

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served & Died

# T★A★P★S<sup>®</sup>

VOLUME 22 • ISSUE 2

MAGAZINE



*Off the Hook*

PAGE 8

*A Brother's  
Journey of Love*

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*Lifelines of Hope*

PAGE 26

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

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

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



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# TAPS®

## Comfort and Support Since 1994

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

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

Thanks to the support of our donors, 2015 was a year filled with healing and hope for the families of America's fallen heroes. TAPS achieved amazing milestones throughout the year in providing help to our family of survivors.

- ★ ANSWERED over 15,000 calls to the 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline;
- ★ PROVIDED much-needed casework assistance in over 1,300 urgent crises;
- ★ HOSTED 20 Retreats with 500 survivors participating;
- ★ WELCOMED over 2,000 adult participants to 11 Military Survivor Seminars; and
- ★ MATCHED 800 military mentors with over 800 children at 15 National and Regional Good Grief Camps and Campouts.
- ★ HONORED 2,300 loved ones through teams4taps sporting events.
- ★ CONNECTED 1,300 survivors with counseling support.
- ★ SHARED 1,100 community resource reports with survivors.
- ★ SAVED survivors over \$53 million in funding and education benefits through scholarship and VA referrals. This means that 750 surviving children of our nation's fallen received a fully funded college education, something they hadn't thought possible.

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For more information on TAPS programs or services please visit: [www.TAPS.org](http://www.TAPS.org)

# Share Your TAPS Story



Before Memorial Day this year, TAPS asked survivors to submit their stories of remembrance and honor to serve as a clear call that freedom comes with great sacrifice. Every citizen shares in the collective loss and mourning of our fallen heroes. It is not a lesson only for Memorial Day or Independence Day. TAPS is proud to lead the way in extending support, love and healing every day to our courageous TAPS family on behalf of a #GratefulNation. Read more at [www.taps.org/gratefulnation](http://www.taps.org/gratefulnation).

I want everyone to know that Memorial Day is not just about the days off, barbecues and parties. I want them to know that it is about the men and women who wear the uniform of our great military, the ones who made the ultimate sacrifice, those who lost life protecting each other and the very freedom our country stands for. I would like for them to take time out of their busy days and go to a memorial wall or cemetery and take in the realization that so many have died to protect our very right to live and to live free.

**Angel Munoz, Texas**  
Surviving sister of Spc. Robert Ray Arsiaga and Sgt. Jeremy Arsiaga

Even with the passage of six and a half years, life does go on. Five years ago, the young men who served with Shawn started visiting us as a group. Now, every May, a group of Marines make a trip to honor Shawn, hug me and fill my heart with love. As long as they want to come, I will always have an open door, I will also make the time. My son can't hug me now, but these young men do a great job of standing in the gap and they are not letting me go.

**Robin Hefner, Texas**  
Surviving mother of  
Lance Cpl. Shawn Hefner

My entire life, I had never considered Memorial Day as anything other than another break from work. Last spring, my 18-year-old son told me, "Memorial Day is a day for honoring deceased service members and should be spent remembering and appreciating the sacrifices they made for the people of this country." This year, Eben has given Memorial Day a new meaning for us. We spent it remembering our son who died in March.

**Eunah Warnke, Kansas**  
Surviving mother of  
Lance Cpl. Eben Warnke

Life looks incredibly different almost two years later. I have a beautiful, thriving toddler who has the exact same glittery blue eyes as her daddy, and I have kept moving just like I told myself I would from the moment of impact. As we spent our second Memorial Day since his passing, I paused and considered how different this holiday is to us now — what it truly means. My daughter and I will be forever changed, and we will always view this "holiday" as a time of remembrance, honor and significant sacrifice.

**Taylor Strong, Virginia**  
Surviving spouse of Sgt. Charles Strong

This Memorial Day marks a new chapter in my life where I understand the importance of grief, where I've allowed myself to really get to know my dad and what happened to him despite the pain it causes. This Memorial Day I will stand for the first time at his graveside no longer as a victim but as his daughter who followed his courageous example by facing my fear and pain of his death and allowing it to transform into a bittersweet part of my legacy.

**Alicia Johnson, Utah**  
Surviving daughter of  
Lt. j.g. Burr N. Johnson, III

If you have a question or comment, please write to [editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org).

# TAPS Offers Space for Healing

Dear TAPS Family,

At the beginning steps of our grief, it can feel as if we are lost on a vast landscape with no compass to help us navigate. Then we connect to the TAPS family and find that we are no longer on this journey by ourselves.

Along the way, our emotions and our needs change...in and out of the seasons, from hearing that special song, or with the apprehension of how we will make it through significant dates or holidays. The TAPS staff, many of whom are fellow survivors, act as light posts as they illuminate the walkway. We walk by your side as a secure place to lean into when you need the support.

At one of our retreats, TAPS Peer Mentors, along with other surviving family members, will be on the sidelines, offering hopeful encouragement that you can make it, one step at a time. Your TAPS family is living proof you do not have to walk this road alone.

Along the path, you will find that TAPS holds a unique space for each of us, offering free range and wide open spaces to safely mourn in whatever manner we each need, while finding individual ways that help in our healing.

Our Survivor Care Team is on the frontline right from the beginning. They offer personal, one-on-one outreach if you need to talk, share or just cry. Our Regional Survivor Seminars and Campouts come to locations near you with opportunities to embrace diverse cultural traditions while grieving, as well as learning about phases of grief and how to tell when you are ready to take the next steps.

You can also join one our Retreats. They are customized for survivors who are

interested in self-reflection and personal growth, and who want to build deeper connections with one another. Before you know it, you may find yourself smiling and laughing beside new friends.

One of our newest initiatives is the Inner Warrior program for those survivors who feel they are at a place in their journey where they have grown stronger and are ready to push themselves to the next level. By mobilizing their grief in both individual and team efforts they strive to be stronger every day and reclaim the life they desire through mental and physical perseverance.

TAPS staff and volunteers would like to offer a special thank you to everyone who attended and helped us mark another spectacular year as we held our 22nd National Military Survivor Seminar over Memorial Day weekend in our nation's capital. We are proud to invite survivors of suicide loss to the upcoming September event in St. Pete Beach, Florida, where TAPS will be hosting our Eighth Annual National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. This event will be offering opportunities for

families to connect with one another while they learn more about their grief as a survivor of suicide loss and focus on healing through post-traumatic growth. Event registration is now open.

You may choose to step into the sunshine and feel the warmth upon your face, or perhaps you would rather reflect in solitude as you relax somewhere under a protective shade. Whatever route you choose to take along your grief journey, TAPS will be there offering you care, support and encouragement every step of the way. As always, we are a place where you can *Remember The Love, Celebrate The Life, and Share The Journey.*

Wishing you healing and hopeful hearts,

*Carla Stumpf-Patton*

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For more information about TAPS visit [www.taps.org/events](http://www.taps.org/events)

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# THE DIRT ON GRIEF CAMPS

BY MOLLY PICKETT AND DR. TINA BARRETT

I don't pretend to fully understand what happens at grief camp that changes the way grief feels, but I do believe in it. Deeply. I believe in it because I lived it. I was 12 when my dad died and I was launched into my own grief journey. My life was changed. Not for a day, or a week, or a year. It was my life – changed forever.

I felt wrecked. Wrecked is the accurate word. Reflecting back 16 years later, I realize that hopeless was also the right word. My family was devastated, ungrounded and hopeless.

Not forever, not doomed, but at that time, we were six beings fumbling through life in the darkest of times and looking for any sign of light. As a child who loved biking dirt trails, dancing in the rain and all things outdoors, it perhaps isn't surprising that years of grief camp at a mountain lake brought some of that hope back to me. It taught me a new way of being in my "new world," and buoyed me along my healing journey.

So what is it about grief camp that can bring light back into the darkest places?

Dr. Tina Barrett asked hundreds of campers, (including me – over 15 years ago), essentially this question. She listened. She sifted through their answers – the wisdom, the hurt and the hope and healing in their words. What emerged, again and again, were these themes:

## CONNECTION

After the death of someone so close to us, the lens through which we view the world changes. Each day we walk through the halls, the office, the subways, the schoolyard and muster up a response to "how are you?" in some sort of socially appropriate way. Amid despair, we often force some sort of routine in order to keep up with the world. Not because we want to, or even feel like we can, but because the world keeps moving.

What a gift it is to look around a circle of individuals and, without saying a word, know there is a shared understanding. Grief camp is a place where you look into the eyes of another being and know they "get it." When another camper says,

"I know," it holds different meaning than it does around town. It is healing. It is powerful. To share in this deep understanding together leaves us feeling connected and not so alone. And feeling not so alone makes this grief a little more bearable.

## TIME TO HONOR AND REMEMBER

Sometimes we want to talk about our person who died and sometimes we don't. Sometimes we find ourselves wanting to share and honor them and sometimes not. But one thing is true: We are thinking about them. We remember. Grief camp creates space to honor and remember. Even when we don't want to talk, draw, dance, light a candle or make a shrine — the opportunities remain. These opportunities to honor our family members through art, words, movement or symbolism help mark the place of our precious loved ones whether we choose to engage in the activity or not.

We want to remember. We want to not forget. Camp offers us ways to do this. Memory tables. Flags of honor and remembrance. Candle lighting ceremonies. Talking circles. Rituals. Sand dancing. All of these become ways to introduce our people to the world and take care of the relationship and memories we carry with us.

## PERMISSION TO HAVE FUN

We know sadness. We know the experience of loss and watching our family members navigate their own tumble into a reality that we so wish wasn't our truth. Though camp holds moments of profound emotion, camp is also filled with joy, delight and fun. The outdoors is a natural playground and camp is full of chances to splash in a lake, sing songs by a campfire, eat s'mores, explore wild places and play games.

We get to laugh again. It is refreshing to experience joy and belly laugh surrounded by others who know the significance of our loss and our pain. We deserve to give ourselves and one another permission to have fun, knowing it doesn't diminish the profound love and hurt tied to our loved ones. It's appropriate and it is often different than what we have become good at in our grief process.

## NATURE

We don't need to manipulate nature. Simply being outside or interacting with the living world can both stir and calm something within us. These experiences offer moments for contemplation and reflection. Metaphors abound. The way a river moves mimics our path weaving over, through and around life's hard places. The wind in the leaves whispers reassurance. The dirt underneath our feet reminds us how to feel grounded as we trust the unwavering gravity holding us to the earth.

One young camper gracefully articulated her connection with the great outdoors: "It was peaceful where we were. It was pretty and you could just go sit and be alone and be with the water or be with the trees or be with anything."

## FREEDOM TO BE

Grief is an individual process. There is no guide or map that tells any of us how to do this. We each find our own path. Camp can give us permission to be exactly where we are, at each precise moment, on our very personal grief journey. Without judgment, camp can give us space to just be.

### About the Authors

Dr. Tina Barrett focuses on best practices of nature-based support with trauma survivors. Barrett has been volunteering for TAPS since 2008. She serves on the TAPS Advisory Board and as a Senior Consultant for TAPS Youth Programs.

