

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

T★A★P★S®

Comfort and Support Since 1994

MAGAZINE

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



VOLUME 19 • ISSUE 1

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

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

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

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



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Comfort and Support Since 1994

TAPS offers immediate and long-term emotional help, hope, and healing to anyone grieving the death of a loved one in military service to America, regardless of their relationship to the deceased or the circumstances of the death.

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

Call us at 800-959-TAPS
Or visit us at www.taps.org



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

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

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

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

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



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COVER PHOTO BY
Crystal Sullivan

*Participants in the 2011 National Military Survivor Seminar
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Let Us Hear From You



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

Sibling Salute

This [TAPS Sibling Retreat] was the most amazing event I've ever attended. I felt so comfortable and accepted. I didn't have to explain my story all over again to yet another group of people who didn't quite understand, because the siblings at the retreat knew exactly what I was feeling without even having to say it. I felt it was okay to grieve, and not hide it because it makes others feel uncomfortable. In my everyday life I feel like I have to search for a reason to bring my brother up in conversation, because people just want me to get over it, but with the TAPS siblings, they made it easy to keep John's memory alive without feeling like I was burdening people! Thank you TAPS for everything you do!

Ashley Fancher, Louisiana
Surviving sister of
SFC John Hennen

Support for all

I can't thank TAPS enough for the support and genuine kindness shown to me after the loss of my son, a Marine, to suicide this year. I am so thankful you were there in my time of despair. You are trained, compassionate, and skillful in your loving support. I don't know what I would have done in those days without you and the TAPS Peer Mentor who was there for me throughout this tragedy.

Lorilei Snyder, Washington
Surviving mother of
CPL Chase Snyder

Magazine Timeliness

I want to thank you again for *TAPS Magazine*. It seems to come when I begin to feel down again about my husband's passing almost three years ago. It has helped me every step of the way from his immediate passing, day to day coping, the birthdays, weddings, new births, and the holidays. I have saved all the magazines. I reread them and share them with family and friends, so it can help them also.

Alma Honczaruk, North Carolina
Surviving spouse of
Ted Honczaruk, USMC (Ret.)

Celebrity Endorsement

I got to know TAPS through one of the Good Grief Camps for children about six or seven years ago. I was overwhelmed by the love pouring out over the survivors. I was staggered by the courage of the families, by the strength they drew from one another, and by what a difference TAPS made—and makes—in the lives of our hero survivors. TAPS provides comradeship, gatherings, inspiration. It has rapidly become my wife's and my favorite cause. I have seen many charities, but never one as lovingly, carefully run as TAPS.

Ben Stein
Longtime friend
and TAPS supporter

TAPS Email Messages

I just wanted to send out a quick thank you for all that TAPS does. Remembering me on my son's birthday is wonderful, not to mention all the other times of the year...but his birthday! Thank you! It made me smile.

Leasa DeLozier, North Carolina
Surviving mother of
PFC Brian Lee Holden

Camp Mentoring

When participating in TAPS Good Grief Camp, I feel that I am working towards meeting the promise to my fallen friends. It is not only an institutional promise that we swear to in our respective Service creeds (Warrior Creed, Airman's Creed, Ranger Creed, etc.) but also a personal promise to the memories of men I am honored to still call my brothers. I find it very fulfilling to give back to the families of my brothers and sisters who have fallen while in service to our nation.

Lt Col Peter Doty, Virginia
Good Grief Camp Mentor



editor@taps.org



Moments... Just Moments

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

Have you ever had a moment? You know, a moment when time stood still and everything was as it should be—right and good and whole and wonderful. A moment when you were in the right place at the right time and life was good. Did you ever have a moment like that?

Did you ever have a moment when the sun danced across the windowpane and made a rainbow through the glass? Or the breeze caught the fragrance of roses and sent it drifting past your nose and you remembered the prom and your first corsage? Did you ever have a moment when the world sang in harmony and everyone knew the words?

I did, but I have forgotten most of those magical moments when time stood still and life was caught in memory. I seem now only to keep count of the empty moments that are left in my life. I seem to keep track of all the things I will never have and keep mental lists of the things I have missed along the way. Death, it seems, has given me a new way of thinking and viewing the world. And moments seem to have changed from wondrous to horrendous. I wonder what happened.

I found myself counting the moments the other day until the light turned green. My mind wandered, and as I searched my memory banks, I began to recall moments. As the light stayed red, my mind drifted back across the scrapbook of my life, and I began to turn the pages.

I remembered a summer day's drive long ago, when we were headed nowhere, just cruising the country road in search of nothing. We passed a barn, one of those old, faded, barns that might have once been red. It was leaning to the west—well, actually, it was sighing to the west—and it looked as though it would simply lean into the ground at any moment. We stopped and just looked at that barn. It seemed symbolic of our struggles at the moment: just barely hanging on, yet still drawing strength from its foundation and structure. That is how we survived our son's battle with cancer: just barely hanging on, yet sustained by some mysterious inner force. We stood still and drank in the symbolism of that barn and drew courage from its message to hang on.

I found myself remembering that moment of long ago. Other moments came to me,

as I sat there in traffic, and I let my mind continue to drift. There were moments of sheer terror, so many of them that they seemed to darken the sun. I pushed them away and searched for something more. I needed to find a moment to refresh me, to recharge me, to tell me to hang on some more.

I found that moment as I remembered a picnic in the mountains, taken only a few weeks before his death. We found a moment of peace as we spread our quilt at the edge of a tiny mountain lake. Surrounded by snowcapped peaks and autumn tinged aspen, we found the solitude and calmness we had been seeking. We basked in the sun and let the breeze caress us. We ate sandwiches and apples and sang camp songs and played silly finger games. We made up stories and looked for elves that might live beneath the fallen leaves. It only lasted a short time, but it was a reprieve from the real world, and we needed the peace of those moments. I am grateful for those moments. Those memories now sustain us in our sorrow.

Do you have moments to cherish? Do you have moments that revive and replenish you? Or are you so busy hurrying through the day that there is no time to gather in the moments? We are often so intent on surviving the day that we fail to find the magic in the moments that are our life. In grief, so many of our hours and days and weeks and months are filled with pain and sorrow that we forget moments.

We are seeking the end of the pain, the end of the sadness, the end of the sorrow. We are so busy seeking that we often become blind to the moments when it doesn't hurt quite so intensely. We may not pay attention to the moments when happiness starts to float past our memory, but as we recognize it, we wipe it away with tears and bitterness, focusing on the knowledge that we will never have any more moments like that one.



And that is true. The moments we have shared with our cherished ones are gone, and we will not accumulate any more on this earthly plane. But must we lose the moments we have, simply because we are too busy or too tired or too afraid to embrace them?

The next time you are overwhelmed or lost or empty or hurting, try to clear your mind and let your heart go searching for a moment. See if you can let your eyes see what is really visible, instead of seeing what is no longer within hug's reach.

Just for a moment, don't look for anything. Just *be*.

The secret to surviving is in the quiet moments of your own thoughts. The secret to surviving grief is not how you face the day or even how you battle the emotions of grief, but in how you choose to spend the moments. Life is nothing but moments, moment after moment, all piled on top of another, jumbled together, tumbled and tossed and lived and let go. We laugh in the moment. We sing, we dance, we weep, we live, and we die in a moment. Some moments are awful and some are magical, but all *are*.

Learn to look for moments. You will not forget a single moment of your life. They are all stored somewhere in the recesses of your mind. But we can choose which ones come forward to support us or defeat us. Let your moments caress you the same way the breeze caresses the leaves as they float downward, spinning towards whatever lies ahead. Do they know they are destined for the leaf pile or are they on some mystical adventure that will only be revealed in the moment it happens?

We don't know and that's exactly right. We don't know. We can only guess or fear or embrace. Go forward into your moments and let them come to you, to fill you, to recharge you, to comfort you. The awful ones weren't any longer than the wonderful ones. You choose which ones to remember.

And the next time you find yourself waiting in traffic or stuck in a place you don't want to be, remember the magic of the moment and learn to cherish the ones you have. Find something to notice and embrace. Savor the moment; it is yours. *



- Catch a sunbeam.
- Notice how leaves shimmer.
- Gaze into the coals of a fire.
- Let the breeze ruffle your hair.
- Let music find a path to your heart.
- Feel a stream tickle your bare toes.
- Breathe in moonbeams.
- Try to catch a falling star.
- Laugh or at least try.
- Pet a puppy.
- Sit in the grass.
- Walk on an old path.
- Let the tears come.
- Find a safe place to scream.
- Listen to your heart.
- Wallow in your grief.
- Wander in your despair.
- Forgive yourself for living.

About the Author



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



She Said, He Said



By Chris Sweet and Danielle Balmer Sweet

She Said

“How am I supposed to kiss you goodbye tomorrow at the airport knowing it might be the last time I see you?”

As Ryan stood there that night with his arms wrapped around my waist, looking reassuringly into my eyes, he promised to come home, told me not to worry, and said he was going to continue to be a “pain in the ass until we are in our eighties.” Nearly six months later, one week before he was scheduled to come home, I received the news we all fear when our loved ones go off to war. “On behalf of a grateful nation, we regret to inform you of the untimely death of...”

