

# T★A★P★S<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE  
SUMMER 2018



FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED

The Six Needs of Mourning ★ How Art Helps Us Heal  
Making New Summer Memories ★ Personal Stories of Hope and Resilience



# FREEDOM STANDS THANKS TO ALL WHO SERVED.

We owe our freedom to all those who have served and sacrificed. Boeing is honored to support the families of our nation's fallen heroes.





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**On the Cover**  
Army Capt. and Military Mentor John Rhoten with Jensen Agno, surviving sons of Staff Sgt. Randy Agno, U.S. Army, representing TAPS at the National Memorial Day Parade, May 2018 in Washington, D.C. Photo by Kimberly Weece.

Agno, U.S. Army, representing TAPS at the National Memorial Day Parade, May 2018 in Washington, D.C. Photo by Kimberly Weece.



# Comfort and Care

## To our TAPS family,

Welcome to this issue of the TAPS *Magazine*, your journal of hope and healing. Within these pages, we hope you find comfort in the articles written by fellow survivors and leading grief professionals. This is our family publication, with resources and information to help you connect, share, and find strength.

TAPS was founded nearly 25 years ago on a simple premise: to provide compassionate care and resources for all who are grieving the death of a military loved one. When my husband died along with seven other soldiers in an Army plane crash, the greatest comfort I found was with others who had also lost loved ones in the military. We understood each other, and we could support each other in a way that no one else really could. And that's the magic of our TAPS family: Regardless of how or where our loved ones died, their lives included selfless service to their country and we forever honor and remember them.

TAPS is a nonprofit organization, built with love and care by surviving military family members to offer supportive services and critical resources that fill gaps in what the government provides. We offer a light in the darkness, calm in the chaos, and a constant loving community to ensure you are never alone and your needs are met. Our services are available to you completely free of charge, including our local TAPS Togethers happening near you, the National Military Survivor Helpline available around the clock, help from our Casework Team that includes benefits and emergency financial assistance, connections to grief counseling and local area support groups, our Peer Mentor program, and so much more (see pages 36-39).

TAPS is funded by donations, and we are proud to be a four-star rated charity with resources focused on meeting your needs, whenever and wherever you need us. In addition to our funded services and programs, we also offer optional events that have become very popular, including expeditions, retreats, and even cruises, at discounted rates or with a refundable deposit. We love hearing ideas about all the ways our TAPS family can get together, so please share with us at [info@taps.org](mailto:info@taps.org).

I hope you enjoy this issue of our TAPS *Magazine*, written with love and care for you. You are a treasured member of our TAPS family, and we are here for you always.

With hope and care,



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requests and address changes to [info@taps.org](mailto:info@taps.org).

**Our Mission**  
The Tragedy Assistance Program for  
Survivors offers compassionate care to all  
those grieving the loss of a military loved  
one. Our National Military Survivor Helpline  
is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at  
800-959-TAPS (8277). For more about the  
resources we provide, turn to page 36.

Volume 24, Issue 2. TAPS *Magazine* is published  
quarterly by TAPS, 3033 Wilson Blvd., Third Floor,  
Arlington, VA 22201; (800) 588-TAPS (8277). Copyright  
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# Dear TAPS...

## YOU MAKE THE EXTRA EFFORT

Please know what a difference you make in our lives. It would be so much easier to tell people to contact an agency or another person, but you make the extra effort to facilitate the communication. Truthfully, I might be afraid to do this alone. Even with all my years and a supportive husband, there are still things I find daunting. Thank you for being such a gift in my life.

**Judith Wheeler**

*Georgetown, TX*

Surviving mother of Fire Controlman  
1st Class Michael Turner Booker, U.S. Navy

## CIRCLE OF LOVE

I feel the circle of love from my TAPS family. You were there when my son died, you have been there for the past year and a half, and I know that you will always be there for me. I feel safe knowing that I have people in my life who will care and understand because they, too, have walked and crawled this difficult path in life.

**T. J. Eaves**

*Mont Alto, PA*

Surviving mother of Sgt. 1st Class Michael  
Oliver Tucker, U.S. Army Veteran

## YOUR EMAILS LIFT MY SPIRITS

I cannot tell you how the TAPS emails on my son Zach's birthday, the day of his death, and the many holidays lift my spirits. Zach—forever 23—would be 36 years old today. His younger brother, USMC Cpl. Jake Kocses, is deployed. We usually talk to each other on Zach's birthday, and this year will be the first time we won't. I understand, though, and am very proud of both of my sons for wanting to serve their country. I speak to Zach in my prayers, and I love to share the joy he adds to our lives, even in death.

**William Kocses**

*Naples, FL*

Surviving father of Sgt. Zachariah Kocses,  
U.S. Marine Corps



## I FEEL BLESSED

I lost my husband almost 10 years ago. He was killed in action while serving our country on May 13, 2008, one week before turning 34. For a very long time I questioned whether my feelings would disappear, I would forget Victor's voice, or our memories would vanish in time. I felt afraid of that happening. Today I feel blessed that my fears were just that—and that none of them have become a reality. This May seems different from other years, maybe because it's a decade and it's hard to understand that I have changed and he did not. His life *was* and mine *is*. I was contacted by TAPS at the start of my grief path, and soon after I started receiving your magazine. Reading the stories inspired me to keep going.

**Maria Cota Horstmeier**

*Colorado Springs, CO*

Surviving spouse of Staff Sgt. Victor Manuel  
Cota, U.S. Army

## INNER WARRIOR WISDOM

As I am watching the sun go down, I am reflecting on my amazing weekend at the Inner Warrior Wellness Weekend in San Antonio. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the TAPS staff for bringing their passion, sharing their love, and teaching me so many new tools. Thank you so much for everything.

**Sabine Ward**

*La Vernia, TX*

Surviving spouse of Sgt. 1st Class Clay A.  
Ward, U.S. Army Retired

## GRATEFUL FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Thank you, TAPS, for the wonderful support and encouragement you provide to us. Your staff is always so helpful and kind. So far I have attended a Moms' Retreat in Charleston, the TAPS Cruise, and the Suicide Survivor Seminar in Phoenix. I have met so many wonderful, supportive, encouraging people

and made many new friendships. I am excited to attend more TAPS events for years to come!

**Julia Wilson**

*Danville, IL*

Surviving mother of Lance Cpl. Tyler Lee Wilson, U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

**COMPOSITION OF LOVE AND SHARING**

Hello to all who wrote for the Writer's Circle Newsletter—what a diverse composition of love, grief, and sharing through writing! To each and every one, keep writing as it is a joy to hear and read everyone's thoughts. Keep caring, daring, and sharing.

**Bonnie Jo Lobosco**

*Easton, PA*

Surviving mother of Staff Sgt. Andrew Thomas Lobosco, U.S. Army

**YOU ARE ALWAYS THERE**

God bless you! You are an inspiration! Thank you to my TAPS family who is always there. I cannot express how much that means. I wanted to express my appreciation in greater depth, but it is hard to put into words all the heartfelt gratitude I have for all of you at TAPS.

**Mae Woods**

*Palmer, AK*

Surviving mother of Spc. Shane Woods, U.S. Army

**PUSHING THROUGH**

A combination of things contributes to my wellness: counseling/sharing with other survivors, busyness, and especially Number 3 from the book *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* by Bonnie Carroll and Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. I started reading it two months ago and froze up. But wanting to move on, I continued. I think I can push through. I know I can push through. I genuinely believe things are getting better. Today is the date three months after Kevin died. And I'm just grateful I'm not going through this alone.

**Jon Krause**

*Quincy, IL*

Surviving father of Lance Cpl. Kevin Krause, U.S. Marine Corps Veteran



## Connect with Us!

### WRITE TO US

This is your magazine! We welcome your thoughts about anything you read in our pages or any experience you have with TAPS. Please write to us at [editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org).

### SHARE YOUR STORY

Your stories can bring hope and healing to our TAPS families. If you would like to share a story about your loved one or your grief journey, we would love to hear from you. All submissions will be considered for *TAPS Magazine*, our blog at [taps.org](http://taps.org), and other TAPS publications. We invite you to read our submission policy and submit your story at [taps.org/shareyourstory](http://taps.org/shareyourstory).

### JOIN US ONLINE

On our website, [taps.org](http://taps.org), you can find information about our resources, programs, and events. You'll also find our blog, filled with stories of survivor strength and healing. In addition, our TAPS Online Community hosts chat sessions you can join from the comfort of your home. Learn more at [taps.org/onlinecommunity](http://taps.org/onlinecommunity).

### SUBSCRIBE TO THE SATURDAY MORNING MESSAGE

The Saturday Morning Message is a weekly email written by and for survivors to provide support along the grief journey. To subscribe, send a request to [online@taps.org](mailto:online@taps.org).

### FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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 [taps4america](https://snapchat.com/taps4america) |  [youtube.com/c/tapsorg](https://youtube.com/c/tapsorg)

**For more information about the support and resources TAPS provides, turn to page 36.**

# The Seesaw of *Resilience* and *Vulnerability*

It's this back-and-forth of grief that provides momentum for the journey.

By Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.

*"To share your weakness is to make yourself vulnerable; to make yourself vulnerable is to show your strength."*—Criss Jami

As you journey through your naturally complicated and painful grief, you are probably being buoyed by—and perhaps also dismayed by—your resilience. After all, here you are. You may not have thought it possible at first, but you have indeed survived.

Military families are trained to be resilient. After all, military service is unpredictable. You may have had to pick up and move several times in the past, forcing you to leave old friends and make new ones and reestablish community connections. Deployments are also unpredictable, and before the death you may have been separated from your loved one

for long stretches of time. Through all this, and because of the military's resilience-focused culture, military families typically learn to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

It's true that your resilience training may have helped you and your family in your grief. The most profound change you could ever experience has happened, and now, as always, you've picked yourself up, dusted yourself off, and kept putting one foot in front of the other. Perhaps your resilience helped you with practical matters such as relocating.

You may have felt dismay sometimes at your own resilience, too. Maybe the fact that life goes on has made you feel distressed or anxious now and then.

Pay attention to those inklings of distress. When it comes to grief, it's wise to beware

of your learned resilience. Why? Because it may tell you to "suck it up," "let go," and put your loss behind you. It may suggest that you need to be strong and in control. Yet what all grievers actually need is to embrace their normal and necessary thoughts and feelings and give them the time and attention they deserve. What grievers need to do is relinquish control of their grief.

Allowing yourself to be vulnerable is just as important as cultivating resilience. Think of them as the two sides of a seesaw. You want the seesaw to balance sometimes, yes, but you also want it to go up and down. On some days you will need to open yourself to your naturally painful grief. The vulnerable side of the seesaw will tilt down. On other days you will marshal your resilience to help you navigate







new challenges and approach life openly as it moves toward you. The resilient side of the seesaw will tilt down.

Both vulnerability and resilience are required for you to mourn. Mourning is the work of grief. It is expressing your inner grief outside yourself. Mourning is talking about your grief and the person who died. It's crying. It's participating in a support group. It's journaling. It's volunteering and walking alongside other grievers. It's actively participating in whatever means of expression feel right to you in the moment and suit you best. It is through mourning that you will continue to heal and find renewed meaning in life and living.

Mourning requires you to be vulnerable to your deepest pain and your most challenging thoughts and feelings. It asks you to encounter them fully and express whatever they bring up for you. It asks you not to suppress or deny or distract but instead to immerse. This immersion is necessary because it is the truth.

But here comes resilience! And resilience asks you to dose yourself with your grief and mourning. It says, "Yes, encounter your necessary grief for a while, then let's go engage in life for a while. We'll keep going like that, back and forth, back and forth."

It's this back-and-forth of grief, in fact, that provides momentum for the journey. I call it "evade-encounter." Your loss always lives inside you, but it's healthy to take part in non-grief-focused activities part of the time. It's healthy to evade your grief sometimes. Then it's also healthy, and necessary, to return to encounter your grief sometimes.

