

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

TAPS®

SUMMER 2020 | MAGAZINE



WHAT'S INSIDE: ART ALLOWS EXPRESSION ★ LEGACY OF SERVICE
HOPE IS THE COMPANION ★ 20 YEARS OF TEAM TAPS

“Sharing our stories of
love and loss are among
the most courageous of
things we will ever do.”

~ Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Center for Loss & Life Transition



LOVE
lives
ON

WWW.TAPS.ORG



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and address changes to info@taps.org.

TAPS IS HERE

24 HOURS A DAY / 7 DAYS A WEEK

800.959.TAPS (8277)

- ★ National Peer Support Network
- ★ Connections to Community-Based Care
 - ★ Casework Assistance
- ★ Emergency Financial Assistance
- ★ Education Resources and Support
for Post-Secondary Education
- ★ TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing
 - ★ Grief and Trauma Resources
- ★ Seminars, Retreats, One-Day Gatherings
- ★ Sports & Entertainment Events
- ★ Good Grief Camp for Children/Teens
- ★ National Military Mentor Program
 - ★ Young Adult Program
- ★ TAPS Online Community
 - ★ TAPS Magazine



ON THE COVER

*TAPS and Outward
Bound Backpacking
Expedition, Point Reyes
National Seashore,
California. (March 2020)*

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FROM OUR FOUNDER

A HOME BUILT ON LOVE



Dear TAPS Family,

The warmth of summer is upon us and we are honored to share encouragement, hope and strength through the pages of our TAPS Magazine, our family journal written with love and care.

Our stories connect, our stories inspire, our stories reflect love. We have gathered together, from our homes across the nation – and the world – to learn, share and grow. We have shared our stories and honored our heroes at the virtual National Military Survivor Seminar and we have gathered through the TAPS Online Community, finding the support and staying in touch, even as we have had to stay at home.

We have scaled mountains, we have run races and we have lifted voices in song – all in celebration and honor of our precious loved ones.

Within these pages you will find messages of honor, messages of resilience, messages of encouragement. We hope you will feel us reaching out to you and taking your hand across the miles. Together we will find our way along this unexpected path.

Consider this publication a hug from your TAPS family. As you turn the pages, as you read the stories, know that you are not alone. You have found a place of comfort and of hope. You have entered a home where love is spoken. You have a family. You have TAPS. Always.

With Care,

Bonnie

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ABOUT TAPS

Our Mission

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is the national nonprofit organization providing compassionate care to all those grieving the death of a military loved one. We honor our heroes by caring for all those they loved and left behind. We do this through peer-based emotional support, grief and trauma resources, programming for adults and children across the country, casework assistance, connections to community-based care, and the National Military Survivor Helpline that is available 24/7. Services are provided at no cost to survivors by survivors, with love and care.

*1ST QUARTER 2020



3,800+

Calls to the
24/7 Helpline



23

Average number
of new survivors
connected each day



2,645

Nationwide programs
that connected military
survivors to one another

Connect with Us!

SHARE YOUR STORY

Your stories can bring hope and healing to TAPS families. We invite you to share a story about your loved one or your grief journey. All submissions will be considered for TAPS Magazine, our blogs at taps.org, and other TAPS publications. We invite you to read our submission policy and submit your story at taps.org/shareyourstory.

JOIN OUR ONLINE COMMUNITY

Information on resources and programs are easily found at taps.org. You'll also find blogs, message boards and chats for connection to others. Learn more at taps.org/onlinecommunity. Also subscribe to our Saturday Morning Message (SMM), a weekly email written by and for survivors. Request the SMM via online@taps.org.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Share your thoughts or TAPS experience with us at editor@taps.org. (Content may be edited for publication). Also join us on social media:

facebook.com/tapsorg | [@tapsorg](https://twitter.com/tapsorg) | [@tapsorg](https://instagram.com/tapsorg)

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

YOU CAN TRUST TAPS

TAPS exceeds industry standards for financial accountability. We are proud to have received many of the top nonprofit charity ratings available.



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Dear TAPS

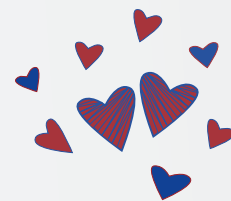
STRENGTH FOR THE JOURNEY

I just wanted to let you know how grateful I am for TAPS. After my younger brother, Tyler Spake, passed away in 2016, I spoke with a few of your TAPS support people on the phone when I was really struggling with my grief. I haven't used many of your services outside of this, but I can't tell you how much it means to know they are there if I need them. Just knowing I have this support network brings me strength and comfort. What I truly cherish though are the communications I receive from you. From his birthday, to National Siblings Day, to Thanksgiving and Christmas, and the anniversary of his death, you remember them all. It means so much to know other people continue to honor his memory with me. I received the below message from you all on National Siblings Day in 2017 and it deeply moved me. I have it saved and look to it for comfort when I really start to miss him. In particular, I wanted you all to know how much I appreciate the thought and care you put into these notes. I write donor communications for a nonprofit and I know that sometimes they can feel like they are just a drop in the bucket. So, I wanted you to know that at least to one person, they mean the world.

Veronica Spake

Sister of ET3 William "Tyler" Spake, U.S. Coast Guard

"We are meant to grow old with our siblings — experiencing life together, sharing each other's dreams and achievements, crying for each other's heartbreaks and enjoying a few pranks along the way. When a brother or sister dies, that relationship doesn't end. Our relationship doesn't look the way we ever imagined, but they're still our siblings, still inspiring us, motivating us, annoying us. We can still create beautiful, new memories. We can still draw strength from them and know they would be proud of us. We can carry them in our hearts, and we can honor them in the way we live. We can choose to celebrate both the relationship we had and the legacy they left behind."



WALKING IN THE SAME SHOES

The TAPS Peer Mentor Program could be considered the heart of TAPS. As part of my journey of healing after the death of my son, I went through Peer Mentor training.

I was assigned my first mentee, another mother who had lost her son. This is the first step of the caring and diligence exhibited by the staff to try to make a good match between mentee and mentor. We have been communicating for several months now, but this week my mentee told me she felt comfortable speaking with me because I was the only person who really understood her grief journey. She had seen a counselor, and she felt the counselor really didn't understand her grief, and she could not openly talk to her.

However, since I had "walked in her shoes," she said she could say anything on her heart and mind to me, and I would know exactly what she meant and how she was feeling. I was so humbled, but also grateful we had been matched as mentee and mentor.

I want to express my gratitude to TAPS for creating this very safe environment in which survivors can connect with each other and walk side-by-side on our journey of healing. ★

TAPS Peer Mentor and Surviving Mom



=



REMEMBER THE LOVE, CELEBRATE THE LIFE, SHARE THE JOURNEY



SHARE YOUR TAPS EXPERIENCE AND GIVE
HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHERS.
EMAIL: EDITOR@TAPS.ORG

ART ALLOWS EXPRESSION When There Are No Words

Andres Ramos, Jr. | Surviving Stepfather of Spc. Jose J. Melendez Jr., U.S. Army



"Rainbow Showers" at night with the visible star that honors Jose

The desire to create was latent in me for a long time even though painting has always been a passion of mine. My parents, especially my mom, pushed me in that direction as a child. I enjoyed portrait realism paintings growing up in Lorain, Ohio.

My son Jose enjoyed art, too. He went to Campbell University, graduating in 2008 with a degree in art. Jose grew up fascinated with abstract art, which was quite different than the portraits I was into. When Jose was a senior in high school we had a discussion one day about abstract art. We talked about our differences in understanding abstract vs. realism. I never understood it.

Jose was killed on November 29, 2017. What followed was a time of darkness for me. I was lost trying to cope with his passing.

One night almost a year later I saw a YouTube video that changed everything for me. It was about an abstract art form called acrylic pouring. I finally understood what Jose had always tried to explain to me.

That moment is truly when my journey through art began. My passion for art was reawakened and I knew this was a way I could honor Jose.

I started learning about acrylic pouring and the many different styles. As my passion grew I realized how relaxing painting really was. It has helped me in understanding why Jose really enjoyed abstract art.

Energy suddenly sprung out of me — energy that I badly needed. Paint spoke to me in a way that nothing else could. I paint so that the eye can see what the inner eye knows. I paint because there is a deep desire for me to give expression to the things I don't have words for. Each piece is unique and cannot be duplicated.

*"And then I discovered paint,
not just any paint, but fluid acrylics,
and it was love at first pour.
I needed this. Painting not only
brought me the things that
photography did, but also joy.
Excitement. Energy. Passion.*

~ Andres Ramos
in his artist's statement



Andres includes a photo and story
about Jose on all his paintings

COMMITMENT OF A SOLDIER, HEART OF AN ARTIST

Jose's personality was quiet and respectable in front of his elders. His mom wouldn't have it any other way! With his friends he was always happy and possessed an unbelievable smile. And he was generous; he'd give you his last dollar or the shirt off his back if you needed it.

When he entered the Army, he informed us that he would be going to Airborne school. I was surprised, for as a child, he never rode any amusement park rides that involved heights.

He took this incredible step to conquer his fear. That was a very proud moment for me to pin his Airborne wings during his graduation.

He was a second-generation Airborne graduate, following in my footsteps. He also conquered his fear of heights on a roller coaster during Memorial Day weekend of 2017 at Carowinds, an amusement park in Charlotte, North Carolina. We rode roller coasters together just like me and my dad did when I was a child.

I know he would be and is proud of what I am doing. This past fall, I was honored to be a featured artist in a Fayetteville, North Carolina, art exhibit. I have now found a way to honor him in every painting that I do. Hidden in each painting you'll find a gold

dot that can be seen during the day. At night that same gold dot turns into an illuminated star. This is Jose always looking down upon us.

FINDING COMFORT IN ART AND IN TAPS

Of all the paintings I have completed, my favorite is titled "Rainbow Showers." I gave it to my wife, Mara, this past December as a Christmas gift. The painting displays a mother and a daughter, standing over a tombstone in the rain — a scene I have seen many times with my wife and our daughter Mara. Everything is about honoring Jose and that is what I see in that painting.

Painting helps me honor Jose. It also brings me comfort. My family and I also find comfort in coming together with other surviving families. We all speak the same language when it comes to taking this journey that we are on. Mara and I can open up to TAPS survivors who understand what we are going through.