Molly Pickett, MA, LCPC, blends her personal experience in group homes, clinical settings, classrooms and bereavement camps to support TAPS programs where she has volunteered since 2014. She has a special focus on healing after suicide.



In my words from a discussion with Tina nearly 15 years ago:

"There are times when you want to laugh the rest of the day and there are times when you want to do nothing but sit down and cry. There's so many different feelings. There are times when everyone wants to be funny and hilarious and times when people want to be serious or times when people feel like laughing or just talking or being quiet and shy. And everyone is good with it. Everyone is fine with how you feel. That's what helped me, just to know that I wasn't alone and there were gonna (sic) be people who were going to cry and I could cry if I wanted to and if I wanted to laugh I could laugh."

Filled with strength from a recent camp with grieving women, these themes ring true for youth and adults alike. Without question, grief camp is not a cure-all, but rather can be one piece of a much larger puzzle of healing and finding our way. As humans, we thrive amid relationships with others; moments of sheer delight; opportunities to remember, commemorate and share; and the splendor and tranquility of the natural landscape, all the while embraced in the gentle support of competent leaders. For me, camps have been pretty significant stepping stones helping me find my footing along a complex journey back to hope.

# OFF THE HOOK

## PERMISSION TO HEAL

BY CHRIS DANIEL ★ SURVIVING FATHER OF PFC. TRAY DANIEL



May 2015 was looking up. Life was taking shape after a long period of turmoil. I had a new apartment and vehicle. I made it through the first year of co-parenting after divorce. Set to start work again as a contractor, I also prepared to start a leadership role in my church's young adult ministry. To top it all off, I was building a deeper relationship with my two sons, Jaxon (4) and Tray (19). May was good.

Then 12 days into June, as I prepared to send Tray happy birthday wishes, things shifted. It had only been a couple of days since Tray and I were in a long-distance Facebook messenger debate over who would win the 2015 NBA Finals. He was stationed at Camp Beuhring, Kuwait,

and not seeing him more often was a remaining hardship.

That day — June 12, 2015 — just two days before Tray's 20th birthday, changed my life forever.

I picked up Jaxon from daycare and we made our way home after a long day. As we walked into the apartment, we passed two military officers sitting in a government vehicle. Jaxon waved.

Moments later, I heard a knock at the door. I saw the two officers through the peephole. I figured they were recruiting and had the wrong apartment.

I opened the door, and they asked if I was Christopher Daniel. I nodded my head yes. They asked if I had a son, Pfc. Monterrious "Tray" Daniel. Again, yes. At that moment, I still thought he might have been court martialed or gone AWOL. But then they asked if they could come in, and I knew.

After hearing the news that my son had been pronounced dead after he was found unresponsive, my body and mind went numb. I searched for words to say. They told me I was the first to know. They hadn't yet reached his mom.

Caring for Jaxon at that very moment allowed me to mask my initial pain. I cried



a little, but knew I had to keep it together for him. They asked if there was anyone they could call to sit with me. I told them that I would be all right.

I tried to call Tray's mom, but didn't get a response. I felt the weight of telling both Tray's mom and my mother. Like a typical guy, I wanted to make sure they didn't have a nervous breakdown over the phone.

I sat in a daze, wondering, "How did this happen when we were just messaging and everything seemed okay?" All I knew was that Kuwait was hot, according to Tray, but he seemed to be enjoying himself. He didn't tell me there was anything wrong. He was gone way too soon.

even lived yet! I questioned if he was depressed, or killed by a sniper, or ambushed by the enemy. I wondered if there was something I should have noticed but didn't.

The next few weeks were all a blur. Quite honestly, I don't know how I made it through. I don't know how I'm even able to write about it now. However, I do know that I couldn't have made it here without the help of TAPS.

Like many of you, I ignored the calls at first. I made sure everyone else in my family was okay first: my mom, my sisters, Tray's mom, Jaxon. But what about me? I neglected the self-care that I desperately needed. Only a month after Tray was

back, and for the first time I was going to have to be brutally honest with myself about what was holding me back: the guilt and shame associated with the death of my son. That was extremely difficult.

The first counseling session was tough. I cried and barely got through it. But she invited me back. I went again, a couple of weeks later. It was more difficult than the first session. My eyes hurt, but it felt better to talk it out and get those thoughts out of my head.

After a few more sessions, my counselor asked me a very poignant question, "What else do you need to keep progressing on this grief journey?"

## I DO KNOW THAT I COULDN'T HAVE MADE IT HERE WITHOUT THE HELP OF TAPS.

The next morning, I pulled myself together long enough to get Jaxon ready to go with his mom. Once she picked him up, I crumbled. I knew the phone was going to start ringing, so I tried to muster the strength to pull it together.

The phone did ring. And it rang and rang again. After talking to Tray's mother and crying for hours over the phone, I had to call my mom. That was horrific.

That entire morning seemed like an Ansel Adams photo — dark, grey and mysterious.

I had to leave my apartment because I felt like I was suffocating. I drove around for hours and ended up at the Washington Monument. I sat there for awhile listening to my iPod, but not hearing. My family called me, and I cried with them as I sat on the steps of the Jefferson Memorial.

I thought about what happened, how it happened, whose fault it was that my son was dead, and why I hadn't been more aware. Why hadn't anyone seen anything? Why him? Why now? How could this be? Why not me instead of him? He hadn't

buried, I found myself unshaven and unshowered in my apartment staring at the ceiling. My refrigerator was empty. I had lost weight and missed dozens of calls from classmates and relatives. I was tapped out. Something had to change.

Then one day, on my way to lunch, I answered the phone without looking at the number. That's unusual, but interventions happen when we need them most. It was the Annapolis Vet Center. They invited me to come and chat. Nothing in-depth. Just come by and pick up some information to help me through the grief process. I already had a box of grief materials and books and my casualty officer provided the VA contact information. But I was honestly afraid to do anything because it would mean accepting the fact that my son was gone and I was hurting.

When the Vet Center called, I knew I needed help. I agreed to come in even though I was afraid, nervous and didn't really know what to expect. For the first time in 15 years, I was afraid to speak to another human being. I talk to people all over the world about what's holding them

"It would be comforting to hear how others are dealing with this. I can't be the only one," I said.

She asked me if it was okay to give my number to TAPS, and I agreed. Immediately after the appointment, I received a call from TAPS. They invited me to a Care Group in Arlington, and I showed up. Again nervous, not sure what to expect, I went. The last thing I wanted to do was sit in a meeting with a group of crying parents, but I needed to know how other people were managing. And that was the second best decision I've made along this grief journey!

I listened to others who were in the exact same position that I was. I met surviving parents, siblings and spouses. I learned that it was perfectly normal to be upset, even angry at times. I learned that it was natural to have days that are totally awesome and days that are the exact opposite. I learned how to throw old plates and glasses at brick walls for therapy on bad days and how to get through it by any means necessary.

FOR MY SON TO BE REMEMBERED AS A HERO, I MUST BECOME  
A HERO AS WELL. I MUST ACCEPT THE FACT THAT HE GAVE  
HIS LIFE SO I CAN BE FREE. I MUST LIVE BIGGER  
AND MORE PURPOSEFULLY THAN EVER BEFORE.

My life has taken another turning point. I've been taking a healthy dose of self-care since September 2015, including monthly grief counseling appointments with my counselor and TAPS Care Group. That puts me in contact with help about twice a month. Am I there for every meeting? No. Do I make an effort to get help when I need it? Absolutely.

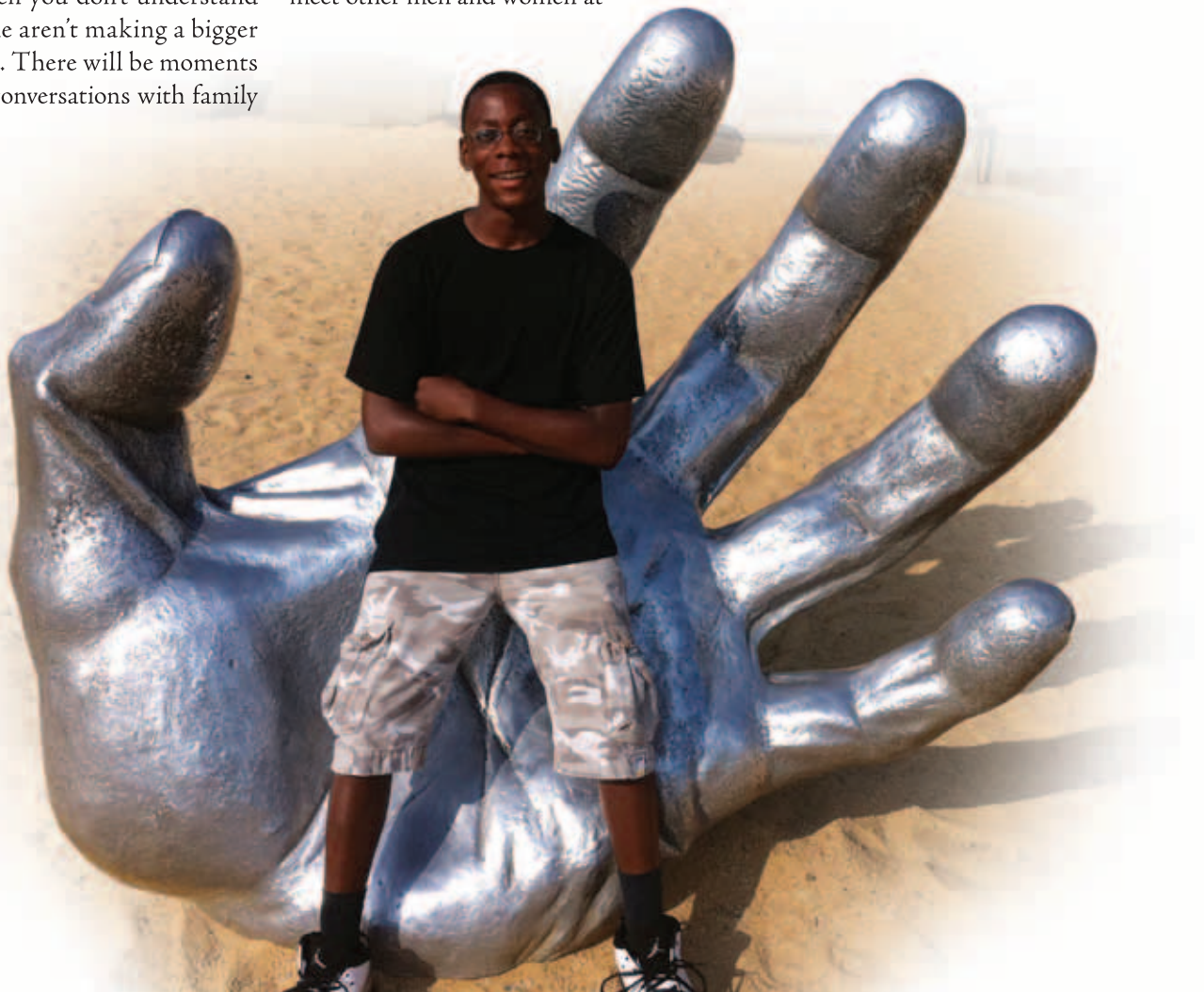
Guys are natural protectors. We want to ensure that everyone else is emotionally stable before we do the same for ourselves. That doesn't work well for us during the grief process. Men have to grieve for ourselves. Unfortunately, there's no playbook. There will be days when you don't understand why more people aren't making a bigger deal of your loss. There will be moments when you have conversations with family

members and they may brush over the topic and not allow you the time and space to talk about it. There will be people who avoid you because they don't know what to say. And it's all okay.