Earlier I asked you to picture a seesaw representing resilience and vulnerability. Now I want you to imagine one of those old-fashioned handcars that railroad workers used in the 17th and 18th centuries to traverse train tracks. Two people would stand on either side

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**Mourning requires you to be vulnerable to your deepest pain and your most challenging thoughts and feelings. It asks you to encounter them fully and express whatever they bring up for you.**

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of the handcar's small platform, and by taking turns pumping the seesaw-like lever back and forth, they could quickly convey themselves down the track with their own muscle power.

The handcar metaphor captures the reciprocating power of evade-encounter as well as vulnerability and resilience do. When you consciously activate and rely on both as you journey through grief, and you work to keep them in healthy balance, you create divine momentum toward healing. If, however, you neglect one side or the other, you get stuck and go nowhere.

The Wikipedia entry on handcars says, "While depictions on TV and in movies might suggest that being a member of a handcar crew was a joyride, in fact pumping a traditional handcar...could be very hard work." Likewise, the back-and-forth of resilience and vulnerability in grief is very hard work. Remind yourself

that there are no rewards for speed. If your handcar moves at a snail's pace, so be it. If it goes backward sometimes, so be it. As long as it's moving, you're on the right track.

And don't forget to take good care of yourself every day. You won't have the energy to muster the back-and-forth of vulnerability and resilience if you're not getting ample rest, nutrition, hydration, exercise, and health care. You will also need help pumping the handcar sometimes. Healing in grief is not a solo activity. Vulnerability and resilience in grief require seeking out and accepting the support of friends, family members, neighbors, and others along the way.

I've been a grief counselor for four decades now, and I've been privileged to bear witness to the power and momentum created by vulnerability and resilience hundreds of times. So I wish you vulnerability and resilience both. Godspeed. ★

---

A longtime TAPS supporter and advisory board member, Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., serves as director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and has written many books that help people mourn, including *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (co-authored with TAPS President Bonnie Carroll). To learn more about grief and to order Dr. Wolfelt's books, visit [centerforloss.com](http://centerforloss.com).

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# The Six Needs of Mourning

Accepting these universal truths can help you heal.

By Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.



## Need 1: Acknowledge the reality of the death.

*“Believe in the wonderment of life, the magic of love, and the reality of death.”—Carroll Bryant*

- Your first need of mourning is to gently confront the difficult reality that someone you love is dead and will never physically be present to you again.
  - Even when a death is anticipated, acknowledging the full reality of that loss may take weeks or months. Accepting the reality of sudden and violent deaths usually takes longer.
  - You will first come to acknowledge the reality of the loss with your head. Only over time will you come to acknowledge it with your heart. As Stephen Levine has noted, “There are pains that cannot be contained in the mind, only in the heart.”
    - At times you may push away the reality of the death. This is normal. You will come to integrate the reality in doses as you are ready.
    - You may be saying to yourself, “I feel like I’m dreaming, I keep hoping I’ll wake up

and none of this will have happened.” We hear this often from trauma survivors. Your shock protects you from being overwhelmed by the loss. You need and deserve time to reconstitute yourself after this traumatic death. You need time to become accustomed to thinking and feeling in your new reality. Go slow. There are no rewards for speed.

**CARPE DIEM:** Tell someone about the death today. Talking about it will help you work on this important need.

## Need 2: Embrace the pain of the loss.

*“The cure for pain is in the pain.”—Rumi*

- This need of mourning requires us to embrace the pain of our loss—something we naturally don’t want to do. It is easier to avoid, repress, or push away the pain of grief than it is to confront it.
  - It is in embracing your grief, however, that you will learn to reconcile yourself to it.

- You will need to slowly—ever so slowly—“dose” yourself in embracing your pain. If you were to allow in all the pain at once, you could not survive.
- People with chronic physical pain are taught not to tighten around the pain but to relax and allow the pain to be present. When pain is resisted, it intensifies. You don’t want to fight with your pain; you want to allow it into your soul in small doses so that eventually you can move from darkness into light.

**CARPE DIEM:** If you feel up to it, allow yourself some time for embracing pain today. Dedicate 15 minutes to doing nothing but thinking about and feeling the loss. Reach out to someone who doesn’t try to take your pain away and share your thoughts and feelings with him.

## Need 3: Remember the person who died.

*“Your silent tents of green  
We deck with fragrant flowers;  
Yours has the suffering been,  
The memory shall be ours.”  
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

- When loved ones die, they live on in us through memory.
  - To heal, you need to actively remember the person who died and commemorate the life that was lived.
  - Never let anyone take your memories away in a misguided attempt to save you from pain. It’s good for you to continue to display photos of the person who died. It’s good to talk about him. It’s good to save belongings and memories of his life.
    - Remembering the past makes hoping for the future possible. As Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard noted, “Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.”

**CARPE DIEM:** Brainstorm a list of characteristics or memories of the person who died. Write as fast as you can for 10 minutes (or more), then put away your list for later reflection.

### Need 4: Develop a new self-identity.

*“She stood in the storm, and when the wind did not blow her away—and it surely has not—she adjusted her sails.”—Elizabeth Edwards*

- Part of your self-identity was formed by the relationship you had with the person who died.
  - You may have gone from being a “wife” to a “widow” or from a “parent” to a “bereaved parent.” The way you thought of yourself and the way society thinks of you has changed.
  - The part of your identity that was shaped by your military status or affiliation is also morphing. The military is very good at creating a strong culture—regulations and processes and ways of talking and thinking that bind military members and their families together. This culture may have given you a sense of belonging. But now that your military ties may be dissolving, what does that mean for the part of you that identified as a military family member?

- You need to re-anchor yourself, to reconstruct your self-identity. This is arduous and painful work. One of your biggest challenges may be to recreate yourself in the face of the loss of who you once were. Let us assure you that you can and will do this.

- Many mourners discover that as they work on this need, they ultimately discover some positive changes to their self-identities, such as becoming more caring or less judgmental.

**CARPE DIEM:** Write out a response to this prompt: I used to be \_\_\_\_\_. Now that \_\_\_\_\_ died, I am \_\_\_\_\_. This makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_. Keep writing as long as you want.

### Need 5: Search for meaning.

*“Why? Parents all over the earth who lost sons in the war have felt this kind of question, and sought an answer. To me, it means loving life more, being more aware of life, of one’s fellow human beings, of the earth.”—Frances Gunther*



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**This need of mourning requires us to embrace the pain of our loss—something we naturally don’t want to do. It is easier to avoid, repress, or push away.**

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- When someone loved dies, we naturally question the meaning and purpose of life and death. It’s hard—maybe even impossible—to make sense of a death that can seem so senseless. While some people find profound meaning in the idea of sacrifice to country, others struggle with what can seem like the squandering of a precious life. And it’s not uncommon for survivors to feel a little of both! Regardless of your feelings about the circumstances of the death, it is normal and necessary to struggle with the “why” and try to find meaning.

- “Why?” questions often precede “How” questions. “Why did this happen?” comes before “How will I go on living?”

- You will probably question your philosophy of life and explore religious and spiritual values as you work on this need. You may also find yourself questioning the military’s rationale or decision-making that

contributed to your loved one’s death. After someone you love is taken from you, it’s normal to question.

- Remember that having faith or spirituality does not negate your need to mourn. “Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.”

- Some people may tell you that asking “Why?” doesn’t do you any good. These people are usually unfamiliar with the experience of traumatic grief. Try to reach out to people who can create a supportive atmosphere for you right now.

**CARPE DIEM:** Write down a list of “why” questions that have surfaced for you since the death. Find a friend or counselor who will explore these questions with you without thinking she has to give you answers.



---

One of the touchstones of grief is that each and every one of us as humans are connected by loss. As you experience the physical separation from someone you love, you are connected to every single person who has experienced or ever will experience a similar loss. Part of the TAPS motto encourages us to “share the journey.”

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### **Need 6: Receive ongoing support from others.**

*“Gracious acceptance is an art—an art which most never bother to cultivate. We think that we have to learn how to give, but we forget about accepting things, which can be much harder than giving... Accepting another person’s gift is allowing him to express his feelings for you.”*  
—Alexander McCall Smith

- As mourners, we need the love and understanding of others if we are to heal.
  - Don’t feel ashamed by your dependence on others right now. Instead, revel in the knowledge that others care about you.
  - Unfortunately, our society places too much value on “carrying on” and “doing well” after a death. Because of this, many mourners are abandoned by their friends and family

soon after the death. It has been said that grief rewrites your address book.

- One of the touchstones of grief is that each and every one of us as humans are connected by loss. As you experience the physical separation from someone you love, you are connected to every single person who has experienced or ever will experience a similar loss. Part of the TAPS motto encourages us to “share the journey.”

- When others offer to help, tell them something practical they can do, such as babysit, grocery shop, or mow the lawn.

- Grief is a process, not an event, and you will need the continued support of your friends and family for weeks, months, and years.

**CARPE DIEM:** Sometimes your friends and family want to support you but don’t know how. Ask. Call your closest friend right now and tell him you need his help through the coming weeks and months. ★



This article was excerpted from *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death: 100 Practical Ideas for Families and Friends* by Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. (Companion Press). The book is available at the TAPS online store ([taps.org/shop](http://taps.org/shop)).



## A SIMPLE ACT CAN CHANGE A LIFE

At TAPS, we understand service and sacrifice. We live lives that honor our loved ones. We are their living legacy. Today, we have an opportunity to continue their mission by giving those around the world who are less fortunate a chance at a better life.

TAPS has partnered with our sister organization in Afghanistan to provide hope to the families of their fallen and stand in solidarity with Afghan widows and orphans desperate for hope.

By purchasing this beautiful lapis lazuli bracelet made by the widows of Kabul from the finest gemstones mined in northern Afghanistan, you are creating a job and providing an education, you are ensuring a safe home for a child, and you are continuing our loved ones' legacy of fighting for freedom and a better way of life for the next generation of children around the world.

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## Honor Your Loved One

**TAPS is proud to announce a special way to honor all our loved ones and raise funds to support the critical services TAPS provides to all those grieving the loss of a military loved one.**

Elegant tiles, available in four sizes, will include a photo of your loved one and an inscription of your choice. They will be proudly and permanently displayed on the wall in the entry of the TAPS National Headquarters.

**TO ORDER, PLEASE VISIT**  
[TAPS.ORG/HQCAMPAIGN](http://TAPS.ORG/HQCAMPAIGN)



Remembrance (4" x 5"): \$100



Tribute (8" x 5"): \$250



Salute (8" x 10"): \$1,000



Honor (16" x 10"): \$2,500

# Someone to *Lean* On

A TAPS Peer Mentor and mentee share their story and connection.



Peer Mentor Sara Wilson (above left), surviving spouse of retired Navy Capt. David Wilson, and her mentee, Kellye Bone (right), surviving spouse of retired Air Force Tech. Sgt. Thomas Bone, have similar stories—their husbands had long military careers in similar jobs, they died of similar causes, and they both have daughters around the same ages (11 and 7 for Sara; 21, 13, and 9 for Kellye). They met for the first time at this year’s National Military Survivor Seminar over Memorial Day weekend. They help each other in very different ways to navigate the painful path of grief.

#### FIRST CONTACT:

**KELLYE:** When she emailed me for the first time, it was very quick and to the point. She didn’t beat around the bush. She said she lost her husband, now tell me about you.

**SARA:** The first contact after that was a little tentative, because Kellye asked me to give her a call and in this world of emailing and texting, I had to remember what to do!

#### WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO MEET IN PERSON:

**KELLYE:** I walked in late to a workshop. I came through the door and Sara’s eyes jumped out at me. There was a look of happiness.

I knew who she was before I met her. She came up and hugged me, and suddenly I felt I wasn’t lost anymore. It was a profound moment.

**SARA:** I was sitting at an orientation for new attendees, and a few minutes into the presentation a woman walked in. Sure enough, it was Kellye, and I jumped up to give her a hug and pull out a chair for her to sit next to me!

#### HOW EACH WOULD DESCRIBE THE OTHER:

**KELLYE:** She is the Navy version of me. We have similar stories. Her husband did radar, my husband did radar. Her husband died of a sudden illness, mine died suddenly from flash pulmonary edema. Our kids are around the same age. She can complete my sentences because

she has been in my shoes. But she has more strength. When I met her I looked at her and said, “I forgot you’re a survivor too.” She said, “Everyone here is a survivor.”

