

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

TAPS[®]

Comfort and Support Since 1994 **MAGAZINE**

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



Comfort and Support Since 1994 **MAGAZINE**

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

In accordance with our goal of compassionate care, TAPS Magazine seeks articles that reflect the theme: Remember the love, Celebrate the life, Share the journey. We accept articles of interest and depth that are hopeful in tone, yet truthful in emotional content. Your experiences or expertise can help us bring hope and healing to other hurting hearts. To submit an article to TAPS Magazine, please write to editor@taps.org.

TAPS IS HERE FOR YOU

If You Need to Talk, Call Us at
800.959.TAPS
or Visit Us at
WWW.TAPS.ORG

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ABOUT T★A★P★S

WHO WE ARE

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national nonprofit 501 (c) 3 Veterans Service Organization providing compassionate care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, since 1994.

MISSION

TAPS provides ongoing emotional help, hope, and healing to all who are grieving the death of a loved one in military service to America, regardless of relationship to the deceased, geography, or circumstance of death. TAPS meets its mission by providing peer-based support, crisis care, casualty casework assistance, and grief and trauma resources.



SUPPORTS the bereaved survivor through a national network of trained volunteer Peer Mentors: those who have lost a loved one in the Armed Forces, and are now standing by to reach out and support others when a death occurs.

EDUCATES survivors, professionals, and members of the military about grief and the traumatic effects following the sudden death of a loved one. TAPS provides reading materials, the quarterly TAPS Magazine, training workshops, webinars, and an extensive website at www.taps.org with links to other helpful organizations.

SPONSORS regional Military Survivor Seminars & Good Grief Camps for Young Survivors in locations across America. These seminars give survivors the opportunity to learn, grow, share, and help each other heal.

OPERATES a national toll free help and information hotline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with support available from TAPS' Board of Advisors: leading experts in the field of grief and trauma. If you are hurting and need to talk to someone, call 800.959.TAPS (8277)

HOSTS the TAPS Online Community of survivors, providing secure chat rooms, a weekly message of encouragement, and general as well as relationship specific forums.

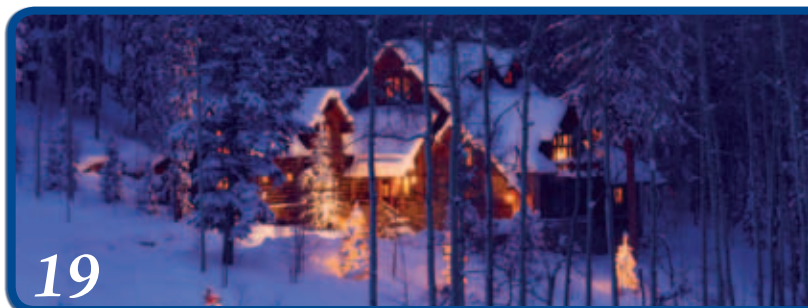


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COVER PHOTO BY

Christopher Levy
Christmas in Arlington National Cemetery



Letters To T★A★P★S



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



I cannot thank TAPS enough for the wonderful healing experience the seminar was for me. Today is day 79 since Matthew was killed, and I am still breaking down every day. But at least I now feel some hope that it won't always be this way. The other parents I talked to are the reason I feel this way... Please keep me advised of any upcoming seminars in the future.

~ Michael Ogden ~
Surviving father of
PFC Matthew Ogden,
Corpus Christi, TX

This was my first time attending the seminar and camp with my 13 year old son. It was one of the most satisfying and uplifting experiences for me and my son. The support I received from listening and speaking to other families was awesome. I am so grateful. When you think your situation is hard and you hear other families' stories, you realize that you are not alone and you keep the faith. Thanks for a wonderful seminar.

~ Yasmin and Malique Patterson ~
Surviving family of
SPC Andre Mitchell, Elmont, NY



I wanted to thank TAPS for all the hard work and dedication that you put into the event at Fort Hood. My children really enjoyed it. The staff and the soldiers made them feel at home even though they were not sure what to expect. I know they walked away from this with memories, and it was a different way for them to honor and remember their father, joyfully. Up until this event, they were unsure of their feelings. This event did show them that they are not alone and that others, too, grieve in different ways. The event gave them comfort in so many ways.

~ Michele Lomas ~
and surviving children of
SSG Charles Mitt, Houston, TX



Just thought I would tell you what this past weekend meant for Hailey. She always struggles with what it is like to have a dad because she was born while Casey was in Iraq. She said that having her buddy [military mentor] helped her figure out what it is like. It helped fill a void; she was given the perfect selection in mentors. We are indebted forever.

~ Ann Byers ~
Surviving mom of
SPC Casey Byers, Lampasas, TX



editor@taps.org





The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors is blessed to have friends who are generous in their support and untiring in their devotion. They come alongside us as partners in meeting the mission of comforting and supporting those who grieve. We are honored to call them Friends of TAPS, and are grateful for their assistance.

During this holiday season, may you find comfort in the memories that are yours to cherish forever. May you gain strength from the companionship and support of those who share in your loss.

During this season of hope and in the new year, may it help you to know that others care deeply and are remembering you, never forgetting your loved one's sacrifice.

*Honoring those who served and died,
Your friends at BAE Systems*

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speak than touched by the words I had worked so hard to compose. When the children chose to remain in school surrounded by their friends rather than staying home, people questioned my ability to parent.

But six months later, when those who expected anguish from me in the first moments after the crash had disappeared back into their own safe lives, I had fallen so far into despair that I begged for my own life to end. I was paralyzed by fear, overcome with pain, and lost in a monochromatic world. I explored every resource imaginable to find relief from this disabling pain.

When those who expected anguish from me in the first moments had disappeared back into their own safe lives, I had fallen so far into despair that I begged for my own life to end.

Then a turning point came. While one is certainly cursed in a mass casualty, those remaining are blessed with fellow survivors. Misery loves - no, demands - company in order to heal. Seven months after the crash, on Memorial Day, I got back in touch with the other women made widows on that fateful day. We discovered that we shared identical patterns of pain, fear, sadness, and emptiness.

But more than that, we could say things to each other that we hadn't said to anyone else. Not to the therapists who patiently listened. Not to the doctors who wrote prescriptions for anti-depressants. Not to the family members who felt so helpless. We could talk to each other about why we all left the insurance checks on our dressers for weeks. We could share feelings of wanting our lives to end so that we could be with our loved ones again.

We shared our dreams and visions and visitations, hanging on every message from the "other side." We cried until we were sick, because we felt safe enough to do so in our own company. We laughed hard with each other; no one else found our black humor particularly funny or allowed us the luxury of laughing when it failed to meet their perceptions of grief. We behaved outrageously (we made woolen hats for the headstones) and lived our lives (after all, we had seen death and were no longer afraid of it).

Nine months after the accident we flew to the city near the crash site and after flying over the wreckage, we did what our husbands could not. We landed at the airport. We chartered a helicopter to go up to the wreckage. It was a powerfully healing time, to see physical evidence that the crash had occurred and finally know for ourselves that it was real.

On the one year anniversary, we went together to the hangar they had flown from at the hour of their departure and prayed to go back in time and alter the course of history. Eighteen months after the accident, we traveled from our respective corners of the country and went on a vacation to recapture the freedom and safety that being together gave us.

Out of that healing came an organization called the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS): a national network of peer support for military survivors, a referral point for grief counseling options around the country, a crisis intervention team whose members have critical incident stress experience, and casework assistance to help families find answers to complicated questions long after their official file has been closed.

TAPS offers this unique dimension to grief and trauma recovery: survivors reaching out and helping each other. Together we can help each other heal. *

About the Author



Bonnie Carroll is the founder and Executive Director for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). Following the death of her husband Army Brigadier General Tom Carroll in 1992, Bonnie spent two years desperately working through her grief and trauma. Finding that a peer support program for surviving military families didn't exist, she researched best practices in the private sector and talked with leaders in the DOD and the VA. In October 1994, TAPS was incorporated and launched, recognizing and addressing the specific needs of those who have lost a loved one serving in the Armed Forces.

Over the years, Bonnie has served our nation in many ways, including: Deputy Senior Advisor for Programs in the Ministry of Communications in Baghdad, Iraq, White House Liaison for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and Major in the Air Force Reserve (USAFR), where she has served as Chief, Casualty Operations, HQ USAF. Prior to joining the USAFR, Major Carroll served 16 years in the Air National Guard. She has authored numerous articles on grief and trauma and appeared on CNN, FOX, NBC's the Today Show and other programs speaking about military loss. Bonnie holds a degree in Public Administration and Political Science from American University, and has attended the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government.

The Empty Chair

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

There's an empty chair in our house and I am not sure what to do with it. It's been empty a long time and although we've moved more than a few times since it became empty, we still haul it around with us. It's not a particularly classic chair or even a very pretty one, and it is empty... all the time. No one moves it; no one suggests putting it away. No one sits in it. It's just an empty chair.