I've learned that this is *my* grief journey. *Mine*. No one can understand the unique pain and anger I've felt or the shame and guilt I've overcome. Not even other grieving parents. However, for my son to be remembered as a hero, I must become a hero as well. I must accept the fact that he gave his life so I can be free. Now, I must live bigger and more purposeful than ever before. It does my heart good to meet other men and women at

the TAPS meetings and share my story, only to see the relief in their eyes when they understand we "get it."

Sharing my story is difficult; however, if one dad, mom, sibling or significant other has a lighter heart, then it's all worth it. Know that letting yourself off the hook and giving yourself permission to heal is not a sign of weakness, but a symbol of strength. It's a badge of honor that you took the liberty to take care of yourself. Our loved ones died for our liberty, and if we don't embrace that freedom to take the necessary self-care steps, we cannot possibly take care of anyone else.



# The Nature of Grief

By Zaneta M. Gileno, LMSW, CT, Director of Community-Based Care



Photo by Jill Crider

One of my favorite things to see is a weed sprouting up through the cracks in a sidewalk. The idea that something so seemingly delicate could push through the concrete and find a way to grow is inspiring. And if that weed happens to be a dandelion, it can make my heart soar. The hope and promise in the fluff of a dandelion filled with wishes, that weed growing through the crack, can speak to our grief journey in many ways.

Nothing compares to the opportunity to gather with others and share our journeys. The dark, the light, the struggles and the breakthroughs all seem to have more meaning when we learn we are not alone. It helps us to see that much of it can have a purpose and all of it can be turned for our good. Although we would give anything to have our loved ones back with us, we can come to realize we not only maintain a continuing bond with our loved one, but also that we are given many new friends, a new family and newfound hope.

One of the ways TAPS provides us an opportunity to gather with others who understand what we are going through is our TAPS Care Groups. From the beginning of our rich history, the TAPS family has taken time, to come together informally all around the nation. One of my most cherished roles at TAPS is to organize, launch and maintain this network of care.

My team in the Community-Based Care program at TAPS works diligently to expand our groups, and it is truly a labor of love for all involved. I imagine our Care Groups are like fluffy dandelions, ready for someone to make a wish...if only for the hope of a new day.

At our gatherings, the TAPS family is able to take a couple of hours out of their month and join with others. Some come when they are new to their loss and others come years beyond. The holidays and special days amount to an especially difficult occasion for many of us, and knowing you can meet with your local TAPS Care Group during those moments can help you take a step forward. Our groups are a space to come together for tears, but also for laughter. To sit in silence or to unload a burden. Our groups are big enough for all of that and everything in between.

As I opened up to the pain of losing my father as a child, I realized how much I was like that weed, stuck in the concrete of life. The situation was just too hard to bear. But in time, and with the support of my peers, I was able to find the cracks in the road that allowed me to grow — up, out and into the world. Others were there, staying with me during the dark times and also showing me to the light. Even though it seemed like I was never going to get out of the darkness, in time I eventually did.

## TAPS LAUNCHES NEW CARE GROUPS

Our groups are informal gatherings of surviving military families and loved ones. They are co-hosted by a TAPS Peer Mentor and a mental health professional. These are our newest Care Groups, but for a full list of options in your area visit [www.taps.org/caregroups](http://www.taps.org/caregroups)

**NEXT MEETING: July 14**  
Recurring on 2nd Thursday  
★ SHILOH, IL ★

**NEXT MEETING: July 19**  
Recurring on 3rd Tuesday  
★ TAMPA, FL ★

**NEXT MEETING: July 21**  
Recurring on 3rd Thursday  
★ AUSTIN, TX ★

**NEXT MEETING: July 23**  
Recurring on 3rd Saturday  
★ BATON ROUGE, LA ★

**NEXT MEETING: July 28**  
Recurring on 4th Thursday  
★ CHARLOTTE, NC ★

And so it is, like nature, when we keep reaching through our grief, toward those open spaces, we can always find a way.

.....  
If you are a TAPS Peer Mentor and are interested in helping us launch a Care Group near you, please reach out to us at 800-959-TAPS. We would love to speak to you.  
.....

# Healing Your Grieving Heart

## Find Space to Heal in Nature

By Bonnie Carroll and Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt



“BY OBSERVING NATURE YOU BEGIN TO SENSE THE HARMONIOUS INTERACTION OF ALL THE ELEMENTS AND FORCES OF LIFE. WHETHER IT BE A STREAM, A FOREST, A MOUNTAIN OR THE SEA, CONNECTING WITH NATURE’S INTELLIGENCE WILL GIVE YOU A SENSE OF UNITY WITH ALL OF LIFE AND HELP YOU TO GET IN TOUCH WITH THE INNERMOST ESSENCE OF YOUR BEING.”

— DEEPAK CHOPRA

### » VISIT THE GREAT OUTDOORS

For many people, it is restorative and energizing to spend time outside.

You may find nature’s timeless beauty healing. The sound of a bird singing or the awesome presence of an old tree can help put things in perspective. Rediscover what it feels like to walk barefoot in the grass or the sand and breathe the fresh air.

Mother Earth knows more about kicking back than all the stress management experts on the planet — and she charges far less.

Go on a nature walk. Or camping. Or canoeing. The farther away from civilization the better.

I (Alan) remember a recent time when I was feeling overwhelmed, and I just went for a walk. I saw beautiful flowers. I saw leaves falling from the trees. I watched my Husky dogs leap with joy. I took long, deep breaths. I felt a sense of gratitude. After the walk, I felt renewed, changed.

### » REMEMBER OTHERS WHO HAD A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PERSON WHO DIED

At times, your appropriately inward focus will make you feel alone in your grief. But you’re not alone. There are

many other people who love and miss the person who died.

Think about others who were affected by your loved one’s death: parents, children, siblings, friends, neighbors, distant relatives, battle buddies.

After a death, the primary mourners receive sympathy and attention. Is there someone outside the main circle who nonetheless had a close relationship or history with the person and may be struggling with the death? Perhaps you could call her and invite her out for coffee.

Give a gift to one of these people. If you have extras of your loved one’s insignia, consider offering them to those who were close to the person who died as a way for them to carry your loved one’s legacy forward.

## » WATCH THE SUN RISE

The sun is a powerful symbol of life and renewal. When was the last time you watched the sun rise? Do you remember being touched by its beauty and power?

Think about our certainty that the sun shines elsewhere, even when we are in the darkness. Perhaps our loved ones are also “shining” elsewhere, even if we can’t see them any longer.

Plan an early morning breakfast or walk in a location where you can see the sun rise. Hike to the top of a hill. Have coffee next to a lake.

Maybe you could make a sunrise ritual a tradition on your loved one’s birthday or anniversary of the death.

## » TAKE A MINI-VACATION

Always keep in mind that when you’re grieving, self-care is essential not only to your survival but also to your long-term healing.

Don’t have time to take time off? Plan several mini-vacations this month instead.

What creative ideas can you come up with to renew yourself? Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Have a spiritual growth weekend. Retreat into nature. Plan some alone time.
- Go for a drive with no particular destination in mind. Explore the countryside, slow down and observe what you see.
- Treat yourself to a night in a hotel or bed and breakfast.
- Visit a museum or zoo.
- Go to a yard sale or auction.
- Go rollerskating or rollerblading with a friend.

- Drop by a health-food store and walk the aisles.

- Schedule a massage with a professional massage therapist.

## » CREATE A SANCTUARY JUST FOR YOU

Mourners need safe places where they can go when they feel ready to embrace their grief.

Create a sanctuary in your own home, a retreat that’s just for you. Furnish it with a comfy chair, reading materials, a journal, a music player. No TV or computer. Or, you may want this to be a room dedicated to silence. As Thomas Moore has noted, “Silence allows many sounds to reach awareness that otherwise would be unheard.”

In your sanctuary, display photos of the person who died if you think that will help you meet some of the six needs of mourning (acknowledge the reality of the death, embrace the pain of the loss, remember the person who died, develop a new self-identity, search for meaning, and receive ongoing support from others).

An outside “room” can be equally effective. Do you have a porch or patio where you can just “be”? Locate a comfortable chair and install a tabletop fountain.

Your sanctuary, even if just a simple room or nook, can become a place dedicated exclusively to the needs of the soul. The death of the person you love requires “soul work.” Your creation of a sanctuary honors that reality.

## » SPEND TIME IN “THIN PLACES”

In the Celtic tradition, “thin places” are spots where the separation between the physical world and the spiritual world seems tenuous. They are places where the veil between heaven and earth, between the holy and the everyday, are so thin that when we are near them, we intuitively sense the timeless, boundless spiritual world.

There is a Celtic saying that heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in the thin places the distance is even smaller.

Thin places are usually outdoors, often where water and land meet or land and sky come together. You might find thin places on a riverbank, a beach or a mountaintop.

Go to a thin place to pray, to walk or to simply sit in the presence of the holy.

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TAPS offers restorative and therapeutic nature retreats for those grieving the death of a service member. Visit [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org) and click on Survivor Events for more information.  
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# HOW CULTURAL EXPOSURE CHANGED MY THOUGHTS ON DEATH

By Dr. Gloria Horsley, MSCNS

I keep hearing from people that the United States is a death-denying society. After my recent trip to India I am not sure I agree. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, in her landmark book, "On Death and Dying," brought death to the forefront of the American consciousness more than 40 years ago. Today, there are numerous books, workshops and research projects examining death and dying. It is my belief that the United States is seen as a death-denying society because of our diverse backgrounds; Americans have a more eclectic approach to grief than more homogenous societies. We don't have set rituals for dealing with death and, for the most part, we can freely express emotions or just choose to walk away. While more ritualized responses to death can reduce anxiety, they can also lock the bereaved into rigid social norms.

## INDIA

My daughter Heidi and I recently visited Southern India, where a predominant percentage of the population are followers of the Hindu faith. During the trip, we had the opportunity to discuss grief, loss and recovery with one of our Hindu male tour guides. He led us on a tour of the city of Varanasi on the banks of the Ganges River. For Hindus, Varanasi is a sacred place where pilgrims visit, bathe and scatter remains in the sacred water.

Our guide met us at our hotel an hour before sunset and, with hundreds of other pilgrims, we headed toward the river. When we reached the banks of the river, we crossed a large cement plaza filled with swamies, priests, gurus and beggars waiting for the nightly Ganga Aarti ceremony honoring the sacred Ganges. We crossed the plaza and walked down a long stairway that led to a waiting rowboat. We were rowed out into the river by two young boys who stopped a few hundred feet from shore where we, along with dozens of boats filled with pilgrims and tourists, watched the colorful sunset ceremony honoring the river.

After viewing this magnificent ritual, our guide suggested that we move onto the crematorium, as it is "quite dramatic at night." *Dramatic* is putting it mildly.