**SARA:** I would describe Kellye as a strong woman who is confident in her place in the world. Her values are solid, and it’s so clear how much she loves her husband and daughters.

#### HOW SHE’S HELPED YOU:

**KELLYE:** She made me feel that I was not alone. She gives me hope and guidance when I feel lost. There were so many complications with my husband’s burial, for example. Sara called to check on me, and I told her what was happening. She suggested I cancel the funeral. I did. I didn’t

know I could do that. It was such a relief. I wasn’t going crazy; she made me feel sane.

**SARA:** She has helped me realize that I still have the ability to help people, even though I’m still on my grief journey.

#### HOW YOU’VE HELPED HER:

**KELLYE:** She told me that I give her hope and strength. I’m not sure, really. At the seminar, she told me, “Thank you for helping me remember what’s important.”

**SARA:** I hope I have helped her in some small way to realize how much strength she has in the face of adversity. I love that she took this cross-country trip with her girls to the National Seminar to open up her heart and do the hard work that grief work really is.

#### HOW SHE’S CHANGED YOU:

**KELLYE:** She has opened my mind and given me strength. She keeps me going.

**SARA:** I think that getting into this Peer Mentor relationship really helped me change how I view myself. And I realize that I am armed with so much information, good counsel, wonderful friendships, and deep resources because of TAPS.

#### ONE THING YOU’D LIKE HER TO REMEMBER:

**KELLYE:** She matters. Sara saved my life. I wouldn’t be here without her.

**SARA:** I would like Kellye to always remember that she is not alone. Some of her friends might be 3,000 miles away, or online, or on the phone, or just there in spirit, but we are there to lift her up and accompany her on her journey. ★

#### Be Part of the Peer Mentor Program >

The TAPS Peer Mentor Program equips survivors 18 months past their loss to serve as a mentor to fellow survivors looking for support from someone who truly understands. Our Peer Mentors are survivors who are trained by peer professionals to accompany others in their grief.

If you are an adult survivor and would like to be connected with a Peer Mentor, please call our National Military Survivor Helpline at 800-959-8277 and ask to speak with a member of our Survivor Care Team, who will walk you through the process.

# Love in the Kitchen

A mother honors her hero by sharing his favorite dish.

By Rita Catlett | Surviving Mother of Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class James Shawn Davenport, Army National Guard

**M**y son, J. Shawn Davenport, passed away two years ago from acute myeloid leukemia while actively serving in the Army National Guard. In his memory on his birthday in June, I make Shawn-Style Enchiladas and share them with my family.

We liked our enchiladas with everything: black and green olives, onions, green peppers, jalapeños, banana peppers, hot sauce, and anything else we had on hand. Shawn and I were not strict followers of recipes; we added or subtracted according to available ingredients and what our tastes were that day. His wife and children were much more selective in their choice of ingredients. So when Shawn made enchiladas, he would insert a toothpick to separate ours from theirs. Ours were large and spicy, just the way we liked them.

That's the way my son lived his life, too: large and spicy. He had a lot of living and loving to do in the 38 years he had on this earth, and he did it! ★



## Shawn-Style Enchiladas

Prep time: 20 minutes | Cook time: 30 minutes

### Ingredients:

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 Tablespoon butter
- 1 small onion, chopped
- ¼ cup green pepper, chopped
- ¼ cup red bell pepper, chopped
- ¼ cup jalapeño pepper, chopped
- 1 (8-ounce) can sliced black olives (or half black olives and half green olives)
- ¼ cup cilantro, chopped
- 1 package taco seasoning
- 1 (15-ounce) jar Old El Paso enchilada sauce, divided
- 4 large (or 6 small) flour tortillas
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese, divided

### Instructions:

- 1.** Preheat oven to 375°F. Brown beef until almost done; drain. Add taco seasoning and finish cooking. Set aside.
- 2.** Saute onions, green and red peppers, black olives, jalapeños, and cilantro in butter until tender.
- 3.** Spray 8 x 11 baking dish with cooking spray. Place tortillas in dish and fill with meat, onion mixture, half of cheese, and half of enchilada sauce. Fold tortillas. Cover enchiladas with remaining enchilada sauce.
- 4.** Bake until bubbly, about 30 minutes. Remove from oven and sprinkle with remaining cheese. Return to oven and heat until cheese browns.

### Share Your Recipe >

If you have a favorite recipe that reminds you of your loved one, please send it to us, along with a brief story about why it means so much to you, at [editor@taps.org](mailto:editor@taps.org).

Rita Catlett, a surviving mother, lives in Frankfort, KY. She enjoys spending time with her three grandchildren, two of whom are the surviving children of her son, Shawn.

# Making New Summer Memories

A mother of two shares five lessons she learned about honoring the past while moving forward into a new future.

By Elizabeth Culp | Surviving Spouse of Sgt. John “Brian” Culp, U.S. Army



Ian and Westley, then 8 and 6, making new memories at the San Diego Air and Space Museum.

When we woke that Thursday morning in May, our boys, ages 8 and 5, were excited that there were only two weeks left of school until summer break. At 8:08 that evening, our whole world changed when that knock landed on our front door. Those two weeks came and went while we attended Brian’s funeral service and met with our casualty assistance officer.

And then came summer. With no routine, no structure, and no requirements, no one in our home wanted to do anything. We were numb. We were sad. We were frustrated. We were fighting the reality that we now had to redefine ourselves as sons and as a single mom and widow. That summer there was a lot of quietness in our home. A lot of tears. A lot of video games and half-eaten meals. And there was very little time spent outside. Very little laughter. Very few conversations. That summer came and went.

As the new school year started and we entered our year of “firsts,” I desperately wanted us to feel normal, to feel happy, to feel like we used to feel. We went to children’s museums, we played games at the arcade, and we joined youth sports teams with other military kids on post. I thought that doing the same things we had done with our dad and husband would draw our boys and me out of the fog and give us some healthy, happy experiences.

I was wrong. Instead of happy, we felt awkward and out of place. We were no longer the same as everyone else, the same as we used to be. We were different. And we didn’t like it. Everywhere we went, we said, “This is where Dad did...” or “Last time we were here, Dad was with us.” It wasn’t working. I had to try something different.

So I planned a trip to Legoland. Brian and I had taken the boys to carnivals and theme parks in the past, and we had talked a year earlier about taking our boys to Legoland one summer. My hope was that this trip would be fun and exciting since the boys loved Legos and theme parks—but not exactly the same as the places we had visited with their dad. This was our first real adventure, just the three of us, and it taught me five valuable lessons:

## 1. It’s helpful to do things that are similar but not exactly the same.

I learned through several awful experiences that doing the same things and going to the same places as we had when Brian was alive was not healthy for us. I had to plan activities that were similar to, but not the same as, the activities we used to do with him. I purposely found events off post and took our boys to activities that did not remind us of time spent with their dad. We weren’t trying to forget him; we simply needed (and deserved) to spend our energy enjoying ourselves rather than carrying the boulder of grief everywhere we went.

## 2. Planning provides something positive to focus thoughts and energy on.

Thinking about an activity or event gave me something to look forward to. I discovered an outlet for creativity through planning small trips. I learned that I didn’t have to micromanage every detail and I didn’t have to have something on every page of our calendar.





Left: Elizabeth and her boys at the Air and Space Museum. Below: Westley inside a lion at Legoland on the same trip.

We still needed our downtime. But exploring online and having conversations with fellow survivors channeled my energy and provided a goal that my mind could manage.

### 3. Scheduling activities offers a sense of control over something.

This is so crucial. When we lose a loved one, our hearts break. When we lose a vibrant, active member of our household and our daily lives, the void can feel suffocating. Planning for a weekend trip to the park or a spring break trip out of town gave me a feeling that I was driving my own life instead of being driven by grief and a situation that I couldn't change.

Planning also provided a helpful framework during trips and activities. This framework freed me to be able to address the unexpected hiccups since I already had a blueprint in mind of what we wanted and needed. I discovered that I didn't feel instantly anxious or completely overwhelmed when small or large issues surfaced because I wasn't flying by the seat of my pants or wasting energy thinking about the next step. For the first time in my life, I knew I was several steps ahead.

### 4. Boundaries are important.

Boundaries keep crucial pieces in and unwanted pieces out. They determine who we allow to affect our decisions and how much of a role they play. I learned that I don't have to stay with relatives when they offer because splurging on a hotel room offers some privacy, a place to retreat from the visits and company, and a pool for the kids to splash around in. I learned that I don't have to accommodate the kids



every waking moment and that, sometimes, Mom just needs (and deserves) some quiet time in a coffee shop. Boundaries also helped me stay within my budget when we traveled and gave me the courage to say no to activities that I really didn't want to be a part of and yes to those that brought me satisfaction and happiness.

### 5. Owning the journey prevents it from owning you.

As we approached the first anniversary, I had to have a serious conversation with our boys. I sat them down and told them that, yes, this journey we're on stinks. Yes, it's not fair. There's nothing we did to deserve it, and there's nothing we can do to change the situation. Dad is dead. We aren't. We are still alive. And we are responsible for how we live and walk this path. We have to own it. I told them that if we didn't

decide to own this journey, it would own us. The death, the grief, and all the yucky parts would win again and again unless we decided that our lives would move forward.

Scheduling our family's activities on my own did not come naturally to me. It didn't feel comfortable at first, and I wrestled often with the idea of imposing structure on myself when I was already wrestling with having so many other emotions forced on me through this loss. Learning to plan was a necessity that helped smooth the path in front of me.

Four years later, summer is here again, whether or not we feel prepared. I still don't have an activity for every page of our calendar. That's on purpose because downtime gives my boys and me a chance to relax for the sake of relaxing. But I have scheduled a few short road trips with the family and sprinkled some local camps, activities, and concerts throughout the three months. Let this be a time that adds smiles to our hearts and laughter to our souls as we take ownership of our time and our journey and make it, as best we can, healthy and happy. ★

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Elizabeth Culp earned a Master of Education in special education and a Master of Science in psychology and is a former special education teacher. She lives with her sons, now ages 12 and 9, in Charlotte, NC.

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# “Everyone Deals with Loss Differently”

Jon Stewart lends his voice to the launch of the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing and shares his thoughts on grief, resilience, and supporting those who need it most.

By Allison Gilbert



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I'm drawn to supporting people who give of themselves so selflessly.  
It's an unusual individual who actually moves toward trouble rather than away from it.

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Jon Stewart's father, a veteran of the Korean War, died in 2013. But the former *Daily Show* host's personal experience with loss is not the only reason he sat down recently for an interview with *TAPS Magazine*. Stewart was in Arlington, VA, for the launch of the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing.

Stewart is a staunch supporter of service members, veterans, and military families. He is also a tireless advocate for first responders and is credited with being a driving force behind the passage, in Congress, of the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act. This legislation provides health care and financial support for 9/11 first responders, who breathed in toxic dust and smoke during the massive cleanup at Ground Zero. According to John Feal, founder of the FealGood Foundation, more than 7,000 first responders have developed cancer (as certified by the government), and nearly 2,000 have died.

Stewart has spoken at military events, visited with troops overseas, and advocated for the care of those who have served and suffered. He talked with Allison Gilbert, a member of the TAPS Advisory Board, as well as with reporters from WTOP radio and Connecting Vets, about the significance of the new Institute. Below is an edited compilation of those discussions.

**TAPS:** Why have you chosen to speak so openly about grief and resilience?

**STEWART:** Grief is really isolating when it occurs. Unfortunately, when people go through tough times, many choose not to reach out for help or don't know what to do. There's so much confusion. Individuals may even wonder if they're grieving the "right" way, which doesn't exist. And while everybody experiences loss, too few know how to grieve so they can hold tight to their loved one's memory while making the best of the time they still have in front of them. This is a field in which TAPS has an incredible wealth of experience and compassion.

**TAPS:** What inspired you to lend your voice to the launch of the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing?