As a military family, we are used to having members of the family in far-away places for long periods of time. My father would be gone for up to a year or even two. His chair was often empty at the table. My husband's military career took him away for many months at a time, and his chair was often empty. And then when our daughter was commissioned in the military we knew her chair would also be empty at times. So empty chairs at our house are not an uncommon thing, but this chair—this chair—should never have been empty.

As the holidays approach, I am always faced with the task of deciding what to do with our empty chair. Should we put it away for the season? Should we decorate it? Or should we just ignore it? One holiday season, we did decide to put it away. Even though it was an empty chair, it left an even bigger empty space.

We've tried to ignore it, but its emptiness is very loud and it is hard to miss an empty chair in a room filled with people sitting in all the other chairs. An empty chair is not invisible. One year we decided to include it in our holiday decorating scheme. That led to some interesting discussions. Should we put a special holiday pillow in it? What about tossing a colorful quilt or afghan over the back? Should we put something in the chair? But nothing we tried could fill the emptiness of that chair. It just sat silent like a sentinel, waiting for something... or someone.

As the holidays approach, I am always faced with the task of deciding what to do with our empty chair.

It took us many years of living day in and day out with that empty chair to finally figure out what to do with it. Our empty chair is pulled up to the table and a single rose is placed on the plate, a symbol of everlasting love. The empty chair represents all of those who are not with us for this occasion but who live within our hearts forever. For us it is not a sad sight because we know that empty chair represents a love we have known and shared. And with that gift, our family is forever blessed.

We join hands in thanksgiving, completing the circle with the empty chair within our family circle, for even though death may have come, love never goes away.

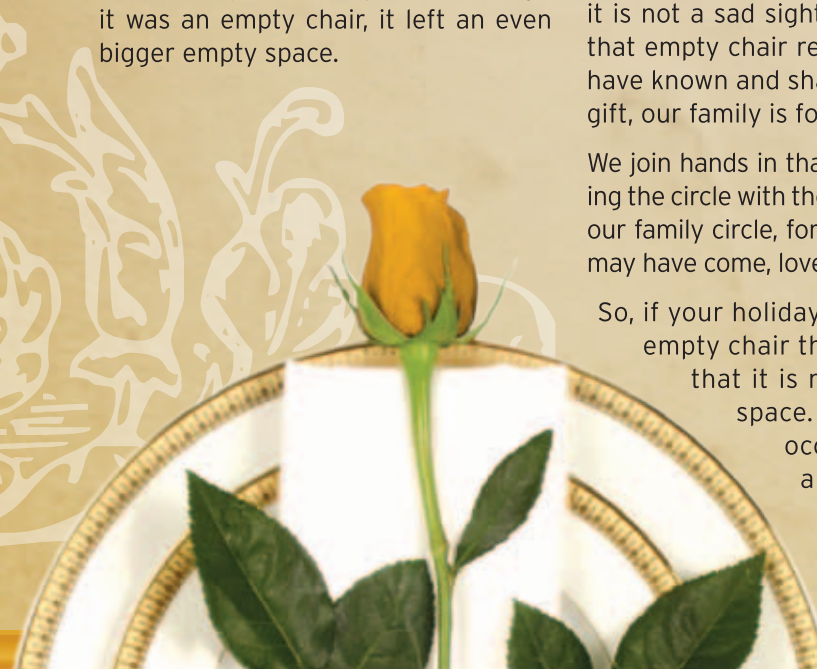
So, if your holiday table will have an empty chair this year, remember that it is not truly an empty space. That place is still occupied by the love and joy of the one who sat in it.



Don't hide that chair away. You may not wish to bring it to the table as we do, but take time this holiday season to remember the laughter, the joy, the love, the light of those who are no longer within hug's reach but whose love still fills us with gratitude.

Join hands around your table, however small, and say a prayer of thanksgiving... for the love you have known and still hold deep within your heart. You are rich beyond measure for having had a chair filled. Don't let death rob you of the heart space that love keeps.

We are a family circle, some chairs filled and others not, broken by death, but mended by love.★



Thanks for the Little While

*Thank you for life, for its good times and bad.
Thank you for love, even when I can't feel it.
Thank you for the love I used to share,
For the arms that held me tight.*

*Thank you for my family
In faraway places, in different times.*

*Thank you for the songs we sang,
For the dreams we saved,
For the smiles we shared.*

*Thank you for the strength that eludes me just now.
Thank you for the weakness that sends me to my knees.
Thank you for the searching, the reaching, the hoping.*

*Thank you for the bonds of memory that hold me in place
in this universe, even when I don't believe in
it anymore or forget what it is all about.*

*Thank you, most of all, for having been blessed
with the love I have known, even now when I fear
I will forget it.*

*Thank you for memory and for filling it full measure for me.
It wasn't nearly long enough, but it will have to do.
Thanks for the moments we danced.*

Thanks for the little while...



About the Author



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

www.griefinc.com

Supporting Children Dealing

By Ami Neiberger-Miller, PA



The holidays can be a magical time of year, but for children who have lost a parent, sibling, or other significant person in their lives, the holiday season can be an emotional minefield. It can also pose additional challenges for their still-grieving, surviving parents and other family members.

For fifteen years the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors has helped surviving loved ones of those who have died in military service. We offer the following tips to help families supporting a bereaved child over the holidays:

❄️ **Talk with your child about the upcoming holiday season.** Even if your child does not talk with you often about the loss, do not expect for your child to be “over it.” Children grieve on their own timeline and differently from adults. Significant milestones, such as the first holiday after the loss, may cause the child’s feelings to resurface, even if the child has not talked about the loss for a long time. Taking charge of your holiday plans and mapping out how you will spend the time can help relieve anxiety. Talk with your child about his or her feelings and expectations. Discuss the activities your child would like to participate in or attend.

❄️ **Talk with your child about holiday traditions** and how they will be observed this year. Some children insist that holiday customs remain exactly the same. Discuss with your child why he or she wants to hold onto a particular tradition or custom. Some traditions may be a comfort, while others might cause pain. Consider which traditions to keep and which ones to forego this year. Do not feel like you have to do something simply because you have always done it that way, but consider your child’s feelings when making a change. Talk with your child about any changes before they occur.

❄️ **Make holiday plans that help** your child feel nurtured, emotionally safe, and comfortable. Laughter, play, and joy are good for your child. Children do not grieve continuously and they need to take breaks from grieving. Encourage your child to play, run, and do recreational activities he or she would normally do. Laughing (which releases endorphins into the brain) and clowning around are good for children.

❄️ **Encourage your child** to attend holiday functions. Consider attending holiday parties and activities, especially if you and your child will be able to spend time with supportive family members and friends. Make an escape plan in case the event is more than you or your child can handle and trust your hosts to understand if you need to slip out.

❄️ **Be observant of your child’s emotional condition.** Watch how your child responds to events and be ready to support and comfort your child. Realize that familiar traditions, sights, smells, and even tastes, may be comforting to your child or may jolt his emotions. Take stock of both joy and sadness. Give your child permission to express both. Bottling up feelings can add to distress, not lessen it. Comfort items that remind the child of the loved one may help. Allowing your child to sleep in a favorite shirt or carry a special item that reminds him of the person who died can provide a sense of connection. Prominent placement of a special photograph of a holiday celebration from years past may help.

❄️ **Pay attention to your child’s health.** It is often difficult for those who have experienced a recent loss to sleep. Make sure your child gets regular rest, eats well, and drinks lots of water. Holiday treats are okay in moderation. Regressive behaviors, acting out, and

with Grief during the Holidays

nightmares may be indications that your child is struggling. Talk with your medical care provider if you become concerned about your child's health.

❄️ **Don't pretend your family has not experienced a loss.** Imagining that nothing has happened does not make the pain of losing a loved one go away, nor does it make the holidays easier to endure. Let your child know that you also miss the person who died. Tell your child that you don't like the fact that things can't be the way they were before the person died. Children may need to hear this in order to feel it is permissible to discuss their own feelings. Even though holiday memories may be painful, they can also be comforting. It is okay to talk about what you have lost and what the holidays mean to you.

❄️ **Stick to daily routines when possible.** The holidays tend to cause upheaval in schedules and routines. The friends your child plays with may go out of town. Daily schedules change when schools close for the holidays. Try to keep your child on a regular bedtime routine and talk with your child about any schedule changes.

❄️ **Allow your child to remember** a lost loved one through a tribute. Light a candle together at dinnertime to remember the person who died. Make a wreath with pictures and items that represent the things the lost loved one cared about. Keep it at home or place it at the gravesite. Hang an ornament on the tree that reminds the child of the loved one. At a holiday meal, help your child offer a blessing that honors the person who died. Create a picture or collage with your child, display a favorite photograph in your home, or let your child help set a place at the dinner table to represent the loved one who died.