Paint reveals on the surface what is happening underneath. It has taught me to stop hiding who I am and to step beyond the fear of rejection regardless of what happens. I now can answer this simple question, "Why do I paint?" For the pure excitement of taking a blank canvas and making something special. ★



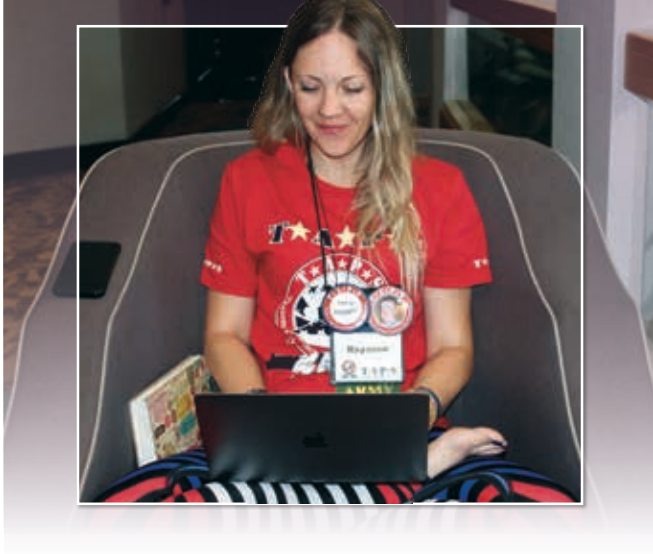
Andres' work on display at the North Carolina Arts Council 10-10-10 Art Exhibit



Mara Ramos presenting TAPS Founder and President Bonnie Carroll with one of Andres' paintings during the Southern Regional Seminar in Jacksonville, Florida

TAPS Online Community

Connection from the Comfort of Home



Coffee and your favorite comfy chair. Warm – cozy – home. The warm embrace of your TAPS family is as close as your living room, your kitchen table or your front porch. Right where you are and just a click away.

Over the past few months, it has been more important than ever to find safe ways to stay in touch. We find strength in knowing we are connected to those who understand our journey, our heartache, our pride, our hope.

TAPS has always found ways to keep military survivors in touch using available technology, creating safe spaces for sharing and supporting. Through the TAPS Online Community, survivors have been connecting virtually for over 20 years. As technology has progressed and the survivor population has grown – so has the virtual community at TAPS.

From a single weekly text-based chat, our “virtual living room” has grown to offer video- and text-based chats along with peer group sites for parents, adult children, men, spouses and significant others, survivors of suicide loss, siblings, peer mentors and more.

With this online presence well established, TAPS was able to quickly enhance the Online Community and adapt other programs to keep survivors connected as stay-at-home mandates were established with the COVID-19 outbreak. Our traditional in-person local Care Groups and TAPS Togethers went online, allowing vital interactions to continue— and new ones to form. We have been able to stay together and stay in touch – even while we have had to stay at home.

Many survivors tried the Online Community for the first time while others visited more frequently, finding a reliable source of comfort and understanding with our TAPS family. With gratitude, we draw strength from each other in the face of challenges, we support one another as we navigate each day, and we celebrate the love, companionship and hope we have been fortunate enough to find with our fellow survivors.

Warmth–Comfort–Home. That is your TAPS family. You are never alone. Staying connected, sharing virtual hugs. Join us online anytime at taps.org/onlinecommunity ★

“I joined my first chat by accident. I clicked on the icon, thinking it would just bring me to information and got a surprise when I entered a live chat! I would have left right away, but before I could, someone greeted me by name. The next thing I knew, I had been welcomed by name by everyone! I didn't stay long the first night; just long enough to introduce myself and share I'd lost my brother to suicide. The next morning, I found an email waiting from one of the chat moderators, telling me she was glad I had stopped by and looked forward to hearing more about my brother Kenny and she hoped to see me soon. I was still very new in my grief at the time, and desperately looking for connections to help me stop feeling so isolated and alone. I returned to the chat the next week and started joining in every week. Over time, this group became some of my closest friends. I love knowing that every Tuesday night, I have this break from life where I can be with my TAPS family who just gets how I feel and lets me talk whenever I need to.”

Rachel Eiting

*Surviving Sister of Gunnery Sgt. Kenneth Eiting,
U.S. Marine Corps*

“One night, I pushed myself to get on the TAPS text chat. In the midst of grief, it was very overwhelming at first, but everyone on the chat welcomed me wholeheartedly. Gradually, it began to feel just like conversations with friends sitting around my dining room table sipping coffee. I have met some of my fellow chatters at seminars. It is like meeting up with old friends. The chats keep me going, get me through, lift me up, and reassure me that I am not alone.”

Sandra Stone

*Surviving Mother of Staff Sgt.
Joshua Stone, U.S. Marine Corps*

IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

TAPS ONLINE COMMUNITY IS STEADFAST

After I lost my son, Lance Cpl. Carl Burgdorf, I started rebuilding my life.

It was important for me to be around other people, so I went back to work. I went to the gym four or five days a week to lift weights and work out my frustrations. I had dinner with friends twice a week in their homes. On Saturdays, I was frequently at a local community center. I stopped for coffee at a local Starbucks on Sunday mornings before church; I knew the names of all of the baristas. Sundays after church, you could usually find me at a local yarn store knitting.

In November, I reached out to TAPS and was matched with a Peer Mentor. She helped me get through the rough days, the holidays and birthdays that break your heart again. After the first of the year, she asked if I had attended any of the online chats and suggested I look into them.

In January, I participated in the women's video chat and was encouraged to go to the regional seminar in Dallas, Texas. I then began to participate in the chat for survivors of suicide loss. It helped so much to be able to talk to other people who understood what it was to lose a child or someone you love to suicide.

UPSIDE DOWN – AGAIN

Then my world turned upside down again with the spread of the coronavirus. Suddenly all of the carefully curated parts of my life that made me feel normal were gone. Restaurants were closed, takeout only. I started working from home, walking across the living room was my new commute. The gym was closed, no more weight-lifting for me. I couldn't have dinner with friends; couldn't risk being around people I didn't live with. The community center was closed, and my local yarn shop closed for the duration. The only things that were still familiar were my weekly phone call with my Peer Mentor and TAPS chats.

TAPS Online Community chats became the primary way I had to connect with other people, to have conversations, to hear voices and see faces. I'm so grateful that there is always someone on the chat who is willing to talk about food or the weather or anything but the virus. TAPS chats are different from social media because everyone on the chat has lost someone precious to them, someone they loved deeply. They understand the catch in your voice, the lump in your throat, the tears in the corner of your eye.

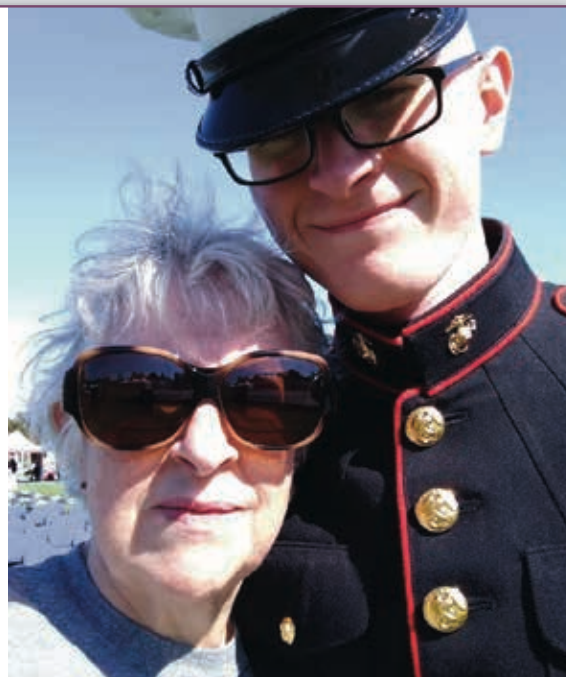
'SO GLAD TAPS HAS BEEN HERE'

At the end of March, I lost my father-in-law. He was 84 and his body just gave out. I couldn't be there when he passed, it just wasn't wise for me to travel in these uncertain times. But I was on a TAPS chat that night to be with my TAPS family. I shared a picture of him. We celebrated a man who had served in the Navy during the Korean War; a man whose son had served in the Air Force and who had three grandsons, including my son, who also served in the military.

It probably sounds a little trite to say that I wouldn't be coping with our new normal as well as I am without TAPS, but it's true. I'm so glad TAPS has been here for me. ★

Lydia Burgdorf

Surviving Mother of Lance Cpl. Carl Thomas Burgdorf, U.S. Marines



Lydia and her son Carl
in Monterey, California (May 2019)

TAPS NEWS

TAPS COVID-19 Response

As stay-at-home mandates were issued, TAPS responded to support the military survivor community in navigating the unprecedented time. Since its inception, TAPS has always been at the forefront of adapting, enhancing and developing programs and services to meet the needs of all who are grieving the loss of a military loved one.

THROUGH WELL-ESTABLISHED DELIVERY METHODS AND BENCHMARKED PROGRAMMING, TAPS WAS ABLE TO EASILY MEET THE CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY THE PANDEMIC.

- ★ **TAPS Care Groups** and **TAPS Togethers** transitioned to online format.
- ★ **TAPS Online Community** continued to offer video—and text—based chats and additional sessions added for survivors to stay connected and find support.
- ★ **TAPS Talks Series:** Virtual gatherings bringing connection and creating a safe space for care and informal learning from expert presenters. Series format offers a brief presentation followed by a moderated Q&A session. Past sessions are archived at: taps.org/institute
- ★ **TAPS Daily:** A daily source of latest news, resources and thought pieces from across the military and veteran community during the COVID-19 response. Learn More: taps.org/covid/taps-daily
- ★ **TAPS Military Survivor Helpline** continued to be answered live, 24/7/365, as it has been since 1994.
- ★ **Resources:** On May 14, TAPS made available to the American people nearly 30 years of resources, information and hopeful healing. Tips, resources and information are available on the TAPS website: taps.org/covid/together for all those affected by the coronavirus.

SURVIVOR RESPONSE TO TAPS COVID-19 SUPPORT

“Your call undoubtedly made my day, and if I’m being honest it made my week. I’ve been feeling off for the last week, going through the emotions of sadness, anxiety, anger, frustration and everything in between. It seems your call came at the most perfect time, just when I needed it.”

“I love the information shared and I had no idea how much stress could impact the body. It helps immensely to see how these relaxation techniques actually work because

Tara actually had us do them together! So helpful!” (TAPS Talk: Self Care Tools)

“I want to thank you and the TAPS staff for all the support for grieving military families. Your organization is much needed for us to come together, heal, talk, and become stronger after our loss.”

“Being very new in my grief, I am thankful for my Peer Mentor. We check in with each other twice a week. It is so comforting to know I can reach out and connect with

someone who has experienced loss like this. The support is very healing. Thank you!” (TAPS Talk: The Power of Peer Mentoring)

“My family is so very appreciative of the help and comfort we have received from TAPS and from your personal calls, texts, and emails. We can’t thank you enough.”