**STEWART:** I'd become aware of TAPS through work I'd done with the USO and

military families at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and Fisher House Foundation. Yet even among those communities, there is a separate area for military families who have experienced loss. Grief is still really tough for people to think about. And Bonnie Carroll, to her great credit, used her loss as a springboard to be there for others who are in that same situation. It's incredible what she's been able to build.

**TAPS:** I'm sure you receive requests to support many charities. Why first responders and the military?

**STEWART:** I'm drawn to supporting people who give of themselves so selflessly. It's an unusual individual who actually moves toward trouble rather than away from it.

I'm also struck by the stoicism within these communities. Members of the military and their families often don't reach out for help when they need it. We depend on them, and yet when the time comes for them to depend on us, too often we're not there for them. So I try to help push along the idea that the least we can do for them is repay their service and selflessness with support.

**TAPS:** Is there a TAPS program that speaks to you the most?

**STEWART:** The Good Grief Camp military mentor program. I think this initiative is especially important for the children left behind—for them to see someone who is like their dad or like their mom, who is in the military, who understands what they're going

through. There are things most people don't even think about. For example, if a loved one is lost during service and the family lived on a base, that family doesn't get to live on that base anymore. As isolating as grief can be, that can be even more traumatic. So for TAPS to come in and provide a softer landing for people and a way to move forward is just amazing.

**TAPS:** Is there ever a wrong time to laugh about loss?

**STEWART:** Everyone deals with loss differently. Laughing is how I deal with it. So for me, for my family, no. We will probably be joking in the midst of a death, during that moment. But everybody is different, and that's what's so great about the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing: It supports a process that tells people, "Hey, there is no right or wrong way to do this. There's no time frame. Embrace who you are. You'll get through it that way." ★

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*Allison Gilbert, a professional speaker, workshop leader, and writer, serves on the TAPS Advisory Board. She is the author of three books on grief and loss, Always Too Soon, Parentless Parents, and, most recently, Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive.*

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### About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing >

The Institute, which launched in March and sponsors events throughout the year, is positioned to be the national and worldwide leader in training and education for bereavement professionals, bereaved individuals, and grieving military and civilian families.

Through an alliance with the Hospice Foundation of America, the foremost leader in professional grief and loss education, the Institute serves as a resource and training center, providing a hub for high-quality collaboration between professionals working in the field of grief and loss.

At the Institute, the two organizations together will provide workshops, seminars, panel discussions, and more to train professionals and help individuals and families thrive after loss. For more information and a schedule of events, visit [taps.org/institute](http://taps.org/institute).



# The Dance

“I knew that I could grow in this strange space of simultaneous grief and gratitude.”

By Amy Dozier | Surviving Spouse of Staff Sgt. Jonathan Dozier, U.S. Army

Months ago, my mom signed my daughter up for cotillion. This would serve two purposes: teaching her social graces and allowing her to bond over tea parties with other kids her age (well, three purposes if you count the alone time I was afforded on these random Sunday afternoons to grocery shop or go for a run). After each class, our three-generation trio would talk about what was learned and how it would be applied in the years to come. Some days we talked about the cookies and lemonade, others about the boredom of learning which fork to use.

One Sunday, my 11-year-old daughter came to me excited to have learned the fox trot. She taught me box steps as we listened to popular music at a blaring volume, laughing at how ridiculous we both looked. But we danced anyway. Together.

Within days, however, laughter turned into something more somber as she confided in me: “Mommy, I don’t think I want to dance at the Grand Ball,” she said. The Grand Ball would be the final dance of the season, featuring all the girls arm in arm with their fathers, waltzing to Michael Buble’s version of “The Way You Look Tonight.” Through tiny tears and with adult-size courage, she explained that she was scared she might be the only girl being escorted by someone other than her daddy.

As hard as I tried, I couldn’t relate to my daughter’s heart in that moment. I had grown up with my father. He did “dad” things for me all my life. He came to recitals, gave me advice, built tree houses, and helped with science projects. He is still alive. My daughter has no memory of her father, who was killed in Iraq when she was 13 months old.

This was uncharted territory for both of us—but if I couldn’t relate, I could help her cope with her distress. We had two options, I explained to her: We could opt out of the Grand Ball altogether, or we could keep a commitment we had—not just to the process of finishing

what we started but to a granddaddy who had stepped in to fill the spot that would have been taken by her daddy on the dance floor. An obvious unease set in as my daughter tried to process the excitement of spending time with her grandfather and the pain of not having her own father to dance with. I explained that these conflicting feelings are allowed to live together. That seemed to ease her mind ever so slightly.

The days went on, and we continued our dance practices. Then, along with a large group of girls who were learning etiquette, my daughter was asked to use her newfound skills at a local debutante social, in preparation for her own Grand Ball that would take place one month later. When the night arrived, she stepped out of her worn jeans and sneakers and into a floor-length white gown and sparkly flats, handing out red roses to high school seniors making their debut in the community. I felt proud of her poise and excited that she appeared to be having fun! As her mood seemed to shift from nervousness to complete wonderment, I watched her study each young woman as her accomplishments and goals were announced. I wondered if, perhaps, my daughter might choose this path for herself one day.

And then, as each young woman was escorted by her father down the grand staircase and into a spotlight for a special daddy-daughter dance, it hit me. I saw the physical similarities in these dance pairs, knowing my daughter would never have the same photo op with her dad. She would never dance with him. The dresses worn by the debutantes looked like wedding gowns. The dads were giving their daughters away to the world in hopes that they’d follow their dreams. Dads. Daughters. Traditions. A rite of passage. And a stark reminder that our own reality was much different.

My mission was fierce: Do. Not. Cry. So I didn’t. For a moment, I allowed myself to grieve the fact that my daughter’s father would never walk her down the aisle. He wouldn’t

hold her children. He would never do the “dad” things I had taken for granted for so many years. I was sad for my daughter’s loss. I harbored anxiety about the future. I also felt the same guilt she did earlier about the role a special granddaddy would play—and disappointment in myself for not giving enough credit to those who have stepped in to fill the role of father through the years. At the same time, I felt hopeful that our lives would be filled with a sense of peace as we continued to be open to the love that constantly surrounds us.

Deep down, I knew that life itself is a dance—full of ups and downs, backs and forths. More important, I knew that I could grow in this strange space of simultaneous grief and gratitude. As I had once explained to my daughter, these feelings are allowed to cohabitate.

Within moments, the formalities of the ceremony were wrapping up and I saw my daughter walking toward the dance floor with her granddaddy. He in his tuxedo, she in her dress and bare feet, they danced. Together.

This experience prepared us for the Grand Ball weeks later, where I learned two important lessons. The first is that extended family and friends play a vital role in raising a child. We have a village of supporters who continue to breathe life into our little family—and although they aren’t Dad, they play an invaluable role. Second, having made our way through this dance, we are officially equipped to handle the next one, whatever and whenever that may be. ★

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Amy Dozier is a surviving spouse, nonprofit and community service professional, veterans’ advocate, and TAPS Peer Mentor. She holds a master’s degree in public affairs and lives with her daughter in North Carolina.

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# Finding *Peace* Through Climbing

“As our loved ones would want us to, we can appreciate our past memories while also living in and cherishing the moment.”

By Leslie Gullahorn Olson | Surviving Fiancée of Sgt. James Scott Bailey, U.S. Marine Corps Reserves and Surviving Sibling of Capt. Greg Gullahorn, U.S. Navy



T eddy Roosevelt used to go off into the wilderness after losses and hard times. This strenuous exercise and connection to nature and self-reliance seemed to be somewhat curative for him. I have personally found this type of adventure to be helpful for me. I hope this journey and others will be healing for you.

My father, John Gullahorn, died suddenly from a heart attack in 1987. I was 18 years

old. He had served driving an ambulance for the Army during the Battle of the Bulge.

In September 2009, I lost my fiancé, James Scott Bailey, in a motorcycle accident. I found out about TAPS and became a member of the TAPS family—a club none of us wants to join but one that is so helpful and caring.

After Scott died, I tried many things to cope: I went to counseling, attended grief groups, and listened to books. I even consulted

mediums. I was lost. I wouldn't act upon it, but I felt that I did not want to live.

I wanted to get away—far away, where nobody knew me or my story. I guess I just wanted to get myself away from my own story that I did not want to be a part of. I have always loved animals and how healing they can be. So I decided to travel to Africa, where I could go on a safari and where nobody knew me, nobody knew my story, and I could

truly escape. While researching the trip, I got the idea to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. I had done technical climbing before but never climbed a big mountain with high altitudes. I thought it would be meaningful to bury some of Scott's ashes on the top of Kilimanjaro.

My journey to Africa was so therapeutic for my sad heart. The people of Africa were amazing and seemed to appreciate the important things in life. They were satisfied with having basic necessities and weren't focused on material things. It was humbling. Through climbing Kilimanjaro, being one with nature, and pushing my own limits, I healed and I grew inside. I buried some of Scott's ashes on the summit and marked the spot with a cross. I received a Facebook message more than a year later from someone who had seen the cross. It was still there!

The healing that happened because of mountaineering hooked me. I next climbed Aconcagua in Argentina—and left more of Scott's ashes at the top. Mountaineering is grueling. I learned that I had a stronger voice inside that said to me, "Keep going." In many cases in mountaineering, you are facing the possibility of death. That actually forces you to live in the moment and make that moment count. It was while climbing Aconcagua that I finally discovered that I wanted to live again. What a healing feeling that was.

Since these climbs, I have buried Scott's ashes on peaks all over the globe, from Alaska to South America to the Himalayas. I took photos of me on these mountains marked with a cross (which I would leave with his ashes) and gave them to Scott's father, which offered him peace and even joy.

When a great mountaineer, Charles Houston, was asked, "Why climb?" he gave this answer: "It is the chance to be for a moment free of the small concerns of our common lives, to strip off the non-essentials, to come down to the core of life itself... On great mountains, all purpose is concentrated on the single job at hand, yet the summit is but a token of success and the attempt is worthy in itself. It is for these reasons that we climb and, in climbing, find something greater than accomplishment."

Mountaineering and pushing our own limits allows us to live in the moment and take responsibility for our own lives. As our loved ones would want us to, we can appreciate our past memories while also living in and cherishing the moment.

I again became a member of the TAPS family when my brother, Capt. Greg Gullahorn, died suddenly on March 9, 2016. We were very



Left: Leslie honors her fiancé at the spot where she buried some of his ashes atop Mount Kilimanjaro. Above: She holds the orange scarf she bought and had blessed for her brother on Mount Everest.

close, and he had always been there for me. I had been training for months and planning to climb Mount Everest, and I was supposed to leave for my two-month expedition on March 28, 2016. I didn't know if I should still go. I talked with my family, and we decided he would want me to go. In Kathmandu, I bought a kata scarf for him—in orange, his favorite color—and had it blessed by two lamas. I carried the scarf up to the summit of Everest and back down. The scarf is now buried with him. I know he was with me on this journey and that he, my dad, and Scott will be with me and beside me always.\*

Leslie Gullahorn Olson earned a bachelor's degree at Northwestern University and a medical degree from the University of Michigan Medical School and now practices as an orthopaedic trauma surgeon. She lives with her husband, an attorney in the Marine Corps, in Okinawa.

#### **Embrace Adventure with TAPS! >**

Grief is an arduous journey. But it can also be spectacular.

On TAPS Expeditions, professional guides lead small groups of survivors through some of the world's most challenging and inspiring landscapes—while participants develop strength and a support network that will last long after the trip is complete.

In March 2019, TAPS will offer an expedition to Mount Kilimanjaro. Applications are open now. Find more information at [taps.org/expeditions](http://taps.org/expeditions).

# The Care We Took

“We all felt proud to handle our soldiers’ possessions with the honor they deserved.”

By Matt Mabe

In the latter half of my second tour in Iraq in 2006, I took over as my battalion’s adjutant, a staff promotion I’d been waiting for. In the Army, the adjutant is a unit’s human resources officer, the person in charge of personnel-related administrative matters like pay, leave, promotions, awards, and discipline. In a combat environment, however, the adjutant has an added responsibility: overseeing the process for handling a unit’s casualties.