❄️ **Help your child write a letter** to the person who died. The letter can honor the legacy that person gave the child, thanking him or her for the gifts they gave to the child and the special things they did together. Allow your child to express how he feels about the person. Some children may want to mail the letter to the person, take the letter to the cemetery, or send it to heaven on a helium-filled balloon.

❄️ **Honor the lost loved one through a gift.** Encourage your child to draw pictures or create gifts that are inspired by the memories of the person who died. Help your child make a donation to a charity the loved one cared about. Consider volunteering as a family at the charity.

❄️ **Use family connections to help your child.** Connections with other family members can help your child feel comforted, loved, and safe. These family connections can also help you cope with the holidays. Encourage your child to build ties with other family members, but remain nearby to reassure your child with your presence.

Although the holiday season can be particularly difficult for families with bereaved children, it can also be an opportunity to honor and remember the person who died and the legacy that special person left for that child. This holiday season and throughout the year "Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey." *



About the Author



Ami Neiberger-Miller, surviving sister of U.S. Army Specialist Christopher Neiberger, has devoted more than 12 years of her career to helping organizations improve how they communicate. Her work with TAPS includes working with the news media, advising surviving families on media relations, speaking to organizations about TAPS, writing press releases, and forging partnerships that help build support for TAPS and surviving families. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Florida and is accredited in public relations.



Gifts, Garlands, and Grief

Including Your Lost Loved Ones in the Holidays

By Sandy Goodman



Holidays can be disabling for those who grieve. I've learned a few things about this path I'm on and found a few crutches for when the road gets too rough.

I remember our first Christmas season after. It began the first week of November in 1996, three short months into our worst nightmare, but a lifetime into missing our child of eighteen years. He had died suddenly, one of those "in the wrong place at the wrong time" things, and he took our hearts with him when he left. Summer screeched to a halt and autumn came and went without our participation.

Still standing in confusion at the threshold of grief, we were stunned when the stores replaced the gloomy ghosts and goblins with sparkling ornaments and cheerful decorations. Neighbors strung lights on their houses, friends sent cards wishing us joy-filled holidays, and not one person mentioned Jason's name. Closing our drapes, we huddled in our cocoon, waiting for his return.

Thanksgiving passed. I recall the empty chair, the unbroken wishbone, and more turkey than three of us could eat. There was an unwatched football game and a failed attempt at gratitude. That was our day, and it was good enough. It was


inconceivable that we would ever enjoy another holiday, much less be thankful for it.

Snow fell. Carols rang out, lights twinkled, church bells pealed. Our thoughts were of Jason, fixed more acutely on his departure than on his arrival eighteen years before. Memories of prior Decembers pervaded our present. Jason ice fishing. Jason sledding. Jason's birthday. Jason opening gifts. Jason throwing tinsel on the tree, on his brothers, and on the dog. Every memory brought tears but every tear brought Jason closer to us. We found him in the pain, the only place we knew how to get to. I believe that first Christmas had to be that way. Showing up was the best we could do.

But now it is thirteen trees, thirteen silent nights, and thirteen collectable ornaments later. I've learned a few things about this path I'm on and found a few crutches for when the road gets too rough. Holidays can be disabling for those who grieve.

I'd like to share some things that might help:

- ★ Believe that your loved one is with you. Include them in your celebrations and in your sadness. Include them when you talk with others about old times and holidays past. If you don't mention them, no one else will.
- ★ Talk to THEM. They hear your thoughts... and if you listen, you can hear their replies.
- ★ Light candles. For thirteen years now I have lit a special candle for my son. This year I will light five, one for each of us, living or not. Why perpetuate the myth of separation? Jason is still a part of this family.
- ★ Do good things in celebration of your loved one's life. Random acts of kindness bring smiles to everyone involved. (www.actsofkindness.org) Buy anonymous gifts, scoop snow from a stranger's sidewalk, or light candles at unmarked graves.



★ Connect with your loved one who died. Take a meditation class or create a special place to go to where you can feel their presence.

★ Call a newly bereaved friend or neighbor and invite them to reminisce with you. Cry with them, listen to them, and share your journey.

★ Give to an organization that your loved one supported.

★ Make a memory tree. Buy a small tree and decorate it with tokens of your loved one's life.

★ Don't worry about what others will think. You are solely in charge of this journey. It's all yours.

Love someone who is grieving? Lost as far as how to help them through this upcoming holiday season? Any of the above suggestions can be adapted to fit your needs: give money in celebration of their loved one's life and tell them about it, make them a memory tree. However, there are two gifts that you can give to a person deep in the pit of grief that will mean more than anything else. Give your undivided attention. Give unconditional acceptance of their journey, wherever it leads them.

I won't end this with a wish that you have your merriest Christmas ever. I know that for some of you that is not possible or even desirable. Instead, my wish for you is this: that you find a quiet moment during the sometimes magical but often horrendous season upon us and relax; that you take a few deep breaths, close your eyes, and envision your friend, child, parent, sibling, spouse, grandparent, or partner; that you accept that dead doesn't mean GONE; that you send out a "Merry Christmas" and "I love you" and then BELIEVE when you hear his or her whispered reply of "I love you, too. Merry Christmas." *



About the Author



Sandy Goodman is the author of *Love Never Dies: A Mother's Journey from Loss to Love* (Jodere Group, 2002), and the founder and chapter leader of the Wind River Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. She has presented at national conferences for The Compassionate Friends, Bereaved Parents of the USA, and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors. Learn more about her experiences and the organization, *Love Never Dies*, by visiting the website at:

www.loveneverdies.net

Surviving the Holidays... Without My Brother

By Heidi Horsley, PsyD, MSW, MS

I was shocked and stunned when I received the news that my brother Scott had died in a car accident. I thought my brother was going to be in my life forever. We grew up together, experienced a shared history, and knew things about each other that no one else will ever know. I always assumed we'd raise kids together, grow old together, and share many more holidays together.

For me, this meant finding a way to honor the memory of my brother while at the same time investing in my new life.

So how did I not only survive the holidays but eventually learn how to enjoy them again without my brother? It was a rocky, painful journey, with pain that hit like waves, sometimes when I least expected it. The holidays brought back so many memories; every song, smell, and tradition was bittersweet.

Initially, joy made me feel guilty. I worried that if I let go of the pain, I would be letting go of my brother's memory. It felt disloyal to experience positive feelings when I missed my brother so much. Well-meaning friends told me that my brother would want me to have a happy holiday, and while I knew this on an intellectual level, my heart wasn't ready to accept it yet.

There were some relatives who tried to recreate a typical Christmas, with family traditions, as if my brother had never died. Not acknowledging my brother was the worst thing anyone could do. The pretense was that every-

thing needed to return back to normal. However, things in my life were forever changed and I needed to figure out how to create a new holiday "normal." For me, this meant finding a way to honor the memory of my brother while at the same time investing in my new life.

Here are some of the things that have helped me during the holidays. I hope they will help you as well. However, everybody who is grieving must decide what works best.

Holiday Survival Tips

- ☆ Plan in advance how you are going to spend the holidays and be able to say no if you need to.
- ☆ Take a break from holiday traditions that are too painful – create new traditions.
- ☆ Connect with others.
- ☆ Share stories of past holidays and spend time reflecting back. Keep your loved one's memory alive for those who were too young to remember the person.
- ☆ Include memories of your loved one in your celebration (e.g., light a candle, display pictures, make a toast in honor of the person).

My brother played many roles during the holidays. I can fill some of these roles but there are many more that will never be filled, and I fill those with all the memories that he left behind. Although we are poorer for having lost our loved ones, we are richer for having known them. I hope you will be able to celebrate the happiness, laughter, and memories that your sibling brought into your life by enjoying this holiday in a new and different way! ☆



About the Author

Dr. Heidi Horsley, international grief expert and author, is a Licensed Psychologist and Social Worker. She hosts two syndicated weekly radio shows: the CBS affiliated, Open to Hope Show, and Healing the Grieving Heart, one of the highest rated shows on Health Voice America. Dr. Heidi is Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Open to Hope Foundation, an international organization committed to providing hope and resources to grieving individuals.

Visit these websites:

opentohope.com
thegriefblog.com





You are warmly invited to attend
T * A * P * S 16th Annual

NATIONAL Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

Memorial Day Weekend

May 28 - 31, 2010

Washington, DC

*Please join us in the nation's capital as we bring together survivors from across the country and leading professionals in the grief and trauma field, to share a weekend of understanding, hope, courage, and love. An atmosphere of care and support await 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*



2010 National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

TAPS proudly announces our 16th year of bringing survivors and caregivers together to “Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey.” The heart of TAPS is the peer support we bring to all who have experienced the death of a loved one in military service; that one-on-one connection that creates a firm foundation on which to build hope and healing.



