Thank You Geoff!

Veteran Service Initiative, Geoff oversees a project that seeks to connect local student veterans with community service projects, thereby giving them the opportunity to continue to lead and serve their country.

With such a busy schedule during the academic year, you would think this frat boy would spend his summer doing frat boy things. Instead, this year Geoff Ball signed up for the ultimate volunteer position. He spent his summer at

Marine Officer Candidate School—his first step on the journey to becoming an infantry officer. This May, Geoff will be commissioned into the United States Marine Corps.

In his work with TAPS, Geoff says he has found meaning, mentorship, and direction. When asked if there was one event he found particularly meaningful, Geoff said, “It was an honor to help at the screening of *Rebirth*,” a film that chronicled the lives of five people directly affected by 9/11. “I was blown away by the movie and the panel discussion, but more than anything it really helped me understand the healing process of TAPS families.”

And despite all he has given and continues to give of his time and heart, Geoff feels that *he* is the fortunate one. “I cannot express how lucky I am to be involved with TAPS and what an impact it has had on the direction I’ve chosen in life,” he asserts.

To TAPS, Geoff has been a true blessing. He is a young man on a mission to serve and for that, Geoff Ball, we salute you. ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Facing Sudden Loss

By Judy Tatelbaum, LCSW

Of all the experiences we confront in life, the toughest to face is the sudden, unexpected loss of someone we love. Loss in itself is painful enough, but sudden loss is shocking. The shock doubles our pain and intensifies our grief.

Even if on some level we understand that no one lives forever, actually losing people we love is unimaginable. When we know someone we love has a fatal disease or when we have nursed a loved one who is very ill, we have a chance to begin to prepare for their loss—at least a little. However, the unexpected death of a loved one—regardless of how that loved one dies—can leave us stunned, lost, and overwhelmed with pain. We may not know how to begin to cope.

Sudden loss gives us no chance to prepare. It is not unusual that we feel cheated by a sudden death, cheated of a chance to say the last words we would have liked to say or to perform some last act that would have had meaning to us like a hug, a kiss, a walk hand in hand. Feeling cheated in this way can add to our grief, anguish, and despair.

Besides our feeling cheated by it, sudden loss can make the world feel less safe. This is a natural response to any unexpected and traumatic event. When someone we love is suddenly yanked out of our lives, we are left feeling that the world isn't a safe place. We may then become fearful and uncertain, or angry and frustrated. This loss can negatively color our view of life, but hopefully only temporarily.

When we face a sudden loss, all at once we have three overwhelming tasks to deal with: our grief over the loss of our loved one, the absence of this special person from our daily lives, and the changes in our lives that are caused by this loss. Each is a big task to take on, and each will become a part of our mourning and healing process.



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

Although it may be hard to imagine at the moment, we must remember that people do recover from sudden loss, and that we too can ultimately move through this terrible pain and begin to heal. It helps to bear in mind that emotional pain isn't constant, and that we don't have to grieve forever. We will love forever, whether our loved ones are with us in body or not, but we do not need to grieve to honor that love. We can just love.

In talking to many people who have suffered sudden loss, I have learned that there are several important, possibly universal, ways to help yourself heal:

- ★ Love yourself and take special care of yourself through your grief.
- ★ Do your mourning now. Being strong and brave is important, but I tell those I counsel to never miss an opportunity to cry. That's not self-indulgent, but simply sensible and honest in dealing with your emotions.
- ★ Expressing your feelings will help you heal, as feelings expressed diminish. Feelings which are repressed don't. So give vent to your feelings.
- ★ Get support from other people: counselors and support groups. You will not only help yourself, but you may also help another and that can be a great source of strength, joy, and recovery.

Most of all, trust that the person you loved and lost would want you to recover from losing them and would want you to remember and honor them by living a fulfilling life. ★

► This article reprinted with permission from Hospice Foundation of America's (HFA) monthly newsletter *Journeys*, April 1996 issue. For more articles on grief and bereavement visit the HFA website at www.hospicefoundation.org/journeys.

About the Author



Judy Tatelbaum, LCSW, is a psychotherapist who specializes in grief and author of the books, *The Courage to Grieve* and *You Don't Have to Suffer*. Other grief related articles are on her website: www.judytatelbaum.com. She can be reached by email at:

jtmiracle@comcast.net



The Kite

By Ruth Wiley ★ Surviving mom of Lieutenant Colonel James Wiley

When

My son was born...

I was like a child with a new toy!

I didn't want anyone to ruin the freshness of

My newborn joy.

*I learned if a child's toy is a kite and he holds it too close or puts it
In a drawer, it cannot be damaged, but the kite is of little or no use.*

I slowly learned to let the string slip through my fingers...

The beauty of my son's growth and love left me breathless as I watched him

Fly to newfound journeys. I vowed I would never let go of my kite...

But when he went off to war, I felt the string slipping through my fingers.

And then one day...

The string slipped away, and I thought for a while I would

Never see my kite again.

Little did I know that I only need to close my eyes

And think for a moment to visualize

Every moment that we shared.

He comes to me in the

Whisper of the wind, and

The laughter of a child

Running to keep

Ahead of a kite

Flying high

Above his

Head...

He will

Always

Be

There.





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