As we approached the cremation site, all seemed dark with the exception of a half dozen or so large random bonfires burning in an area smaller than a football field.

## THE CREMATORIUM

From our boat, which was stopped about a hundred yards from the shore, we could see that the body of a man, face exposed, was being prepared for cremation. He was wrapped in gold cloth and was carried by four men and dipped into the Ganges. He was then put on the ground to drain off the water after which he was placed on the prepared wood pile. Finally, the "main mourner" lit the fire. The main mourner could be identified by his newly shaved head and white robe.

The whole scene was surreal, but I was really taken back when our guide suddenly said, "My father was cremated here a month ago, and I was the main mourner." At a loss for words, someone in our group actually said, "Wow your hair must grow fast." Which, to my relief, he gave a hearty laugh. He said that he was still very sad but had been told by the priest not to cry as it would interrupt the rising of the spirit into heaven. At this point, his voice cracked and he turned his back on the whole scene.

TAPS understands that we cannot turn our back on grief. Even though a culture provides a set of ceremonies around death, grieving is a universal human response.





## HEALING STORIES TRANSCEND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

By Bevin R. Landrum, MA, *TAPS Magazine* Editor

Not every TAPS survivor is able to attend one of our healing events. Family or health constraints may leave us feeling isolated and alone in our grief. For our families, their TAPS Survivor Care Team contact, our community-based care connections and the TAPS Magazine may be the only regular supports they have. When you add on a parallel cultural grief experience it can feel overwhelming.

Maria Lazaney wanted to honor her son, Staff Sgt. Carlos Lazaney-Rodriguez, on his angelversary. Carlos was killed in 2014 in a shooting at Fort Hood. His parents, wife, siblings and others look forward to each of our TAPS Magazine editions to help them find their way through the confusing aftermath of grief. So Maria reached out to her Survivor Care Team contact a few months ago to see how they could share their traditions with other survivors.

The family's Puerto Rican heritage means they visit his grave frequently, offer special masses and pray for Carlos and other military families experiencing loss. But they also try to perpetuate the memory of Carlos as "a great soldier, a great son" by recounting the story of his life each year on his angelversary. Within their culture, this annual reminder of the special person they miss is a way to honor the life he lived. Knowing that TAPS is here for their whole family gives them hope to have courage in the face of their loss.

Another TAPS survivor remembers watching strange women cry at her grandfather's funeral. She didn't know who they were, but they seemed to cry and mourn more than some of her own family members. It was many years later that she realized they were wailers — often paid to cry at funerals in the Philippines. It can seem awkward for children and adults to compare their personal grief to unexplained or antiquated cultural standards. TAPS provides a safe place for our survivors to understand that your grief is your own. Loss is not measured in numbers of tears but in the love we hold in our hearts. A Peer Mentor can be an excellent sounding board as we try to navigate our personal experience of grief in the context of our family traditions and culture.

TAPS family stories of healing transcend cultural boundaries. We blend our traditions into a shared celebration as we honor the memories of those we loved and lost. The happy times remain to bind us together in healing and unity. If you have a story of love or courage and would like information on how to share this in writing with your TAPS family, please contact [editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org).

The grief journey is not individualistic, but rather to be shared and undergirded by the communal sense of our own mortality. Indeed, it is not something most people want to deal with until they have to. I think denying death until it happens is as natural as grieving a death.

Below are thoughts on grief relating to the death of my son, both parents and two siblings.

### FOUR LESSONS I'VE LEARNED

- Grief is a normal reaction to loss.
- Grief is a journey of indeterminate length.
- Those who have experienced full sadness can know true joy.
- My experience: The first year, I was frozen in grief and had to just live it. The second year was tough because I was thawing out. During the third year, the healing began, and today, I am a very happy person!

It is my hope that you will honor your own grief, develop your own rituals and realize that the one constant variable in grief recovery is time. I invite those who have lost hope to lean on the hope of others until you find your own.

#### About the Author

Dr. Gloria Horsley is an internationally-known grief expert, psychotherapist and bereaved parent. She is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Clinical Nurse Specialist, and has worked in the field of family therapy for over 20 years.



# SAFE ZONES

## BOUNDARIES IN EARLY GRIEF

By Emily Muñoz, Strategy & Communications Senior Advisor

Surviving spouse of Army Cpt. Gil Muñoz

Author Bill Bryson wrote a book called “I’m A Stranger Here, Myself,” which chronicles his re-entry into American culture after living in the United Kingdom for 20 years. While the book isn’t about grief, it is about change and what happens when the world around us changes without our consent or awareness.

Sometimes we become strangers to ourselves. Doesn’t it often feel, especially in early grief, as though we have been plucked from the density of human sensations and, instead, suddenly feel only thudding emptiness or searing pain? The world is simultaneously bigger and smaller. We have splintered into before and after: things that matter and things that don’t, the ways we can be saved and the ways we can’t.

### A World Both Too Big and Too Small

This rushing shift in perspective may confer meaning where there used to be none. Things from your “old life” that seemed critically important may now seem pointless, disposable. Dizzying changes in emotional and energetic emphasis may leave us feeling

as though nothing in life makes sense anymore. Will relief be found in a world that can hold the enormity of our pain, or is a world that big overwhelming in itself? Might some measure of peace be found in circling the wagons and focusing on what is safe and known? Do we find comfort in the possibility of the future or in certainty?

At TAPS, we know that the answers are often very complex and that they fluctuate and change as grief shifts and changes. We want you to know that at TAPS you have people you can trust and a family you can count on. We also want to be your tether as you look beyond your grief into a new world of fearless presence.

Grief creates porous boundaries. At a time in our lives when we feel least like framing the world around us, it is most important to define the limits of our grief space. The unpredictability of the grieving process provides no hiding place from the instinct to seek safety; instead, grief churns a strange kind of panic continually into the forefront, leaving us exposed. We’re uncertain of what and who to keep in and what to keep out; we don’t know what we need or what we can or should do. We’re strangers here in this new life, and yet we still must mark off the place we’ve landed.

In the movie “The Hand that Rocks the Cradle,” a man named Solomon has the task of building a fence for a family. As he begins to understand what part of the yard needs to be contained, he asks the family’s matriarch if he should build the fence to keep people in or to keep people out. Grief, especially early on, prompts this question continually. Fences help us care for ourselves and for each other. They create safe places for us to grieve and heal, and they also indicate the intentions of others. If someone climbs over a fence into your yard, you can be sure that they have a motivation that is personal.

### My World Feels Too Small: My Fences Keep People Out

When it feels like the world is closing in on you, the protective instinct may be overwhelming to tuck in and hide away like a turtle. Often, we can start making our worlds more manageable by creating smaller safe zones. Some ways to protect your space are to cut down hours at work, stop working altogether, drastically change the social calendar for yourself or your family or stay at home or in bed due to intense exhaustion. It may take one or all of these to give you a sense of refuge.

Rigid boundaries do serve to protect us, but they also lock us away from the perspectives that may lead to hope and healing. The narrower our world becomes, the harder it is for us to relate to people and for others to relate to us. It is too easy for one point of view to become deafening, especially when pain, anger and grief dominate the emotional landscape in your safe zone.





### After the Storm

When grief strips us of self-confidence, energy to socialize and the familiar mirrors of family and friends, going into survival mode and battening down the hatches makes sense. However, the imperative is still to come out after the storm is over. Beautiful days at sea are not meant for the crew to be crouched below deck hiding from yesterday's stormy seas. When what you have done to make life manageable becomes overly confining it's time to re-evaluate.

If you are avoiding activities, intimacy or the give-and-take of receiving and providing support and care for others, it may be time to consider whether your fortress has become your prison. Take a moment to consider what parts of your life may represent the rigid boundaries of self-protection and why. Why haven't you tried to start, even if slowly, adjusting them? What will it take for you to have the courage to stick your head out and just see if the storm is over or what the damage is to the ship?

### Let TAPS Be Your Periscope

Close and trusted family, friends, TAPS Peer Mentors and the Survivor CareTeam can help you gradually make your world a little bigger, talking you through inevitable disappointments, and offering the solid comfort required to help you feel grounded while you peek out for a little

sunshine. You may also benefit from shifting the focus from yourself to volunteering with others, exercise or social support groups.

### My World Feels Too Big: My Fences Keep Too Much In

Grief causes normal boundaries to become porous and leaky from necessity. We need people to step in and take care of portioning out the lasagna, getting our children to school and making arrangements. When coupled with inherently overwhelming and crippling surges of grief, the additional complicating factors of publicity and family dynamics mean that we can end up not only strangers to ourselves but strangers whose life decisions are now communal in nature.

Boundaries, while protecting emotional and physical health, also govern the patterns of interaction between others. Yes, we all must be able to ask for and receive help. When we're grieving deeply, we have no choice.

Grief changed us, but it did not change our basic human rights. We are still entitled to autonomy, no matter the relationship that is lost. When we feel as though we are being swept along or no longer in charge of our own decisions, it may be time to fix the holes in our fences.

### Taking Back Your Power

Yet, at some point, we should want to resume control over some of these tasks. As grateful as we may be to those who stepped in to help us take care of the day-to-day necessities and with larger decisions, eventually, there comes a time when we want to take back some of our power. But what do we do if, having trusted others to help in certain areas, we lack confidence in our own ability to take back our power?

Picking up the reins again is frightening for many people. It is a particular challenge as it relates to grief. Becoming one's own advocate is a sign of how drastically life has changed. The people who have inspired, protected and cared for us may be dead; additional nurturing relationships may have changed dramatically as a result of that death.

### Let TAPS Help You Feel Empowered

If your world feels unmanageable, it may be time to re-identify your priorities. Imagine yourself as a juggler, who has previously been able to keep lots of balls in the air. This same number of balls is not going to be possible at first in your new grief life. Think about what's most important. Choose the first few balls carefully. Your focus is not on an entire circus, or on who else is performing. It doesn't matter if you used to be able to juggle 20 balls, or if the person next to you is juggling 50. If your focus is on too many things, none of them will be successful. Narrow the frame and let TAPS help. Let a member of the Survivor CareTeam, a trusted confidante at a Seminar or involvement in the Inner Warrior program help you make *your life manageable* again—one ball at a time.

*continued on page 25*



# #GRATEFULNATION

2016 NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR  
& GOOD GRIEF CAMP





# BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP NURTURE HEALING

By Jonathan Kirkendall, MA, LPC, Youth Programs Manager

After months of preparation, phone calls and staff meetings, staff and volunteers flew in from every corner of the country for the final push to make ready for the 22nd Annual National Good Grief Camp. In one day, we were operational and ready to welcome the almost 1000 children, mentors and volunteers showing up for the Good Grief Camp in Arlington, Virginia.

However, before the campers arrived, our mentors received a comprehensive training that covered the TAPS history and mission, grief and child development, their role as a mentor and specifics on keeping children safe.

Two of the mentors who came for training this year were Brenden Roos and Steph Collenette. Brenden and Steph were paired with 10-year-olds Landon Gilbert and Tyler West to mentor throughout the Good Grief Camp.