Ryan had been instantly killed by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). He was at the very end of his first and only deployment, serving as a Federal Agent for the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. We had always said if you could look up the definition of the perfect marriage in the dictionary, you would find a picture of us. Ryan and I had 11 amazing

years together; we were soul mates and best friends in every sense of the word. I once had someone tell me that we must have been husband and wife in another lifetime because it came so easily to us.

At some point after Ryan died, friends and family began to comment on the idea of me dating and finding love again. I would tell them, “I was so lucky the first time, there is no way I could ever be that lucky again.” I was satisfied and content with that logic and went about my life as Ryan’s widow and the mother of our children. I was proud to be Ryan’s widow; it is a title I did not ask for and never wanted, but one that I completely embrace.

It means that I will forever love a man that loved his country so much that he was willing to die for it. Understanding the violent nature of his job led Ryan to write me a goodbye letter just in case he didn’t make it home. There were two things in it that stood out: to live my life, because in his words, “I died; you didn’t” and to find someone that would love me and be there for me. I can’t imagine the thoughts and

feelings he struggled with to be so insightful and understanding, but that was just the kind of person he was.

He Said

“Time of death, four-o-eight.”

Those words continue to echo in my mind and are permanently etched into my brain. It was in the early morning hours of February 12, 2009 that my wife succumbed to the rigorous chemo treatment for her cancer at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Jessica and I had fallen in love 12 years earlier while we were both assigned to our first duty station at Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina. Once we got together, we knew instantly that we would be together forever. She was my soul mate and I was hers. Now I found myself alone and struggling to find the words to tell our three kids that Mommy was in Heaven and not coming home.

After Jessica died I thought that I would never love again, nor did I want to, quite frankly. I had accepted a life of pain and



Photos: TAPS Archives



loneliness; I wanted a life of pain and loneliness. Jessica was the love of my life, period, and even the thought of loving another woman would diminish the love that we shared. That was until I met Danielle.

She Said

Fast forward four years. I met Chris while attending Snowball Express in 2009. I walked up and introduced myself after noticing he was wearing an Air

Force sweatshirt. I wondered if he and Ryan had ever been stationed at the same place, at the same time. We determined that wasn't the case, and went on to talk about Ryan's and Jessica's deaths. My heart ached for Chris as he explained to me his one year mark was a couple of months away. I vividly remembered how difficult that one year mark could be, so I offered what little advice I could and we said goodbye. We didn't see each other again until the TAPS National Seminar in 2010. We talked for a few minutes and didn't see each other again until Snowball Express 2010. Quickly and without doubt, love was in the air, and we didn't waste a single moment to pledge our forever love.

To say that luck has struck twice would be an understatement. Not only have I been fortunate to have the love of two great and amazing men, I have also found my "other" soul mate and best friend. Just as quickly as Ryan and I realized that we were meant to be together, Chris and I also realized that we were meant to be together. We had been placed together, not by chance, but by fate. I like to think of Ryan's love for me as being so strong,



Photos courtesy of the Sweet family

that by him putting Chris into my life, it is a way of him continuing to love me and ensuring my happiness. Chris's description of the love he and Jessica shared, and the marriage they had, is almost a mirror reflection of what Ryan and I had shared. The marriage that Chris and I have sometimes feels like a continuation of those marriages.

He Said

On the 4th of July in 2011, under the arches of the Air Force Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, I did something that just a few years earlier was completely

inconceivable. For the second time in my life, I married my soul mate. The guests consisted of a handful of casual passers-by, our five children, and two very special heavenly guests represented by tiny photo charms attached to Danielle's bouquet. Just as I believe that Jessica and I were meant to share our lives together, and Ryan and Danielle were meant to share their lives together, I believe that ultimately Danielle and I were meant to share

the rest of our lives together. I know how much Danielle still loves, misses, and grieves the loss of Ryan, and she knows how much I still love, miss, and grieve the loss of Jessica.

Danielle and I like to believe that we were a match made in Heaven, literally. Who we are today, our love, our beautiful family; we owe it all to Jessica and Ryan. Many of our friends and family cite what is perceived as obvious for how and why Danielle and I came together. They assume that it is our shared connection of tragedy, death, and grief. But the greater commonality is that we both loved and were loved so perfectly and that we have found far more similarities with how we lived and loved with Jessica and Ryan than how we coped with the grief and tragedy of their deaths.

We are amazingly fortunate that we can allow ourselves and each other to continue to love and honor our late spouses and that we can share that with our combined five children. In our home we will always honor and remember Jessica and Ryan (or Mommy and Daddy as the kids like to say) in Heaven. ★



Tech. Sgt. Ryan Balmer died June 5, 2007 in Kirkuk, Iraq. He was assigned as Special Agent to the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.



Tech. Sgt. Jessica Sweet died February 12, 2009 five months after she was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia.

Proactive Grieving

And How We Climb the S.T.A.I.R.S to Get There

By Mitch Carmody

When my father died in 1969, I was only 15 years old. My mom told me that I was the man of the family now and that I needed to take care of the farm and my sisters. I did just that. I did not grieve, I did not cry, I did not publicly mourn. I hid my sorrow as if it were some awful secret I was ashamed of. I moved on.

When my brother died five years later, nothing much had changed. My brother had been hospitalized as a ward of the state since early childhood. Because he had been born severely handicapped, his death was regarded as a divine mercy by most, and we thanked God that he was released from his torment. Still, I did not mourn.

Nine years after that, my twin sister and her two young sons were killed in an auto accident. Her husband celebrated the fact they had gone to be with Jesus, and there was very little display of public mourning. I did not mourn.

Three years later, my son Kelly died of cancer, and I defaulted to how I was raised to react. Buck up and get over it. I stuffed my grief and blended back into the real world. I was good at it.

But I started to realize that stuffing all my losses had crippled my spirit. I had no zest, no vision, and no color in my life. I felt defeated and lost in a world of different shades of gray. Although not suicidal, I certainly felt that I would embrace the angel of death and not fear his sting.

Then one day I walked past a photo of my son and looked into his face for a long time. Paralyzed and lost in reverie, I started to shake, then scream, then cry, crumbling to the floor in unbounded agony. *I cannot do this!* I screamed. I made a conscious decision right then and there to dive back into my grief,

starting with my father and continuing right up to my son.

I embraced my grief, engaged my spirit, honored my child, and began to actively mourn my loss. I shared my continued pain with my family, my friends, and my co-workers. I talked about Kelly, wrote a book, and started to create works of art again.

*No timetable, no shortcuts,
no false expectations, no failures.
Just one step at a time,
forward and back,
climbing the S.T.A.I.R.S.
when we are ready,
willing, and able.*



By proactively working on my grief, I started to heal and again felt purposeful and (dare I say) even happy at times. I had started a new relationship with my dead son, and found it was good. Our loved ones die a second death when no one speaks their name.

I believe we are ready for a paradigm shift in processing grief in this country, and it's happening now. Since 2002, I have seen a subtle transformation taking place—almost a pride in ownership of one's own grief. This is *my* grief, *my* journey, as long as it takes. I accept its challenge, and the world will have to accept that this is who I am and how I am dealing with my loss; it's how I survive.

I believe there are no predictable linear stages in processing the death of a loved one. Rather, I believe the grief journey is a series of steps negotiated one at a time, each one taking as long as it takes to reach the next. No timetable, no shortcuts, no false expectations, no failures. Just one step at a time, forward and back, climbing the S.T.A.I.R.S. when we are ready, willing, and able. Each step takes as long as it takes and is different for everyone. Whether the death was the result of a long-term illness, a sudden unexpected accident, murder, or suicide, we who are left behind will have to climb this stairway.

Active participation in our grief journey is paramount to survival. If we want to feel good again, feel joy again, feel part of the world again, we should strive to become *intentional survivors* and not hapless victims. Seek help, read, reach out to others in pain, set a goal no matter how small, grieve outside the box, lament without shame, live your loss. Ascend these stairs knowing that you must do so to survive, but take it slowly, with baby steps.

S.T.A.I.R.S.

Shock

When our loved one dies, we are in reactionary disbelief, numb head to soul. This is how we are able to choose a casket, sign papers, read sympathy cards, and publicly share our grief with others. We are in a primal stage of survival. We function as automatons and accomplish the impossible: we bury or cremate the body of our loved one.

Trauma

The ensuing reality of our loss and our struggle to comprehend it and weave it into the fabric of our daily life may be the step where we linger the longest. We return to work, go through the holidays by rote, and struggle every day to cope. Every morning when we open our eyes after a fitful night's sleep, we again fight with denial and disbelief. The light of a new day beckons us to rejoin a world that we are reticent to embrace. Moving forward and functioning at all seems to dishonor our loved one. We

know there is no going back, but we do not want to move forward, so we stay where we are for as long as it takes.

Acceptance/Absorption

This is the most powerful step in processing our loss. When we accept that the loss has taken place, we can then make plans for the future, as nebulous as it may seem. This is not an easy admission to make but a crucial one for our survival. Accepting the reality of the loss is not forgetting or letting go; it's living with the loss and accepting its collateral damage to our future.

Introspection/Insight

We look deep within ourselves to try and find ourselves. We question our faith and seek to find the meaning of life in the depths of our sorrow. We use the tools of intuition, gut feeling, and prayer to access the world inside and out in a different light of perception. The more we know, the more we realize what we don't know. We look to find answers to the whys and the cries of our wounded soul... and are finally willing to hear the answers.