My battalion’s tour in 2006 placed my fellow soldiers and me in one of the most dangerous areas of Iraq during one of the darkest periods of the war. We were based in Ramadi, a violent city in Al Anbar province and an epicenter of the country’s insurgency. Our battalion’s

mission was to clear the city’s roads of improvised explosive devices: grueling and dangerous work. Attacks on our platoons came daily.

From the start of my new job, my staff set about processing the unit’s steady stream of wounded soldiers. In the tragic instances when soldiers died, there were the requisite investigations, reports, and paperwork. The Army’s automatic and highly controlled notification process took care of getting the devastating news home to families. A personalized letter of condolence from the battalion commander was customary and followed shortly afterward.

Meanwhile, battle buddies and platoon mates began the somber process of sifting through and cataloging the deceased’s personal belongings: family photos, knick knacks, laundry, souvenirs purchased at the local bazaar, half-written letters home—the material remnants of an honorable life cut short. This duty was at once cathartic and sacred. It allowed us to get to know our comrades in ways we hadn’t before, through

the prism of their relationships with loved ones back home.

We all felt proud to handle our soldiers’ possessions with the honor they deserved. Most of us realized we would never meet the families on the receiving end, so it was even more important to ensure that items were fixed, cleaned, neatly arranged, and above all respected. All of this was a crucial part of

many of us found that getting back to work was a powerful antidote to the experience of crushing loss. I was always proud of how bravely battle buddies and platoon mates refocused on the task at hand, even as I quietly worried about the long-term psychological and emotional effects on them.

Fortunately, institutional support was always on hand immediately. Chaplains and

healthcare providers helped surviving soldiers work through the pain, heartache, and trauma—at least for those who sought it.

But soldiers are blessed to have another support system for confronting their grief and achieving long-

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**Soldiers are blessed to have another support system for confronting their grief and achieving long-term resilience: They have each other.**

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term resilience: They have each other. The bonds forged in training and combat among members of small military units can be as strong as the ties that bind families. Therefore the shock of loss and the paths to healing are similar in nature and intensity to those experienced by families themselves. Bonds among fellow soldiers are connections that last lifetimes, and they do so because of the sacrifices of the fallen. Every death in the tribe is memorialized and honored in ways that should give surviving loved ones hope and make them swell with pride.

Still, years later, with the sounds and fury of war a fading memory, I am reminded that for some—particularly veterans like me who have wandered from the tribe and thereby lost that vital connection to supportive peers—the battle continues. Resilience is not a straight-line trajectory. It doesn’t go up and up and up. It takes time and patience and reflection and work. But no matter how painful the incident of loss or how difficult the road to recovery from it, there is always hope.

From the start of my new job, my staff set about processing the unit’s steady stream of wounded soldiers. In the tragic instances when soldiers died, there were the requisite investigations, reports, and paperwork. The Army’s automatic and highly controlled notification process took care of getting the devastating news home to families. A personalized letter of condolence from the battalion commander was customary and followed shortly afterward.

Meanwhile, battle buddies and platoon mates began the somber process of sifting through and cataloging the deceased’s personal belongings: family photos, knick knacks, laundry, souvenirs purchased at the local bazaar, half-written letters home—the material remnants of an honorable life cut short. This duty was at once cathartic and sacred. It allowed us to get to know our comrades in ways we hadn’t before, through

the proper process for sending off America’s finest warriors. It was necessary for our own well-being, too.

All our soldiers’ deaths were followed immediately on the basecamp by meaningful vigils that captured the fullest measure of their character and their devotion to country. According to military custom, portraits of the fallen were displayed next to boots, rifles, and tags. Speeches were delivered by officers and close friends. Roll was called, with the deceased’s rank and name answered only by lingering notes of silence. Prayers were offered. Afterward, appropriate periods of mourning were observed.





PHOTO: TAPS ARCHIVES

For nearly a quarter century, the TAPS staff has helped thousands of families on their path to healing and ultimately resilience. And it is focused now on doing the same for battle buddies who might be wracked by the guilt or grief that springs from wondering, “Did I do enough?” “Why him and not me?” “Will I ever get over not getting to say goodbye?”

For me personally, joining TAPS has forced me to revisit some of the more painful episodes of my military service, like learning after my

first tour in Iraq that my best friend from West Point killed herself and the devastation of losing the best soldier I ever knew in an electrical fire in Ramadi. TAPS has helped me find meaning by honoring the selfless sacrifices of the fallen and to find peace in my reflections on their extraordinary lives. I have learned that resilience isn’t about being tough in the face of adversity. It’s about owning one’s grief and deriving purpose from the tragedy. ☆

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Matt Mabe, a former Army officer and journalist and a veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is the director of strategic operations for TAPS suicide prevention and postvention initiatives. He lives in Philadelphia with his wife and two daughters.

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# THE HEALING *Power of Art*

Paper, paint, canvas, and a clothesline—how a creative process helped one surviving spouse move forward after her husband’s death.

By Tasha Sprovtsoff | Surviving Spouse of Staff Sgt. Nicholas Sprovtsoff, U.S. Marine Corps

I’ve wanted to be an artist since I was my kids’ age. I loved drawing and was often praised for it: “You’re such a good artist.” I heard it all the time.

I used to build houses with Legos and draw the structures on paper, so I thought I might become an architect. I also traced body shapes out of my mom’s catalogs and used the form to draw clothes, so fashion designer was another possibility. I wound up attending an art school and getting my degree in graphic design because I thought it would offer me the broadest spectrum

of possibilities. After college I worked for a publishing company designing ads.

And then I met Nick, a sergeant in the Marine Corps. We got married, I got pregnant and had a little girl, and my mom life and military life took over. I could feel it in my

body that I needed to be more creative, but there was no time.

When our daughter was 14 months old and I was pregnant with our son, Nick was killed in action. Creating art was the last thing on my mind. After a while, I would get out my sketchbook at night when the kids were in bed, but I didn’t remember how to do it. I didn’t know what to draw. I would sit there staring at it, almost like I didn’t deserve to do it because I hadn’t been practicing.

Eventually the kids started Montessori school two days a week. I searched for local art classes—at the local craft store or anything I could find. I started practicing again.

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I asked myself,  
“What do you want to do?”  
And I answered, “I want to be doing art.”

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Previous pages: In step one of her creative process (left), Tasha spreads paint across a Gelli plate. One of her finished pieces (right), titled “The Lake,” was inspired by her family’s cabin in Canada—a place of happy memories. Above: “Flower Field”—with blue sky above, green grass and flowers below—was one of the first pieces Tasha created with torn paper.

Once they were both in school five days a week, I asked myself, “What do you want to do?” And I answered, “I want to be doing art.” I found a studio space for rent, and I was shaking while driving over to check it out. I thought, “This is finally it!”

I rented the space and started focusing on my art. At first I felt I didn’t know what I was doing. But little by little, I discovered a process I love.

To start, I spread acrylic paint onto a Gelli plate, which is a flat surface that looks and feels like gelatin. Then I press whatever mark-

making objects I choose into the paint to create patterns. I’ve used the bottom of water bottles, bath loofahs, trivets, yarn, a potato masher, cheesecloth, and a plastic bag. Each makes a different pattern in the paint. I then place white paper on top of the plate so the paint transfers to the paper. I lift up the paper to see if I like the pattern. If I don’t like it yet, I keep adding layers of paint, letting each layer dry on a clothesline I hung on the back wall of my studio before adding more paint. I repeat the process with more and more pieces of paper and hang them all to dry.

Once the sheets of paper are dry, I tear them up. To me, this represents my life—and the lives of many widowed people. The printed papers are built layer by layer, just like our lives starting at birth. We add a layer when we graduate from high school, start a career, go on a big trip, fall in love, have children. All these were layers of my life, and my husband was the person I was building them with. The moment he died is represented by ripping the paper to shreds, which is how my life felt. As I’m ripping the

paper, I'm telling my story. I do battle some anger about Nick's death, and some days tearing paper isn't even enough—I wish I were breaking dishes.

But then I take the ripped paper and create a new work of art. With Mod Podge glue, I attach the pieces of paper to a wrapped canvas to make a collage. This represents the fact that with time, something new develops. Parts of what existed before are recognizable, but you no longer have exactly what you had. The only choice is to take what you can and build something new.

I host a support group twice a month to share this process with local widowed people, and they say they feel uplifted and energized by being together, sharing about their person, and creating something new that doesn't require thinking too much or making new decisions.

This is what my art represents: the life that can never be the same but is once again beautiful. ★

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Tasha Sprovtsoff, an artist and yoga teacher, lives in Colorado Springs, CO, with her 7-year-old daughter and 6-year-old son and shares her work, art-class schedule, and support-group schedule at [happyfishartstudio.com](http://happyfishartstudio.com).

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## How Art Helps Us Heal

By Karen Anderson

Creating often comes from the gut. It begins in a place where words don't exist. It is a place deep down inside you of raw feelings and emotions that are often inexpressible and intangible. When you surrender to these feelings and emotions by letting them surface, you can begin to attach images, color, and form to them in an intuitive way, making them more concrete to work with.

Whether you create with paint, markers, pencils, or simply a glue stick and scissors as you cut out images and paste them on paper to form a collage, here are four ways making art contributes to the healing process:

- *It allows you to express yourself without words.* It gives your experience a voice in the sense that you can attach words to your creation as it becomes clearer and more workable.
- *It is nonjudgmental.* It exists because it is what you are feeling at that moment. It can be a gentler way to start the healing process.
- *It provides a container to hold your emotions.* This space also provides a silent witness that validates your feelings as real.
- *It helps physiologically.* The process of creating reduces stress, anxiety, and depression by lowering your heart rate, slowing down your breathing, and helping you break the cycle of ruminating negative thoughts.

Anyone can be creative and receive the healing benefits of art making. Say to yourself, "I am not setting out to make a Picasso but to acknowledge my feelings through imagery." The healing process is about trusting yourself and being honest. Simply begin and see what turns up.

*Karen Anderson is a board-certified art therapist and grief counselor who offers workshops using art and meditation for healing life's transitions and losses from her studio, Healing Thru Art, in Woodbury, CT.*



Above, left to right: A water bottle is one of Tasha's favorite objects to press into paint because she loves the flower shape it makes. To create "The Butterfly," she used pieces of torn paper cut into very specific shapes. In "Aspen Grove," the red and yellow strips of paper represent aspen trees, which grow in abundance near Tasha's home in Colorado.

# A WEEKEND OF Help, Hope, AND Healing

## The 24th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Each year during Memorial Day weekend, we gather in our nation's capital to honor our fallen heroes and support one another. This year, some of our survivors were attending their first TAPS event while others rejoined us after attending for many years. All experienced comfort, hope, and a sense of family as they connected with, laughed with, cried with, and healed with others walking a similar grief journey.

### CONNECTIONS



*"I was surrounded by people who truly walk in my shoes...so much love and compassion."*



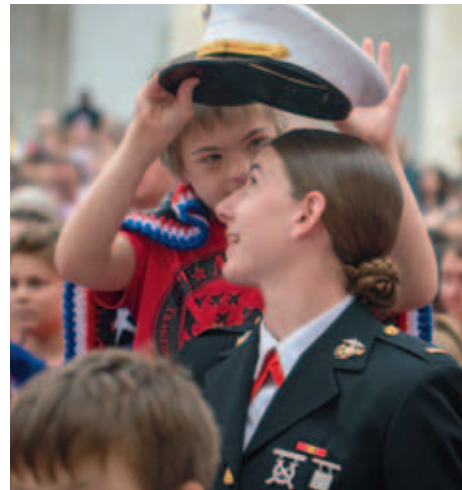
The bonds forged at the National Seminar help ease the pain of the grief journey. Clockwise from top left: A Good Grief Camp mentor helps a surviving daughter place a note she wrote to her father on the TAPS Family Tree. TAPS Founder and President Bonnie Carroll huddles with TAPS family members. Good Grief Camp mentors and children dance at the camp's opening ceremony.