Brenden's journey started in 2015 when he opened an email from his chain of command encouraging him to mentor a child of a fallen hero at the upcoming TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar. As a Petty Officer 2nd Class with the Naval Information Operations Command, which participates in a command-sponsored volunteer program called Project Good Neighbor, he was one of 22 unit members inspired to volunteer as a mentor for TAPS.

Growing up as a Navy brat, Brenden's dad was away frequently on ship duty. "But my dad always came back home. TAPS kids don't get that happy ending. It made me realize it could have been me," he said about his motivation to help our youngest TAPS survivors.

While Brenden was a returning mentor, Steph was new. Her best friend from a prior assignment in Italy and her current supervisor recruited her to volunteer as a mentor. They both volunteered before as mentors and thought she would be a great fit. Steph is active duty at Joint Base Andrews in the 11th Security Forces Squadron and believes her experience as a first responder helped prepare her to understand her mentee's loss and grief.



In 2015, Brenden had been paired with Tyler, who lost his father, Army Staff Sgt. Matthew West, in Afghanistan on Aug. 30, 2010, when insurgents attacked his unit with an IED. Tyler attended his first Good Grief Camp in 2015, and he and Brenden immediately bonded. They spent a lot of time in a small group with a senior mentor and his two mentees, Landon Gilbert and Nathen Jones. The group created the space for trusted sharing and support for the boys to know they are not alone.

Brenden has kept in touch with all three boys via emails and phone calls. They even attended additional Good Grief

Camps and Campouts together. So, it was no surprise that during registration this year, Tyler's mom requested he be matched again with Brenden.

Landon Gilbert, son of Navy Lt. William Craig Gilbert who died by suicide in 2012, also requested Brenden. The two kids know each other, and while Tyler wanted to be paired with Brenden, he knew that his friend Landon really wanted Brenden as his mentor. Tyler agreed to be matched with a new mentor. Steph immediately felt that coming into a previous close mentor/child relationship actually made it easier for her as a first-time mentor. Tyler was already more open and used to talking to his mentor, and this set the tone for their interaction during the Good Grief Camp.

Campers of all ages and mentors are busy from the moment the National Good Grief Camp starts. Everyone is given plenty of time to learn about each other, tell stories of loved ones and form bonds that will last throughout the weekend and beyond.

Saturday may be one of the busiest days for our "middles." By midmorning, campers and mentors load on a bus to spend the afternoon in Potomac Park along the shore of the river.

This third annual event, Playfield in the Park, is a TAPS favorite made possible with the Yellow Ribbons United partnership to provide an afternoon field day of fun for TAPS kids. Yellow Ribbons United, founded by Emma and Derrick Dockery, brings teams, athletes and sports-minded organizations together to support military families.

The fun started with a run through a rainbow arch of balloons and high fives from major D.C. sports athletes. The weather was perfect, not too sunny and not too hot. For two hours, with the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument in view, campers ate, danced and played as they strengthened friendships and found joy.

I caught up with the foursome as they grabbed food and some shade during lunch. Tyler told me that sometimes the playing is the best part. “When I used to talk about my dad, it made me sad,” Tyler said. “Mom said I was supposed to grieve, but I didn’t want to be sad. TAPS helped me learn how to remember my dad and how much I loved him. Everyone here is like me. They get it. Sometimes we just play because we understand you don’t always have to talk about it.”

And play they did. With their loved one shining down on them, hundreds of campers ate ice cream and pizza, played basketball and danced together. Watching them smile and laugh never gets old.

For some kids, this is the only week of the year when they feel normal about having lost a parent. Back home, most of the kids have both parents. Here, it’s no big deal to talk about your hero and how much you miss them. In fact, Landon shared how much he looks forward to Good Grief Camp. “Every time helps me with my grief, so we keep coming back,” he said.

After spending Sunday morning together, the mentors and campers say goodbye to each other in the afternoon. This part can be rough, but many mentors stay through Monday to go to Arlington with their mentee’s family or pay respects to their own fallen comrades. The children need this transition period to adjust to the world they live in the rest of the year. That world is now easier to navigate because of the security that comes from bonds of friendship with other campers and the continuing support they have with their mentors.

## SUMMER READING LIST FOR KIDS

BY JONATHAN KIRKENDALL, MA, LPC

I was lucky enough to have a mom that loved to read to us as we grew up, so it’s no surprise that when I began as a group leader at Good Grief Camps, I turned to books to help the kids talk about their own grief. Over the years, I come back to many of the same books over and over again. My strong suggestion is that you read them first before reading them out loud to your kids – some of them are very moving!

### **The Fall of Freddie the Leaf**

By Leo Buscaglia

A lovely parable for all ages, children to adults, illustrating the life cycle from birth to death through the life of a leaf.

### **Rabbityness** By Jo Empson

Beautifully illustrated, this book tells the story of an artist rabbit whose disappearance brings drabness to the forest inhabitants – until they descend into a dark hole and discover the gifts left for them.

### **The Invisible String** By Patrice Karst

A story that tells of the tie that really binds in a simple approach to overcoming the fear of loneliness or separation.

### **Tear Soup** By Pat Schweibert

The book tells how people are afraid to approach someone who’s grieving, and how people who try to be helpful, sometimes are not. A lovely book that invites all the emotions of grief.

### **Knock Knock** By Daniel Beatty

Love this powerful, heartfelt book of a boy whose father is suddenly gone, the love he leaves behind, and the natural resiliency of children.

### **I Miss You** By Pat Thomas

A great book for preschoolers, this story explores and normalizes the feelings of grief for these little ones.

### **Help Me Say Goodbye**

By Janis Silverman

A grief activity book for children, this is also a handy resource for parents and teachers. I’ve used activities from this book every year at Good Grief Camp.

### **Dog Heaven**

By Cynthia Rylant

A simple, beautifully illustrated book about dog heaven. More than just a book about where dogs go when they die, this book invites children into a conversation about death and grieving.

### **Mark’s Special Mission**

By Gregory Keeney

This book eloquently explains the circumstances, pageantry and the ceremonial nature of the U.S. Army Old Guard Caisson Platoon’s mission in Arlington National Cemetery. The book teaches healing through relationships, compassion through recognition and reverence for the nation’s fallen warriors and their family.



# Hiking the Pacific Crest Trail: A Brother's Journey of Love

By Bevin R. Landrum, MA, *TAPS Magazine* Editor

"MY DAYS ARE USUALLY SPENT WALKING FOR HOURS AND HOURS, HURT AND OUT OF BREATHE, THEN I'M REWARDED WITH GOD'S CANVAS AND BEAUTY WHEN I REACH THE TOP OF A TRAIL. I FIND IT REWARDING ENOUGH TO DEAL WITH THE STRUGGLE. AFTERALL, RAY WALKED THROUGH DESERTS AND HUMPED A PACK FOR MILES. YEAH, IT'S WORTH THE STRUGGLE."

Sunrise comes slowly to the mountain ranges that line the Pacific Crest Trail. Mount Whitney is the highest hurdle as the sun climbs 14,505 feet for her rays to crest the top. The golden beams usher in a new day for the intrepid hikers making their way from Mexico to Canada along the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail (PCT).

Jerry Bevel is one of those hikers. He set out on the multistate trail on April 21 and plans to finish the journey of love on Oct. 4, his brother's birthday. Ray won't physically be at the finish line to congratulate Jerry. Instead, Jerry will mark that day in solemn remembrance of Cpl. Ray M. Bevel who was killed in Iraq on April 21, 2007, when an IED exploded while he was on combat patrol operations with his 10th Mountain Division unit.

## WHEN LOVE IS ALL THAT REMAINS

After losing a sibling, it is common to realize your identity was tied to shared experiences — summer vacations, church camp, homework, practicing ball in the backyard, chores. Then someone in uniform knocks on your door and life changes. Part of your identity is gone.

It takes time to discover who you are now that you can't continue making memories together. When love is all that remains, how do you purposefully incorporate your loved one into the rest of your life?

## LOSS OF IDENTITY

Working through your own grief is complicated by the tendency to rush into caring for your parents or other siblings. It's even possible to feel isolated in this new space if you are the sibling left to hold the family together during a great tragedy.

Perhaps you begin to take on the role of the brother or sister you lost. If they were the gregarious jokester, then maybe you start watching a bit more Saturday Night Live to hone your comedian skills.

Slowly, you begin to lose the thread of who you were before your brother or sister didn't come home from service. It is important to make the space to define who you are now and find a way to tie the legacy of their love to your future. For Jerry Bevel, the journey to define a new path and honor his brother takes shape against the majestic scenery of the PCT.

## LARGER THAN LIFE

Ray lived larger than life and loved the outdoors. He liked to camp and go rafting as a kid. He always called home from his first deployment with a joke or a laugh. Ray worked with his hands and loved to build things. He was never afraid of failure. He would try anything — once — to challenge himself. Jerry's brother never complained about carrying around a fully weighted rucksack and getting shot at in Iraq. He just did it. That was Ray.

## LIVE A LITTLE BIGGER

Jerry and Ray didn't spend a lot of time together outdoors, but a couple of years ago Jerry felt compelled to do something Ray would have done. When Jerry heard from a friend about a TAPS retreat for surviving siblings, he immediately knew he wanted to go on the whitewater rafting trip. Then last year, he summited Mount Kilimanjaro on the TAPS inaugural Expedition and found himself running down the mountain from the summit with other survivors.

On the way down, Jerry found it exhilarating to test his normal physical limits and realized his outlook on life had drastically changed since Ray died. Jerry recognized in that moment the imperative to "live a little bigger" for Ray. The constraints of his former identity gave way to the possibility of choices that weave parts of Ray into new memories.

## WHAT NEXT?

When Jerry asked himself what action this required, he knew it had to be big. He calls himself a "solo" guy who doesn't have a wife and kids waiting at home. This gave him a lot of freedom to consider longer challenges to test what he really wants out of life.

At first, he considered the Appalachian Trail (AT) but thought it was crazy to embark on a hike that would take months to finish. Still, the parallel of Ray rucking with his gear and Jerry hiking for miles with a backpack resonated in his heart. Then Jerry came across a YouTube video posted by John Amorosano, a veteran PCT hiker. The documentary about the man's trail experiences was inspiring, but 2,650 miles is no small feat and often takes the entire snow-free season to complete. It's even longer than the AT.

## MEANT TO BE

Jerry thought he might be going too big too soon, but then he watched the end of the video and realized John completed his trek on Ray's birthday. At that point, a lightbulb went off and Jerry just knew. Not only was it a sign, but if the stars aligned, Jerry could also finish on Ray's birthday.

No, it's not a coincidence that Jerry chose to start his trek on Ray's anniversary and plans to end on Ray's birthday. Only 35 hikers per day are allowed to start the PCT journey. When Ray applied for his permit, way past the recommended deadline, 75 percent of the April 21 slots were already taken. He knew Ray was watching out for him when the permit arrived in the mail marked "approved."