Reinvestment/Rebuilding

We take charge of our journey and find creative, healthy ways to process our loss. This is what I call *Proactive Grieving*: we attempt in earnest to reconstruct the foundation of a life that has been shattered and try to regain the joy that is our birthright. We become *intentional survivors*. We can make a difference in the world and fulfill our personal destiny. When we honor our loved one's life by creating a legacy in their name the world is then enriched instead of diminished.

Serenity/True Peace

This is not always possible in this world (loss or no loss in our lives), and yet it can be attainable. It may take years—even decades—to reach this point, or it may creep into our lives on the journey itself when we are caught by surprise to see the face in the mirror smiling.

Miracles do happen ...*Believe.* *

Ascend these stairs knowing that you must do so to survive, but take it slowly, with baby steps.



About the Author



Mitch Carmody is the author of *Letters to My Son* and the newly released second edition, *Turning Loss to Legacy*. Since losing his son to cancer in 1987, he has published articles for national grief periodicals, newsletters, and internet sites, as well as appearing in many radio and television interviews. He is an accomplished artist and creator of the innovative *20 Faces of Grief*. Mitch has conducted workshops at the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar for several years. For more information, visit www.heartlightstudios.net

Taking Action

Finding Meaning in Involvement... Again

By Alice Daniel ★ Surviving mother of SSG William Austin Daniel

10:45 p.m. The house is quiet; all are sleeping but me. Austin's been dead for more than three years now. Some things are better. I'm cooking again. We've recently moved from our family home of 26 years. I don't believe I could have done it early on, but it seems like a good move now. It was painful to watch the little boys in our subdivision chase snakes and frogs in the drainage ditch. My boys used to do that, coming in for snacks with sweat on their noses and that special "little boy been playing outside" smell.

I began playing golf again a couple of weeks ago. My heart's not really in it, but I've found the diversion helps keep me from those relentless, haunting thoughts of what might have been, why can't I change it, and is he really never coming home again. I'm actually going to play bridge again, too, although I won't be able to remember what cards have been played—you know, the old lack-of-focus and memory-lapse thing. But it will be good to see people again.

I've complained that my friends have abandoned me, but perhaps

it is I who abandoned my friends. No one can be much of a friend to someone who hides in the house 24/7. How can they befriend me when I don't answer their phone calls? Why shouldn't their worlds go on like before?

Slowly but surely I'm rejoining the land of the living. Celebrate the life...celebrate the life—that's what TAPS is all about, and I do believe it is finally settling into my exhausted, confused mind. I've come to understand that my heart will forever be heavy; my gut will hurt on and off forever. But I realize a change has come about. I'm engaging in my life again.

My way of dealing with adversity has always been to take action—find the problem, fix it. When Austin was stationed in Germany

and his unit was poised to invade Kosovo, I didn't let fear paralyze me. I stepped into action and painted every wall and ceiling in my house. When my younger son was deployed to Iraq, I stepped into action and became Key Volunteer Coordinator for his company. When Austin was diagnosed with cancer, I didn't assume the fetal position and hide. I got on the phone with the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and helped set up the best treatment available for my son.

And now I realize I have returned to my old coping mechanism. Jump into action, try and fix it, just do something constructive! I've become heavily involved with our local Folds of Honor Patriot Shootout Golf Tournament. It's one of 4,200 events held across the country each year to raise scholarship money for spouses and children of deceased or injured military service members. Education for survivors—constructive action. Yeah! At this year's pre-tournament gala, we will award the first annual "Baton Rouge Patriot Shootout SSG William Austin Daniel Memorial Award"

MY WAY OF DEALING WITH
ADVERSITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN
TO TAKE ACTION - FIND THE
PROBLEM, FIX IT.



to a veteran or active duty military hero for distinguished military and public service. The honoree will receive an original oil painting of a bald eagle by Louisiana artist Tony Bernard, commissioned especially for this award. Action and celebrating the life all at one time—a little of the old me has emerged.

I've also become passionate about another cause. After participating in TAPS events and talking with other survivors, I learned a horrifying fact. Austin's cancer was probably not just a genetic defect. Many of our veterans have returned home to be diagnosed with cancer. I learned that cancer is a leading cause of death among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. My daughter-in-law was in a seminar

with other widows and was appalled to learn that the cause of death of half their loved ones was cancer. Of those, 50% had Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

I believe I was more angry to learn about the burn pits causing our loved ones to become ill and die needlessly than I have been about Austin's death. The old Alice jumped into action and began researching. It's true. There were open-air burn pits, and hundreds of our heroes have become ill breathing these emissions while deployed in the Middle East. I learned that Congressman Todd Akin of Missouri introduced legislation to form a Burn Pit Registry so that our Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will keep track of our loved ones and their health issues after deployments.

The old Alice is back. I phoned my congressman's office, offering any help I could possibly provide, including testifying in front of House or Senate committees

THE OLD ALICE IS BACK.
I PHONED MY CONGRESSMAN'S
OFFICE, OFFERING ANY HELP
I COULD POSSIBLY PROVIDE.



regarding Austin's death. Then I sent the following letter to both my Senators urging their support of the legislation:

Dear Senator,

I encourage you to support the Open Burn Pit Registry Act in the Senate. There are thousands of Louisiana residents who have served our country in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are seeing hundreds of deaths due to burn pit related illness. My son, SSG William Austin Daniel died on September 7, 2009 from Hodgkin's disease. He served in Iraq in 2003 – 2004 at Camp Victory, Baghdad, with the 2-156 Infantry Brigade from Louisiana. There were open burn pits at Camp Victory. This is a very serious situation that demands further action immediately.

I've been in touch with a wonderful doctor who has been researching lung problems caused by the burn pits, and we have suggested a plan of action similar to the one used for rescue workers who developed

illnesses related to 9/11. We now have a group of four women—two wives, a mom (me) and a sibling—who have weekly phone conferences updating each other on our progress regarding the burn pits. I also now mentor three moms who have lost children to leukemia after deployments.

And finally, there are two objectives I want to pursue: (1) to have survivors visit www.burnpits360.org to register their deceased loved ones and share information about their illnesses (More than 1,000 people have registered on their site so far. TAPS has also accumulated data on more than 1,000 deaths attributed to mysterious illness or cancer.) and (2) to have Congress pass a law requiring the VA to establish a registry as well

as an independent study of the Department of Defense's efforts to collect and track air quality data in forward-deployed areas.

Yes, part of me is gone forever. A part of me died with my precious son. However, there are parts of me beginning to creep back into everyday life despite my resistance. I'm becoming active in the world again, taking up causes, participating in worthy endeavors, even playing games and having fun. I no longer blame my friends for absent friendships. I realize I've pushed them away as much or more than they've stayed away from me. I am now inviting them back in to my life. Most of all, I'm "celebrating the life" in spite of the pain. Oddly enough, that seems to be the very thing that is easing the pain. *

After this article was written, Congress passed bipartisan legislation and presented it to the President on January 1, 2013. Included in the legislation is a provision to establish an Open Burn Pit Registry at the VA.

Recognizing and Grieving Secondary Losses

By Jill Harrington LaMorie, DSW, LCSW

Have you ever thrown a pebble in a still pond and watched its impact? As it settles to the bottom, waves expand outward from the point of entry, disturbing the water in ever growing rings of motion. The one single event of a pebble falling in the water affects all that is around it with multiple, vast, extending ripples. Death has that ripple effect as well, setting off a disturbance that moves across time and space.

The death of someone we care about is a primary event in our lives, the pebble in our pond. But the experience of loss doesn't end with the funeral. Instead, the death sets in motion subsequent losses, called secondary losses, that occur as a result of the primary loss, creating a sense that we are losing everything, and that the pain will go on forever.

In the military survivor community, we have a saying that death is a "permanent, unaccompanied deployment." In reality, it is an obvious loss of a life and is considered by many to be the only loss. Because of this, secondary losses are often unanticipated by the bereaved (until they are living through them) and are not well understood by others in the survivors' lives.

Death changes our world, and part of the work of the grieving process is learning how to adjust to a new, assumptive world. The changes death brings are physical, personal, social, spiritual, emotional, and psychological. Death alters our environment to include a defined ending and the demand for a new beginning.

One of the new demands placed on the bereaved is to identify

the losses that follow the death. Grieving secondary losses is a normal and healthy part of learning to live in a newly changed world. It is important to acknowledge the losses that have already taken place, recognize those that are currently taking place, and envision losses that the future will bring. We need to know that each identified secondary loss will require its own grief response in its own way and in its own time.

Family and friends also need to recognize secondary losses and the associated grief they bring. In wanting to see their loved ones happy and "getting on with life," they can unwittingly deny or disenfranchise real feelings of grief. Awareness, patience, and understanding can allow us to move through our grief.

The following are some of the losses we may experience after the death of a loved one, friend, or family member. Individuals will not necessarily experience all the losses mentioned here and may experience additional losses not mentioned in this article.

Loss of Family Structure: the instantaneous change in family composition. A radical change has taken place in the immediate family. For siblings, birth order is changed. For parents, a challenge comes when people ask, "How many children do you have?" For spouses, there is no longer another adult in the home. For children, there may now be only one parent. Remaining family members must take on new responsibilities or jobs around the house that had previously been performed by the deceased.