PHOTOS: TARA RUBY, NESSA CHASE, LENZY RUFFIN

# GOOD GRIEF CAMP



*“How awesome to see the smiles on the faces of the kids and volunteers.”*



First row, left to right: A Military Mentor salutes with two campers; a Military Mentor with his mentee. Second row: A Legacy Mentor and mentee; a playful moment between a Military Mentor and mentee; Rodney McGruder of the Miami Heat hugs a camper during an NBA clinic. Third row: Vice President Mike Pence comforts a Good Grief Camper; a TAPS Good Grief Camp graduate.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE CARBULLIDO, ARI STRAUSS, HANNAH SLUSSER, LENZY RUFFIN

# SPECIAL EVENTS



*"I absolutely had the most amazing time. TAPS is my real home."*

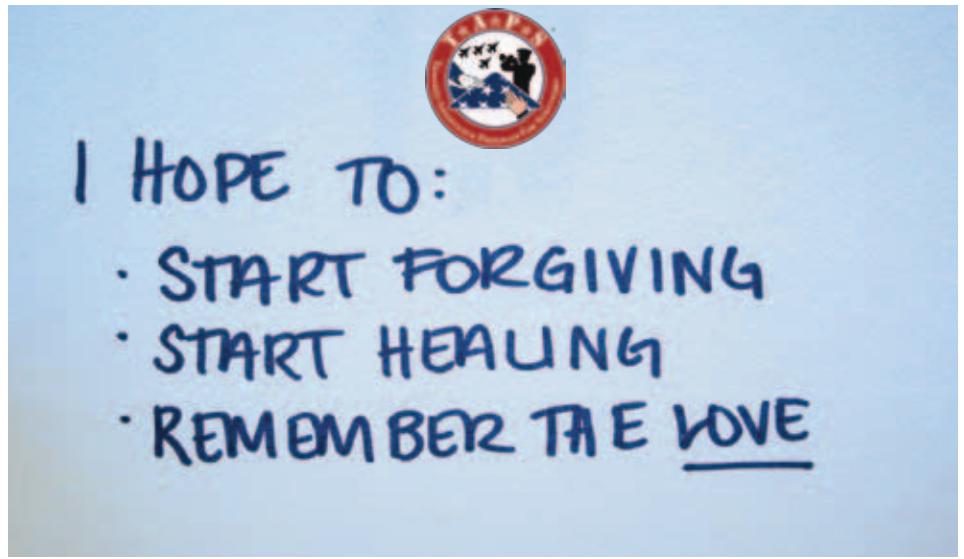


Top: ABC news anchor Kyra Phillips, Chef Robert Irvine, Diana Award CEO Tessa Ojo, Admiral Mike Mullen, and Amazon executive Teresa Carlson headline the first-ever TAPS Thought Talk. Second row: TAPS Young Adults at Earth Treks Gym; Legacy Mentor siblings at the Memorial Day parade. Third row: actor/singer John Schneider performs; TAPS family members on the National Mall.

PHOTOS: TARA RUBY, NOREEN DOLOUGHTY, ARI STRAUSS, TONY STEELE



# HEALING



*“We smile because we will always embrace and celebrate their lives.”*



First row: A wreath made by Good Grief Campers was placed at the Tomb of the Unknowns on Memorial Day; hopes shared on the Wall of Intention. Second row: a survivor in the Artful Grief Studio; messages on a Tree of a Thousand Thanks. Third row: TAPS surviving children at Arlington National Cemetery; a survivor shares her loved one at the Memorial Day parade; a warm TAPS hug.

PHOTOS: LENZY RUFFIN, NESSA CHASE, BRANDY MEJIA, ANDREA MADGE, TERRENCE BROWN

# CREATING *Connections*

If your grief has made you feel isolated, you are not alone.  
These suggestions may inspire you to reach out  
to others who feel the same way.

By Emily Muñoz | Surviving Spouse of Capt. Gilbert A. Muñoz, U.S. Army

**G**rief is inherently about interrupted connection. We are separated from someone we love. Loneliness, then, is logical. I just didn't expect it to show up years after the searing had turned to scarring. When it did, it was because, in my early grief, I had leaned so much into the hope that the universe still held joy and purpose for me, that eventually this would all make sense. But loneliness showed up, clutching and persistent, exacerbated by widening divergences between what I saw as the richly layered, purposeful lives of others and my hollow trajectory as a childless, pathologically busy, urban single. (That's also the world's worst online dating headline.)

I thrive on being engaged and involved, but I also need solitude to recharge. Yet slowly my ability to distinguish between soul-nurturing solitude and creeping aloneness started to degrade. Instead of recharging, I was retreating. And I felt guilty about it: I was ashamed for living in a strange half-light, for not making connections that let me be all in. That's not, as the French novelist Emile Zola said, what I came to do. I came to live out loud. I want an abundantly textured life. Our loved ones' sacrifices require it.

Grief is, in many ways, the pain of separation. This is often exacerbated by the body's primitive desire to hide and isolate or to change environments completely. As we process, we are self-referential. We have to turn inward, to curl up into our pain. When we are ready

to turn outward, we're faced with figuring out who and what is still there. As Jim Lovell, commander of Apollo 13, is heard saying in the flight loop transcript, "Tell me what on the ship is still good."

Every time we emerge from the fog, we're checking to see what parts of our lives are consistent. Who has moved? Who's gotten married? Whose kids have graduated? Who can I still relate to? Who isn't frightened by my vulnerability? Who has enough space for part of my burden? Who won't have to get a babysitter if I want to go to the movies with someone?

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**The paradox of loneliness is that it's universal. Everyone has been, or will be, lonely. It's something we can all understand, even if it manifests differently for each of us.**

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Who can take time off work without financial risk? Will I have to wear real pants? Do I even have any real pants?

If grief is about separation, it stands to reason that healing is about integration and connection. It's about anti-loneliness. But the more I healed from the pain of loss—the more I stitched my life back together—the more I understood the second- and third-order effects of what had happened to me. As I was healing in the direction I needed to, the rest of the world

didn't stop and wait for me as I tried to claw my way back to a path that wasn't mine anymore. I did make my way back to the land of the living, but I didn't expect to be lonely there.

The paradox of loneliness is that it's universal. Everyone has been, or will be, lonely. It's something we can all understand, even if it manifests differently for each of us. The sharp and bitter grief of child loss may leave parents feeling like strangers in relationships and around other families. Children can experience loneliness as feeling different, excluded. Single parents lose hope of having adult conversations, much less relationships, and are hit with the loneliness of a quiet house, whether it's when the bus leaves for elementary school, college, or basic training.

Loneliness, having hidden behind the closed physical and emotional doors for so long, is now being viewed as a widespread and serious health concern. A nationwide study by health insurer Cigna found that nearly 50 percent of 20,000 respondents considered themselves lonely. This is not situational loneliness. It's more

than having one's feelings hurt or feeling sad for a few hours to a few days. This loneliness is persistent and often debilitating. Research shows that it can be as damaging to one's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It increases the risk of heart disease, substance use and abuse, and many other diseases and disorders.

This means that the battering down of the emotional hatches—whether it's the result of elected isolation or unintentional disconnection—is not good for our physical

and emotional health. Both isolation (having few relationships or infrequent contact with others) and loneliness (feeling alone or disconnected) present significant health risks. Face-to-face interaction improves mood and immune system functioning, lowers the risk for disease, and improves feelings of connection to a community.

We have suggestions below for fighting feelings of loneliness, but the most important one is to understand that if you feel like you don't fit in or that life has left you behind, you are not the only one. You do not have to be lonely in your loneliness. Instead, you can use the feelings of wanting to belong and share experiences and adventures to bridge the gap to others who are feeling the same way. Allowing yourself to feel vulnerable about your loneliness may be the most important way to drive it away.

At TAPS, we often say that grief changes our address books. As some people stand with us, others drift away. This analogy isn't about asking you to tear out pages or mark out names. In fact, our charge in our grief is to face the feelings of loneliness and seek out the connections that inspire us, that make us better. Our charge is to use what we have learned in our pain and isolation to add to our address book—to reach out and ask people into our lives. Here are 10 ways to do that.

### FIND A CAUSE.

Sebastian Junger, author of *Tribe*, explains that the feeling of purpose that results from active engagement in a cause can have positive effects on mental health. Junger further explains how the dynamics of shared mission and unity contribute to these improvements.

When we don't feel needed, we lose direction, focus, and self-worth. If you don't think there's anyone who needs you, look again. Volunteer opportunities abound, and we all thrive when we feel like we're a part of something.

### RESIST PASSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA SCROLLING.

Social media, when used in certain ways, can deepen your connections with people. If you're using social media, use it as a communication tool, not a comparison tool.

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This page: Surviving family members connect with each other at a TAPS Empowerment event. Next page: Finding community through yoga and other forms of healthy movement can help with healing.



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Seek out others with similar interests. Drag a friend with you. Start a book club.  
If you invite someone to do something and he or she doesn't want to come,  
offer another option. Say yes when someone invites you.

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## MOVE MORE.

Join Team TAPS or a local running, walking, or cycling club and learn how to find community through healthy movement. Invite friends over to exercise to a yoga or Pilates DVD.

## SEEK OUT OTHERS WITH SIMILAR INTERESTS.

My local coffee shop has a Tuesday night men's knitting circle. If there are places with a Tuesday night men's knitting circle, there will be someone around you who has at least one interest similar to yours. Drag a friend with you. Start a book club. If you invite someone to do something and he or she doesn't want to come, offer another option. Say yes when someone invites you.

## TALK TO PEOPLE DURING EVERY INTERACTION.

Say hello to people walking their dogs. Call a cashier by his or her name. Get to know the people who are in your neighborhood and build a sense of being seen and known. Research shows that it isn't necessarily the heart-to-heart connections that stave off the effects of loneliness. Casual connections help too.

## USE THE POWER OF YOUR TAPS FAMILY.

Through our Care Groups, health and wellness programming, seminars, TAPS Togethers, sports and entertainment program, and Helpline, you always have a family who sees you where you've been, where you are, and where you want to go. ★

## RECOGNIZE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A RUT AND A ROUTINE.

A functional routine sets you up to feel good about your day—it holds a great deal of potential energy and feels like emotional scaffolding on which you can construct a good day. If you're in a rut, on the other hand, you may feel defeated or stuck. Once you identify what parts of your life feel like movement and which parts feel like going through the motions, start to shift away from doing things that don't nourish your soul just because that's what you've always done.

## WHEN YOU'RE WITH PEOPLE, PUT YOUR PHONE AWAY.

On a vacation with friends, we all agreed not to have our phones at the table after food was served. If we broke the rule, we had to donate to charity. Not only did it build community and accountability, but it also felt great to step away from a habit that didn't connect us as people or to the world around us.

## IDENTIFY WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK.

There are things that we all keep in our back pocket as ways to put off healing and connection, even though it's what we so desperately need, want, and deserve. For me, it was a messy home—an apartment that was always the task hanging over me that I "should do" before I did anything else—and that prevented me from welcoming others in. If it's an obstacle like that, put on your jet pack and free yourself from what is holding you back.

You can't dedicate space to connection if you don't have any in your life, so the same thing applies to your schedule. If you keep yourself so busy that you can't connect in a way that helps you feel less lonely, something has to give. It isn't easy to take time for yourself, and unless you have the space to take it—mental, physical, emotional, professional—it's unlikely to happen. Evaluate where you can carve space, and follow through.

## LEAVE YOUR HOUSE.

Go to the park. Go to a coffee shop. Expand your world just a little. Start walking around the block every afternoon.

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Emily Muñoz spearheads the TAPS Inner Warrior Program and facilitates activities offering a healthy and active healing path for survivors. She came to TAPS following the death of her husband in 2005.

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If you're a survivor of suicide loss,  
TAPS has a special place for you.

JOIN YOUR TAPS FAMILY  
AT THE  
**10TH ANNUAL  
NATIONAL MILITARY  
SUICIDE SURVIVOR SEMINAR  
AND GOOD GRIEF CAMP**  
OCTOBER 5-8, 2018  
INNISBROOK RESORT  
PALM HARBOR, FLORIDA

At this TAPS national seminar you'll meet other people walking the same road—suicide loss survivors from across the country who come to share stories, struggles, moments of reflection, and loving support.