## RAY'S STORY

It wasn't easy in the beginning for Jerry to share Ray's story on the trail. It seemed awkward to just throw it out there. But as more people began to learn what inspired Jerry to start his journey, the more the story took on a life of its own. Jerry now wears his brother's photo button on his pack where everyone can see it. He also sports a special 10th Mountain Division T-shirt commemorating all the fallen of the Division, including Ray. When he comes into camp or meets up with a new group, they have often already heard why he is hiking the PCT. They ask him about Ray and give Jerry the opportunity to talk about his service, share the memories and honor the amazing person who inspired him to start this endeavor. Jerry hopes to spread Ray's story across the West Coast and promote awareness for TAPS and other fallen heroes and their families. He wants this journey to inspire others to "live a little bigger" for someone they love.



## JOURNEY OF LOVE

Jerry has now completed almost 800 miles of the PCT including 556 miles through the desolate desert of California. He's run out of water three times only to be rescued by others sharing their meager water rations. He's picked up numerous resupply boxes from family and friends who are supporting his trek. Fire closures caused him to lose a week he had to make up by hitchhiking.

At press time, Jerry is in the Sierra Nevadas and daily faces the hardest experience he has ever undertaken. Each step is an emotional journey of love as he considers the weight of his brother's life and influence. Heat rash and blisters only make him remember Ray's love of country. The 50 pounds Jerry carries in his pack seem a small thing compared to the magnitude of Ray's sacrifice. These thoughts are what motivate Jerry to put one foot in front of the other on the trail. With each step he discovers a new Jerry, one shaped by the legacy of his brother's memory.

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\*Editor's note: TAPS plans to continue checking in with Jerry on his trek and will feature an update in a future edition of the magazine. You can find Jerry on Facebook (/jerry.d.bevel) or Instagram (@bigspoon421) to follow his journey of love.

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# Stronger Every Day

By Emily Muñoz, Senior Advisor, Strategy & Communications

Surviving spouse of Army Cpt. Gil Muñoz

*There will be a moment when "making it" is no longer enough, when the ache of grief, and the enormity of change become a call to action and self-care.*

For many people, this call manifests itself in a need for purposeful movement. Whether it's emotional or spiritual exploration, perspective changes or physical activity, movement is proof of life. It's an indication that, while we may feel left behind in a world without our loved ones, we're still called to lead full, rich lives that honor them and ourselves.

The Cape Cod Ragnar Relay was the flagship event of the TAPS Inner Warrior initiative, a program that, although still in its infancy, will serve as the survivor empowerment component of Team TAPS. Intended to rekindle the fire for self-improvement, success and personal strength, the Inner Warrior initiative is focused on creating community, teaching new skills and providing entry opportunities into sports outside of running. The Inner Warrior program will eventually include obstacle races, bicycling and swimming events, triathlons, land navigation and orienteering, rock climbing and more.

Along with the emphasis on challenging physical boundaries — we offer everything from a Couch to 5K program to a marathon, with triathlons to come — the intent is to encourage members of the #TAPSfam to be stronger every day.

The Inner Warrior program was created to celebrate the truth that love, whether physically present or not, makes us powerful beyond measure. More importantly, it makes us able to do things we could



not and would not do alone. Together, members of Inner Warrior teams find strength where their loved ones did — on their left and their right. In each other.

Twelve members of the TAPS family banded together in Hull, Maine, on May 12 to begin Ragnar's 200-mile relay on Cape Cod. Packed into two vans, they ran 36 legs on beaches, railroad trails,

bike paths and small-town roads and sidewalks. They passed the slap-bracelet baton through cold rain, injuries, blisters, daytime heat and nighttime uncertainty as they remembered fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and spouses gone too soon. The van signs proclaimed that each team member was stronger every day for the most compelling reason — the fallen heroes who continue to inspire us to make them proud.

Two hundred miles in a day and a half means there is little time for sleep, but a lot of time for the kind of bonding that only occurs when you're each running multiple times in the course of 36 hours. Between shots of Gatorade and almond butter, and amid clouds of Gold Bond, surviving family members made the kind of connections that endure. Being part of the Inner Warrior program means committing to be, once again, a part of something bigger.

The Inner Warrior program is gearing up for our events this year, starting with a Wellness Weekend on Aug. 5-7. We'll also participate in the Ragnar Trail Relay in North Carolina on Oct. 7-8; Army Ten-Miler on Oct. 9; Marine Corps Marathon and 10K on Oct. 28-30 and community races during Veterans Day weekend.

When you are ready to become newly proud of who you are and how you are living, when you don't just want to endure — you want to believe — then it's time to connect with your Inner Warrior and fight for the lives they wanted us to have.

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Find out how you can  
become stronger every day by  
emailing [innerwarrior@taps.org](mailto:innerwarrior@taps.org).  
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Continued from page 17

When we're trying to do too much, it means we haven't set healthy boundaries for ourselves—and likely not for others. We can't explore situational changes. We may not be able to tell how we've grown, and understand how far we've come, or how far we have yet to go. We also don't know how to recognize the people who consistently respect or violate our needs as we redefine them. This is another area where a Peer Mentor, community counseling connection or TAPS staff can help you find ways to regain control and create the space for comfort and growth.

### A Fence That Does Both

In a way, grief is a gift from your loved one. The time to redefine who you are and what you want, what works for you and what doesn't. How do you know if you're living too big or living too small? How do you know if you need to release control or take a little more? A great overview of boundaries, and ways to explore these questions, is available at [psychcentral.com/lib/keeping-good-boundaries-getting-your-needs-met](http://psychcentral.com/lib/keeping-good-boundaries-getting-your-needs-met) (tiny url is <http://tinyurl.com/h6nxuvo>).

You will not always feel unsafe and unsettled. Instead of focusing on the anxiety of defining your entire life, focus on finding the places where both your grief and your life are protected by people who care. This is, after all, the TAPS magic. If you're tightly focused on control, we'll help you stretch, little by little. If you're letting everything slip because you're still...well, trying to do everything...let us find ways to help.

We are always able to set the tone by acknowledging that we are disoriented and in an unfamiliar place. We can explain, just as Bill Bryson did, that the places with which we have been familiar, and which have in many ways defined us, have changed dramatically. It takes a while to find your safe zone.

# Grief Can't Stop the Tides

Karen Morgan

Surviving wife of Chief Warrant Officer 2 Charlie Morgan

The ocean has always given me comfort,  
even before Charlie's death, but especially after.

My 9-year-old daughter doesn't always understand why we have to drive 25 miles down to one of my favorite pull-offs in Rye, New Hampshire, and park there to watch the waves pound the rocks.

Sometimes, I can win her cooperation on this monthly trip with a sandwich or a promise to find crabs under the worn and darkened rocks that we dare to turn over. For her, it's all about the tangibles right now.

But for me, I come to understand the spiritual intangibles, or at least to sit with them. The really good ones that I'll never fully wrap my mind around because they are truly larger than life.

### The ocean is so enormous and vast that it puts me into perspective.

The ocean puts life and death into perspective.  
The cycles of life and death are openly displayed here.  
Birth, growth, death and even survival.

### My own survival makes more sense where the waves never cease.

At first, the beating cadence of water against rocks is restless.  
But after I've been there a while,  
I find some peace in the sound. I realize that life continues on.  
The tides keep coming in and out.  
We can't stop them with our grief.

It makes me ponder my role in life.

What was Charlie's?

I find peace in knowing that our meaning ebbs and flows as our understanding of unconditional love changes — giving and receiving love without expectation or knowledge of the future. Just like the ocean waves that have no expectation of where the currents will take them, our love continues whether we know its course or not.

# LIFELINES OF HOPE



## Reveal New Possibilities

By Dr. Carla Stumpf-Patton

*These lifelines come in many forms, such as support from peer survivors or newfound encouragement that offers us strength.*

We will never forget where we were and what we were doing when we heard the knock on the door that brought the devastating news of the death of our loved ones. The exact moment in time when life as we once knew it was irrevocably and forever changed is seared in our memory. In those moments, life can feel as if it were suspended in the darkness of pain and sorrow. We are lost in uncharted and foreign terrain and unable to find solid ground to move forward — until we find a lifeline of hope that helps us understand new possibilities of how we will make it through this.

And we do make it through. One step at a time, one day at a time, one moment at a time and, occasionally, one breath at a time. These lifelines come in many forms, such as support from peer survivors or newfound encouragement that offers us strength. These anchors amid

our grief give us safe footing to stand again with something that drives us forward. Two

TAPS families share their journey of healing and how lifelines of hope have given them a renewed sense of purpose.

Kirsten Yuhl-Torres explains how she never thought more about hope than on the day she lost it — the day her family was notified that their only son, Sgt. Joseph W. Perry, was killed in action in Iraq on Oct. 2, 2006. He was only 23.

It was the day when “our future, our hopes and dreams, came to a devastating halt.” Kirsten remembers thinking that “when you lose a child, you feel as though you have lost your future, and Joe was our only child. I thought we would never feel hope or happiness again, but I was wrong. Hope can come from tragedy.”

For Kirsten and her family, hope began with the phone calls from Joe’s commander and platoon

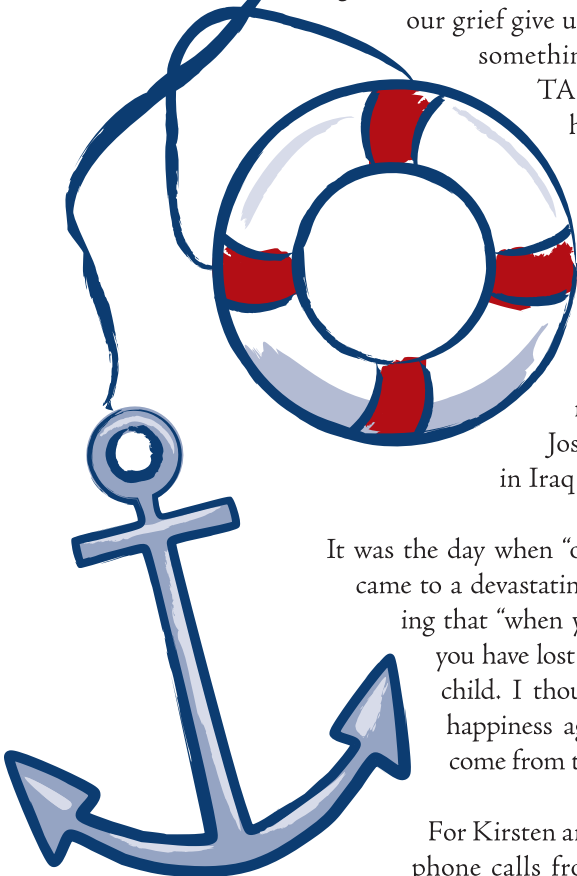
leader who reached out to console the family. They were grateful to be connected to the soldiers with whom Joe had once served. Kirsten says during Joe’s deployment they sent care packages as a way to maintain contact with him. “It brought joy to us as we packed food and goodies into the boxes that we mailed.”

Kirsten and her husband later learned there was a sister unit in Iraq and decided to ship 200 containers of Cup O’ Noodles soups (Joe’s favorite) to the first sergeant of the company. “We needed to continue doing this. Doing something that we had done for Joe made us feel alive again.”

Then they received a gift of hope — a letter from a soldier thanking them. The parents were elated and began sending individual packages to the soldier. He wrote them back, asking them to send care packages to soldiers in the company who did not receive any mail. So they started sending packages to these other soldiers, too.