Loss of a Primary Relationship: loss of a significant person who was prominent in your life. The time you spent together, conversations you had together, and activities you enjoyed together have ended. There may also be a loss of things you wished you did together, but never had the chance to accomplish. Special memories you shared are now yours alone. For spouses and adult partners, there is an end to an intimate sexual relationship. For parents, an adult child was just becoming a friend. For siblings, the friendship was being experienced on a more mature basis.

Loss of the Familiar Way of Relating to Family and Friends:

avoidance of family and friends because they do not know how to respond to the bereaved person's changed status. Survivors may find that friends avoid them at social functions, at work, or in the hallways at school. This can bring additional sadness and anger to the bereaved. Changes for the remaining children can



include new people in their lives, different babysitters, more or less time with grandparents, and changes in daily routines or afterschool activities.

Loss of Support Systems: loss of friends, family, community organizations, and others who help to sustain and lend strength on a daily basis. We say that grief has a way of changing our address books. When we look for those who have been there for us in the past, they seem to have disappeared. At a time when we most need extra attention, we often have to develop new systems of support.

Loss of a Chosen Lifestyle: being forced to begin a new way of life despite one's personal wishes. For surviving spouses, this means being single again and possibly childless. For siblings, it can mean becoming an only child. For parents whose only child dies, it can mean the loss of future grandchildren.

Loss of Financial Security: serious financial loss associated with death. In many cases, the primary wage earner is gone. For others, there can be loss of employment due to the grief process or serious debt incurred by the deceased or as a result of the death.

Loss of the Past: inability to share memories of the past journey with the deceased. For survivors who are left alone by the death, there will be no "remember when's." This can also apply to surviving siblings, even though their parents remain, because they are now only children.

Loss of the Future: the immediate cessation of plans made with the deceased. This is a large piece of the grief journey for survivors of a young adult death. The losses can include growing old together, having children with that person, watching that person graduate from college, watching them begin their own family, celebrating birthdays/graduations/marriages of children, being able to resolve unfinished business, and the wish of living happily ever-after, to name a few.

Loss of Dreams: disillusionment resulting from the disappearance of the



Grieving secondary losses is a normal and healthy part of learning to live in a newly changed world. It is important to acknowledge the losses that have already taken place, recognize those that are currently taking place, and envision losses that the future will bring.

plans listed above. This is especially true when a young person dies. Survivors grieve not only a past and present with that person, but also future hopes, goals, and dreams. The untimely death results in a shortened life for the deceased but a longer remaining lifetime for young survivors who are learning to live with loss.

Loss of Identity: loss of the roles that you no longer fulfill in a relationship. Parents who are now childless may no longer consider themselves parents; surviving spouses are no longer lovers; a surviving sibling may be an only child. This loss of role can be in the home, in the family, at work, among friends, and in the community, as well.

Loss of a Large Chunk of Self: loss of the part of the self that was given to the other person in love, and that death seems to have violently ripped from one's being. Intangibles that we freely gave to someone are now gone.

Loss of Self-Confidence: a survivor's failure to recognize his or her own personal self-efficacy. It is easy to make human mistakes on this unknown journey, especially in the initial weeks and months when our attention is completely taken by the death. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy or the thought that we are not able to do anything right.

Loss of Ability to Make Decisions: the insecurity following the loss of self-confidence that causes the survivor to look for direction and advice from others. Many survivors wonder, "What should I do now?" If the deceased had input in making decisions, there is now a void in the process. Survivors are forced to rely on themselves to make choices without that person, which can lead to confusion and indecision.

Loss of Ability to See Choices: the sense that the survivor has no control over his or her life, leading to an inability

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

to accept that there are still alternatives, options, and allowable preferences. Because the new lifestyle was not a conscious choice, it is harder to see that choices still remain.

Loss of Trust: inability to have faith in a positive outcome. Death can shatter our trust in the world, those around us, and ourselves. Trusting enough to open oneself to love again can be very painful and is often avoided by many.

Loss of Security: inability to feel safe. Knowing that the world is an unsafe, unpredictable place can lead to feelings of anxiety and vulnerability. It can be accompanied by uncertainty of what to expect, what will happen next, or how we will react or respond. For survivors who relocate, the changes in homes, sleeping arrangements, schools, churches, and neighborhoods can heighten the feeling of insecurity.



Loss of a Sense of Humor: the failure to see anything funny. Because of the pain associated with losing an important person in our life, we may not feel like laughing at anything. In the immediate aftermath of the death, we even wonder whether it is still okay to find humor in situations, happiness in events, and enjoyment in life.

Loss of Patience: the loss of our normal ability to tolerate impaired skills and less-than-ideal reactions. We become impatient with our inability to recover, feel better, and handle normal stress. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy and failure, as the process of grieving normally lasts for several years. In addition, we may find ourselves crying more, yelling more, or arguing more with those we love.

Loss of Ability to Focus and Function: loss of concentration due to preoccupation with feelings of pain and sadness. Many survivors report that their ability to focus has become impaired. Focus and full functionality can be difficult to recover, especially if there was trauma involved. There can also be a significant loss of energy, both physically and emotionally. It is estimated by some that one hour of grieving is comparable to eight hours of manual labor.

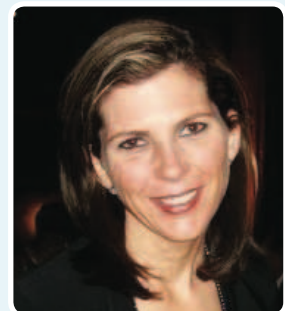
Loss of Health: the physical problems resulting from emotional stress, pain, trauma, shock,

The grief process helps us survive all kinds of losses and challenges, so that we can make the necessary adjustments to new circumstances.

and grief. Many survivors experience sleep problems, eating problems, heart issues, headaches, stomach problems, depression, anxiety, or all the above. It is a good idea to seek medical attention following a death so that health problems are not compounded.

A Final Word: It takes time and patience to heal. It is my hope that this list will help all grievers, friends, and caregivers to understand why nothing can replace the grieving process. The grief process helps us survive all kinds of losses and challenges, so that we can make the necessary adjustments to new circumstances. Awareness of the many secondary losses that can accompany a death can help the grieving person and those around him or her to be more patient as they learn to navigate their way through a new world, charting a new course as they embark on their pioneer journey to their future life. ★

About the Author



Dr. Jill Harrington LaMorie is the surviving spouse of Navy Lieutenant Commander Andrew LaMorie and proud mother of their children, Madeline and Alexander. She served as the TAPS Director of Professional Education for more than two years, as well as being a peer mentor, group facilitator, and workshop presenter. Jill completed her doctorate in social work at The University of Pennsylvania and currently works at USUHS Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. She brings more than seventeen years of experience in working with people living with life-challenging illness, trauma, grief, and loss.



You Are Cordially Invited to Attend



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

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

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

Remember the Love ☆ Celebrate the Life ☆ Share the Journey



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

Please Join Us

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

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

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

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

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

★ REGISTRATION ★

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

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



★ ACTIVITIES ★

WORKSHOPS FOR SURVIVORS & PROFESSIONALS

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

SPECIAL EVENTS

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

PEER MENTOR TRAINING

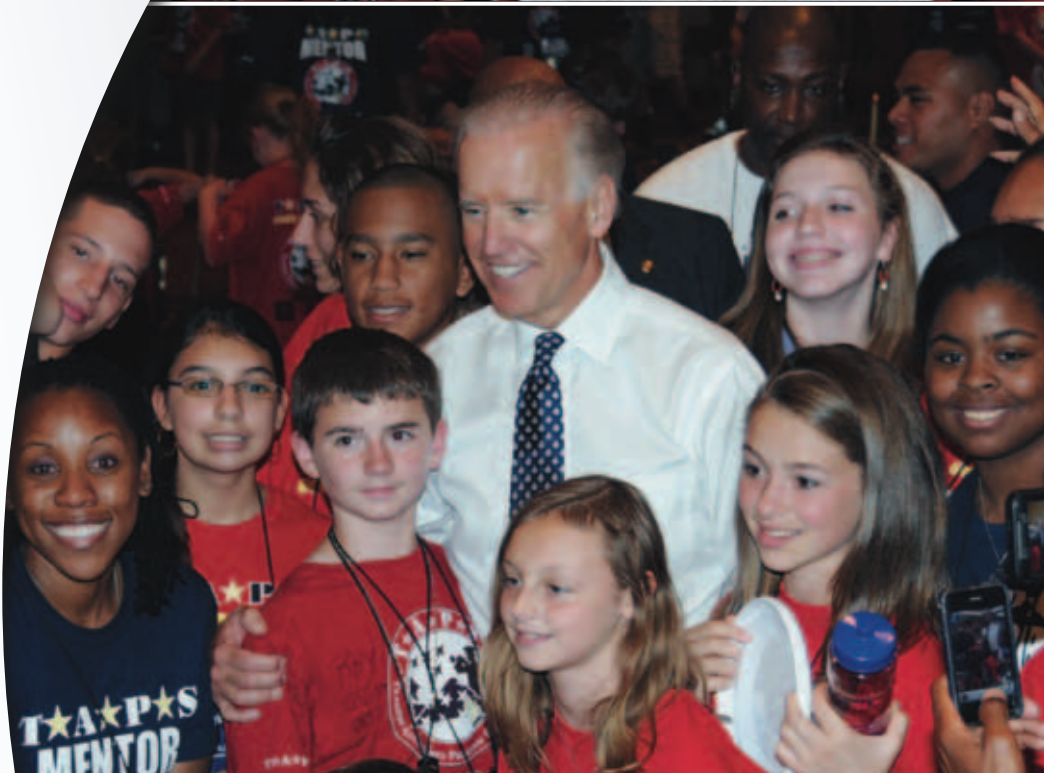
If you are 18 months beyond your own loss and ready to be there for others, we offer a full day of training on Thursday, May 23, 2013. You will learn more about grief and trauma, gain basic helping skills, and become part of our TAPS Peer Mentor Team. Register for the Peer Mentor Training as part of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

SUPPORT GROUPS

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

GOOD GRIEF CAMP

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



Register Online at
WWW.TAPS.ORG



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



Register Now

Register now to attend TAPS 19th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. Seminar registration closes May 6, 2013. Camp registration closes May 6, 2013 or when camp registrants exceed 475 children. Don't wait until it's too late! Go to www.taps.org and click on National Survivor Seminar.