Throughout the year, TAPS presents Regional Survivor Seminars and Good Grief Camps for Young Survivors - bringing hurting hearts together in safe, supportive environments to share our grief, honor our loved ones, and begin building toward the future. But the cornerstone of our seminar outreach is the National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors, held each Memorial Day weekend.

known grief experts. Equally important, you receive the precious gift of spending time with hundreds of other survivors, all walking a similar journey through grief. The four-day event begins with registration and opening sessions on Friday, and ends with attendance at Memorial Day services at Arlington National Cemetery.



While regional seminars involve a single day of activities for a localized group, our national event offers four days in a conference setting to survivors from all across the nation. Workshops, support groups, activities, and events - all are structured to provide you with resources and information! You will receive support and training from nationally

TAPS extends a warm invitation for you to experience a weekend that will touch your heart and strengthen your spirit. Since 1995, TAPS has welcomed all who are grieving the loss of a loved one who died while serving, providing a full weekend of events for adults and children alike. 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.”



There is an overwhelming sense of bonding because we all have become a family through the death of our loved ones who served. ~ Debbi Rivers



Your registration fee assists TAPS in defraying part of the cost of meals, workshop materials, TAPS t-shirt and tote bag, as well as ground transportation to all special events during the four day event. The registration fee for children attending the Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors assists with the costs of meals, transportation, two Good Grief Camp t-shirts, a TAPS backpack, and other camp materials. Along with these tangible items, you will take home the priceless experiences of the weekend; joining with others and forming vital connections that last a lifetime. A single investment in yourself provides dividends long after you depart!

It is easy to think we are alone in this journey... but at the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors, we are not alone. There is always someone to lend an empathetic ear, a supportive shoulder, and the precious gift of time to be there for you; whether to talk or to just sit quietly. This was eloquently

expressed by Faye Crawford, mother of SGT Jay R. Gauthreaux, when she said, "I came to the convention alone; I left with a family, a family I did not expect, but am most grateful to have."

In dealing with struggles of the heart and soul, we seek people and places that can provide solace from the grief that surrounds us. The time we spend with each other and the memories we take home are invaluable to us as we face each new day and take each new step in this most unexpected life.

We warmly invite you to share our weekend. Whether it is your first visit or you are returning for our annual family reunion, a warm smile, an understanding heart, and open arms await you. Join us as we "Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey"... together!

"TAPS is a family. TAPS is America's family caring for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. As a survivor, this is my family reunion. This is a place where we come together to hold each other and get recharged for the year ahead. It's our chance to meet others who just with a look understand the pain of grief and by sharing that grief, ease the burden. It's an incredible weekend. It's beyond friendships because the relationships formed here are family. This is our place to be." *

~ Bonnie Carroll, TAPS Founder

★ Workshops for Survivors & Professionals ★

Our carefully chosen topics include understanding complicated grief in the military, coping with new family dynamics, special issues facing children, parents, and significant others when a death occurs, and recognizing post traumatic stress.

★ Support Groups ★

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

★ Special Events ★

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

★ Peer Mentor Training ★

For those who are one year beyond their own loss and are ready to be there for others, we offer a full day of training on the Thursday prior to the seminar. You will learn more about grief and trauma, gain basic helping skills, and become part of our TAPS Peer Mentor Team. *

Register Online at
WWW.TAPS.ORG



I still count my TAPS pals as my best friends on earth as we share a bond that no one else can understand. ~ Kay Taylor



2010 National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors

For anyone faced with the traumatic loss of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces, TAPS provides a supportive atmosphere that offers comfort and nurtures healing. At the seminar you will connect with others who have suffered a similar loss, learn coping strategies to help, and hear how others find the strength to learn and live again.



★ Logistics & Registration ★

Start planning now to attend the 16th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar! Register online today at www.taps.org. From our home page, click on National Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp for more information and link to registration.

All events and workshops for the 2010 seminar take place in (or depart from) the comfortable and inviting Crystal Gateway Marriott on Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington, VA.

The Gateway offers 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.)

The Marriott Crystal Gateway boasts two restaurants, in addition to a fitness center, indoor & outdoor 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.

The seminar registration fee of \$185.00 includes selected meals, workshop materials, ground transportation to all special events, and a TAPS shirt and totebag.

The Good Grief Camp registration fee of \$50.00 per child attending 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 \$119.00 per night.

Events begin with registration on Friday morning, so plan to arrive before noon on Friday, May 28 for attendance at our opening session. Departures should be scheduled after 3 p.m. on Monday, May 31, 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 for Sunday evening, May 30, after our last session ends at 4 p.m.. ★



Snow is falling gently,
Lights glisten in the night,
Baked cookies, bells, and carolers
Fill the season with delight.

Holiday Hope

By Ellen Andrews

We watch with distant wonder:
How can there be such cheer,
When someone that we love so much
Will not be home this year?

Yes, there is something missing
From this bright Christmas season.
Try as we might to fathom it
We cannot find the reason.

But as we look upon the lights
That set our world aglow,
We see the spirit of the season
Wrapped with Christmas bows.

Just as the Star of Bethlehem
Shone brightly from above,
The true glow of Christmas
Comes from hearts filled with love.

The memories that we cherish
Whether we are young or old
Bless us with an offering
More precious than pure gold.

Though pain may surround us
And we feel no Christmas cheer,
Our loved ones are with us
And will always hold us dear.

The bonds of earth are broken
And our loved ones out of sight,
But their memories and love remain
To warm us through the night.

As you go through this season
And decorate the tree,
Cherish memories of the past
And beauty yet to be.

The light of Christmas brightens
As children's voices sing;
It reminds us of the beauty
The season truly brings.

Although it's only one day,
It can last the whole year through
With the gifts our loved ones gave us...
Merry Christmas to you. *

About the Author

Ellen Andrews is the surviving fiancée of Navy Lieutenant David J. Huber, who died in an aviation accident shortly before their wedding in 1995.



How Can We Celebrate? New Rituals for the New Normal

Because the holidays are traditionally spent as family times, the pain of loss can be quite severe during this season, especially in the first years without our loved ones. Some families find comfort in renewing old traditions, and some find that the old traditions bring more pain than comfort. For those who are looking for new rituals and traditions, we offer the following ideas from surviving TAPS families. *



The first Christmas, we had to have a tree for my granddaughter, so my daughter decided to have a "blue Christmas" as it represented our spirits without our precious John. We bought a new tree and put blue lights and blue and silver balls. On our second Christmas, we put up our first annual red, white, and blue Hero Tree. It had red, white, and blue lights, ribbons, and ornaments. I got two patriotic ornaments with John's name on them from an ornament store at the mall.

On Christmas Eve, we watched a video that John had filmed on his last Christmas with us. We couldn't see him but we could hear his voice as he taped us. We all just sat spellbound and felt like he let us find it just that night, discovering it as we were setting up the video for the next morning.

~ Penny Young ~

In addition to the large tree that my daughter seemed to need, I made a small Hero Tree using silver bulbs and pennants stuck into the Styrofoam. On one side of each little flag, I put a first name, "Evan," and the military title with full name on the back of the flag, "CPL Evan Andrew Marshall." I made a flag for each of the fallen soldiers whose parents I had personally met. I added a dove ornament to represent "Peace on Earth," my wish for our world. I saved it for every holiday.

~ Sheila Marshall ~

I put up a memorial Christmas tree last year with flags and a picture ornament of Will. Also last year, the gifts I gave were memorials with Will's picture on it. I felt good about that and will probably continue to do that until they say, "Enough!"

~ Ann Mock ~



One year with the Dey side of my family we each made individual holiday ornaments representative of something that reminded us of Billy. Each person was asked to make enough of the ornaments to share with one another. We now all have about 15 ornaments symbolic of the love and good times shared with Bill that hang on our Christmas trees across the states. I have a special box where I keep these ornaments and each year as I hang them on our tree, I am once again reminded of the love we shared and the journey we have taken.

~ Debbie Dey ~



One thing that my wife decided to do last year was to give a gift to one of our son's friends. She was sad that she, as a mother, couldn't be buying a gift for Tristan anymore. So she decided to buy a gift and give it to a friend of Tristan's who had lost her mother to cancer. I'm not sure who we will give a gift to this year.

~ Grant Smith ~



Following an idea that was presented in an article in TAPS Magazine, I asked each member of our family and several close friends to write a memory of Conor. As the memories arrived, we placed the unopened envelopes in his Christmas stocking. On Christmas morning, we each took turns reading the memories that had accumulated. Some made us laugh, some made us cry, and others simply placed us in the moment with him again. We heard stories we hadn't heard before and were able to relive other moments that were special to us. It didn't take the pain away, but it somehow helped to have such a special way of including Conor in our Christmas gathering.