Find strength in your TAPS family, knowing you are not alone, as we celebrate the lives of our loved ones. Find out more and register at [taps.org/nmss](http://taps.org/nmss).



# We Are Here for You!

TAPS offers immediate and long-term emotional help, hope, and healing to all those grieving the loss of a military loved one. This at-a-glance guide outlines some of the ways in which we provide compassionate care.



## **National Military Survivor Helpline**

Grief doesn't follow a schedule, and often some of the loneliest moments come at night or on weekends or holidays or even in the middle of a busy day. Continuously operational since 1994, our Helpline consists of a network of trained peer professionals who are on call for you 24/7/365 at 800-959-TAPS (8277), whether you are in emotional crisis, need to connect with TAPS resources and programs, or just want to remind yourself that you are part of a loving, supportive family.

## **Peer Mentor Network**

The TAPS Peer Mentor Program means you'll never walk alone. We equip survivors who are at least 18 months past their loss to serve as mentors to fellow survivors looking

for support from someone who truly understands. They are there to listen when you need someone to talk to, be a friend when you're feeling lonely, and celebrate the triumphs in your grief journey. Knowing you are not alone, you can find validation and ultimately a sense of hopefulness with your peers. Find out more: [taps.org/peermentors](https://taps.org/peermentors).

## **Casework Assistance**

In the midst of emotional exhaustion, many of the bereaved are surprised by the complexity of managing benefits, paperwork, and the loose ends that require attention. We work closely with trusted partners to find and use as many resources as possible that fit your needs. Close relationships with government agencies and service branches help us resolve issues regarding burials, benefits,

eligibility, records, and more, while a network of other organizations consults regularly on everything from health care and insurance issues to financial hardship and credit counseling. Find out more: [taps.org/casework](https://taps.org/casework).

## **Connections to Grief Counseling**

TAPS provides connections to free and unlimited grief counseling, trauma resources, and local area support groups. Individual grief counseling is important to many survivors traveling the grief journey. Sitting one-on-one with a skilled therapist who understands grief and trauma can help you work through some of the most painful parts of your loss. Finding the best fit is important, and we can help. The right grief counselor can help you discover strengths, develop your own coping skills, and

help you work through questions, changes in relationships, and secondary losses. Find out more: [taps.org/griefcounseling](http://taps.org/griefcounseling).

### Education Support Services

TAPS serves as a guide to scholarship information and benefits resources for military survivors. Our education support team can explain scholarships and benefits; work with you to align resources and education goals; help you communicate with schools, college, and universities; and support you in going confidently into the next phase of your life. Your education is part of your loved one's legacy for you—and we want you to grow into it with as much peace of mind as possible. Find out more: [taps.org/edu](http://taps.org/edu).



### Suicide Loss Support

A death by suicide can leave behind a wake of emotions that complicate an already painful grieving process. Many of us ask, "Why did this happen?" We worry that our loved ones will be remembered for how they died instead of how they lived and served. Suicide loss survivors can be assured that they have a safe space within TAPS to remember, honor, and grieve their loved one's entire story. Special TAPS programming and resources, including the annual National Military Suicide Survivors Seminar, provide gentle, understanding support as we work through the emotions associated with this type of loss. We have walked in your shoes and are here to offer comfort and care. Find out more: [taps.org/suicide](http://taps.org/suicide).

### TAPS Online Community

The TAPS online grief support groups are here for you wherever you are in the grief process—and wherever you are in the country or the world. Whether you want to share your story or just read how other survivors are sharing and coping, our online grief support community is a way for you to develop and strengthen your connections with your TAPS family from the comfort of your home.

As a gathering place for survivors, the TAPS Online Community hosts chat sessions for real-time conversations, message boards that provide space for questions and comments, a blog, and peer-based sharing groups to drive conversation and connection. Find out more: [taps.org/onlinecommunity](http://taps.org/onlinecommunity).



### Publications

TAPS has created a series of pocket-size guides—including "Survivor Guide," "Benefits and Finances," "Education Support Services," "Children's Grief," "Grief Guide," and "Supporting Survivors of Suicide Loss"—that are available at no cost to survivors and supported by experts in the field. Other resources include *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death: 100 Practical Ideas for Families and Friends* by Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., and the children's book *Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope*. Find out more: [taps.org/publications](http://taps.org/publications).

### TAPS Events

The grief journey takes you out of your comfort zone. But when you see that others share this journey, you can find new ways to grow and

heal with a little more confidence. Our events bring surviving family members together for sharing, growth, and healing following loss. Hundreds of TAPS events take place all over the country each year. Opportunities for connection include: national and regional survivor seminars; TAPS Togethers, casual one-day events in your local community; health and wellness retreats, empowerment programs, and expeditions; and sports and entertainment experiences. Find out more on pages 38-39 and at [taps.org/events](http://taps.org/events).

### Youth Programs

Though their lives are marked by grief, young survivors at TAPS know their lives will also



be marked by camaraderie, mentorship, emotional maturity, adventure, and fun. Led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health, and education, TAPS Youth Programs—which include Good Grief Camps at TAPS seminars, summer campouts, teen adventures, and family retreats—provide safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing. Find out more: [taps.org/youthprograms](http://taps.org/youthprograms). ★

To learn more about the support that is waiting for you from your TAPS family, visit our website at [taps.org](http://taps.org) or call the Helpline anytime at 800-959-TAPS (8277).

# Get Together with TAPS!

TAPS hosts hundreds of events for military surviving adults, young adults, and children every year. This is what they're all about!

## National Seminars

TAPS hosts national seminars twice a year. The National Military Survivor Seminar—which takes place over Memorial Day weekend in Washington, D.C.—is open to all within the TAPS family, and there is no limit on registrations. The National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar, for those who have lost a loved one to suicide, is held every October on either the West or East Coast. Each includes three full days of workshops led by experts in grief and loss, small-group sharing sessions, and special events. Both seminars have a small registration fee, which can be covered by a scholarship.

## Regional Seminars

TAPS regional seminars are weekend-long events that occur across the country and are held in conjunction with TAPS Good Grief Camps. The seminars are inclusive, discussion-based events that include workshops for understanding and processing grief and small-group sharing sessions designed to help you connect with peers. TAPS seminars are open to all within the TAPS family, and registration is never capped or closed.

## Good Grief Camps

Paired with regional and national seminars, TAPS Good Grief Camps are two- to three-day events that give children the opportunity to share and learn coping skills through games, crafts, and other activities in a fun and supportive environment. Each child is paired with a military mentor who serves as a “big brother/big sister” and reminds the child that he or she is still a part of the military community. Good Grief Camps are open to all children under the age of 18.

## Retreats

TAPS retreats are five-day events that bring together small groups of adult survivors who share similar losses to further build a sense of community. The retreats use physical activities and movement to create experiences that help



us understand how we can move forward in our grief journey. Separate retreats are held for surviving spouses and significant others, parents, siblings, and adult children. Each event is capped at 40 participants, and registration is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

## Inner Warrior Events

Inner Warrior Wellness Weekends and Training Camps are three-day events focused on nourishing your body and spirit. The weekends provide practical advice on self-care, nutrition, and exercise as well as time to process how your grief affects your body. The events are open to all within the TAPS family, with attendance limited to between 25 and 40 survivors. Registration is accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

## Women's Empowerment Events

TAPS Women's Empowerment Weeks of Renewal are five-day events that take a holistic approach to helping survivors reclaim their identity after loss. Through art, journaling, mindfulness, and movement, survivors work within a sisterhood to establish a framework for moving forward with purpose, gratitude, and joy. Open to surviving women who are at least two years from their loss, the events are application-based and capped at 30 survivors.

## Family Campouts

TAPS Family Campouts are three-day events that take place in the summer and fall. Children ages 6 to 17 who have lost a parent and/or a sibling attend with a parent or guardian. The events feature typical summer-camp activities like rope courses, swimming, nature walks, and family time around the campfire, as well as sessions for both children and adults that teach coping skills, communication strategies, and ways to enrich the family unit. The camps are application-based, and attendance is capped.

## Young Adult Events

TAPS offers multi-day outdoor experiences for young adults (ages 18-25) who have lost a parent/guardian or sibling. The events bring survivors into nature to challenge themselves physically—through such activities as ziplining and river rafting—while also learning to navigate their grief journey, increase personal growth, develop important life skills, and build lasting relationships with peers. These experiences are application-based, and attendance is capped. TAPS also offers young adults the opportunity to give back to the community and build character through service projects organized by Habitat for Humanity. These are overnight events, and attendance is capped.





### TAPS Togethers

These small events in local communities offer an opportunity for you to come together with other survivors to participate in activities while enjoying the fellowship of your TAPS family. Know of a local restaurant that would love to host a dinner for TAPS? Want to meet up with your TAPS family at a local Starbucks? Is there a fair coming up that you'd like to attend with other survivors? TAPS can help arrange a get-together and invite all the survivors in the local area to join in. Send us your ideas!

### Online Chats

The TAPS Online Community provides weekly opportunities to connect with other survivors through a variety of chats, held in both written and video formats. You can easily participate at no cost from the comfort of your home.

### Care Groups

Care Groups allow you to connect with other survivors in your local area. There is never a fee to join your local TAPS Care Group. These groups are continually expanding across the country and are co-led by a Peer Mentor and a mental health professional.

### Stars4TAPS Entertainment Experiences

Stars4TAPS partners with the entertainment industry to create opportunities for surviving military families to make new memories with the musicians and Broadway, TV, and film actors who once brought them and their fallen hero joy. (Share stories of your heroes and the entertainers they loved at [stars4taps@taps.org](mailto:stars4taps@taps.org).) Each event differs in size and scope, and most are open to survivors of all ages who live within a 50- to 75-mile radius of the event. Registration is entry-based, and participation numbers are determined by event criteria and partner support.

### teams4taps Sports Experiences

The TAPS sports program, teams4taps, brings survivors together with professional sports teams, players, and organizations to honor and celebrate their fallen heroes at games, practices, field trips, and other special events supported by the partner organization. (Share stories of your heroes and the sports players and teams they loved at [stars4taps@taps.org](mailto:stars4taps@taps.org).) Each event differs in size and scope, and most are open to survivors of all ages who live within 50 to 75 miles of the event. Registration is entry-based, and participation numbers are determined by event criteria and partner support.

### Team TAPS Races

Team TAPS gives survivors the opportunity to honor their fallen hero through competitive sporting events. Team TAPS races in two premier events each October in the Washington, D.C., area: the Army Ten-Miler and the Marine Corps Marathon. Survivors can join Team TAPS for either of these races at no cost. TAPS supporters can also join Team TAPS and run in honor of fallen heroes.

### Self-funded Programs

In response to popular demand, TAPS offers opportunities to join your TAPS family on an adventure, such as an expedition, a safari, or even a cruise, at a discounted group rate. Some tours may have limited availability, and everyone is welcome to suggest ideas for these programs. Ever wanted to go on an African safari or a Caribbean cruise but don't want to go alone? We have travel experts who can research a great group rate for us, and we'll be happy to get the word out to others! ☆

For a complete list of upcoming TAPS events, visit [taps.org/events](http://taps.org/events). To send us event ideas, email us at [info@taps.org](mailto:info@taps.org).

# Dreams Can Come True

## Survivor education benefits help families reach their goals.

By Robert M. Worley II

**W**hat's your child's dream job? Chef? Veterinarian? Teacher? With the right education, the potential opportunities are endless. But when a family member or loved one is lost, saving money for college can be difficult.

The Department of Veterans Affairs knows how hard it can be for families who have experienced loss to pay for higher education. That's why there are several VA assistance programs available to support spouses and dependents of service members who have died or become disabled in the line of duty.

### The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship

After her husband was killed in action, Malia Fry, a Marine Corps widow, did not know how she was going to send her children to college.

The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship grew out of her efforts to honor her husband's memory. This program provides Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to children and surviving spouses of service members who died in the line of duty after September 10, 2001.