“Every note, every call, every voicemail, every single bit of outreach from TAPS gives me a small break in the day to catch my breath and lighten the load.”

Tips to keep in mind...

♥ FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ARE OUR BEDROCK.

We draw strength from others and mutually lift one another up. The military taught us that to survive we have to get comfortable embracing a new family, over and over. Each of us is called to create for ourselves the family and community we need and be available for one another. We are capable of building strong communities, like the TAPS family.

♥ RESILIENCE IS WITHIN US.

We shall endure because we have endured. Military life has shown us that we can rise to new challenges. Moving, changing schools, coping with deployments, being far away from family, and a myriad of other challenges present opportunities to overcome. We are capable of great resilience.

♥ WE EMBRACE PERSEVERANCE.

Grief is a marathon, not a sprint. We pace ourselves because we know the journey is long. We have found the water stations and other resources along our path that refresh us and we push on. We persevere and run our race in order to be the living legacy of our loved ones who have passed.

♥ WE UNDERSTAND LOSS.

The great C.S. Lewis said, "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear." The military has taught us to make friends with fear and uncomfortable situations, to move toward the unknown until it is known. We move toward the grief - to befriend it, to make it known, and bring healing - together.

♥ WE ARE THANKFUL FOR THE LITTLE WHILE.

The military life has taught us to appreciate every moment - not knowing when we will be called to endure long deployments or loss. We strive to cultivate a heart of gratitude for the time we have together. It will never be enough, but we are thankful for the little while. ★

"With a focus on military and veteran loss, TAPS has partnered with national and international experts and organizations to focus on these global issues. As our nation addresses this COVID-19 pandemic, TAPS is once again sharing best practices and is directly assisting the American public in this unprecedented time of isolation, fear and loss."

~ Bonnie Carroll, TAPS Founder and President



♥ FOR MORE INFORMATION: taps.org/covid

SIDE BY SIDE

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN OF GRIEF

Rachel Hunsell | TAPS Expeditions Coordinator
Surviving Sister of Lance Cpl. J. Kyle Price, U.S. Marine Corps



These past few months, we've been called to focus on what's really important. We've been physically distancing from our friends, loved ones and strangers to protect them and ourselves. We've strategized our outings for basic needs like groceries, healthcare, fresh air and sanity. Our 2020 Mount Kilimanjaro Expedition team returned home from the rooftop of Africa, the peak of the mountain, to the valley our nation and world had begun to collectively face.

Not every survivor will find themselves on Mount Kilimanjaro or trekking any physical mountain on the planet, but every single one of us knows intimately well the mountain we call grief. We invite you to walk alongside us and find yourself in the climb, as a few members of the 2020 Kilimanjaro Expedition team share their stories and lessons from the mountain we climbed together and the journey of their grief.

WHAT LEE WOULD WANT'

I wanted to do something big for my son and, in some ways, for myself. For many years, one of my dreams was to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, and when I got word I was accepted to the 2020 TAPS Expedition I was ecstatic, and then dedicated my life to being in the best possible physical shape for the climb. Success for me would be achieved through not only physical conditioning, but mental and spiritual. Mind, Body and Spirit.

It was not easy in many ways to do this Expedition, but I felt in my heart and soul that this is what Lee would want for me and nothing else mattered. Many times before, during and after the Expedition, I received confirmation of that truth. I know Lee was looking down with a big smile. I am and always will be proud of him and miss him everyday.

While I have so many great stories and memories of this Expedition, I will always remember my fellow survivors, the "Iron Ladies" I call them. They're amazing survivors of a tremendous tragedy in this life, and they navigate this rough terrain everyday with courage and hope. Courage isn't always found on the battlefield.

TAPS helped me to understand many aspects of the grieving process. Two have stood out for me as a father - 1. Do what you need to do to help heal, not what

somebody else thinks you should do. 2. Never let anybody tell you how long you should grieve and heal...take as long as you need, there is no time limit.

Bill Cole
*Surviving Father of Sgt. Lee Cole,
U.S. Army National Guard*

'IT IS OK TO SMILE AND LAUGH'

I learned that we are all so incredibly strong. We shared, cried, hugged, sweat, huddled for warmth, bared down for that last bit of air and strength to summit a mountain, but most importantly, we laughed together. We laughed amid our sadness — something that our past selves never thought would be possible. There is not a minute that goes by that we do not think of our loved ones that we lost, but it is OK to laugh and smile.

It was not climbing the tallest mountain in Africa or continuing to hang around each other after not showering after a week (ew!), that made anyone strong. Honoring our loved ones in whatever way we deemed fit, sharing their stories and loving each other through the good and the bad, that is the real strength and every single one of my Kilimanjaro teammates, now friends, possess.

Robin Hill
*Surviving Sister of Capt. Russell Hill,
U.S. Marine Corps*



BLENDING THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Angry, sad and not the person I was, I so badly wanted to feel normal but struggled with my thoughts and my sense of belonging. I was weak and alone. I had been on the grief trek for a while and knew Jake's 10-year KIA anniversary needed to be grand. Climbing Kilimanjaro with TAPS Expeditions was just the right journey to take.

The chaotic routine of climbing a mountain became my new normal. The days were filled with laughs, songs and stories of the ones we love, and focusing on our own personal basic survival. Breathe, drink, eat and stay warm.

A daily check-in gave us an intimate view of each other's truths so we became inclined to help one another succeed even though our objectives of why we wanted to reach the summit of Kilimanjaro may have been different.

Popular advice says, "Don't live in the past," but the past is where Jake lives so I want and need to go back there to be with him. The TAPS Kilimanjaro Expedition gave me the opportunity to blend the past and the present in a safe place. I was able to honor Jake and his 10-year KIA anniversary by bringing the past front and center, just like the next step on a climb where you need to keep your head down and in front as you look for the next right move. This journey gave me amazing memories with an authentic smile and a new family to belong to so I don't feel so alone. I walked off the mountain feeling stronger with a better sense of who I am, and I am now a mountaineer who summited Kilimanjaro!

Krista Meinert

*Surviving Mother of Lance Cpl. Jake Meinert,
U.S. Marine Corps*

WHILE A PANDEMIC BREWED BELOW

This past fall, I passed the mark in time where my first husband has now been gone longer than we were together, and while I can honestly say that I do not think of him every day, the indelible mark he left on my heart remains. Although I have always despised the phrase "move on," I have definitely continued to move forward with my life — remarrying, separating from the Navy, planning for

continued...





the future. The present and the future both seem to be a lifetime away from what I was living a decade ago. I chose to go on the TAPS Expeditions trip to Mount Kilimanjaro more for myself than for him, an acknowledgment of my journey.

Climbing Kilimanjaro was the most difficult physical task I have ever asked of my body. The scenery that surrounded us was otherworldly: seven different climate zones in six days. The beauty, often not conventional, is hard to describe. The pace of the climb was often painfully slow but necessary to conserve energy; the Swahili phrase is “pole pole,” which means “slowly, slowly.” And truly that is what happened on the mountain: Life slowed down. Step after step, rest break, food break, bathroom break, camp, dinner, and sleep. Pressure breathing became a way of life. The world, however, continued to turn. We lived a week in simplified existence on a mountain in the middle of Africa while a global pandemic was brewing down below. And while it seems cliché to relate the climbing of a mountain to a journey through grief, the comparison continues to be true. Each member of our Expedition team had a different experience on the mountain, and each one of us has had a different journey through our grief. I am thankful that I was able to make this comparison firsthand. The struggles that I endured during the climb increased my gratitude to be there exponentially.

By the end of the trip, Tanzania’s wonderful people, Mount Kilimanjaro and my fellow survivors had taken up residence in my soul.

Lindsey Crain
*Surviving spouse of Lt. John Cedric
“Ceddie” Rath, U.S. Navy*

‘NO MATCH FOR WHAT WE HAD SURVIVED’

Over the months and years since the death of my husband, people have told me how strong I have been through everything, but I’ve never felt strong. For a long time I’ve felt adrift, not being able to see past my own pain. I felt like I was one step away from falling apart, one step away from failing my kids, one step away from giving up. Many times I did want to just give up; I didn’t feel this strength everyone kept talking about.

Headed to the summit, a guide pointed to my TAPS pin with my handsome husband’s picture and it reminded me why I was doing this. For the rest of the trip I kept telling myself, “I’m doing this for you, for our family. If losing you (my husband, Will), didn’t break me, this won’t either. If I didn’t quit then, I sure as hell won’t quit now!”

What I realized on that mountain is that I (we) had already experienced the most difficult thing in our lives, so climbing to

TAPS Expeditions are outdoor therapeutic adventures that draw survivors together in the healing powers of the wilderness, require participants to step out of their comfort zones, and foster growth in mind, body and spirit. Expeditions require dedication, preparation and a willingness to learn, trust and grow. Leading up to the expedition, survivors form a team bond and gain familiarity with each other through monthly team meetings. These teams that transform into a family are a source of encouragement during training, on the Expedition, and long after. For more information, contact Rachel at expeditions@taps.org.

the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, though no easy feat, would be no match for what we had already survived. This new realization will forever remain in my head and my heart.

There are no words to describe the feeling of reaching the “Rooftop of Africa,” just like there are no words to describe the pain of losing one of the people you love most in the world, but I do know that the tears shed at the summit felt beautiful and peaceful, unlike the tears I have been shedding the last two years. I still don’t feel like the strong woman others say I am, but now I know and believe in my heart that I’m a fighter, I’m a survivor and I’ll never quit.

Rosselyn Kapun
*Surviving spouse of Chief Petty Officer
William Kapun, U.S. Navy*

There is a weaving of intentions that only a collective challenge can bring together. These stories are but a glimpse into the resilience of survivors choosing to walk bravely, step by step, into life’s greatest challenges. Today we find ourselves looking at our fellow survivors, our fellow climbers on the mountain of life, and each experience is uniquely different, yet we feel bound together. And, after my second journey to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, as I stood side by side with my fellow survivors and climbers each of us carrying our own stories, meditations and intentions, I could feel the one thing that bound us all together: love.

It is the love that binds us, and it’s the love that will carry us on. ★

Like a Leaf on the Water

Edward Dixon | Surviving Father of Army SSG Edward F. Dixon, III & Misty D. Dixon

Like most individuals, I was like a leaf drifting on the surface of the stream of life – just going where the wind and the current took me. All was good for the most part. I felt the warmth of the sun. I felt the breeze blow by me and heard the songs of nature.

I did what I needed to do.

I did not resist.

I just went along with the flow of life and for the most part I was happy.