~ **Sandy Masterson** ~



After Brad died we found ourselves unable to hang up the stockings by the chimney with care... Our stockings were hand-knitted by my mom with our names on the top and special designs below that were significant for each person. It just hurt too much to have Brad's name hanging up with an empty stocking. So last year we bought red and green decorated buckets, and filled them with small, silly items along with a generous portion of chocolate. For now it helps us deal with the pain of missing Brad not to be faced with such a stark reminder of his absence.

~ **Betsy Beard** ~



Thanksgiving is the hard one for me so it a BBQ outside now. I don't do all that traditional stuff because Buck was buried just three days before Thanksgiving and then three days later we had another Memorial at home for him. Now the BBQ might consist of hotdogs and hamburgers or ribs and steak depends on the mood of the day. Since Buck loved to eat I know he'd like the BBQ.

~ **Debbi Rivers** ~



Stars are very special to me now - Tom became a Brigadier General just weeks before he was killed in an Army plane crash with seven other soldiers, and he wore stars that had belonged to his father, a Major General in the Army. Following Tom's death, the North Star seemed to shine particularly brightly for me and was a twinkle I sought out on the cold winter nights. So I began to collect stars throughout the year: silver for Tom's General Officer rank and gold for my status as a gold star wife. It was that star collection that adorned my little Christmas tree. To everyone else, it appeared to be just holiday decorations, but to me it was a celebration of Tom's life and a memory of our love.

~ **Bonnie Carroll** ~



Chris and I loved snow, which is part of the reason we moved to Maine. The first Christmas after his death I was driving to spend part of the day with my in-laws, as we always did. It was cool and sunny but not cold enough for snow. I cried for the entire trip and at one point I was crying so hard I could barely see, and I remember saying out loud, "I don't know how to do this without you, I don't know how to do this alone." At that moment a snow shower came out of nowhere. It was brief but it was a gift that carried me through the day. It was Chris reminding me that he was there in my heart and I would never be alone. Now snow on Christmas makes me smile and I celebrate for both of us.

~ **Betsy Coffin** ~



One of the things we missed the most after the death of our son was the buying and giving of presents at special times of the year. So we decided to continue the gift-giving tradition this way. As a family we shop for a gift that we would give to our son/brother. We set a specific amount to spend and have a grand time shopping for "Big A". We wrap the gift in the most beautiful paper we can find and take it to the Salvation Army. It was very difficult the first year because we couldn't agree on what to buy. After much discussion (that resembled an argument) we finally decided that Dad would buy a gift for the age our son would be that year, and I (and Big Sister) would buy a gift for the age he was when he died. So we actually have two gifts to give, but then we get twice the warmth and wonder of sharing our love. It is our favorite holiday tradition, and we have never missed a year.

~ **Darcie Sims** ~



Major General Mark Graham

A Legacy of Hope

By Maureen Rose ★ Reprinted from *The Turret*, the official publication of Fort Knox

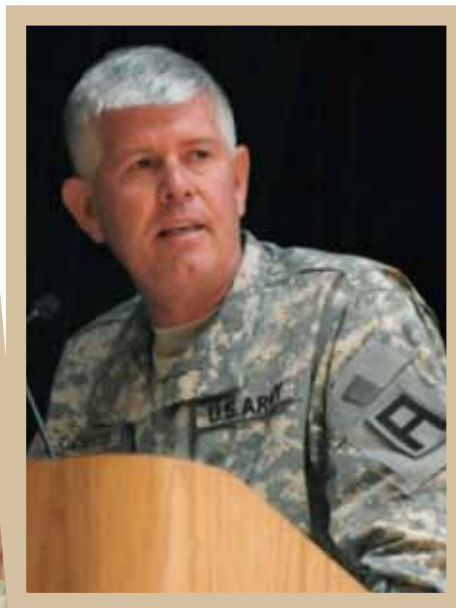
In opening senior leadership training July 24, Major General Mark Graham, the commander of Division West, 1st Army at Fort Carson, Colorado, quoted Oswald Chambers, a 19th century Scottish theologian.

"We say there ought to be no sorrow but there is sorrow, and to survive we have to find ourselves in it. If we try to evade sorrow, refuse to lay our account with it, we are foolish. Sorrow is one of the biggest facts of life."



Graham and his wife, Carol, know the largeness of that fact only too well. Of their three children, only daughter Melanie has survived. The Graham's son, Jeffrey, was killed in action in Iraq in 2004 while his brother, Kevin, committed suicide just a few months earlier. Kevin was a senior ROTC student at the University of Kentucky and was studying to be an Army doctor. He had discontinued his antidepressant medication for fear it would affect his future military career.

The grief of losing two sons - both in military service - drove Graham to the brink of early retirement. He did not think he could continue serving the Army. The day he planned to turn in his official paperwork, Carol read a passage



to him from *Streams in the Desert* by L.B. Cowan. It changed their lives. It read, in part:

"Yesterday you experienced a great sorrow and now your home seems empty. Your impulse is to give up amid your dashed hopes. Yet, you must defy that temptation for you are at the front lines of battle and the crisis is at hand. Faltering for even one moment would put God's interest at risk. Other lives will be harmed by your hesitation and His work will suffer if you simply fold your hands. You must not linger at this point, even to indulge your grief."

The Grahams took that devotion as a sign that there was still a mission for them and a purpose for remaining in the Army family. Although they continued

to grieve, they learned to take one day at a time, and eventually they realized their mission more clearly.

"More Soldiers were killed in Iraq and others died in car accidents and by suicide," he said. "It occurred to us that maybe this was the reason we were meant to continue to serve. We personally knew the pain these families were feeling and we could genuinely connect in a way we never could have before. As we tried to comfort the broken hearts of the people God put in our path, an amazing phenomenon occurred. We received more healing in our spirits than we gave. Others seemed to help us more than we helped them."

Although still healing, the Grahams have become advocates for Soldiers who suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and other mental health illnesses.

"From our personal tragedies, my wife Carol and our daughter Melanie and I have come to realize that in order to survive, we had to use our brokenness to reach out and openly share our story and try to give hope to others," said Graham. "As an Army and as a nation, we must get in front of suicide, work to prevent it by action, not just figure it out after the fact."

The pain in Graham's voice lends validity to his call for Army leaders to find a way to help mentally ill Soldiers returning from deployments or facing subsequent deployments.

"I am here to tell you that we cannot be quiet any longer. We cannot take that hushed tone when speaking of suicide, and we cannot ignore the warning signs," he said. "People are hurting. They need to be helped, not judged."

My wife Carol and I missed the warning signs of our son's depression and just could not see that his illness – if left untreated – was potentially as deadly as if he had had cancer or heart disease." While the Grahams continue to advocate for increased help to Soldiers with mental health problems, it comes with a price.

"Even though Carol and I both made this commitment to keep going, it has not been easy," Graham explained. "I made speeches as Soldiers deployed and redeployed. We celebrated at the welcome home ceremonies and watched as families were reunited after long separations... which left us always wondering how the world could even keep turning without Jeffrey and Kevin in it. At church we tried desperately to hold back the tears as other people's prayers seemingly were answered."

Graham also shared that one of many sources of comfort for his family has

been the friendship and support of his then-boss, Lieutenant General David Valcourt, now the deputy commander at the Training and Doctrine Command.

Although Valcourt had the horrible job of notifying Graham of his son's death in Iraq, he demonstrated his understanding of the Grahams' pain. When Graham was promoted, Valcourt was there to pin the stars on Graham's uniform. But he had engraved a special message on the back of the stars. Kevin's name is engraved on one star and Jeffrey's name is on the other. At the promotion ceremony, Valcourt told Graham, "Your boys will always be with you."

Graham acknowledged that now he wears the stars on his uniform to represent his sons.

"We have pledged to use Kevin's death to raise awareness in the military to the dangers of untreated depression, post-

traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, and other mental health issues," he said. "We are compelled to speak out for all of the 'Kevins' of the world who have no voice."

Graham said there is still a terrible stigma associated with suicide in the Army and in society in general. He asked the leaders in the audience to empower the Army and communities with the education and tools to break through the fear and stigma surrounding suicide.

In closing, Graham asked his audience to remember wounded Soldiers – those with visible wounds as well as those with invisible wounds.

"It has been said that depression is the slow bleeding of the soul, and we must continue to encourage Soldiers to reach out and get help," he said. "Be the tourniquet that stops the bleeding of these priceless souls." *

Mark and Carol Graham's Work with T★A★P★S

In the TAPS family we know the devastating sorrow of losing a loved one, but few of us have had the experience of burying not one, but two, sons. Mark and Carol Graham, along with their remaining daughter, Melanie, have carried this extra burden for more than six years, first losing Kevin to suicide in 2003, and then Jeffrey eight months later in combat. The Grahams have seen firsthand how differently the public responds to the circumstances of death.