★ LOGISTICS ★

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





TAPS®

Run & Remember Team

Corporate Challenge

Most members of our TAPS family are familiar with our Run and Remember Team, and many of our survivors are participants, running a grueling marathon or walking a 5K “race” to honor their loved ones who died in service to America. But not everyone knows about the special Corporate/Company Challenge program that TAPS instituted in 2010, three years ago.

The Corporate Challenge program was designed by Run and Remember Team Director Marie Campbell to allow companies to pay tribute to the sacrifices made by our loved ones while creating awareness and raising funds to support the TAPS mission.

One of the first participating teams in 2010 was Telos, a company that provides cybersecurity for military, intelligence, and federal agencies.

“Being a government contractor with many DoD customers, Telos employees work day in and day out with our nation’s military members,” said Renate Neely of Telos. “What greater respect could we pay them than to support their loved ones in need?”

In addition to paying respect and raising funds, Corporate Challenge team members are privileged to learn more about our fallen

heroes in a personal way. They are connected to surviving families by running in memory of their loved ones.

“Having the photo [of the fallen hero] on your back is very a very powerful reminder of how precious life is,” said Kristen Kelly, who ran with Ray Group International (RGI) last year. “In my race experience, this provided the motivation to push through the pain when the race got tough. I felt proud to share such a monumental life accomplishment with my TAPS family, the TAPS community, and my coworkers.”

Companies also benefit from the challenge. By participating with TAPS Run and Remember Team, companies create an environment where employees can be part of a meaningful team while training to become more fit and healthy.

“Becoming involved with the TAPS Corporate Challenge was a fun, yet challenging, way to get involved with a charity that we all believe in,” said Kelly. “It was also a great way to build our wellness program and an opportunity for us to bond as coworkers. The whole experience has left us with many wonderful memories through our months of training

together.” Since RGI was acquired recently by Price Waterhouse Coopers, the team this year will have a new name, and possibly some new runners.

After running the MCM in 2012 as part of the Corporate Challenge, Tony R. Jimenez, Executive Vice President JRC Integrated Systems, said, “At JRC, we are committed to giving back to the community. We consider it an honor to be able to run for TAPS, and I would encourage other companies to give back in any way to those who have sacrificed for our country. There is no better way than to help their families.”

JRC is a service-disabled veteran-owned small business, and more than half of its employees are veterans. Yet they still feel compelled to go the extra mile to support others.

If you work for or represent a company that would like to support TAPS’ mission, contact Marie Campbell at run@taps.org to get started. You can choose any race in any location to launch your team. Meanwhile, turn to page 22 to read David Easley’s account of his 2010 experience running the MCM as part of the Telos Corporate Challenge Team. ★



Photos, TAPS Archives



TAPS®

Run & Remember Team

Running the MCM for TAPS

By David Easley, Team Telos Runner

In 2010, Telos Corporation had been a financial sponsor of TAPS for several years, but wanted to step up its involvement with this great organization. The company decided to do this by accepting the Corporate Challenge with TAPS Run and Remember Team. Telos employees would train for and run the Marine Corps Marathon (MCM) in memory of a fallen service member and each Telos runner would be connected to the family members of an honored service member early in the year as the Telos runner began his or her training regimen. Over the course of the months of training, through the connection with the family, the Telos runners would learn about the hero in whose honor they would be running. Then on race day, the runner would wear a special TAPS singlet along with an 8"x10" picture of the fallen hero pinned to the back of the singlet.

I volunteered for the team with some reluctance, because I was initially focused on the race itself. I had not run a marathon for five years and knew the training commitment that would be required to meet my goal. But the thought of running as a part of this program and giving back in such a very small way to the families who had sacrificed so greatly was all the motivation I needed to make me get out there and train for 26.2 miles of running once again.

TAPS connected me with Mrs. Mary Manoukian Calhoun whose only child, Marine Corporal

Nick Manoukian, was killed in combat operations in the Al Anbar province of Iraq on October 21, 2006. Mrs. Calhoun is a wonderful woman, kind and humble. Nick was her only child and was her world. Understandably, this loss was still devastating to her and would be throughout her life, but she had found the sustaining power to continue on after her loss through reliance on her faith. Over the course of several months, we exchanged emails and spoke on the phone. I was able to see the man that Nick was and her great love for him. We discussed her faith and how it helped through this ordeal. She sent me a special patch with Nick's name and picture which I sewed on to my TAPS singlet in addition to the 8"x10" picture attached to my back.

Mary told me about meeting a woman named Trish Collinsworth when she was waiting at the airport for Nick's body to be returned home for burial. Tragically, Mrs. Collinsworth was there for the same purpose. Her son Cliff was also a Marine from Michigan and had

been killed in the same attack that took Nick's life. Mary and Trish had become friends and lived close enough to each other to be able meet from time to time for lunch or coffee. Their circumstances had clearly bonded them in a special way. She said that someone from the TAPS Run and Remember Team was going to be running to honor Cliff Collinsworth's memory at the Marine Corps Marathon.

A few days before the race, in our last conversation before the event, Mary mentioned that she had just seen Trish and that the Collinsworth family would be coming to DC for the race. Mary, however, would not be able to make the trip. The idea of me meeting with the Collinsworth family seemed to lift her spirits and enhance her connection to the race, but she hadn't actually arranged such a meeting for us. I recall her saying, "I am just praying that somehow you will be able to meet up with Trish." I told her I would love to meet with them, but we didn't go much farther than that.

As race day dawned, I was energized. In the races I had run over the years, I had seen thousands of people running in honor of others, but had never done this myself. I had seen people with customized shirts, or writing scrawled on their clothes, or wearing sandwich boards or photos, but I had always been anonymous. Now I was asking people to take notice of this man whose name and image I wore. I wondered what



Photo By Cpl. Jacob D. Osborne



Photos, TAPS Archives

sorts of reactions or encounters this memorial would invite. Needless to say, with a race of more than 30,000 runners and twice that many spectators, there were too many shouts of encouragement and recognition to track. There was always, though, a shout of recognition and support (often a “hoo-ah”) from those wearing the TAPS singlets.

I had been disciplined in my training, but as so often happens when running a marathon, I started to suffer after mile 20. My legs were sore and heavy. I was fatigued. There were many points where I felt as if every fiber in me was screaming for me to just stop. When I would push through those points, it wouldn't be long before I was right back to the same feeling. And with each passing step, the intervals between feeling okay and feeling distressed would get shorter and shorter. You are engaged in a physical endeavor, but it is your mental and spiritual stamina that is being tested. I often pray or recite scripture verses at times like these for inspiration.

Finally, after turning by the Pentagon, I reached the last mile—a long straightaway filled with thousands of runners struggling

to reach that finish line, the same as me. I was hurting. I was frustrated because I was so close to the finish and yet I felt like I might not be able to continue, that I might have to stop or be sick or just crawl the last half mile.

And that's when I saw it.

About 50 yards ahead of me, I noticed a guy wearing a TAPS singlet, but he didn't have a picture pinned to the back of it. Instead he had writing on the shirt that read “CLIFF” in big letters, with something else written below it that was too small to see. Could it be? I had to know. I was hurting, but I sprinted with everything I had in me to try to catch up. And as I got closer, I saw the letters below that read “Collinsworth.” Tears formed in my eyes, and I pushed forward again.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Out of the sea of humanity running this race and out of the most improbable wish of a grieving mother, with no human planning to make it happen, I was now running the final quarter mile of the race next to a runner wearing a shirt with Cliff Collinsworth's name on it. I could barely speak, but when I talked to him, I learned

that he was a close friend of the family and that the whole Collinsworth family, including Trish, had come out to run the race. I told him about Mary's prayer, and we shook hands and then pulled each other the last stretch of the race across the finish line.

When I told Mary about the encounter with the Collinsworth family, she was happy but also calm as she clearly knew that God answers our prayers.

I cannot know Mary's feelings over her loss. I can't begin to express the proper amount of gratitude to her for her family's sacrifice on our nation's behalf. My prayer, though, was that this experience could be another step in helping her live with the tragedy of losing Nick and that the work TAPS does to help survivors of fallen heroes would continue. *

David Easley, CPA, is the Controller and Vice President of Finance and Accounting for Telos Corporation. Telos is a leading provider of advanced technology solutions for customers including all branches of our armed forces, intelligence, and civilian agencies of the federal government.