Then came a moment that I hoped and prayed would never happen and I found myself caught up in the vortex of a whirlpool. I was dragged down below the surface and there I found myself in darkness – drifting and bouncing off and being dragged along the bottom of the stream of life. Always moving as if I did not have the ability to control where I was going and feeling like I would never see the light of the surface again. I felt like this was going to be my life from now on and happiness would never enter my life again.

That is when I noticed there was a bright glow just ahead of me in the darkness. As the current moved me closer to the glow, I found that it was a beam of light that had penetrated the darkness and it was beautiful. It appeared to have arms and it was reaching down to me. Instead of reaching for it, I just lowered my eyes and drifted past it. I felt at that time I did not deserve to feel the warmth of the light again.

I do not know just how long it was before I saw the glow and then the beam of light once more. This time it was not only reaching out for me, it called out to me to grab hold of it.

This time I extended my arms and grabbed a hold of it and before I knew it, I was once more on the surface. I once more felt the warmth of the sun, felt the breeze blow by me and heard the cheerful song of nature.

I did not know it at that time. I had the ability to pull myself out of the darkness and into the light at any time I wanted to. This ability was kept a secret from me by the darkness I was in.

We need to always remember.

No matter how dark your life may feel, the light that can bring happiness back into your life is there and all you have to do is reach out and grab it!

Let us honor our child or other family member who sacrificed their lives defending this great nation.

We need to live our lives to its fullest.

We need to be thanking them every day for that sacrifice by calling out their names.

For our heroes will never be forgotten

As long as someone says their name.



A LEGACY OF SERVICE - **A MISSION OF HONOR**

Mona Gunn | National President, American Gold Star Mothers, Inc.
Surviving Mother of SMSN Cherone Gunn, U.S. Navy
Surviving Spouse of Lou Gunn, U.S. Navy, Veteran

There is no loss like that of a child whose life was cut short.

My son Cherone's death was devastating to our family. He chose to follow in his dad's footsteps and join the U.S. Navy. Immediately following his death in the attack on the USS Cole, there was nothing but pain in our hearts. The only thing that sustained us at that time was our family and friends as well as all the memories of his 22 years with us. We are not supposed to outlive our children and the death of a child creates a huge hole in the family.

When the USS Cole was attacked on October 12, 2000, our country was not at war. It was a surprise attack and it wasn't really connected to terrorism. Then almost one year later, thousands of Americans were feeling like we were when those planes were hijacked, and our country was attacked in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. We re-lived October 12, 2000, on September 11, 2001.

Four years after Cherone's death I heard about American Gold Star Mothers. Joining them brought a level of comfort because I saw that there were other mothers who knew how the USS Cole moms were feeling. We all suffered through the death of our children while serving in the military. My husband worked as a readjustment counselor at the Veterans Affairs Vet Centers when Cherone was killed and he was sustained by supporting the 16 families. He stood out as the spokesperson whenever anything about the USS Cole was in the news and he was always there to speak up for what



happened to those 17 sailors asking that there be justice for the loss of their lives.

I often say that the Lord prepared me for the death of my husband by taking back my child first. Lou was diagnosed with lung cancer in September 2015 and with my faith and hope, I expected him to beat that disease like so many others. Unfortunately, within five months, he was gone. God knew that the month of February changed for us after October 2000 because Cherone was born on Valentine's Day. I guess He said, "I may as well take your husband this month." My husband joined our son on February 21, 2016.

UNITED IN SERVICE

Both my husband and I knew we had to learn how to move forward and honor our son's service. My husband served 21 years in the military and decided to honor our son by becoming an advocate for his fellow veterans as a member of the American Legion and Disabled American Veterans. I chose to mirror his service when I initiated chartering a chapter of American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. (AGSM) in the Hampton Roads area.

In June 2019, I accepted the honor of being named National President of American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. The biggest driving force behind my advocacy work has been educating the general public about the meaning of Gold Star. Even though my father was a WWII disabled veteran and my uncle had a son who died while he was in the U.S. Marine Corps, my family knew nothing about Gold Star and my uncle was a Gold Star Dad.

I also often say not every service member who dies on active duty has a spouse or a child, but they all have a mother and father. American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. was founded by a mother in 1928 who said, "Self-contained grief is self-destructive." It is a journey none of us wanted. It is important to me that everyone understands that this is an organization of mothers, fathers, siblings, and grandparents who keep alive the memory of their loved one by doing for others in their communities. Many of our members volunteer in their local VA Medical Centers where our organization

has input on decisions that impact veterans. This is what our founder did 92 years ago and her legacy continues.

UNITED IN SPIRIT

My son was one of 17 sailors killed, so my husband and I immediately had a connection with 16 other families. Twenty years later we are still connected and communicate with each other as families on a regular basis. We have a bond like no other because we all felt the deep hurt of losing a son, daughter, spouse, father, mother, and sibling. Many of us return each year to the Remembrance Ceremony to hear the names read and the bell rang for each sailor. Connecting with others who are going through a military loss, enables you to always have someone who understands how you are feeling. No one knows how you feel with that void or hole in your heart like another who has that same hole in their heart. You connect immediately with a hug, clasped hand, linked arm, and tears from the same kind of hurt. You know you are not alone.

UNITED IN PURPOSE

There are so many organizations performing outreach to military survivors and they may all have different missions. Collaboration among these organizations is key to bringing awareness and delivery of support. Each person has unique needs so one organization may be what they need when they are new on the journey and trying to just get through each hour of the day. Other organizations may be what they need when they are further along on their journey. Therefore, the support organizations must be ready to meet the survivors where their needs are the greatest. Our organization has been honored to participate at TAPS seminars in the Resource Village and AGSM and TAPS are also part of a coalition consisting of seven nonprofit organizations that support survivors.

Organizations like American Gold Star Mothers and TAPS carry forward the important message that we are unique in our missions yet we serve the same group of people – military survivors. When we collaborate and support each other, whatever military survivors need to sustain themselves can be fulfilled. This journey we are on has its high points and low points but with the support of others, we learn that we can move forward. The goal of moving

on is never to get over it but learning how to move forward with support when needed, honoring the service and sacrifice of our military heroes. ★



TAPS MEMORY

I was notified of a team4taps event to attend the Saints vs. Redskins game at FedEx Field. We invited Cherone's Godparents because my husband's long-term friend was a Redskins fan. It was September 2015 when my husband was diagnosed with lung cancer and he had his first chemo treatment the week before we attended the Salute to Service game on November 15. He was very weak and wasn't up to a lot of walking but made it out to the field for the pregame where Lee Greenwood sang, "Proud to Be an American." After the USS Cole attack, I was so broken, I could not listen to that song and would turn off the radio when I heard it being played. However, I felt proud to be standing on the field with the other 49 families surrounded by our close friends and I made it through without a teardrop. Fifteen years later - progress was being made on my grief journey.

Hope Is The Companion

That Helps Us Believe in Tomorrow

Renee Nickell | Surviving Sister of Maj. Samuel Griffith, U.S. Marine Corps

I was about seven days into our state's stay-at-home orders for COVID-19, when I awoke from a night's dream. It went something like this: It was dusk at the high school my brother and I attended. The parking lot was packed with cars. My parents and I had wondered where my brother, Sam, had gone. It's one of those weird dreams where you are your current age in the dream, but you are also 16 again. I began searching for cars until I stumbled upon his. He wasn't there. I pulled out my phone to text him and as I scrolled through my texts, I realized there were no recent texts from him. That's weird.

I then went into my contacts and scrolled. There was no Sam. Maybe it's under another name. Sammy, brother, bro. Nothing. The beat of my heart was on time like a drum, faster and faster. Where was my brother? I became frantic, grabbing random strangers' arms, turning them toward me. They could probably feel my breath in their face as I asked, "Do I have a brother? Do you know what his name is?" I was confused as to why my brother was nowhere to be found, no evidence of him in my contacts and I even doubted he had even existed. It had turned from dusk to complete darkness as every car was leaving until the only car left was his. And I was standing there — alone.

I understand it is no coincidence I had a dream like this during this time of isolation when feeling alone is an understatement.

I hadn't felt that alone since the first two years after his death. We are approaching nine years — how can that be? How can nine years pass that quickly and yet I can still hear the sound of his laugh or his reaction when I tell him something stupid? His little chuckle when he found

Let the love of those we miss be our guide through the troubled waters of life, but also our inspiration that we can and will, get through this life. Together.

Sam on deployment in Iraq, 2009



something I said to be amusing, the lift of one eyebrow when I would wonder what he was thinking, or the stern fatherly voice when I knew I had messed up. Where was that brother?

As I sat quietly with my morning coffee, my heart suddenly sank as I began to think of all the military families who are at home — alone. Alone with their thoughts, their memories, the haunting sound of their loved one's laughter. I could feel the worry grow inside me for those who are fearful of forgetting. I remember those days, when that was me feeling hopeless in despair and all alone. I thought of the parents who couldn't see their grandchildren or rely on any adult children to comfort them, or the spouse suddenly thrown into schooling children at home, with no one to lean on. The child, afraid perhaps, of losing another parent. A world forced into isolation with so many already dealing with depression and anxiety. Who will be there for them?

Perhaps old photo albums were opened, attics sorted, or high school memorabilia cradled and wet with tears. Maybe suppressed grief began to surface in the loneliness.

I could identify with the sibling. The sibling that hasn't just felt quarantined during a pandemic. But the sibling that has felt the isolation of feeling alone in their grief far longer. The sibling that withdraws a bit more each time someone asks them how their parents or the spouse is doing, not even thinking to ask how they are. Bypassed as if their grief was over as quickly as the burial.

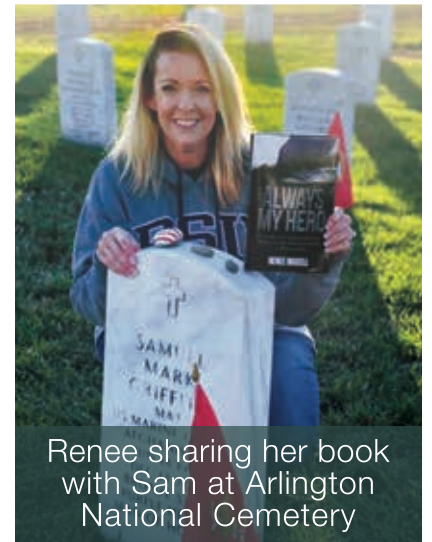
About three years after Sam had been killed, I started writing a book about our life together. I deleted every word. I wasn't ready. I had far too much I still needed to face. At the six-year mark, I started again. This time, I had walked through a tremendous amount of healing and I wanted a book that would tell certain



Renee and her brother Sam in 2009



Sam and Renee dressed for Easter, 1980



Renee sharing her book with Sam at Arlington National Cemetery

stories, but especially to tell the sibling story: the story of sibling love, unwavering loyalty, the closest friend one will ever have. I wanted other siblings to know they aren't alone. I wanted to show the parents and spouses what our grief looks like, to bring them a level of understanding. I wanted to show how families aren't perfect and we are all just trying to make it. I wanted people to laugh until they cried because that's what Sam would have wanted. I wanted to show civilians the ugly and raw parts of being a survivor and how when a hero dies, there is much collateral damage, some that can't and never will be repaired.