Kirsten explains how the new connections with soldiers felt like “tributaries of hope, lifelines that reached back and forth between people we didn’t even know. As connections to soldiers grew, the joy began to return to our lives. We thought we would never feel hope or happiness again, but we did!”

As Kirsten reflects back on their journey, she found a lifeline — “a newfound strength that we never knew existed; we gained understanding about our existence beyond this lifetime that gives us peace. We came to understand the dynamic of hope. The important connections we





made with these soldiers and their families now stretch around the world. We may have lost our only child, but, through his sacrifice, we have gained thousands of sons and daughters who have helped us find a new future filled with hope and promise.”

The Scallorn family found their lifeline of hope through a project that developed in honor of their son and brother, Airman 1st Class Cody Scallorn, who died by suicide on Jan. 2, 2012, at the age of 18. Cody’s mom, Peggy, explains how she was “beyond lost and felt as if my heart had been ripped from my chest. I did not want to go on because the pain of losing my son was so great, but I made a promise to myself that I would not let his death be in vain.”

Peggy says being surrounded by others walking the same journey helped her family tremendously. “I saw the wonderful work that TAPS was doing in the Good Grief Camp, and we connected on deep levels with other families we met along the way.”

Cody’s sisters were 10 and 16 at the time of his death, and Peggy saw how much they were struggling but also how much they benefitted by attending TAPS events. Peggy’s daughters wanted to help the children attending TAPS Good Grief Camps and the family came up with the idea of making Comfort Creatures.

“We started designing and sewing, and the first year, we donated 200 to the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar. As word got around, other surviving families and friends began donating materials and sending donations to cover costs of fabric,

thread, stuffing and shipping. We have survivors and supporters who have generously donated their time by cutting patterns, sewing creatures and mailing them to us to use to distribute. The success of our project has been fueled by those who have volunteered to be part of it.”

This year, the family sent Comfort Creatures to every TAPS Regional Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp, as well as to Arlington, Virginia, for the National Military Survivor Seminar over Memorial Day weekend. “We plan on sending enough to every event for the rest of this year. Being able to give back to the children whose hearts are hurting has been healing in our grief process.”

The Comfort Creatures have their own Facebook page where TAPS families, mentors, staff and supporters share photos from events and adventures of the creatures. “Every step in this grief journey has been a learning process for us, and our family has found hope, purpose and meaning out of a tragic loss. When Cody passed, we never knew this would come of it, but I know he would be proud of what we are doing to honor him, and his memory will continue to live on in this project.”

In the early days of grief, it can seem impossible to find anything that anchors us back to a sense of stability, especially when hope feels to be out of sight or grasp. We may wonder if happiness will return or when we will experience laughter and joy again. We all mourn in our own individual manner and timeframe, and we can find hope in a variety of unique ways when we least expect it.

As we begin to take steps to heal, such as talking with a fellow survivor, participating in a TAPS Seminar or Retreat, attending a local support group or working with a private grief counselor, the lifelines of hope begin to appear and offer us opportunities to work on healing our hearts as well as helping others.

If you feel ready and are looking for suggestions, TAPS offers a variety of purposeful ways to become involved. No matter how large or small, it all starts with taking that first step on the path that brings you purpose and hope, and TAPS will be here for you along your journey, encouraging and supporting you every step of the way.

### About the Author

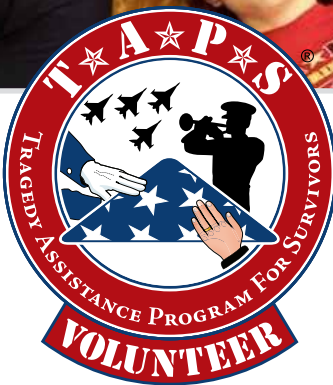
Dr. Carla Stumpf-Patton manages Suicide Survivor Services at TAPS as a subject matter expert in grief, trauma and suicide. She holds a B.S. in Psychology, an M.A. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and a Doctorate of Education in Counseling Psychology. She is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, National Certified Counselor, Certified Fellow Thanatologist and Certified Clinical Trauma Professional. Dr. Stumpf-Patton is the surviving spouse of Sgt. Richard Stumpf, who died by suicide in 1994, several days before their only child was born.

# Life Beyond the Seminar: Through the Lens of a Good Grief Camp Mentor

By Paige Williams

*Mentors help maintain care and comfort for TAPS families even after programs end.*

Daniel Davenport woke up one morning in April and sent a text message; a simple enough task, one that many of us do so often we think nothing of it. But for one TAPS family, this text message was so much more. Because on the anniversary of her father's death, a child knew she was in the thoughts and prayers of her mentor. And that child's mother knew her daughter had a role model, confidant, and friend — every day of the year. It is moments like these that motivate Daniel to give back as a Good Grief Camp mentor.



*Thank you,  
Daniel Davenport!*

Daniel got involved with TAPS when he volunteered for the 2013 TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar. After returning from a 10-month deployment to Afghanistan in 2012, Daniel felt “a new appreciation for life and liberty” and decided to give back in the form of community service. He knew he wanted to serve the military community and was looking for an organization that could help him support a cause important to him. When he heard about the TAPS mission, he was excited to get started.

His first experience with TAPS was a bit nerve-wracking, especially because, as a mentor, he would be paired with a child for an entire weekend of emotional support and care. It was important to Daniel that he provide a meaningful experience for the grieving child so that they could both grow and support each other through the weekend. However, any doubts he had about his impact were diminished as

soon as he connected with his first mentee. He knew he was making a difference when, after spending his first day fretting over whether he was even able to get by, he overheard his mentee tell a friend that, “TAPS got it right this year,” when pairing her with Daniel.

After seeing the support mentors can and do give to surviving children he was hooked, and he has served at every TAPS National Seminar since. He makes a point at every Seminar to get to know his mentees.

He makes sure their voices are being heard and they feel comfortable opening up to him about their grief, or even just their everyday life.

Though the National Seminar brings them together only over Memorial Day weekend, Daniel feels a responsibility to stay in touch with his mentees year-round. Regular contact with these kids is a way for him to make sure they are supported emotionally but also not getting

into trouble. One teenage mentee goes so far as to introduce him to friends by saying, “Hey, this is Daniel, my mentor from TAPS. I call him before I do stupid things.”

These lasting impressions have inspired Daniel to give back beyond Good Grief Camp. In the past year alone, he has helped TAPS sell Courage Caps, staffed expo booths for the Marine Corps Marathon and Army Ten-Miler, distributed packets at events, worked the Potomac Hunt Races and helped set up the TAPS Honor Guard Gala. In this way, he has provided countless hours of support to a variety of our different programs and events.

However, the best part of volunteering for Daniel will always be the kids: the joy, the atmosphere and the love in the room whenever they get together. He is able to celebrate their success with them, knowing he played an important part in their journey. “I feel a sense of purpose in their life...and I don't think there's any other joy.”



## Social Media and Bereavement

How it can help, connect us and provide safe space to share feelings  
Claire Henline ★ Surviving daughter of Lt. Col. William Henline

For better or for worse we live in an age of social media. We get our news from it, our recipes, our baby and puppy videos and increasingly our support system.

In prior eras, those bereaved were left alone to mark their losses after funerals and memorials. The world went forward at its own pace. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest and other social networks are now giving grief a voice and making public the message that there is no timeline or set pace for healing a broken heart. Seeing even the smallest acknowledgement that our life is forever changed is important — even if it is in the form of a “like” or “heart” or “sad” notification.

Online displays of grief rather than personal interactions can be more comfortable for all involved. Face-to-face encounters often make those unfamiliar with tragedy uncomfortable. It may even result in more hurt feelings when all the wrong things are said and done. The safety barrier of social media enables people to grieve publicly in whatever manner is comfortable for them. At the same time, it allows their followers to find their own comfort zone in offering support. Now, empathy and understanding are available 24/7.

This is especially beneficial to our TAPS family. We meet each other at events and have the ease of connection and support by becoming friends on Facebook. This

free and popular platform is a critical component of peer support.

The anniversaries, the hard days, the walls we hit and the proverbial hills we conquer are inherently understood and instantly acknowledged online by our TAPS family. This instant response is critical. Emojis, GIFs, memes, likes and words of caring from those who “get it” come to survivors in the moments they really need support. Your TAPS family also knows when to offer the sweet, the bittersweet and when not to sugarcoat.

Social media allows us to easily share memories, photos, even tag our deceased loved ones’ accounts to keep the relationship as fresh as it will ever be. After all, we know that death ends a life, not the relationship.

Facebook keeps that relationship tangible in a new way by allowing accounts to be memorialized. It’s an option that enables us to keep the life of a deceased loved one fiercely in the present. It also allows others who knew our loved one to share their own memories and stories and thus participate in our grief rituals and journey.

If we are missing our hero, we have at least this modern ability to click from any device and see them, hear them in videos and send messages of our love out into the universe for them.

Social media also allows us to know each other’s fallen heroes. As online followers of living legacies, we get to see the people we will never meet. Right there before us, scrolling through our feed, is evidence of lives still present and impactful. We may even experience genuine grief in feeling we have lost the possibility of their future; all this by only meeting them through a digital footprint.

Social media has forever expanded the way we express sorrow and grief. Online grieving and condolences are part of a standard ritual in the aftermath of tragedy and death. We acknowledge life in all its precious moments and help destigmatize grief. To some, perhaps those who are lucky to have not yet known great loss, posts marked with “#RIP,” “prayers” or sad face emojis may seem artificial. In a fast-paced digital age, there is refreshing humanity in taking even a moment to respect a life now gone.

### About the Author

Claire Henline is a native of Washington, D.C., and has worked for almost 15 years for military organizations in both historic preservation and communications. She currently serves as the TAPS Social Media Manager.

# 2016 Programs Schedule

## JULY

- ★ Wisconsin Womens Retreat  
July 18–22 • Milwaukee, WI\*
- ★ Southern California Adult Children Retreat  
July 20–24 • Orange County, CA
- ★ Grand Teton Kayaking Expedition  
July 22–26 • Grand Teton National Park, WY\*
- ★ Southern California Good Grief Campout  
July 24–27 • Julian, CA\*
- ★ Fort Hood Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp  
July 28–30 • Fort Hood, TX

## AUGUST

- ★ Tennessee Family Campout  
August 1–4 • Bolivar, TN
- ★ Montana Widows and Sisters Retreat  
August 3–7 • Ennis, MT\*
- ★ Inner Warrior Wellness Weekend  
August 5–7 • Raleigh, NC
- ★ Atlanta Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp  
August 12–14 • Atlanta, GA
- ★ Appalachian Trail Teen Adventure  
August 13–19 • MD\*
- ★ Alaska Siblings Retreat  
August 18–22 • Anchorage, AK\*
- ★ Alaska Parents Retreat  
August 18–22 • Anchorage, AK\*

## SEPTEMBER

- ★ Machu Picchu Expedition  
September 1-9 • Machu Picchu, Peru\*
- ★ Northern California Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp  
September 9-11 • Sacramento, CA
- ★ Montana Mens Retreat  
September 14-18 • West Yellowstone, MT\*
- ★ Arizona Womens Empowerment Retreat  
September 18-23 • Sedona, Arizona\*
- ★ National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp  
September 30-October 3 • St. Pete Beach, FL

## OCTOBER

- ★ Inner Warrior: Ragnar Trail Carolinas  
October 7–8 • NC
- ★ Hawaii Empowerment Retreat for Women  
October 8–15 • Moloka'i, HI\*
- ★ Dude Ranch All Population Retreat  
October 16–21 • Raymer, CO

## NOVEMBER

- ★ TAPS United Kingdom All Population Gathering  
November 9–15 • UK\*
- ★ Charleston Moms Retreat  
November 16–20 • Charleston, SC
- ★ Baltimore Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp  
November 18–20 • Baltimore, MD

## DECEMBER

- ★ New England Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp  
December 2–4 • Cromwell, CT

\* Note: These events are either closed or on a waitlist. If you see an event you are interested in attending, but registration is full visit [www.taps.org/events](http://www.taps.org/events) regularly as 2017 events will be announced soon. As a reminder, registration and applications for most events open three months or more in advance. Be sure to sign up early for 2017 events.