>>For more information about the TAPS Run and Remember Team, visit www.taps.org and click on Get Involved. Then Click on Run • Email run@taps.org • Phone 800-959-TAPS (8277)



National Bereavement Study

★ A Call to Action ★

One of the recurring themes of grief is the feeling of isolation, the sensation that we are alone in the world and that no one understands what we are going through. At some point many of us find a way to “give sorrow words” as William Shakespeare wrote more than 400 years ago. We find our voice and want to be assured that someone is listening. The National Military Family Bereavement Study (NMFBS), in partnership with TAPS and other organizations, gives surviving military families just that, the opportunity to be heard in a nationwide research venue.

The NMFBS is the first project in our nation’s history to study the impact of a U.S. service member death on the family. This includes families of origin (parents and siblings) and families of procreation (spouses and children), regardless of the cause of death of their loved one. Now in its second year, the study is actively seeking participants in all three phases of the research.

More than 500 survivors have participated in the study in the past four months, giving a number of reasons for why they wanted to



work with the research study. Andy Weiss summed it up when he said, “I participated to honor and remember my son, Danny. It is a small way to try to help others and help ourselves recover a sense of balance in our own devastation.”

The first step (Phase 1) in participating in this landmark study is to complete the bereavement questionnaire. The questionnaire covers topics such as your health, the service member’s death, and your current feelings and concerns. It reflects the perspective of the individual who is grieving. In taking the questionnaire, individuals are asked if they would like to participate in the second phase of the study, which is the family interview.

In Phase 2 additional questionnaires are given on the subject of how families reacted to, and coped with, the death. Family members are interviewed separately, and the goal is to find out how the death affects the family over time by conducting three interviews over two years.

Surviving spouse Kristen Santos-Silva said, “My son and I participated as a way for our voices to be heard. We could truly speak openly and honestly, and communicate feelings that we tend not to allow to surface

daily or want to deluge someone else with. Participating in this study allows one to express feelings.”

Phase 3 of the study involves regional focus groups based on relationship type. Focus groups help the study assess common themes among specific relationship types (parents, siblings, spouses, children). The group session meets at a location convenient to survivors.

Information collected by the study will help the military know how to provide the best support to survivors. It will also affect the development of practices that will best help the bereaved find clues to healing and ways to repair their shattered lives.

As bereaved mom Lisa Jo Adkison wrote, “I believe it helped me to feel a little more empowered (a small sense of controlling part of my grief journey). I am proud (patriotically) to be participating in something so important.”

Who can participate in this study?

Eligible participants include parents, step-parents, adoptive and custodial parents, siblings, step-siblings, spouses, ex-spouses, adult partners, children, and step-children whose service member has died (whether by accident, combat, illness, homicide, or suicide) in active duty status in the United States military (Active, Guard, and Reserve components of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines) on or after September 11, 2001. ★

For further information, visit www.militarysurvivorstudy.org or contact Dr. Jill Harrington-LaMorie, DSW, LCSW, Senior Field Researcher, NMFBS, at jill.lamorie.ctr@usuhs.edu or (301) 944-4976.



TRAVIS MANION
FOUNDATION





USO/TAPS Good Grief Camp Outs

Summer Fun for TAPS Children



It's the time of year when the weather is gradually getting warmer. School is winding down, and children are looking forward to various vacation activities, whether it is sleeping in and relaxing, participating in team sports like swimming, or just hanging out with friends and family.

The summer break can also prove to be a lonely time for grieving children. After the novelty of free time wears off, boredom often sets in, and the kids may begin to miss their special loved one more than usual.

Now is the time to start planning for the summer with a trip to one of our USO/TAPS Good Grief Camp Outs. It may be the very thing you are looking for to help your children find some joy and healing during their break from school.

Whether your children are new to TAPS or regulars at our seminars and camps, TAPS would love to have them join us this year at one of our overnight Good Grief Camp Outs. We are proud to partner with USO for the third year in a row, and this year we have added a fourth location, allowing more TAPS kids the opportunity to experience a USO/TAPS Good Grief Camp Out.

Photos, TAPS Archives



"We are so happy to offer this additional resource for our TAPS children," said Heather Campagna, TAPS National Director of Youth Programs. "The camp-out is a unique experience, and the overnight component increases confidence in children and helps them overcome their fears while being surrounded by support from TAPS staff and military mentors."

The USO/TAPS overnight camps are designed for kids between the ages of six and eighteen who have lost a parent or sibling who was serving in the Armed Forces. The three day, two night camp experience is filled with traditional and military themed camp activities, grief education, and emotional support.

"Every time I bring my children to a Good Grief Camp Out, they reconnect with the other children they have met, as well as their previous mentors, which makes it feel as though they are coming home to distant family," wrote one parent. "When they leave, they have new friends and mentors, and their extended family has grown once more! It's a wonderful feeling!"

Campers find comfort in knowing that there are other children who understand



what they are feeling and experiencing. As one parent told us, "I think just seeing how many other children were in his same situation of losing a parent helped tremendously in his coping with the loss." Another parent wrote, "She did not want to leave when I came to pick her up, and that made me smile. I am grateful to all of you for a job well done and for allowing her to share her experience of losing a loved one."

This summer we will be conducting USO/TAPS Good Grief Camp-Outs in or near the Fort Bragg/Camp Lejeune area, Fort Hood, Fort Carson, and Camp Pendleton. There is no charge for the camps, other than your transportation to and from camp. All lodging and meals are provided.

We hope to see you soon and look forward to spending time with your precious children this summer for a few days of fun, fishing, swimming, hay rides, campfires, s'mores, and much more! Please check our website, www.taps.org, for dates and registration. *



Helping Children Cope Over Time

By David J. Schonfeld, MD and Marcia Quackenbush, MS, MFT, CHES

Grief is not a quick process. People who have lost a family member generally feel that loss throughout their lives. To continue giving your children support, it's important to understand how they may cope with their grief over time.

No child is too young to be affected by the death of someone close. Even infants respond to a death. They miss the familiar presence of a parent who has died. They sense powerful emotions around them, and notice changes in feeding and caregiving routines.

Young children can grieve deeply, even though they may not appear to be doing so.

They don't usually sustain strong emotions the way adults do. They may visit their concerns briefly, and then turn to play or schoolwork. This helps them avoid being overwhelmed, but doesn't necessarily mean their concerns have been addressed.

Older children and teens may try to focus their attention on schoolwork, sports, or hobbies. They may assume more responsibilities at home by helping their parents or other children in the family. Encourage your children to continue their friendships with peers and the activities they enjoyed prior to the death. Even after the death of a family member, it's important for children to keep being children.

Here are some ways adult family members and friends can support children over time:

Help children preserve and create memories.

Children sometimes worry that they will forget the person who died, especially if they were quite young at the time of the death. The entire family can keep the person's memory alive through stories, pictures, and continued mention of the person in everyday conversation.

Parents can model ways to talk about the person who died and make his or her memory a part of holidays and other special occasions. Finding ways to recognize and remember what was valuable in the relationship with the person who died is part of the healing process.

Children often like to have physical reminders of the person who has died. Some children want to carry a picture or object that reminds them of their family member or keep it in a special place in the home. They may keep clothing or a pillow in their room that still has the person's scent on it.

Anticipate grief triggers.

Memories and feelings of grief can be triggered by anniversaries or other important events. The first holiday after the death, the first birthday, the first start of school, a father-daughter dance—any of these might bring up sudden and powerful feelings of sadness.

Everyday events can have an impact as well—a favorite song may come on the radio, a favorite dish might be on the menu at a restaurant, a child might come across an old card from the family member who died. These grief triggers often catch people off guard. They can be troubling to children who are trying hard not to think about the person who died.

Don't wait until school problems start. Talk to your children's teachers and other key people at the school, such as coaches, band directors, and club sponsors.



Photo by USAF Staff Sgt. Catherine Thompson

Help your children understand that these experiences are natural. They will happen less frequently over time, but may continue to be powerful.

Talk to your children's teachers.

After a death, children often have difficulty concentrating on their schoolwork. They may benefit from tutoring, support, or temporary changes in test schedules or other classroom demands.

Don't wait until school problems start. Talk to your children's teachers and other key people at the school, such as coaches, band directors, and club sponsors. Describe the loss your family has experienced. By requesting the support of your children's school early on, you're taking steps that can prevent problems from starting.

You may want to talk to the school counselor as well. Even if children don't want to see the counselor, he or she can act as a resource and may be able to help if a situation comes up during the course of the school day that upsets your children or triggers a grief reaction. Counselors can also facilitate planning with classroom teachers.

Talk with the school again when your children change schools or start a new year with new teachers.

Talk to your children's health care provider.

After a death has occurred, children often worry about their own health and that of others in their family. They are also experiencing greater stress than usual, which can cause a range of physical symptoms, including headaches and stomach aches.

Your children's pediatrician or other health care provider can help identify physical complaints that stem from physical illness, emotional distress, or a combination of the two. Health care providers can also direct you to community resources that help support families experiencing grief, such as bereavement support groups or camps for children who've experienced a similar loss.



A health care provider may offer to talk with your children to see what they understand about these events. Sometimes he or she can help children express concerns they may be withholding from the family.

Recognize that grieving can last a lifetime, but should not consume a life.