I wanted to display grace, and love, and forgiveness toward the deepest wounds. Most importantly, I wanted to give others hope. Even in the midst of the deepest and darkest isolation, hope is the spark that can get us through anything.

Hope was the friend that saw me in my darkest time of depression. Hope was the woman who helped me finish the Marine Corps 10K the year after Sam was killed, when I had fallen one mile in – and she encouraged me the entire way to the finish line, sacrificing her placement in the race. Hope was the horse that helped me through the demons of my past and my crushing anxiety. Hope was the pastor

who helped me get to Dover to retrieve Sam's remains, when we couldn't afford it. Hope was the TAPS magazine in the mail or the TAPS Resource Kit I had thrown into a corner of my closet right after Sam was killed, finding it at just the right moment.

Hope is the middle name I gave my sweet baby girl, born 10 days before Sam's birthday, four years after his death, and reminded me it was okay to live again.

"I just held my baby girl in my arms, ever so thankful to God for guiding me, speaking to me, and delivering me ... in more ways than one. I felt Sam there with me in my heart, cheering me on. I knew he was proud of me too, for taking an impossible step forward. Something bigger than myself happened that day. It was time for me to start believing for impossible things again."

— excerpt from *"Always My Hero"*

I reflect back on those times I felt so isolated in my pain, when I felt Sam's loss over and over, like the contractions of childbirth, barely being able to catch my breath in between. In a time when our country is in recovery mode and most likely, your heart is too, let us reflect on those things or people, or our faith, that

continue to guide us and give us hope. Hope to get through the day, the night, the week. Hope to believe again for greater things — for the impossible. Let the love of those we miss be our guide through the troubled waters of life, but also our inspiration that we can and will, get through this life. Together. ★

Renee Nickell, author and Gold Star sibling to Maj. Samuel Griffith, USMC, penned her first memoir, *"Always My Hero: The Road to Hope & Healing Following My Brother's Death in Afghanistan,"* after her brother was killed in action in 2011. Nickell's mission is to increase awareness of the difficulties military families face, so that we can help them endure, recover and heal. Renee is a devoted military wife and mother of four. Her current projects include writing the screenplay to *"Always My Hero."*

2020 Virtual National Military Survivor Seminar and Family Program

Love Lives On



Thank you!

for welcoming your
TAPS Family into your own homes
this Memorial Day weekend for the
Virtual National Military Survivor Seminar



Sharing photos and moments of hope. Offering smiles and encouragement. Finding vital information and resources. Connecting, listening, learning, growing. These are hallmarks of every TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and this year was no different. Well, a little different.

Due to COVID-19, TAPS adapted our annual gathering to a virtual format. Each day offered workshops, sharing groups and special programming for the entire family. From our homes we did what we always do – we shared, we listened, we found community and we found strength. We welcomed first time attendees and we re-connected with old friends. We gathered around a virtual campfire, we smiled and connected our hearts.

We came together as a family. We took from the experience hope and inspiration for the journey. We continue together, we honor those who have given their all and we know that Love Lives On.

TUESDAY, MAY 19

Goals, Grief and How Things Change
~ Renée Monczynski

"Really appreciate how well you broke down the components of goals"

Rooted in Hope; Connected in Love
~ Tina Barrett & Erin Jacobson

"Thank you so much for a very helpful and encouraging session!"

Care Groups

"The input from the women who have been widowed much longer than I gave me hope."

"This is my first year for Nationals and I have been able to connect with some amazing siblings!"

FRIDAY, MAY 22

When to Lead and How to Follow in Your Grief Journey
~ Gabriel Rao & Rachel Hunsell

"I learned a lot about myself in this session. Thank you all. Much LOVE and HUGS!"

Moving Forward with a Broken Heart
~ Dr. Eileen O'Grady

"Dr. O'Grady had me craving her knowledge so much, I did not want it to end. Thank you so very much for all the resources!"

Care Group

"It was healing to hear the stories from others and about their journey!"

Virtual Family Campfire, S'mores and Stories
~ Tony Paz & Kerry Garland

"Superb! This is the best mood our family has been in all week."

"It was so much fun and a much-needed connection for the whole family."

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20

Integration and Inspiration
~ Erin Jacobson & Emily Muñoz

"Truly spectacular, even virtually. The Women's Empowerment team are incredible lighthouses! Shine on!"

The Uniqueness of Your Grief
~ Dr. Ken Doka

"I saw myself in so many different circumstances that were brought up. Questions and answers were helpful."

Care Group

"Loved the group interaction and conversation. I felt like it was very easy to connect to so many new people I didn't know yet."

SATURDAY, MAY 23

Opening Session
~ Bonnie Carroll, Dr. Alan Wolfelt, General (Ret) Martin Dempsey, & Voices of Service (Hosted by Kyra Phillips)

"Enjoyed hearing from all and listening to Gen. Dempsey sing the Unicorn song!"

Out From the Shadows, My Healing Journey
~ Bob Delaney

"This is why I attend TAPS seminars. To become a better listener from these amazing presenters!"

Traumatic Loss: Understanding & Healing
~ Kim Ruocco & Dr. Carla Stumpf-Patton

"Kim and Carla always give me something new to think on, to take with me until the next time...to use as I stroll forward"

Love After Loss
~ Dr. Justin Yopp & Dr. Denise Rollins

"It really spoke to my heart."

Mental Resilience and the Courage to Be Where You Are
~ William Wagasy

"The advice was concrete, practical, and DO-able!"

THURSDAY, MAY 21

Grief After a Death From Illness
~ Dr. William Hoy

"The questions at the end of the session were very much questions I needed answers to. Great job!"

"I appreciated how he shared the importance of me and who I was before the death..."

Managing Day-to-Day Finances During the Coronavirus Crisis
~ Joseph Silva

"Great suggestions."

Care Group

"I feel so blessed and grateful to have my TAPS Family."

SUNDAY, MAY 24

FAMILY PROGRAMMING Parenting Panel
~ Dr. Frank Campbell & Dr. Judy Mathewson

"Thank you for the needed validation for parenting our littles, middles, and teens."

FAMILY PROJECT The Legacy of Us
~ Renée Monczynski & Kimberly Taylor

"My senior was so excited to check in with all of his TAPS Mentors and friends all across the United States!"

VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE Creating A Game Plan: We're All In This Together
~ Coach Jenkins & Cody Zeller

"The words from these friends in the basketball world were so good, kind, healing. They helped make survivors feel seen and validated."

"I'm loving every moment with you. I have cried and laughed. It's nice to know WE'RE NOT ALONE!" ★

WHERE THE MUSIC BEGAN



The Inspiring Stories Behind Love Lives On

"Love Lives On" is an album dedicated to the men and women who served and died in defense of America's freedom. The songs included in this powerful collection share an honest message of courage, perseverance, and love. They are a vivid reminder of the guardians of our freedom and a reminder that the family also serves. Ten stories, ten families. Voices united.

**WE ARE PROUD TO
SHARE THE LIVES – THE INSPIRATION
BEHIND EACH SONG.**

LOVE LIVES ON

*In loving memory of Brig. Gen.
Thomas Carroll, U.S. Army*

Brig. Gen. Thomas C. Carroll, a lifelong Alaskan and commander of the Alaska Army National Guard, lost his life in 1992 at age 44 when his National Guard plane crashed on the Chilkat Peninsula with seven other soldiers on board. He left behind his wife, Bonnie, who found no support to help address her heart-wrenching grief and struggled to help the other families who lost their military heroes in that crash.

How Tom lived—and died—changed Bonnie forever. How she responded would change the lives of hundreds of thousands of others.

Bonnie founded the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) so no one would ever walk alone after the death of a military loved one—to make sure that, as the words on Tom's headstone say, Love Lives On.

CLIMB TO GLORY

*In loving memory of
Sgt. Eddie Hernandez, U.S. Army*

Capt. John Rhoten is an intelligence officer in the U.S. Army who deployed twice to Iraq and twice to Afghanistan. Since 2011, John has volunteered as a Military Mentor in TAPS Good Grief Camp, touching the lives of many children who have lost a military loved one. He serves to honor his fellow soldiers who did not return from battle. John said, "As an infantryman, you live on the edge, never knowing how far you will go in life because you signed up to lay your life on the line for your country and for your brothers."

John dedicated this song to his friend, Sgt. Edelman (Eddie) Hernandez, who lost his life in Afghanistan in 2007 while defending a bridge to allow the rest of his company to get safely across.

YOU CARRY ME TOO

*In loving memory of
Lt. Florence Choe, U.S. Navy*

Lt. Florence Bacong Choe, 35, was killed in 2009 in northern Afghanistan when an insurgent, posing as an Afghan soldier, opened fire as Lt. Choe jogged along the perimeter fence of the command post where she was serving as a medical administration and logistics mentor to the Afghan National Army. She had volunteered for the assignment. Her husband, Jay, a Navy physician, was in San Diego with their daughter, Kristin, when he received the news.

"That was the darkest time of my life," Cmdr. Choe recalls. "My daughter who was at the tender age of 3 at the time, was my savior and my light. Kristin gave me the strength to carry on." Today, as Jay and Kristin jog together in their neighborhood in San Diego, he marvels at how much Kristin is like Florence, despite her limited memories of her mother.



TAPS FAMILIES IN NASHVILLE

PRESS ON PRESTON

*In loving memory of
Pfc. Preston Brown, U.S. Army*

Pfc. Preston Brown loved basketball. While deployed to Iraq in 2001, he would spend his extra time playing the sport he loved. In January 2012, he had been home in El Paso, Texas for a few weeks when he skipped his usual basketball game to check on two friends he was concerned about. Preston was killed by a stray bullet when he and his friends were caught in the crossfire of a gunfight that erupted in a parking lot.

Others in his unit recalled, "When you get off the plane, you breathe a sigh of relief that you brought all your soldiers home safe. Then to lose one of them while on block leave, it's one of the worst feelings ever." Following Preston's death, five lives were changed when the family donated one of his lungs, his liver, kidneys, and heart to critically ill strangers. In 2014, his family had the pleasure of meeting Preston's heart recipient — forever bonded by their connection to Preston.