In the beginning, the Grahams focused on setting up suicide prevention programs on college campuses. But after being invited to talk about Kevin's death at the 2007 TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar, they began to speak openly in the military about suicide prevention.

"TAPS has given us a way to channel our grief in a positive way. Before we connected with TAPS, I was holding my pain on the inside. TAPS connected me with other dads who were carrying the same pain and loss as I was. Finding TAPS was a huge turning point in our lives," said Mark.

The Grahams are committed to raising awareness to the dangers of untreated depression, post traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health issues, regardless of their own continuing pain. They have also supported TAPS by hosting and giving the keynote addresses for two regional seminars



at Fort Carson, Colorado, in addition to attending the 2009 Gary Morris Invitational Golf Tournament, and the 2009 TAPS Gala where Mark was presented with the TAPS

Honor Guard Leadership Award.

"We desperately needed a safe place to share stories about both Jeffrey and Kevin, a place where we could laugh and cry if we needed to. There is so much love and acceptance in our TAPS family that we can truly share Kevin's story as much as Jeffrey's. And by reaching out to others and helping them to heal, I have found healing myself."

~ Carol Graham



Holiday Healing For the

By Mary Jane Hurley Brant, M.S., CGP

The holidays have arrived. Normally they are a time for family fun and celebration but when you are grieving the loss of someone who has died, the season is different: it is painful.

Grieving is a long process. It takes time to heal from the loss of a loved one. When we are grieving, we can feel completely overwhelmed with sadness, overwhelmed with missing the beloved person who has gone. We long for them. We think we will not survive. So we ask ourselves, "How can I make it through these days?"

Here are some thoughts that have helped me. Maybe they can help you.

For Your Body

Rest: your body has experienced loss. It is exhausted. Take a nap when you can. Walking in the sunshine every day, even for just 15 minutes, will help to elevate endorphins. Take some baths instead of quick showers. Eat nourishing foods, like a delicious soup and a slice of warm whole-grained bread. Limit your sugar, caffeine, and alcohol; they affect mood. Drink generous quantities of water; it restores energy. Get a back massage; it lessens the stress lodged in your muscles. Get and

give as many hugs as you can; touch heals. Stroke your pet; it calms the body. Pray, meditate, breathe deeply, practice yoga, and exercise; it brings you home to yourself.

For Your Mind

Start a new tradition. If you don't have small children to attend to, simplify the decorations. An aromatic wreath on your front door and bakery purchased cookies are more than enough. Keep these days simple and peaceful. If you have always prepared a big sit-down meal, have a little brunch instead. Carve out some time for yourself, an overnight to the beach or the mountains with your prayers, your journal, your favorite inspirational books, and your music. I browse the shelves of our local library; it is calming for me. If being around other people helps, seek them. People like to be asked for help; it makes them



When we are grieving, we can feel completely overwhelmed with sadness, overwhelmed with missing the beloved person who has gone. We long for them. We think we will not survive.



Body, Mind, and Spirit

feel useful when they don't know what to do. Watch any movie that makes you laugh; you need to help your process along. Lastly, find a person to share your sorrow with, whether a friend, a spouse, a minister, a priest, a rabbi, a clergyman, or a counselor.

For Your Spirit

First, give compassion to yourself. Remind yourself that you did a good job loving the departed person and trust they are now safe and free. Second, be around those people whom you love and who love you; they will soothe your weary soul. But remember, you are vulnerable now and a remark from an insensitive person will injure you as never before.

Attend church, or synagogue, or temple, and pray for the departed, for yourself and your family. Pray for peace, pray for faith, pray for grace, pray for forgiveness. Have a small ritual that not only acknowledges the continued spiritual presence of the deceased but a ritual that you know would make them happy, too. An idea to celebrate the person

We are grateful, so very grateful, for having had the blessing of them in our lives. We honor our deceased by loving those still in our lives and by making every day matter.

that you have lost would be to get every member of the family together and bake their favorite cake, pie, or cookies. Then sit down with tea or hot chocolate or cold milk and share happy holiday memories. Maybe family photos or mementos could be brought out. Tears may come but let them; they open up the gates for laughter and hope. In our family, we talk about our Katie with our three precious grandchildren so that they have a chance to know her through our remembrances. She is their Aunt Katie in heaven with God now. Katie loved the magic that children bring and she would love how we have opened our hearts to this chapter in our lives.

When we remember that no one's spirit ever dies, we will feel the light of confidence and direction shift in

our souls. Yes, we acknowledge that our lives are not the same without the person who has died, and we know that we will miss them forever. But we are grateful, so very grateful, for having had the blessing of them in our lives. We honor our deceased by loving those still in our lives and by making every day matter. *

About the Author



Mary Jane Hurley Brant is the author of *When Every Day Matters: A Mother's Memoir on Love, Loss and Life* (Simple Abundance Press, 2008). For 29 years she has worked as a Human Relations Counselor with a concentration in Jungian studies and depth psychology. Throughout her long career, MJ has worked with hundreds of individuals, couples, and groups to bring a deeper understanding and meaning into their lives. MJ has a private practice in Bryn Mawr, PA.

Reach her at:

www.WhenEveryDayMatters.com



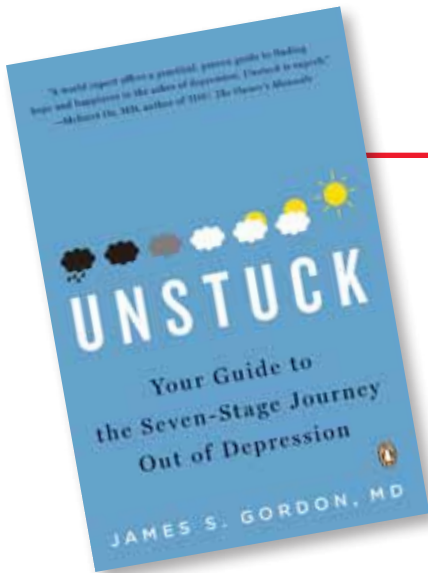


De-Stress Yourself!

Relax in the Midst of the Holiday Season

By James S. Gordon, MD

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→ Intro to Meditation

Meditation is not difficult or esoteric. You don't have to go to some faraway mountain retreat or strange place or put on different clothes to do it. And you certainly don't have to pay a fee or join a group or renounce your religion.

Meditation is practical and easy to learn. It decreases the stress that keeps you confined in depression and produces the relaxed, moment-to-moment awareness that allows change to happen. Meditation quiets your body and allows you to observe more calmly the mind-generated terrors that may alternately agitate and immobilize you. And meditation nourishes the courage and persistence you will need as you make the journey through and beyond anxiety, despondency, and fear.

The word meditation comes from *medi*, the same Sanskrit and Greek root that is the origin of our word *medicine*. *Medi* means "to take the measure of" and "to care for." There are three basic types of meditation. In *concentrative* meditation, we focus on a sound, an image, or words. *Concentrative* meditations are part of virtually all the world's

In the early months and years of grieving (and especially during the holidays), many of us experience difficulty concentrating, relaxing, and even just breathing. The following is excerpted from *Unstuck: Your Guide to the Seven-Stage Journey Out of Depression* by James S. Gordon, MD.

spiritual traditions and religions. The second type of meditation, awareness or mindfulness meditation, appears to have originated with Buddhism. It encourages moment-to-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they arise. The third kind

steadying, and reassuring you at every stage of your journey. When you do *Soft Belly*, you simply allow your belly to rise with the in breath and fall with the out breath, while you focus on the image of a soft, relaxed belly.

Meditation is practical and easy to learn.

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awareness that allows change to happen.

of meditation, *expressive* meditation, is the oldest one on the planet and is still central to the practice of many aboriginal and tribal people. It includes fast, deep breathing; shaking, dancing, and whirling; and spontaneous emotional expression.

→ Concentrative Meditation

The technique I most often use myself is called *Soft Belly*. *Soft Belly* is a biologically powerful *concentrative* meditation and is grounded in slow, deep breathing. I teach it at the very beginning of our journey because I hope *Soft Belly* will be your constant companion, quieting,

When your belly is soft, your lungs, together with the muscular, dome-shaped diaphragm that separates the chest from the abdomen, expand more and the volume of air you inhale increases. The exchange of oxygen in the lower part of your lungs, where the blood flow is greater, improves. When your belly is soft, all the other muscles in your body begin to relax as well. *Soft Belly* can help quiet the mental and physical agitation, the persistent fight-or-flight response, and the chronic stress that are almost always present along with exhaustion, hopelessness, and self-condemnation when we are depressed.