Children grieve in stages and over many years. At each new stage in their lives, such as when they graduate from school, leave home to go to college, get married, have their own children, or reach the age when a parent died, they will have new skills in thinking and relating to others. They will use these skills to reach a more satisfying explanation of this death. They will build an ever-deeper understanding of its impact on their lives.

In many ways, the work of making meaning from a death never really ends. But, over time, this work becomes less difficult and takes less energy. It may start as a full-time job. Later, it becomes more of a part-time effort that allows other meaningful work and experiences to occur.

Parents often wonder when it's time to encourage children to move on with their lives. Shortly after a death, many children find they are ready to resume their normal day-to-day lives. They find comfort and support in returning to school, spending time with friends and taking part in the activities they did before the death occurred.

However, some children will take longer to get back to their regular daily tasks. They may wish to stay home from school. Sometimes they worry that harm will come to other family members if they aren't there. Some children stay home because they believe the surviving family members need them nearby. Give your children encouragement. They need to know you are okay, and that you expect and want them to return to school and their other daily activities.

Children may worry that both parents will die and leave them alone. At these times, children may find comfort in knowing that, even if this highly unlikely event occurred, the family has a plan about who would take care of them. Consider sharing this plan with your children if they express such concerns.

Children often need extra support and attention for a period of time. They might want help with homework because they are having trouble concentrating and learning. You may want to help set up some social time with friends, such as an outing to the park or a trip to the movies.

Getting back to school and a regular routine is important for your children's health and enables them to move along in their grieving process. In general, if children are having trouble getting back to usual routines after several weeks, it's a good idea to seek outside advice. Check with your children's health care provider or school counselor. *

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Excerpted with permission from *After a Loved One Dies—How Children Grieve* ©2009, The New York Life Foundation (NYLF). Visit the NYLF website at www.AChildInGrief.com to find valuable resources that will help guide you and your family through the death of a loved one. The NYLF has provided significant support to TAPS and is committed to providing support for children and families who are grieving.
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You're Not Going Crazy...

By Stephanie Frogge, MTS, CTS



Oceans of ink have been spilled on the subjects of love and loss, and it makes sense that the two are so closely linked. The pain of loss is in direct correlation with the love we feel. The more we love, the more keenly we feel the absence of that which we love.

This brief article only skims the surface of the facets and complexities of bereavement. For those who like to read, surf the web, watch television, take classes, or seek out experts, there are unlimited sources of in-depth information about grief. You could spend a lifetime working to understand grief, and your education would never be complete.

In part, grief will never be fully understood because it's a human experience, and your personal encounter with it will be a reflection of those things that are exclusively you, the person who died, and your unique relationship with that person. No field of study will ever be able to capture the distinctive and exclusive experience of your grief in this moment.

Despite the reality that your grief experience is going to be unique in many respects, there's at least one universal aspect to it: bereavement is not easy. It turns everything inside out and upside down. And since there's no way anything can be that completely and utterly disruptive and also "normal" in any sense of the word, we think we must be going crazy.

Well, yes and no. If crazy means extreme, senseless, and outrageous, then yes. Bereavement is all of those things. But if crazy means mentally ill, then no. Grief is not a mental health disorder. I recognize that for the bereaved, that's not necessarily good news. Some of us would absolutely love to be packed off to a nice, cozy little asylum where we didn't have to talk with anyone, interact with anyone, make any decisions, or be responsible for

ourselves or anyone else. However, most manifestations of grief, in all their extreme, senseless, outrageous, and unpleasant ways, are quite normal. You will certainly feel, behave, talk, think, and act in crazy ways, but you are not mentally ill.

Important Note: if physical or mental health challenges were already a part of your life journey, bereavement is likely going to make those worse. Please work with your health care professionals to figure out ways to monitor and cope with your bereavement so as to keep complications to a minimum.

You're not going crazy, but grief feels extreme.

Grief lasts a long time, much longer than most people expect or are willing to tolerate. For most of us, it will take a number of years before we are as recovered as we're going to get. Research suggests that it may take a year or more to simply reestablish daily living patterns. You will never again be the person you were before your loved one died, and it takes a long time to find that new way of living. The task takes even longer when the death was sudden and traumatic.

Grief also involves a crazy range of emotions: emotions we didn't even know existed and emotions we were familiar with but are now experiencing at a depth and intensity that we never imagined. These emotions are often extreme: all-encompassing rage, bone-chilling horror, bottomless pits of despair. The feelings are further complicated by their roller coaster characteristics. It never seems to be one thing for very long before we ricochet off in a completely different direction. Many of us have found the intensity of these emotions to be more than our friends and family can tolerate and have found some relief in talking to an experienced mental health professional.

For some, the craziness of grief is manifested in extremes of behavior. We may find ourselves engaging in frenzied activity such as cleaning the house, shopping, immersing ourselves in work, or engaging in uncharacteristic sexual activity. Using activity as a temporary outlet for intense feelings or as a respite from the wearying tasks of mourning can be healthy. Using it to avoid the pain of grief or engaging in behaviors that are hurtful to yourself and others, is not.

You're not going crazy, but grief feels idiotic.

The long version is that trauma changes our chemical make-up and brain wave functioning, which in turn impacts everything we do. The short version is that grief makes us stupid. It's the rare bereaved person who can't recall several great examples from their own experience. We can't concentrate; we can't remember to do even basic tasks; we forget where we're headed before we even get in the car. It's maddening, and there may be some unpleasant consequences (see what happens when you don't pay the bills for a few weeks), but it's normal. Although this is easier said than done, try to be patient with yourself. And if you must make decisions, talk them over with people you trust.

There may be a part of you that simply cannot believe that what has happened is really true. You may find yourself making up crazy scenarios that "better" explain why your loved one is absent. Your heart and your head may be completely at odds with one another in terms of coming to understand what has happened. You may "see" your loved one in public places, find yourself sniffing their clothes, or believe for a moment that they are calling when the phone rings. This is normal, too. Your inability to fully embrace what has happened is a reflection of the enormity of your loss, not of your mental health. Don't let anyone try to convince you otherwise.

You're not going crazy, but grief feels outrageous.

Your body is going to get in on grieving, too.



If crazy means extreme, senseless, and outrageous, then yes. Bereavement is all of those things. But if crazy means mentally ill, then no.

The list of physical reactions common among the bereaved is nearly endless, but science is finally catching up with what most of us have suspected all along: what goes on in our minds and hearts will be reflected by our bodies. Headaches, sleep disturbances of all kinds, muscle tension, rapid heartbeat, nausea, aches and pains, compromised immunity, and stomach pains are just a few ways that grief can manifest itself physically.

If you already have a medical condition of some kind, you can be sure that grief will impact that, too. Stay in touch with your doctor. Force yourself, if you have to, so that your physical health can be monitored. There's no point in adding another level of stress to your life if you can possibly avoid it.

A final word

The only way to get on the other side of grief is to slog through it. Grief can be postponed, but it cannot be dodged, skirted, or gone under or over. And remember, as painful and crazy-making as grief is, its very intensity is testimony to the power of our love and the significance of our loss. *

About the Author



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



Self Care: Reconnecting...with Myself

By Leslie McCaddon, surviving spouse of CPT Mike McCaddon, MD

One of the things I heard early on at TAPS, as well as from my counselor at home, is the importance of self-care. I'm a mother of three young children. Whenever this term "self-care" is thrown around in my presence I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

Take care of myself?

Sure! I try to shower, most days. I eat well... well, at least when I eat the kid's leftovers! I sleep. Sure, I sleep! I sleep a little bit each night at least.

There have been a few moments since Mike died that my body and mind gave me no choice except to take care of myself.

I'd never had anything like it happen to me before in my life: my body and mind just chose to quit. All I could do was sleep. And cry. And hope that my brother was as okay as he seemed at picking up with my kids where I left off. Those moments were extremely difficult for a control freak like me. I did not like having to fall apart on a schedule that wasn't my own.

I think I've become a little more self-aware in the past six months. I seem to sense when these times are coming and take steps to take care of myself (yes, *really!*) before my body decides for me. I've done things like limit our extra-curricular activities, order food out more often than not, and call my counselor even when it isn't our day to meet.

One of the biggest areas of self-care I am still working on is learning to trust myself. Only I really know what I can handle and what I need. And I am also the best judge of that for my children.

In a world that seems to produce a pseudo-psychology "expert" on every street corner, it can be scary to tell the world, "Thanks for your opinions, but since you've never actually walked in my shoes, I think I'll take it from here." Especially when the world includes well-meaning family and

friends (and store clerks, teachers, nurses, and a host of others).

That is one thing I deeply appreciate about TAPS. Although there are many experts there, we are reminded that we are each in charge of taking care of ourselves and doing whatever it is that we need to process our own grief. I was reminded on Sunday morning [during the TAPS National Suicide Survivor Seminar] that if the best thing for me was to step back and take a nap, then by all means, I should do that!

While my kids bounced off to the USS *Midway* with their peers and mentors, I went back to my room and called my grandmother who lives minutes from the hotel. Before I knew it, I was wrapped up in her nurturing arms and crying into a plate full of pumpkin pecan pancakes.

Just what I needed: I was taking care of myself by letting my grandma take care of me. As we sorted through the layers of my emotions—being in San Diego was very *hard* because this is where my husband I and got married nearly 12 years ago—it became clear that my heart really knew what it needed right now, but I was afraid to do anything about it.