Text TAPS to 95577 to receive event alerts and reminders from TAPS.



# Walk This Way Therapeutic Walking as Healing

By Lalaine Estella, MA, Community-Based Care Coordinator

Those of us who work in bereavement know there is no one way to grieve. Just as there are many forms of grief, there are as many ways to support the person who is grieving.

Some people are really good at articulating their feelings and processing their emotions verbally. Some are not comfortable talking about what they are going through and may internalize their feelings. Others may use art, physical activity or writing as outlets to express themselves.

Knowing that there are differences in the way people grieve, Felicia Marquez-Wong created a grief support program that speaks to those who are looking for an opportunity to talk about their loved ones while providing social interaction with others, and some exercise.

Felicia, the manager for social work and bereavement services at St. Francis Healthcare System in Hawaii, created Walk in the Mall, a grief support group that has been providing a structured grief walk once a month for 17 years.

“The Walk in the Mall provides socialization and opportunity to share their losses in a safe environment. Walking is a safe way to exercise and it reduces stressors,” Felicia says. Groups start with brief introductions and mild stretching before the walk, and a licensed clinical social worker leads the group. “It is open to the community, so anyone is welcome. They may walk either with a seasoned or longtime griever

or stay with the facilitator depending on their needs,” she says. After the walk, there is grief education and an invitation to brunch nearby where another hour is spent socializing.

“I have learned to listen better to others, and respect the courage it takes to bring your heartache and talk about it,” said one regular participant. “I love walking and taking part in it and the brunch makes sure I talk and laugh with some people.”

Cathy Campbell, manager of bereavement services at Hospice of Washington County in Maryland, says her Grief Walks program was developed for the “instrumental griever,” one who typically is not comfortable sharing emotions and prefers physical expressions of grief. “They may clean the house from top to bottom, or go to the garage to tinker or work out in the garden,” she says. “There are many different, healthy ways to express grief. Our grief group is casual and flexible and tries to reach those with different styles of expression.”

The Grief Walks program is held in the fall and is offered free of charge. The easy-paced, walking group offers participants an opportunity to share, re-energize and learn from others who have also experienced the death of a loved one. “What we’ve found is that while being active and walking, some people naturally open up.”

“Sometimes it’s helpful to have a group where you don’t just sit and talk, but talk while walking,” Cathy says. “You are getting exercise and some comfort.”

Walking is an activity that requires little or no specialized skills or training and does not require special equipment. Felicia does recommend that new participants talk to their doctors before starting a walking program. The bereavement managers do assess participants for suitability in the walking program before they can join. For recent or traumatic losses, individual grief counseling may be recommended first.

“I really look forward to coming to this (walking) group,” one participant said. “I can express what I feel openly, the way you can’t really do at home.”

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The Community Based Care team at TAPS can connect you and your family with free grief support resources in your community. Call 800-959-TAPS (8277) or email [info@taps.org](mailto:info@taps.org) for more information.  
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## About the Authors

Lalaine Estella is a community-based care coordinator at TAPS and has a master’s degree in public health. She walks her dog Momo daily, practices yoga regularly and runs with Team TAPS whenever she can. She is a surviving daughter of Francisco Estella, U.S. Navy.



# Are You Ready to Be a Peer Mentor?

August Cabrera ☆ Surviving spouse of Lt. Col. David Cabrera

During my first TAPS Expedition, I watched new friends stretch, reach and jump for handholds on the rock walls as we climbed. This day, full of red sandstone cliffs near Moab, Utah, was the culmination of our four-day Colorado Plateau adventure. Earlier, as we prepared to rock climb, we learned to be successful we have to properly gear up: shoes, harness, helmet and, the most important thing, a safety line tied to an experienced, committed guide. The best guides are those who have conquered the route you are attempting and who will not only talk you through finding each hold, but who are tied to your safety line, ready to catch you if you should get scared, need a break or even begin to fall.

They know how to help because they have been in the same place.

However, simply having climbed the wall — or walked further down the grief path — doesn't mean you are ready to be a guide. Good guides are only valuable when they come to the relationship fully committed to the success of the person relying on their experience and support.

If I want to get to the top of a 40-foot wall, I want someone below me who is paying attention, talking me through it, responding to my concerns and ready to catch me. And if I want to reconcile my life with my loss, I want a Peer Mentor who is attentive, communicative, responsive and also ready to be my lifeline on the bad days.

How do you know if you are ready to be invited into another person's life — someone who has lost a loved one and is searching for support — and walk alongside them in their grief? How do you know if you are ready for that kind of responsibility and commitment?

Here are three key questions to ask yourself:

## 1. Am I in a place in my life where I can logistically make this work?

A good guide is patient and has the necessary time.

Do you have enough space in your life that you can be available to your mentee on a regular basis? While the time necessary is different for each relationship and can range from daily communication to chats a couple of times a year, you need to know what resources you have available.

## 2. Am I in a place in my life where I can emotionally make this work?

A good guide is prepared and has the necessary strength.

The Peer Mentor program tries to match mentors and mentees based on relationship and the nature of the loss (combat widow to combat widow, for instance).

Do you have the emotional strength to hear details of what happened to their loved one without it upsetting you and opening still-tender wounds of your own loss?

## 3. Am I in a place in my life where I can commit to it being all about them?

A good guide is present and has the necessary safety equipment.

This is not a typical friendship, this is a loosely structured relationship where the main focus is on the mentee's journey. Are you committed to being as present as possible to your mentee? Do you have your own support network, connections within the TAPS Peer Mentor program or maybe even your own personal Peer Mentor as your necessary safety equipment?

If you have pondered these questions and discover you are ready to begin a new part of your journey helping another survivor navigate his or her own grief, please contact TAPS at [peermentors@taps.org](mailto:peermentors@taps.org).

Maybe now it is your turn to grab a safety line or a phone and commit to supporting another survivor. Your shared experience could mean all the difference for the person on the other end of the line. And the relationship created when two survivors are joined together is life changing for everyone.



### About the Author

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





# TRIBE: ON HOMECOMING AND BELONGING

By Sebastian Junger • Reviewed by Maj. Jerry Landrum, MA, MMAS, U.S. Army

War correspondent and documentarian Sebastian Junger's latest book deals with the failure of American society to reintegrate American soldiers returning home from combat. Junger is most known for his book "The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea" and his film documentary "Restrepo." Given his deep connection with soldiers and experience as a war correspondent, Junger's perspective is based on raw emotion and personal understanding. Taken a step further, many of his findings parallel the sense of isolation survivors encounter after losing a military hero and their deeply abiding need to belong again, a solution often found within their TAPS family.

Junger uses history and scientific research to argue that a lack of communal relationship marginalizes America's returning combat veterans, which contributes to mental health issues. From a historical perspective, he juxtaposes American Indian tribal society against modern American society. Tribal communities faced existential challenges ranging from starvation to murderous attacks from other tribes. In order to survive, each member had to do their part. Because of their loyalty to the group, freeloading, treason, and cowardice were rare occurrences; but when they did occur, the tribe acted decisively.

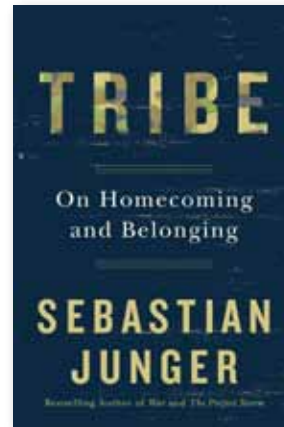
In modern society, such cooperation for survival is not necessary. There is no need to work together in agricultural or hunting endeavors to survive. The result is a comfortable but isolated way of life. According to Junger, "Whatever the technological advances of modern society — and they're nearly miraculous — the individualized lifestyles that those technologies spawn seem to be deeply brutalizing to the human spirit." This is no more obvious than with a family

struggling to find meaning after losing a loved one in military service.

However, modern warfare forces a commitment to community that increases happiness. Whether it was in World War II during the German Blitz of England or the bitter Bosnian civil war in the early 1990s, participants often look back at the epoch as the "happiest of times" — a time when the singular devotion to group survival transcended personal concerns. Junger argues this phenomenon occurs when "self-interest gets subsumed into group interest because there is no survival outside group survival, and that creates a social bond that many people sorely miss."

In the American way of war, a very small portion of the population deploys to distant lands to fight a shadowy enemy not widely accepted as a threat. Because a small portion of the population is sacrificing for an abstract political objective, there is disconnectedness between the American population and its soldiers.

True, the Americans venerate soldiers with shopping discounts and platitudes such as, "Thank you for your service," but Junger argues this type of comment "only deepens the chasm between the military and the civilian populations by highlighting the fact that some people serve their country but the vast majority don't." When American soldiers return, they find it difficult to secure work and are often treated as victims. Thus, post-traumatic stress and suicide rates are on the increase among these groups. When military families face loss, they often must move away from the communities where they



live and find a new home. If America is to effectively deal with these issues of isolation, it must rediscover its sense of community.

Yet, we know our survivors and returning combat veterans face the darkest of days most successfully when supported by a strong, caring community. They are clearly

fighting for survival in a world that has forever changed for them. There should be no separation between those who sacrificed and the love we hold for them. Welcoming them into a supportive environment is critical to their eventual healing.

When those who volunteered to fight for our nation come home and when families courageously grieve heroes who will never return, they deserve seamless integration into a tribe, a family, where they immediately feel belonging and purpose. I ask who is there for families of America's fallen heroes? For military survivors, TAPS is that tribe.

Junger's book is challenging and helpful in understanding the complexities of post-combat reintegration. It reminds the reader that communities such as TAPS are essential to trauma recovery and healing after grief. At only 135 pages, the reading is definitely worth the small investment of time to better understand an issue where we can each make a difference by offering not only respect but a sense of belonging to the heroes in our midst.

## About the Author

Jerry is a troop commander at Fort Meade, Maryland, and a doctoral candidate in the Kansas State University Security Studies Program.

# Seminar Sponsors Change Lives

Over Memorial Day weekend, TAPS brought together 2,000 surviving family members, mentors and volunteers for a time of remembrance and celebration at our 22nd Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. We could not have supported our families without the generous donations of our donors. Here are some of the amazing healing moments of connection from the weekend.



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