→ Benefits of Meditation

Slow, deep, relaxed breathing mobilizes the parasympathetic nervous system, the half of the autonomic nervous system that balances the fight-or-flight response of the sympathetic nervous system. It creates what Harvard cardiologist Herbert Benson called "the relaxation response." Conscious use of deep breathing overrides the pattern of fast shallow breathing that leads to, and results from, anxiety, and offers us more of the oxygen that is necessary for efficient and relaxed mental functioning. It stimulates the vagus (from the Latin for "wandering") nerve, which balances the functioning of a number of our most important internal organs.

Slow, deep breathing also decreases our blood pressure and our heart rate, smoothes out our intestinal functioning, and lowers our levels of the stress hormone cortisol, our blood sugar, and, in some studies, our cholesterol as well. When we meditate regularly, using techniques similar to Soft Belly, the portions of our brain associated with fear and anxiety, and with unpleasant thoughts, quiet down. PET scans and MRIs show us that slow, deep meditative breathing lights up the parts of our brain that are intimately connected with happy thoughts and good feelings.

I first learned Soft Belly thirty years ago in a workshop on death, dying, and loss, given by Stephen Levine, an experienced and wise traveler on the journey out of depression and despair. I've used it almost every day since. I like it because it's graphic and concrete. It uses words and a physical image to enhance and deepen the experience of breathing, to gently focus our ever-wandering minds. I like it, too, because it is utterly nondenominational, and because it so subversively cuts against the grain of our culture's stress-producing position of choice: the tightly pulled-back shoulders and sucked-in gut.

As we focus on the words and image of Soft Belly, we slowly, gently move the thoughts that disturb us toward the

periphery of our consciousness. As we relax, we gain perspective on the worrisome way we are accustomed to think. We're able to concentrate better.

Used regularly, slow deep breathing rebalances the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis. It stills the agitation that makes us despair when we're depressed. It quiets the racing heart of 3:00 a.m. terrors. It helps us gain perspective on the thoughts-and the ways of thinking-that agitate and depress us. It improves our mood. Using Soft Belly, you will likely find, little by little, that you are taking control of your physical and emotional state, making positive, powerful changes in how you feel.

→ Soft Belly Breathing

Sit quietly in a comfortable chair. It's good to have things around you that make you feel peaceful and comforted: a work of art, a photo of a loved one, some flowers, a religious symbol. It's better if the lights are somewhat dimmed. You can start with five or ten minutes of Soft Belly. Use a kitchen timer to tell you when your session is over.

continued on next page...





Your mind will clear.

It will function better.

Your body will relax.

You'll realize you can help yourself.

Your mood will lift.

Sitting quietly, close your eyes. Breathe slowly and deeply, in through your nose and out through your mouth. Allow your belly to be soft as you breathe, expanding on the in breath, relaxing on the out breath. You might say to yourself as you breathe in, "Soft," and as you breathe out, "Belly." This will focus your mind and remind you that you want your belly to be soft. When thoughts come, let them come, and let them go. Gently bring your mind back to the phrase, "Soft... Belly," "Soft... Belly."

As you repeat this phrase to yourself, you're giving your mind something to focus on. Sometimes people have the idea that relaxation or meditation has to do with focusing on nothing. Our minds just aren't built that way. We only make ourselves more agitated and, yes, more depressed, if we try to force thoughts away or judge ourselves harshly because they keep returning. Let thoughts come. Let them go. Bring your mind gently back to "Soft... Belly."

As you breathe slowly, focusing on "Soft Belly," anxious chatter about past or present failures and imperfections begins, slowly, to grow fainter. The clamor of doubt and worry about what may happen quiets.

When you're ready – or when your timer rings – open your eyes and bring your attention back into the room.

It's nice to have a special place where you do this meditation, one where you can close the door and be by yourself. And it's good to have a regular time, too. It helps connect you to your practice and gives structure to your days.

You can begin doing Soft Belly for five or ten minutes, perhaps twice a day. As time goes on, you may want to do it for longer periods, or more often. You can do it whenever you feel anxious, or uncertain, or when your mind gets locked into repetitive thoughts, guilty feelings, or a preoccupation with how bad you've been, or how hopeless your situation is.

If you feel too agitated when you sit to do Soft Belly, get up and move around. Do some chores, go for a walk. Then try it again, sitting on a bench in a park after you've walked for a while, or in a coffee shop or a library or church or back home. Little by little, you'll feel the relaxation that grows in you.

Sitting this way will not make the thoughts go away – and trying to force them away will only reinforce their importance – but it will give you

some peace and quiet amid them, and a distance from them. They will gradually loosen their hold on you. Your mind will clear. It will function better. Your body will relax. You'll realize you can help yourself. Your mood will lift. *

About the Author



James S. Gordon, MD, a Harvard educated psychiatrist, is a world-renowned expert in using mind-body medicine to heal depression, anxiety, and psychological trauma. He is the Founder and Director of The Center for Mind-Body Medicine, a non-profit educational organization dedicated to reviving the spirit and transforming the practice of medicine. For more information, visit:

www.cmbm.org



T★A★P★S Sibling Retreat

Surviving Brothers and Sisters Gather for Support



The loss of a brother or sister serving in the military – to war, suicide, training accident, or illness – can be devastating to a sibling left behind. The second annual TAPS Sibling Retreat was held in Las Vegas, Nevada in September 2009, the largest gathering ever held of surviving adults who have lost a sibling serving in the military.

The 95 attendees came from all over the country to connect with others, hear presentations on sibling grief by Dr. Rayna Godfrey and Dr. Darcie Sims, and participate in support groups. Fourteen siblings also attended TAPS Peer Mentor training, so they can become supportive companions for other bereaved siblings.

"I love going to the sibling retreat. I like sharing stories with other siblings; I can connect with them," said Stacy Vargas, surviving sister of US Marine Lance Corporal Brian Escalante. Vargas attended the retreat with her three sisters and said of the sharing sessions, "It helps me deal with my grief. It makes my life easier, to talk about my feelings."

Among bereavement professionals, sibling grief is known as disenfranchised grief, because it is often unacknowledged by society. Yet the adult brothers and sisters left behind must cope with watching their parents suffer the death of a child while adjusting to a future that does not include a person they had thought would be a lifelong friend.

Finding a connection with others is important, say attendees. "Being connected with other siblings helps to give me a sense of not being alone," said Kristin Otto, surviving sister of US Navy EN3 Daniel Otto.

"Since my brother died I've heard all about how hard it must be for my parents, but it didn't feel like anyone other than my own close friends got how hard it was for me," said Otto. "Knowing that others know how that feels makes a big difference..."

Her feelings were echoed by Bethaney Beach, surviving sister of US Army Sergeant Robert Kassin. "Being connected to other siblings helped me by realizing I wasn't totally alone," said Beach. "Listening to the stories that were shared really helped me put into words what some people were missing when it came to my grief."

Because relationship stress often accompanies sibling grief, a support group was offered for spouses and significant others. "The spouse group also helped my husband," said Beach. "Since getting home he has been more understanding and willing to work on our marriage. If it weren't for this weekend I think we may have been stuck in limbo for a while."

The retreat's attendees are part of the rapidly growing TAPS online sibling community which now numbers more than 180 members who participate in secure chats and email forums for bereaved siblings. *





TAPS Run & Remember Team Tackles Marine Corps Marathon

For survivors, running a race in memory of a loved one is deeply personal.

For a special group of runners tackling the Marine Corps Marathon, 10K Race, and Healthy Kids Fun Run October 24-25, 2009 in Washington, DC, every step was laced with memories and honored those who paid the ultimate price for freedom. More than 180 runners, many of them surviving family members, ran with the TAPS Run and Remember Team and raised funds to help TAPS.

For many, it was a family affair. Michael Wert, age 8, of Reed City, Michigan, ran the 1-mile Healthy Kids Fun Run to remember his dad, US Marine Corps Master Sergeant Michael Wert, who lost his life while rescuing two boys caught in a rip tide. His mother and sisters ran the 10K and marathon.

For survivors, running a race in memory of a loved one is deeply personal. "Running the marathon is a beginning to a new journey for me and my family. It's an opportunity for me to share the love of my brothers by reaching out to other fallen soldiers' families," said Monica Velez, of Austin, Texas.

Monica ran to remember her only siblings, US Army Corporal Jose Alfredo Velez who was killed in action in Iraq in 2004 and US Army Specialist Andrew Velez, who committed suicide while deployed to Afghanistan in 2005.

For many survivors, giving back to TAPS is part of why they run. "TAPS has been an important healing part of my life for several years. This unique organization provides compassionate support and tremendous services to anyone who has lost someone they loved in uniform," said Barb Christie, of Charlotte, North Carolina. She ran the 10K to remember her husband, US Marine Corps Colonel Richard Christie, who died from a rare form of cancer in 2003.