By the time I got back to my hotel, I was no longer fighting my heart. I was making arrangements to take care of myself by staying an extra week in California. The kids and I would drive up to hug my 92-year-old grandfather. We would be able to visit my other grandmother in the hospital after an unexpected surgery.

We would stand with our toes in the Pacific just like we did so many times with Mike.

This weekend has found me recommitting to the process, and courageously listening to my heart about what our family needs.



Photos courtesy of Leslie McCaddon



Taking care of ourselves means different things to different people. It often includes a good counselor, exercise, and rest. For many of us we are lucky to include events with our TAPS family in the category of tending to our needs.

We would cry together—and it does seem that this weekend has unleashed a torrent of tears for our little family. These tears weren't manufactured at TAPS, but they were accessed. Now we are taking a much-needed break to really feel these feelings, and heal a little more together.

Even with a resort full of other people who have lost a loved one to suicide, there is no one who can understand our particular grief. It is our own. We are the only people who can make our way through it. We seek out support and advice, but at the end of the day we can only really do our best. And since I'm the mom, it often just comes down to my best.

When we headed out to TAPS I was full of hope for healing and a desire to reconnect. What I didn't see coming were a lot of the other specific emotions I'd have to deal with. To be honest, I wasn't prepared for it at all. Still, because of the supportive atmosphere I was able to take the time to ask the important question, "What do we need right now?" and answer it with an honest and open heart.

As difficult as facing our grief is right now, I've been reminded it is also brave. We aren't charging forward, clinging to structure in the name of manufactured stability. Rather, we are dealing head on with a loss that is inescapable and, in so many ways, unspeakable.

This weekend has found me recommitting to the process, and courageously listening to my heart about what our family needs.

The fruit of this weekend is even beyond reconnecting with others. It has also allowed me to reconnect with myself.

Many times during this first year of grief, I was amazed and deeply humbled by the loving support from friends and even strangers. And nothing compares to the support found from other survivors. Unfortunately, I've also encountered well-intentioned people who mean to support, but actually add confusion by offering opinions on just about everything I chose to do (or not do). When I listened to such "supporters" I was tempted to doubt myself and second-guess my choices.

The truth is, no one else has lived our lives, experienced our loss, or journeyed our particular grief. Whatever your beliefs, it seems we can all at least agree that this journey is uniquely and particularly our own. We can relate to one another, cry on each other's shoulders, and certainly support each other in figuring out the slippery concept of self care.

Taking care of ourselves means different things to different people. It often includes a good counselor, exercise, and rest. For many of us we are lucky to include events with our TAPS family in the category of tending to our needs. No matter where we find our support, it is important that we remain committed to taking care of ourselves by staying connected to who we really are. As scary as it is for some of us to accept, our hearts really do know the way. Perhaps, it is time to start unapologetically trusting them again. *



About the Author



Leslie McCaddon was one of two widows *TIME Magazine* featured in its July cover story on the surge in Army suicides. Her Army Captain husband, Dr. Michael McCaddon, died in March, 2012. Leslie wrote part of this article as a blog for *TIME* during our TAPS National Suicide Survivor Seminar in San Diego in October 2012. Reprinted with permission.



Online Financial Counseling To Help Beneficiaries Plan Ahead

By Fran Hackett, Vice President of Administration and OSGLI,
Prudential's Group Insurance

Eligible beneficiaries in the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) Program can now take advantage of two new online financial services that can help with financial planning and also provide the ability to create a will. Eligible beneficiaries include those who have received a payment from SGLI, Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI), or Family SGLI (FSGLI). The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) makes these services available to all eligible beneficiaries at no cost.

Beneficiaries are often unprepared for the loss they've endured. Normal feelings of grief and confusion may be compounded if they are also recipients of a large benefit payment. Money never replaces a loved one—some even may wish that they didn't have the money at all. Making financial decisions is far from being a priority while coping with a major loss. However, if you are a SGLI, VGLI, or FSGLI beneficiary, you can access the financial planning services as often as you like for help with any of the immediate financial decisions you may be facing during your time of difficulty. When you're ready, you can also request a detailed financial plan that can assist you with short and long term financial goals.

ONLINE FINANCIAL PLANNING

With online financial planning, you simply enter your information into a secure website. A financial professional will then review the information you provided and prepare a customized financial plan designed to assist



Beneficiaries are often unprepared for the loss they've endured. Normal feelings of grief and confusion may be compounded if they are also recipients of a large benefit payment.

you with your financial goals. You will receive an e-mail letting you know when your plan is ready for review. If you have any questions, just call. Financial planners are always available to speak to you by phone.

Whether you use the online service or call, please know that these services are provided by an independent company whose team of financial professionals are experts in handling a wide range of financial matters. You will receive objective guidance in a pressure free atmosphere from individuals who have your best interests at heart. And you can rest assured that your information will remain completely confidential.

ONLINE WILL PREPARATION

A will may be the most important legal document you ever sign. Having a will is

especially important if you have young children, because it gives you the opportunity to designate their guardian. But if you're like most Americans you don't have one because the common belief is that wills are complicated, expensive, and must involve an attorney. The online will preparation service enables you to quickly and easily prepare your own will at no cost in the comfort of your own home without an attorney.

Simply access the website and you'll be taken step-by-step through a series of straightforward questions. At the end of the will-creation process, you'll receive a legal will, valid in all 50 states. All you'll need to do is print and sign. With this document in hand you can have peace of mind knowing that your assets will be distributed according to your wishes.

LEARN MORE

Remember, if you are a SGLI, VGLI, or FSGLI beneficiary, then you are eligible to take advantage of these services that can provide you with the guidance you need to gain a sense of security about your financial future.

To learn how to access the online financial planning and will preparation services, visit benefits.va.gov/insurance/bfcs.asp. If you prefer to speak to a financial professional, please call FinancialPoint® at 888-243-7351. ★



TAPS VOLUNTEER

★ Marissa Tarulli ★

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

To say that Marissa is busy is definitely an understatement. She's a full time junior at George Washington University (GWU) and is involved with their Veterans Student Initiative. She's also a Squadron Commander in the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC), a member of the Arnold Air Society, and a part time employee in today's workforce.

So how in the world does she get around to volunteering, and why does she do it? Marissa admits that the most challenging thing about volunteering is "finding the time to do it, making the extra effort to make it a part of your schedule." However, she isn't one for taking the easy path in life, as she's aspiring to be a commissioned officer in the United States Air Force. For Marissa, the reason she finds the time is heart, or as she puts it, "seeing how much it means to the people you're helping. It's about giving something of yourself which seems so little, but makes such a positive difference for them."

During her sophomore year at GWU, through their Alternative Spring Break program, Marissa discovered TAPS and fell in love with the organization. She realized she had found inspiration with TAPS that would keep her around for years to come.

Although she's never lost a loved one in military service, Marissa understands the importance of taking care of military families. She feels that she cannot ignore the families, as they play such a vital role to the success of our military men and woman who are serving or have served our nation.

For nonprofit organizations, first impressions are lasting impressions and are vital to recruitment and retention. Volunteers



Thank You Marissa!

and donors alike want to know that their contribution, whether it is time or money, will have a positive, lasting, and meaningful impact on those being served. Marissa was immediately captivated by TAPS. "I truly just fell in love with the mission and the people TAPS is serving," she said. Since her first volunteer opportunity with TAPS, she feels she's been welcomed as a part of our community. That's why TAPS is the first nonprofit she mentions when people ask her about volunteering.

Since her initial introduction to TAPS in 2011 through GWU's Alternative Spring

Break program, Marissa has been a major volunteer advocate in the student body. That year she volunteered at the TAPS Honor Guard Gala and ran for TAPS in the Marine Corp Marathon 10K race. During the summer, when time permitted, she dedicated three days a week to assist with administrative tasks in the TAPS National Headquarters. One of her projects was assembling and binding the Peer Mentor Manuals, used nationwide at our regional seminars.

With the start of 2012 came a new round of volunteer opportunities for Marissa. She again participated in the Alternative Spring Break initiative, assembling resource kits for TAPS. She also formed a group of her AFROTC colleagues to volunteer at the 2012 TAPS Honor Guard Gala, assisting with registration and table placement. It didn't end there; Marissa continued to organize groups for our 18th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar as well as both the Army Ten Miler and the Marine Corps Marathon, our two largest Run and Remember events.

Marissa's advice for new volunteers, wherever they may serve, is "don't get discouraged during your first volunteer opportunity regardless of where you go; keep trying for opportunities, and you'll find one that's near your heart." For Marissa, the mission that is near to her heart is TAPS. ★

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



Soon You Were Gone

By Sandy Goodman



*I remember when you were small and you played for hours with army men in tiny dirt trenches,
And gunfire rang into the night in your room where you were safe and loved.*

*I remember when you came to me and your dad with excitement in your eyes
and papers in your hand, saying that you had decided and that we would be proud,
And soon you were gone and we were terrified.*

*Letters were few, calls more often. A new war, technologically transparent,
More to know, more to avoid. Care packages with prepaid minutes and iPods, instead of cookies.*

*I remember when you stopped calling and when they came to our door and I fell to my knees.
Your dad stood quietly unable to talk, unable to breathe.
Gun shots, Taps, flags, and flowers, a hearse with your body but not you
because you are here with us.*

*I remember when you were small and in your room safe and loved
And soon you are gone and we are terrified.*



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