"Every child of every fallen in the line of duty receives it," Malia says. "All they have to do is sign up for college and apply."

Those who qualify may receive up to 36 months of benefits, including full tuition and fees for in-state public colleges. Recipients are also given allowances for monthly housing and supplies.

Malia's efforts made it possible for hundreds of children and surviving spouses of fallen service members, as well as her own children, to attend college without worrying about the cost. She encourages those eligible to take advantage of the Fry Scholarship: "It's not based on grades. You have it. It's yours."

### The Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program

This program offers education and training opportunities to eligible spouses and dependents of veterans who are permanently and totally disabled due to a service-related condition or who died while on active duty or as a result of a service-related condition.

Dependents must be between the ages of 18 and 26 to receive benefits for attending school or job training. For spouses, benefits end 10 years from the date VA determines eligibility or from the date of the veteran's death. For surviving spouses of service members who died on active duty, benefits end 20 years from the date the service member died.

These benefits cover a wide range of opportunities, including college, business, technical and vocational programs, certification tests, apprenticeships and on-the-job training, tutorial assistance, and work-study.



Brittany Tipps, holding a photo of her father on her high school graduation day, is headed to Texas A&M University-Commerce on a full scholarship this fall, thanks to the VA's education benefits.



### The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act

This legislation, also known as the “Forever GI Bill,” will bring significant changes to veterans’ education benefits in the coming years. Most changes enhance or expand benefits for veterans, service members, families, and survivors.

One such change is eliminating the time limit for use of the Fry Scholarship for some recipients. Prior to the Colmery Act, children had until age 33 to use the Fry Scholarship, and surviving spouses had 15 years from the date their service member died. The time limits have now been eliminated for children

who became entitled after January 1, 2013. For Fry spouses, it no longer matters when they became entitled. Thousands of families can now access their benefits when the time is right for them.

For the Survivors’ and Dependents’ Educational Assistance Program, eligible family members currently enrolled in education programs may receive up to 45 months of benefits. For those who enroll on or after August 1, 2018, the number of months of entitlement will decrease to 36. Starting October 1, 2018, however, the amount of monthly assistance will increase to \$1,224 for full-time coursework, \$967 for three-quarter time, and \$710 for half-time.

Surviving daughter Lauren Stubenhofer, shown with her family at her high school graduation, received a full scholarship to attend Clemson University, her parents’ alma mater.

VA hopes these changes and others brought about by the Colmery Act will have an immediate and positive impact on veterans and their families looking to pursue educational goals.

Whether it’s a child heading off to college or an adult returning to school, higher education comes with a price tag. Fortunately, with support from VA benefits, the children and spouses of fallen heroes can still follow their dreams.

“I go to a TAPS event and I go in the kids’ section and there are hundreds of kids in a camp. Every one of them gets to go to college,” Malia says. “And that’s pretty amazing.” ★

*As director of education service for the Veteran Benefits Administration, Robert M. Worley II provides executive oversight for policy, planning, and integration of education programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.*

### TAPS Can Help >

Your education is part of your loved one’s legacy for you, and the TAPS Education Support Services team is here to ensure that you enter this phase of your life with peace of mind. For more information on accessing education benefits and scholarships for surviving spouses and dependents, call our education support coordinators at (800) 959-TAPS (8277) or email [education@taps.org](mailto:education@taps.org).

In addition to education benefits, spouses and dependents may be eligible for other VA benefits, such as health care, disability compensation, home loan guarantee, and employment services. To find out more, call TAPS Casework at (800) 959-8277 or email [casework@taps.org](mailto:casework@taps.org).

# John Jarecki

## Good Grief Camp mentor and TAPS supporter

While reading his local paper on Memorial Day weekend in 2010, John Jarecki came across an article about TAPS Good Grief Camp. “There’s a camp for children who lost a loved one in the military?,” he thought to himself.

He was shocked to realize there was an organization for people just like him. He immediately drove over to the Arlington hotel where the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar was taking place, walked in, and asked, “What is TAPS, and where have you been my whole life?”

John was 5 years old when his father, a captain in the Air Force, died in an F4 crash. No one helped his family navigate the financial and emotional difficulties, and John watched his mom struggle with little support and the loss of the military life they knew.

At that seminar, John shared his story and met other families who were grieving the loss of their military hero. He felt a powerful sense of belonging and knew he wanted to be involved with TAPS in a meaningful way.

“When I see TAPS Good Grief Camp children, I have flashbacks to my own experience,” said John, who is now 42 and lives in Alexandria, VA. “I get it because I know the long road of healing they face.”

With guidance from the TAPS Youth Programs staff and Military Mentor Daniel Davenport, John trained to become a Good Grief Camp mentor in 2011 and chose to work with teenagers. “That is a difficult age and transition period,” John said. He knows firsthand how grief can manifest in a young person’s life later on if not properly addressed. “You can’t get away from grief—it demands recognition,” he said.

In 2013 John was paired with 15-year-old Taylor Dudley (shown above right with John), and the two shared a close and immediate connection. John watched her grow up and attended her high school graduation. He was also by her side when she received the 2016 Ted Stevens Leadership Award, which is presented to a surviving family member who has demonstrated outstanding leadership on behalf of other military survivors. Taylor was



recognized for her work as a Legacy Mentor, a Good Grief Camp graduate who has chosen to give back by supporting younger children who are newer in their grief.

“I feel immense pride now that Taylor is a Legacy Mentor and sharing her own loss, grief experience, and healing with other Good Grief campers,” John said.

In addition to mentoring at Good Grief Camp, John supports TAPS in other ways. He is part owner of two restaurants in the

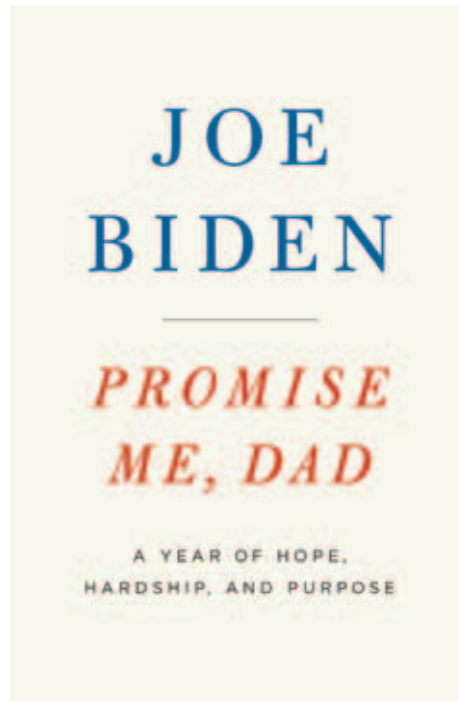
Washington, D.C., area—Grady’s and Red’s Table—and often hosts fundraisers on behalf of TAPS. He also provides catered meals for some TAPS events.

As a survivor and supporter, John knows that the mission and work of TAPS fills a void for those experiencing a military loss. “I feel a commitment to be there for those who reflect my own loss,” he said. “I want to share the lessons I’ve learned to help them find hope and healing.” ★

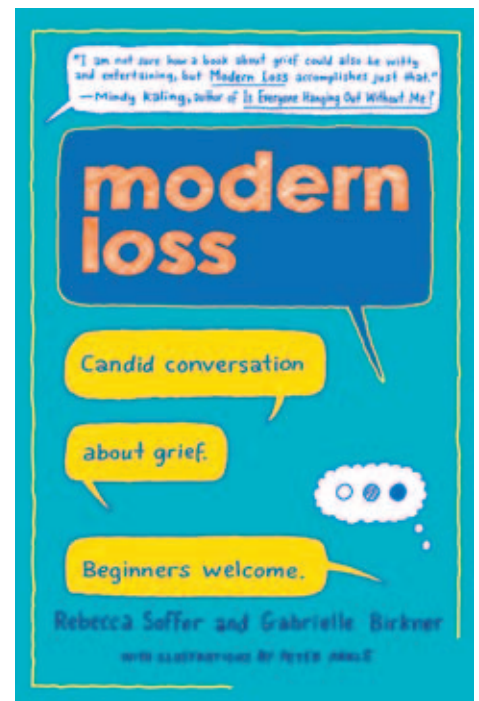
# Three Books for Your Grief Journey



***Transforming Loss: Finding Potential for Growth***—edited by TAPS Advisory Board member Dr. Ken Doka and Hospice Foundation of America president Amy Tucci and featuring some of the most influential voices in the field of grief and bereavement—examines the potential for positive change following loss. Exploring the theory that adversity can lead to personal growth, each chapter—including “Voices: Transforming Life After Loss,” by TAPS founder and president Bonnie Carroll—illustrates the concept that the death of a loved one drives individuals to construct new understandings of themselves and their priorities. In essence, this anthology serves as a reassuring friend, urging us to consider our most painful moments as fuel for reexamining our lives. (Hospice Foundation of America, available at [hospicefoundation.org](http://hospicefoundation.org))



After Joe Biden’s eldest son, Beau, was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor in 2013, he implored his father, “Give me your word that no matter what happens, you’re going to be all right.” The Vice President promised. ***Promise Me, Dad: A Year of Hope, Hardship, and Purpose*** is a testament to Biden’s ability to not only endure the loss of his son—an Iraq War veteran and former Delaware attorney general—years after losing his first wife and daughter but also to thrive after experiencing such wrenching pain. Biden’s highly visible role does nothing to soften his anguish; indeed, his willingness to lay bare his suffering while recalling the struggles he faced in fulfilling his responsibilities will likely resonate with every reader who has had to do the same. (Flatiron Books, available in bookstores and online)



From Rebecca Soffer and Gabrielle Birkner, creators of the Modern Loss website, comes a captivating book with the same name, a collection of short essays about death and mourning from more than 40 contributors. Fluctuating between sadness and humor and every emotion in between, ***Modern Loss: Candid Conversations About Grief*** illuminates topics ranging from the importance of leaning on friends to managing small talk to redefining who we are after traumatic, identity-altering shifts. With cartoons scattered throughout by illustrator Peter Arkle, this anthology will inspire readers to cry, laugh, grieve, and heal. Most of all, the stories offer the kinship and connection that come only from knowing others have walked and survived a similar path. (Harper Wave, available in bookstores and online) ★

Reviews by Allison Gilbert



## *“They’re Both Named Roger”*

I was six months pregnant when my husband died, so my son never got to meet him. I have pictures, so he can recognize him, and when we go to Arlington he knows this is his dad’s stone. He hangs on it, and he puts stuff on top of it. It’s something for him to be connected to. This is one of my favorite photos I’ve ever taken of him. He has a pure smile on his face. He’s just so happy, and I’m happy that I’ve been able to provide him with an environment he can be happy in even though this sad thing happened. My son looks just like his father. He makes a lot of the faces he made, and his smile is like a little carbon copy. He’s 5 years old now and just learning his letters. He was tracing his father’s name on the stone with his finger, and he realized that their names were the same. They’re both named Roger. He’s starting kindergarten in the fall, and I’m going to be thinking a lot about his dad. I’ll be sad because he won’t be here to see it, but I’ll also be happy because I know how proud his dad would be. ★

Photo and story by Christine Hutchison  
Surviving Spouse of Sgt. Roger Halford, U.S. Army



Women's Rose Gold & Navy Tee  
\$25



Youth Angels Pink Glitter Tee  
\$15



Women's Terry Shorts  
\$35



Baby Onesie  
\$15

# What's New AT THE TAPS Store



Golf Ball Marker  
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Men's Dri-Fit Polo  
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Klinger Stuffed Animal  
\$10



Klinger Toddler Tee  
and Children's Book  
\$15 each



PopSocket for  
Phone or Tablet  
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Find these bestsellers and other TAPS clothing, housewares, and accessories at [taps.org/shop](https://taps.org/shop)



800-959-TAPS (8277) ★TAPS.org

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors offers comfort, care, and resources to all those grieving the loss of a military loved one.

**TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS**  
3033 Wilson Boulevard, Third Floor  
Arlington, VA 22201

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“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

Leo Buscaglia



PHOTO: SGT. JAMES K. MCCANN