Inviting others to remember can be part of the journey for survivors of all ages. Kamryn Dey, age 10, of Crofton, Maryland, set up a children's team called the "Little Dragonflies," patterned after an adult team her mother established. Both teams ran in memory of Kamryn's father, US Navy Lieutenant William Dey, who died when his F-14 Tomcat crashed in June 2000.

Renny Parker of Camden, New York, ran the marathon alongside his son, Isaiah to remember his son and Isaiah's brother, US Marine Corps Sergeant Eli Parker, who was killed in action in May 2006 in Iraq. "TAPS has been a great

source of help and comfort to us - giving us strength and encouragement to keep moving forward," said Renny.

And for some, it was about honoring our fallen and supporting their families. The TAPS Run and Remember Team included friends, neighbors, coworkers, and active-duty servicemembers. Melissa Kaplan, of Potomac, Maryland, ran the marathon in memory of US Army Captain Brian Bunting, who died in February 2009 in Afghanistan. Melissa and Brian grew up in the same community in Maryland.

"Each year my heart continues to grow with so much joy!" said Marie Campbell, TAPS Run and Remember Team Director. "It's so nice to see so many smiles of celebration after my teammates have crossed the finish line. I know our beloved fallen heroes must be near during the MCM weekend because there is so much love and celebration." *



To see more photos, visit our Photo Gallery online at www.taps.org



Beyond the Marine Corps Marathon

The T★A★P★S Run & Remember Team Takes to the Road



Run in memory of a fallen hero while raising funds and awareness for TAPS in a city near you!

Since October 2000, the TAPS Run and Remember Team has participated in the Marine Corps Marathon and, more recently, in the Army 10 Miler. Not only do these events raise awareness of the TAPS mission, but they also have raised more than half a million dollars in donations to assist in funding the programs and services TAPS provides.

The TAPS Run and Remember Team will continue these two wonderful traditions in our nation's capital for years to come, but beginning in 2010 we will be branching out to various events all around the country. No matter where you live, you can find an event near you!

Form a team or run alone!

If you like to run, you can honor your loved one and support TAPS at the same time. If you are not a runner, but know someone who would like to run in memory of a fallen hero, ask them to participate. For those who don't know a fallen hero, TAPS will link you up with a surviving family in the area of the event and you can run in memory that family's fallen hero.

The steps are simple:

- ★ Choose an event in your area.
- ★ Register at that event's website.
- ★ Set up your fundraising page at our Friends of TAPS website. From the homepage at www.taps.org, click on "Run and Remember Team." The only fees you pay are the registration fees at the hosting event's website.

Register today at one of our new 2010 events or choose an event close to home.

REGISTER TODAY FOR UPCOMING 2010 EVENTS



Dallas Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon

March 14, 2010

Register at dallas.competitor.com

Marine Corps Historic Half and Semper Fred 5K, Fredericksburg, VA

May 16, 2010

Register after November 18 at marinecorpshistorichalf.com

San Diego Rock 'n' Roll Marathon

June 6, 2010

Register at san-diego.competitor.com

Virginia Beach Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon

September 5, 2010

Register at rnrvb.com

San Antonio Rock 'n' Roll Marathon, Half Marathon, Kids One Mile Run

November 14, 2010

Check website for 2010 registration at san-antonio.competitor.com



To learn more about these events, or if you would like to participate in another event in your local area, please email us at HonorCorps@taps.org or call us at 800-959-TAPS (8277). We will be more than happy to help get you started. *



T*A*P*S Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Survivors of Suicide



Families who have experienced death by suicide of a loved one who served in the military found help and comfort at the TAPS National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp.

"Experiencing the death of a loved one is difficult for any family, and suicide carries unique challenges because of the stigma associated with this type of loss," said Kim Ruocco, director of suicide survivor education and support with TAPS. Ruocco's husband, Marine Major John Ruocco, took his own life in 2005 three months after returning

from a deployment in Iraq. "The family is left to pick up the shattered pieces of their lives and we're here to help," said Ruocco.

In conjunction with the seminar, the Department of Defense Task Force on the Prevention of Suicide by Members of the Armed Forces, held a day-long meeting and invited TAPS families to offer insights and recommendations. The task force is chaired by Major General Philip Volpe and co-chaired by TAPS founder and chairman Bonnie Carroll.

The federally-directed task force is preparing a report for the Secretary of Defense and the US Congress on how to prevent suicide in the Armed Forces, and recognizes the important role of input from surviving family members.

On Friday and Saturday, families attended workshops and participated in support groups, all led by leaders in the field of coping with a death to suicide. Dr. Darcie Sims conducted a workshop on humor in grief, nurturing laughter through tears. An interactive writing workshop with Dr. Jack Jordan helped





family members express their feelings and develop skills to help when they go home. The Rita Project was on-site to help survivors, including those who thought they were “not artists” to use art materials and collage as a healing tool.

In discussing the myriad of emotions that survivors encounter, Dr. Frank Campbell offered survivors tips on how to cope with emotions and the reactions our bodies have to them.

“Most of us fight feeling how much pain we are in,” said Campbell. He noted that often the “fighting” we engage in with our feelings manifests itself in sleep disturbances, tense muscles and headaches. “You have to give yourself permission to get the tears out,” said Campbell.

As Terence Madigan wrote afterward, “We met so many wonderful people and it helped us realize so many things. A few of the most important are: It’s okay to still cry, it’s okay to laugh and

not feel guilty (sometimes in the same sentence) and that we never have to be alone with our thoughts, TAPS will be there for us.”

TAPS children came together in their own age groups, each with a mentor from the military, and learned ways to handle their grief and talk about the death of their loved one. The kids also had the chance to have fun, playing outside and visiting the USS Midway.

During the Saturday night banquet, Major General Mark Graham spoke not as a military leader, but as a dad. Graham lost his son, Kevin, an ROTC cadet, to suicide in 2003, and a second son, Jeffrey Graham, to combat in Iraq eight months later. MG Graham and his wife, Carol, are active in TAPS where they offer help and support to other families experiencing death by suicide. “Our two sons died fighting different battles,” said Graham. “We use our brokenness to reach out and

openly share our story. We never take anything for granted,” he said.

On Sunday morning, Dr. Laura Biddle led a special service on the beach. She presented everyone with two roses to place into the water a red rose to honor their loved one, and a white rose to honor those who support them now.

“I would tell those who are thinking about using TAPS as a resource that this is a safe place; that it’s comfortable and welcoming,” said Good Grief Camp attendee Erin Gallagher.






“Although it’s a difficult journey with no finish line, I never thought I would feel so alive in my heart,” said her mom, Mary Gallagher. “We are survivors, and TAPS gives us hope.” *

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 Visit www.taps.org to view photographs. The Photo Gallery can be found on the News/Media page.
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Holiday Gifts that Support TAPS

-  **Green Beans Coffee, TAPS Organic Special Blend:** The company that got its start serving great coffee to our troops in the combat zone now offers an organic blend just for TAPS!
-  **Baghdad Bracelets:** The Power of Women: a tradition in Iraq becomes a fundraiser for TAPS. Buy them to wear and, in the tradition of Iraqi women, to share!
-  **TAPS Tote Bag:** Generously sized to hold everything from your bracelets to your laptop and show your support of the TAPS mission.
-  **TAPS Apparel:** Ladies Navy Blue Run & Remember shirt or Red T*A*P*S shirt. 100% cotton, made in the USA. Check our website for available sizes.
-  **Real Stars by Ben Stein:** The men and women who wear the uniform of the United States of America and fight for our freedom while risking their lives are the Real Stars!

Support TAPS as you shop from home!
Check out our website today for gifts that give back to TAPS.

Go to WWW.TAPS.ORG and click on Holiday Shopping



Next Step of Your Journey?

If you have reached the point in your grief journey where:

*A certain amount of joy has returned to your life,
You can initiate and maintain new relationships,
And you are beginning to engage more fully in living your life after loss*

It may be time to consider reaching out to help others who are more newly bereaved. If you have found comfort, friendship, and healing in TAPS, we have several programs that will allow you to contribute in a meaningful way.

Peer Mentoring

Giving your time and energy to those more recently bereaved in a one-on-one long distance telephone companionship relationship.

Care Group Facilitating

Bringing support and helping others to explore the many facets of grief in a local group setting.

Memorial Giving

Giving monetary gifts to TAPS in memory and honor of your loved one. TAPS is a nonprofit 501(c) 3 Veteran's Service Organization that receives no government funding. Gifts are fully tax deductible.

Workplace Giving

Federal employees can make charitable payroll deductions through Combined Federal Campaign giving. Our CFC Number is 11309. Others may make contributions by specifying Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors through United Way payroll deductions.

For more information visit:
WWW.TAPS.ORG





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