*"These are
stories of
American heroes."*

*~ DEAN SAMS,
SONGWRITER*

ISN'T IT AMAZING

*In loving memory of
Maj. Ian Brinkley, U.S. Marine Corps*

Ian C. Brinkley, a Marine aviator who had graduated top in his class in flight training, died of cancer in 2016 at the age of 42.

Moto, his call sign — also known as Master of the Obvious, earned a full-ride athletic/academic scholarship to attend Catawba College in Salisbury, North Carolina. He was commissioned as an officer in the Marine Corps in 1997 and reported to Pensacola, Florida, where he earned his Naval Aviator wings. He served several tours in Afghanistan and Iraq and as an instructor pilot.

Moto's service to our country was commended many times over. He is survived by his widow, Dawn Brinkley, and their two sons, Marcus and Gavin.

K9 BROTHER

*In loving memory of
Sgt. Joshua Ashley, U.S. Marine Corps*

Sgt. Joshua Ashley has been described as a "lion of a man, brother soldier, and a dog's best friend." When he died in 2012, he wasn't on the front lines in Afghanistan; he was in front of the front lines with his German shepherd, Sirius, clearing improvised explosive devices (IEDs) ahead of his special operations unit.

Josh joined the Marines immediately after high school and became a military police officer and later a K9 handler. Josh was killed by an IED, saving many others, including Sirius.

Recognized posthumously for his bravery and heroism, Josh was awarded a number of commendations including the Bronze Star. He is survived by his parents, Tammie and Jon, brothers, Jon and Jordan, and his K9 partner, Sirius, who was adopted by his family and lives in California. "For me, being able to adopt Sirius is like having Josh with me," Tammie Ashley said.

PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW

*In loving memory of
Spc. Wyatt Martin, U.S. Army*

Spc. Wyatt Martin was a combat engineer who cleared the routes so his fellow soldiers would have safe passage. He joined the military in 2012 because his life and his family were so perfect that he had to give back.

Wyatt, a native of Mesa, Arizona, deployed to Afghanistan with the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood. In late 2014, he and a fellow soldier were killed when an 800-pound bomb was detonated next to their vehicle in Parwan Province.

Wyatt is survived by his parents, Brian and Julie, and sisters, Katie and Beth. Hunting and fishing were Wyatt's greatest passions. He is remembered as a young man with "a bigger than life" personality, character and charm. He told his parents, "If something happens to me, know that I went happy."

NEW SET OF WINGS

*In loving memory of
Col. David Banholzer, U.S. Air Force*

Col. David Banholzer was the 14th Presidential Pilot of the United States; he also served as Commander of the Presidential Airlift Group stationed at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. At home, he took his young daughters "around the world" by drawing airports for them on butcher paper in the living room, until a rare brain cancer, Glioblastoma Multiforme, took his life.

David earned his commission from the Air Force ROTC program at the University of Wisconsin and entered active duty in December 1992. He served in a variety of roles and received numerous commendations. He was recognized with the Col. Joseph B. Duckworth Award, presented to the unit or individual who has made the most significant contribution to the art and science of instrument flying.

JOSHUA 1:9

*In loving memory of
Pfc. Joshua Islam, U.S. Marine Corps*

Joshua Islam, a native of Gainesville, Florida, died in a training accident at Camp Pendleton, California at the age of 19. He was an honor student and accomplished athlete; he was a pitcher and outfielder for the state championship Weddington Warriors baseball team. He was a top marksman at the School of Infantry and was preparing to become a member of the Marine Corps Reconnaissance Force.

Joshua wore a dog tag inscribed with the Bible verse, Joshua 1:9, given to him at birth. It read, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. God is with you."

Joshua is survived by his mother and father, Donna and James, three brothers, Jarrett, Levi and Devin, and three sisters, Shannon, Victoria and Abigail.

REBEL WINGS

*In loving memory of
Sgt. Nicholas Pansini, U.S. Marine Corps*

Inspired by the events of 9/11, Nick Pansini joined the Marine Corps shortly after graduation from Heritage High School in Littleton, Colorado. During his four short years of service he was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, and deployed to Iraq twice. Sgt. Nick Pansini was honorably discharged in January 2010.

He had enrolled in classes as part of his journey to become a firefighter but took his own life several months later. Describing Nick's death, his mother said he "died at war in the hallway of his home." ★

"Love Lives On" was made possible by the generous support of the Roots & American Music Society (RAMS), a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization and record label based in Memphis, Tennessee, and the dedication and creativity of the dozens of songwriters and performers who participated in this project. All proceeds from the sale of the Album or singles will benefit TAPS and the military families we support.

Learn More: taps.org/loveliveson

20 YEARS of TEAM TAPS

Conquering the Distance – Honoring our Heroes

This could be a simple story of individuals who love to run, lacing up their sneakers and pounding the pavement in pursuit of a personal best time, wanting another finisher's medal to add to their collection or channeling their energy into physical activity.

This could be a simple story. Yet this twenty-year journey is a story filled with passion, determination, reverence, love and a happenstance or two thrown in along the way.

On a fall day, two surviving military widows, Marie Campbell and Lori (Hunter) Musselman joined each other to participate in the 25th Marine Corps Marathon.

They completed each step, each mile as a celebration of their heroes – their husbands who had served in the Air Force and Army respectively. Husbands who had given their lives in that service. These women also ran as a way to give back to the organization that had brought them together – the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). Sharing their love of running and using this event to raise funds for TAPS was a way to say thank you for the love, support and sense of hope each found after devastating personal heartache.

This was the beginning of Team TAPS...

“

“I knew the Marine Corps Marathon would be a special way to celebrate Dee’s life. However, I actually felt closest to him in the months leading up to the marathon as I trained. The day of the actual marathon, I knew I was doing it for him, but it was also for me. Through the entire 26.2 miles, and after I crossed the finish line, I felt a sense of empowerment, something I hadn’t felt in a long time. I couldn’t wait to do it again the following year.” ~ Marie Campbell

“The road to the first TAPS marathon event started with a desire to honor my husband CW3 Dan Hunter. Marie and I started together and separated after the half-way mark with the promise that I would make it across the bridge before the deadline. It was a grueling event for me as I had not trained well and had a knee injury. I hit the wall at mile 17. I wanted to stop but couldn’t let myself quit on Dan, Marie, or TAPS. I finally crossed the finish line 5 1/2 hours later with tears streaming down my face. I was so proud of our journey and swore I would never do it again! Thankfully Marie picked up the baton and kept it going. I still run (5k to 13.1k races) for myself and in memory of others. The races allow me to push myself, channel my energy into something positive and every time I think of Marie and our first race! ~ Lori Hunter Musselman

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CONNECTING STORIES, TOUCHING HEARTS

Each participant in a Team TAPS event honors a service member.



Tony Ochoa, a longtime supporter of TAPS began running with Team TAPS in 2015. In his initial contact

he shared: "My father is retired Air Force and I grew up on military bases all over this country and parts of the world, so I have a large amount of pride for our military and this country." Tony finds one of the most impactful aspects of his participation is getting to know the families. Through the Fallen Hero Match, he was connected to Mary Gallagher, a surviving spouse to run in honor of her husband, GySgt. James Gallagher, U.S. Marine Corps. Tony shares that his friendship with Mary has always been special. "I feel she invited me into her family. At the finish line, she gave me dog tags with her husband's name on them. Getting to know the hero I'm running for

through the family is always meaningful. The work of TAPS is so important and to be just a little part of it is an honor."

Often, participation with Team TAPS transcends the event itself. Hearts can find peace and long held wishes, other than to cross a finish line, can be realized. You never know when the race begins where the journey will take you.



Patrice Sullivan, surviving significant other of Marine Corps veteran Sgt. Thomas Donaldson, had such an

experience at the 2017 Marine Corps Marathon 10K race. "Tommy served in the Marines from 2000-2004 before he died by suicide in 2005. During my second MCM10K with TAPS in 2017, one of Tommy's Marine battle buddies I had never met LITERALLY ran into me while I was running and said 'how do you know the guy on your back?' (Referring to my TAPS photo). I explained he was

my boyfriend and the guy said 'He was my sergeant.' We hugged and cried and the guy said 'I have been waiting 12 years to find you and pay my respects.' We crossed the finish line together. The next year we all met at the MCM10K again I was able to introduce Tommy's parents to two of his battle buddies! This year we plan to all meet again and make it a tradition to honor and remember him."

Team TAPS gives individuals a way to support the mission of TAPS. It also stands as a testament to the strength, pride and resilience of survivors. It is an example of the power of community and the spirit and determination of the human heart.

This story is more than running. It is more than challenging ourselves physically. It is a story of honor, of courage, of celebration.

It is a story of love. It is the story of Team TAPS. Moving memorials - placing one foot in front of the other, pushing beyond the "wall," gaining strength. Remembering the Love - Celebrating the Life - Sharing the Journey.

TIMELINE: 2004



TEAM TAPS EXPANDS TO INCLUDE CHILDREN AND PARTICIPATED IN ITS FIRST MARINE CORPS MARATHON HEALTHY KIDS ONE-MILE FUN RUN

Wearing bib #1 - Tommy Horton, at age six, honored his father Major Robert L. Horton, U.S. Army (Ret.) by running in the 2004 Marine Corps Marathon Healthy Kids One-Mile Fun Run. Now a TAPS Legacy Mentor, Tommy serves as a companion to newly bereaved children at TAPS Good Grief Camps - where he found support for so many years. As a Legacy Mentor and participation in Team TAPS events, he continues to honor his father's legacy of service to others.

TIMELINE: 2008



SERVICE MEMBERS DEPLOYED IN IRAQ PARTICIPATE IN THE MARINE CORPS MARATHON FORWARD

On October 26, 2008, service members prepared to run in the sands of Iraq to honor their fallen battle buddies. Marine Gunner Sgt. Dustin Kazmar woke at 0400 to ready himself for what would turn out to be anything but a normal day. Unusually heavy rain had runners soaked from head to toe. Kazmar had completed 9.2 miles when word came that due to the conditions, the race was cancelled and everyone needed to return to the start/finish line. Dustin was disappointed - but not defeated. He said to himself, "There is no way I am not going to finish what I have started," so after a short break, he set out on his own to finish - rain or no rain.

At mile 22 he thinks of, as he says "throwing in the towel." He then begins to "think about our fallen warriors, all the people that have supported me in raising money for the TAPS organization, and what the organization stands for. I found the motivation I needed."



SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Team TAPS isn't just for those who like to run. It's also for those who like to cheer on participants or volunteer. Many survivors and friends come to be a part of the camaraderie and share in the spirit of events. Whether manning a water station, helping distribute memorial photos and singlets to participants or providing extra motivation along the race course, anyone – at any fitness level – can be a part of the uplifting and joyful atmosphere a Team TAPS event provides. ★



TIMELINE: 2020



TEAM TAPS IS PROUD TO BE OFFICIAL CHARITY PARTNERS WITH THE MARINE CORPS MARATHON, ARMY TEN-MILER, BANK OF AMERICA CHICAGO MARATHON, TCS NEW YORK CITY MARATHON AND THE ARMED FORCES CYCLING CHALLENGE

AND THE JOURNEY CONTINUES...

“

“Thank you Team TAPS. This has been my dream to run in memory of my brother, Sgt. 1st Class Rich Henkes. He was the reason I began running. I may not run fast but I will finish for him.” ~ Tamara Henkes

“Why do I run? I'd say it depends on the day. Some days it's really for a workout. Some days it's my escape from reality, free therapy. Some days it's for a break from working at home, staring at my computer screens. Every day, though, I run to remember! Forget mileage times, I go for memories per mile.” ~ Jamie Sienko

”

Loving Again After the Loss of an Intimate Partner

Carla Stumpf-Patton, EdD, LMHC, NCC, FT, CCTP | Surviving Spouse of Sgt. Richard E. Stumpf, Jr.

SURVIVOR STATEMENTS

"When my husband passed away, I lost my trust in everything around me. What I thought was safe and secure (my marriage and our life together) could no longer be counted on. When I was open to dating again, it was like starting from the ground up. I had to learn to trust myself, trust my feelings and trust the person that I was dating."

"It helped knowing that my new husband was accepting of me honoring my late husband. That support with our open communication has made it possible for me to continue to hold that space of honor for my late husband and still move forward in my life."

Love and intimacy are sensitive and very personal topics. Finding love again after the death of an intimate partner can be a joyous experience for those who are ready. However, this type

of life transition can raise issues around trust, intimacy, and communication. It can also present unique challenges for those with children or when considering blending families.

Discussing issues after the death of an intimate partner can be complex, confusing, and emotionally charged for many reasons.

QUESTIONS MAY ARISE FOR BEREAVED PARTNERS, SUCH AS:

- Will I ever want another relationship?
- How will I know if or when I am ready for this?
- Does this mean I am forgetting my former partner?
- Can I ever love again?
- Can I have a new relationship and still love my partner who died?
- How do I integrate this into my life as I move forward in my grief?
- How will this impact my children?

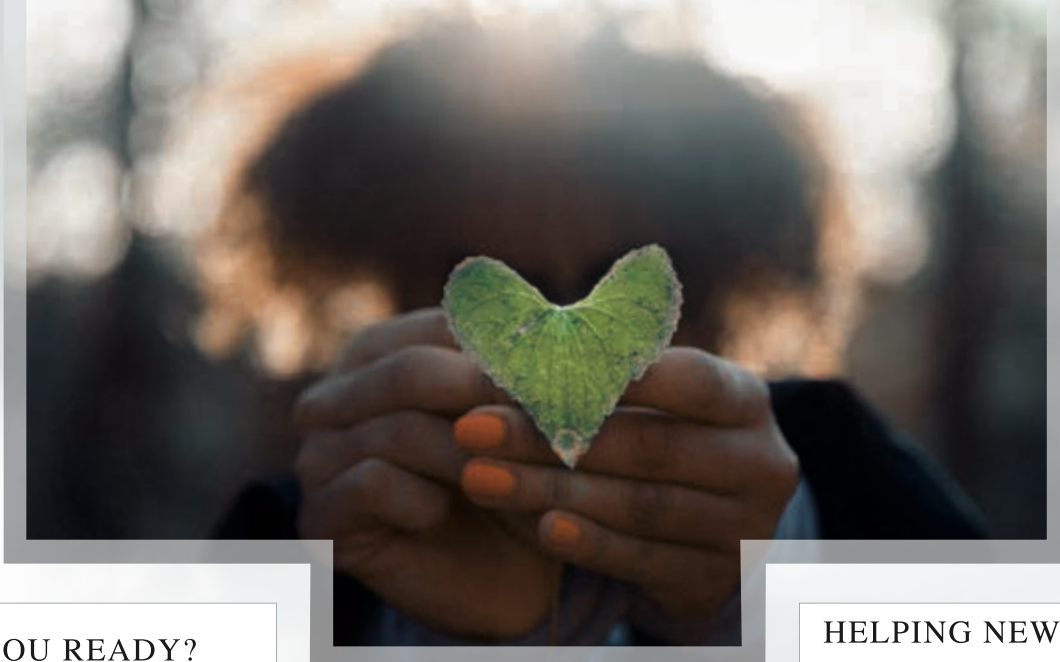
You are not alone in wondering these things, but answers are unique to each individual.

A PERSONAL DECISION

It is OK to talk or think about this, even if you have no desire for another relationship. Perhaps you just want to hear about the experiences of others. Maybe you are ready to explore dating, are already dating, may be in a committed relationship, or have remarried.

Others will often have advice, but you have to do what is right for you. If you are wondering how long to wait to date, there are no absolute timelines. If you wait "too long", people will make comments about you "not getting over it" sooner. If you decide to date "too soon," people may say you are moving too fast or you may worry that people will think we did not love our partner enough. Moving forward does not mean you are forgetting, nor does it mean you loved them any less. It means you are giving yourself permission to experience love, joy, and a fulfilled life.

Be realistic and know that there is no perfect scenario and that no person can ever replace your loved one or the love you hold for them in your heart. This is a process that will take time, patience, and understanding from yourself and the person with whom you begin a relationship. There are no rules other than upholding the overarching sense of safety and well-being for yourself and/or children. If you do not fully trust your own instincts or have questions and concerns, it can be helpful to discuss this with someone you trust and who genuinely has your best interest at heart.



ARE YOU READY?

When considering if you are ready for a new relationship, you might assess if you have stabilized the major issues surrounding the death of your loved one. Some concerns require special attention and overlooking these issues can contribute to feeling stuck in our grief.

Give yourself time and space to authentically mourn as you work through the grieving process, particularly in the days, weeks, months, and early years after the death. If you skip over, or fast forward past this grief work, you might later find yourself revisiting emotions that impede healing.

For future healthy relationships, it is important to process any unresolved issues from the former relationship. This might be the case if there had been challenges, such as issues around communication or trust, particularly around infidelity, addiction, or violence.

Consider the phase of grief in which you find yourself. The TAPS Postvention Model (originally developed for suicide loss survivors and applicable with other causes of death) addresses grief phases. In the third phase, Posttraumatic Growth, there is a noted shift in grief where the survivor is able to focus on the greater life story of their loved one, rather than just the details of the death. In this phase, you might ask yourself: "Am I at a point in my grief journey where I have found healing and growth, and/or perhaps considering a new, hopeful future for myself?"

CONFLICTING EMOTIONS ARE COMMON

Wherever you may be in your grief, the thought of intimacy or a new relationship can bring up complex and conflicting emotions. You may have a sense of loneliness and need for companionship. You may fear the unknown and desire stability and emotional security. You may be conflicted between feelings of judgment and acceptance (imposed by yourself and/or others), as well as moments of confusion or doubt and moments of confidence or clarity. You may feel guilty by allowing yourself to feel excitement about a hopeful future.

If you are struggling with a sense of hesitation, it helps to focus on ways you can feel more empowered about your choices. It is important to know these are common struggles and while there is no correct response, it is often helpful to find a healthy balance between the issues you are struggling with while you continue to grow and heal.

Give yourself permission to feel whatever you need and do what is right for you. It can be helpful to communicate what you are experiencing. In cases where you may be considering remarriage and depending on your circumstances (such as those receiving benefits), you should be an informed consumer to understand implications related to legal, financial, and benefits issues.

HELPING NEW PARTNER, CHILDREN, & YOURSELF

It is important to consider the perspective and feelings of the new partner, especially so they do not feel they are living in the shadow of the person who has died. Develop and maintain open and honest communication. Some of the common issues that should be addressed include feeling secure and loved in the current relationship, adapting to the grieving family system, understanding the impact of trauma associated with the death, setting and maintaining healthy boundaries, willingness to be involved in support systems, balancing past memories with future possibilities, being treated fairly and respectfully by others.

As a parent, you will need to discuss new friendships, relationships, and dating. You will also need to consider how and when to introduce a new partner, how this will change the family system, and why it will be critical to respect individual needs of each person in the family.

Other issues to explore will be the new or changing roles and boundaries within the family system (such as parenting styles), implications when blending families, and the possibility that family counseling can help with these transitions.

All of this can be overwhelming. Remember to seek help from those in your support network, such as family, friends, online communities for bereaved spouses or partners, bereavement support groups, clergy and faith community, individual, couples, and family therapy, and organizations such as TAPS. ★

HEY TAPS KIDS!

WE HAVE MISSED YOU ALL SO MUCH AND MISS ALL THE FUN WE HAVE TOGETHER AT GOOD GRIEF CAMP! EVEN THOUGH WE ARE APART, WE CAN STILL BE CONNECTED AND HAVE FUN TOGETHER THIS SUMMER!

WHAT OUR MENTORS ARE DOING:

TAPS Military Mentors will be designing their very own "Flat" Mentor to send to TAPS kids!

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Take me (Flat Mentor) with you on your adventures and be sure to document our time together!

Use the ideas we have shared or plan other exciting explorations for us!

Remember to take good care of me and keep me in a safe spot when I need to rest!

**Love,
Youth Programs Team**

PARENTS/GUARDIANS:

Would you like to request a mentor for your child? Please contact us at mentors@taps.org and we will connect your child to mentor to begin The Flat Mentor Summer Adventure!

NEW & FUN ACTIVITIES

While you are hanging out at home this summer we have a few fun things for you to do. These are activities that will help you remember your loved one and share with your fellow TAPS kids and mentors!

MAKE A MEMORY BOX

It can be hard to understand your thoughts and feelings when someone dies. It may also be hard to share those feelings with family and friends. While it may be difficult to talk about, you will always keep them in your heart and never forget them. Here is a project to help you collect special memories to keep and to share.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- A Box
- Paper
- Glue
- Photos
- Colored pens, pencils, or paint



DECORATE YOUR BOX:

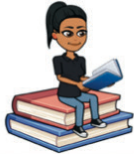















This step can be a lot of fun and there is no right or wrong way to do this. Make something that feels right to you. You could draw a picture of something your person loved or use their favorite colors. Be creative!

FILL YOUR BOX:

Now that you've decorated your box you can start filling it with little things that remind you of your person: photos, or drawings and stories that you wish you could share with your person. You can add new things over time when you feel like it. It's a place to keep all those special things that are important to you.

Share a photo or tell us about what you have included in your memory box. Send to editor@taps.org.

IDEAS FOR YOU AND FLAT MENTOR:

<p>Let's read a book together! You know how much I LOVE to listen to you read!</p> 	<p>Going on a walk would be amazing!</p> 	<p>Build me a fort! Let's hang out in a fort! It can be made with blankets! Get creative!</p> 	<p>Umm.. I get it, you like video games. Can I try to play too?</p> 
<p>Can we just have some chill time with your family? Let's just hang out!</p> 	<p>I'm hungry! Are you going to feed me or what? Whatcha gonna make?</p> 	<p>Can we take a bike ride together? Don't forget your helmet and make sure I am secure! I don't want to blow away!</p> 	<p>I need to workout and keep up my fitness! Let's get strong together!</p> 
<p>Can you build me an obstacle course or draw me a hopscotch game?</p> 	<p>Let's just go play outside! I mean, there is soooo much we can do in the sunshine!</p> 	<p>You know, I'm not that fab at drawing. Can you teach me to draw some pictures?</p> 	<p>It's been a while since I've played a board game or a card game! Let's play!</p> 
<p>Hmmm... when's the last time you've helped around the house? Let's do some chores together!</p> 	<p>You know how much I love Random Acts of Kindness! Let's see yours!</p> 	<p>Lip Sync Challenge! Let's sing your favorite song!</p> 	<p>Choose your own Adventure! Surprise me in a good way!</p> 

That Teaching Spark

SHARE YOUR IDEAS!

We'd love to hear what you would like to see in Klinger's Korner.
Send your ideas to editor@taps.org.

We Are Here for You!

TAPS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR HELPLINE

Grief knows no boundaries. Moments when we need extra support can come at any time. Our Helpline is answered live — 24/7/365 — with gentle care from peer professionals who ensure the caller has open access to all that TAPS provides. Whether you need emotional support, connection to resources and information or if you want to share what is on your heart, the TAPS Helpline is here for you. Call 800-959-TAPS (8277).

PEER-BASED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

This is the foundation of TAPS. Survivors helping survivors — coming together to find strength and hope. Our Peer Mentor network offers a supportive companion as you navigate the aftermath of loss. Survivors who are at least 18 months out from their loss volunteer their time and receive training to be a supportive presence for new survivors. You will gain comfort in knowing you are not alone. Peer Mentors also lend support at TAPS events throughout the year. Find out more: taps.org/peermentors.

CASEWORK ASSISTANCE

Managing paperwork and unexpected needs can add to the weight of grief and loss. Our casework team delivers compassionate assistance for all the needs a family may have, including access to pro bono legal assistance, emergency financial resources, information on state and federal benefits, and connections to private social services support. Find out more: taps.org/casework.

EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES

TAPS guides survivors through the bureaucracy and paperwork necessary to receive the education benefits available for the dependents of America's fallen heroes. Coordinators work with you to determine the best options for financial assistance. Find out more: taps.org/edu.

COMMUNITY-BASED GRIEF SUPPORT

TAPS provides connection to free and unlimited grief counseling, trauma resources and local support groups. We can assist in finding the right grief counselor to help you develop coping skills, work through questions and navigate the myriad of emotions associated with grief and loss. Careful research and a large network of strong community partners to help locate support close to home. Find out more: taps.org/grieffcounseling.

SUICIDE LOSS SUPPORT

A death by suicide can leave behind a wake of emotions that complicate an already painful grieving process. Many of us ask, "Why did this happen?" We worry that our loved ones will be remembered for how they died instead of how they lived and served. Suicide loss survivors can be assured they have a safe space within TAPS to remember, honor and grieve their loved one. Special programming and resources, including the annual National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar, provide gentle, understanding support as we work through the emotions associated with this type of loss. As peers, we want you to know that you can and will survive this. You are not alone and we will be by your side, offering comfort, care and hope. Find out more: taps.org/suicideloss.

ILLNESS LOSS SUPPORT

TAPS is leading the effort to ensure families whose loved one died from illness are recognized, cared for and aware of all benefits they are eligible to receive. TAPS is working to raise awareness about risks and effects of toxic exposure and help families navigate the benefits process after loss. We are pulling together relevant legislation, medical studies, expert testimony, literature, and reports to create a reference manual to serve as a foundation for future advocacy. Find out more: Email info@taps.org.

CONNECT ONLINE

The TAPS Online Community offers the ability to connect virtually with other survivors from the comfort of home. With video- and text-based chat sessions, message boards, blogs, weekly communications and peer-based sharing groups, you have a variety of ways to strengthen your support network. You can participate at your comfort level – actively share or just listen/read the input of others. Find out more: taps.org/onlinecommunity.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Though their lives are marked by grief, young survivors at TAPS know their lives will also be marked by camaraderie, mentorship, emotional maturity, adventure and fun. Led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health and education, TAPS Youth Programs provide safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing, including Good Grief Camps, summer campouts, teen adventures and family retreats. Find out more: taps.org/youthprograms

YOUNG ADULT PROGRAMS

This dynamic program is for surviving children and siblings ages 18-25 and helps our graduating Good Grief Camp children transition into a program all their own. The Young Adult Program focuses on five pillars of growth: Personal Development, Financial Stability, Communication, Career Development and Service to Others. Each individual is given tools to create a well-rounded life full of hope, healing, and growth. Find out more: youngadults@taps.org.

TAPS INSTITUTE FOR HOPE AND HEALING

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing serves as a resource and training center. Through webinars, webcasts, workshops and events, the Institute educates survivors of loss as well as professionals who work in the area death notification, funerals and grief and bereavement support. For military loss survivors and other survivors, the Institute provides programs such as understanding suicide; understanding children's grief; practical tips for coping with grief; wellness workshops and creative ways to keep the memories of loved ones alive. For professionals, the Institute offers academic programming taught by experts in the field. For these professionally oriented programs, continuing education credits are available from a wide range of health and social service professional boards. Find out more: taps.org/institute.

PUBLICATIONS

TAPS has created several proprietary publications to serve the survivor community and offer valuable inspiration and information. A series of pocket-size guides, with input by subject matter experts, offer insight and information on available resources and services. These guides are provided at no cost to survivors. Other publications include the book *Healing Your Grieving Heart after a Military Death: 100 Practical Ideas for Families and Friends* by Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., the children's book *Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope* and *TAPS Magazine*. Find out more: taps.org/publications. ★

Good vs. Bad Pain

Finding Power and Purpose through the Hurt

Emily Muñoz | Director, TAPS Women's Empowerment
Surviving Spouse of Capt. Gilbert A. Munoz, U.S. Army



We know that pain is uncomfortable, but can it also be a good thing? A useful thing?

Pain can be a valuable teacher. But as much as we may learn from it, we may also feel compelled to avoid it. It takes tremendous emotional energy to constantly have to come to terms with how much has gone awry. How much should we wrestle with how hurt we are, and how much should we surrender?

WHAT IS PAIN?

Pain is a signal, an alert that we should be careful, that we are in a vulnerable position. Physically, we experience pain when the brain senses tissue damage. Emotionally, the course of action is more complicated, but it's not entirely neurologically different.

We have, essentially, the same system for interpreting all kinds of pain, whether it's the anguish of bereavement or the ache of a lower back.

We experience social or emotional pain when connection to our tribe is threatened. From an evolutionary standpoint, psychological pain forces us to assess actual or potential social problems. It's also a way for you to signal to your tribe that you need help.

The brain may initially register the pain of a grieving heart and the pain of a physiological experience in the same way, but the effects of each type of pain on the brain are different. Emotional pain leaves a different mark on the brain, which enables us to empathize with

each other and build community. When we experience pain together, as in our TAPS family, it serves another purpose — to unite us at our time of highest vulnerability. If your pain is keeping you away from others, if it's isolating you and keeping you from community, that may be one indication that your pain is truly hurting more than helping. What, then, are other ways that we can determine whether or not we're experiencing discomfort that's destructive rather than constructive? How do we know whether our pain is teaching us or limiting us?

WHAT IS YOUR PAIN TRYING TO TELL YOU?

Pain is predominantly information. Yes, it's uncomfortable and distressing, but it's also one of the body's most effective means of communication. If you're not listening, then you're hurting for no reason. True suffering occurs when we can't figure out how to turn pain into purpose.

Pain is either an indication that something has changed or that something needs to change. If pain is the only thing you hear, it may be time to listen to the urges to heal. These may be quiet and tentative because we have so many imposed barriers that tell us that healing is forgetting. We know differently, though. In early grief, pain can be deafening — and there will always be times that it drowns out all other sensation. However, it shouldn't be the only thing you are experiencing. If the pain is all you can think about, then you may be moving into a situation where you're not able to access other coping skills. It may be time to renegotiate your relationship with pain, especially trying to figure out why you're hurting so much.

WHERE IS THE PAIN COMING FROM?

When we stub a toe, the toe sends signals to the brain. The brain evaluates what's happened (how did that coffee table get there?!?) and, using a variety of clues and signals, we feel pain in the toe. Although the brain is responsible for the feeling of pain, the cause and effect occur in the same location — the toe — and pain is a marker of the injury. Identifying the source becomes complicated when body pain isn't limited to one area, or when its origin isn't physical at all.

Emotional pain, too, is often traceable to an experience. Learning to name and identify pain for what it is, and for why things hurt, can help you do for your spirit what the nervous system does for the body. Tracing the origins of what makes you feel worse and what makes you feel better can help you take some of your power back.

ARE YOU FINDING POWER OR PURPOSE IN YOUR PAIN?

“Good” pain is pain that reminds us what's important — it still hurts in the moment, but the experience of it is worthwhile. Growing pains and grieving pains are both powerful — yes, they feel terrible, but they also remind us that productive pain is expansive — we break open.

When we're hurting, we want to make ourselves small — to hide, contract,

disappear, run from it, or stuff it down. Of course, there will be times when that is necessary, but the amount that you're doing is a good indication of whether or not your pain is making you stronger. Pain that's confronted — pain that's addressed — is pain that you've begun to burn as fuel for your journey. Does it mean that it's gone? No. But it does mean that you understand it and can learn to work with it and work through it. We want to avoid moving toward a state where pain takes hold such that we can't stop doing certain things and we can't start doing others.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF MY PAIN IS CONSTRUCTIVE OR DESTRUCTIVE?

If you are intentionally causing pain to yourself or others, this is usually not the kind of pain that is productive or kind. If you are using pain as a distraction, the focus is on the wound and not on the healing. Pain then becomes the objective rather than the means.

Constructive pain is pain that, while uncomfortable, promotes healing. Are you growing and learning from pain? It hurts to have to try to let go of how life was and how life could have been; it's also difficult to know that there is no easy answer, no cure. We know that the accompanying demands on the nervous system (hypersensitivity to stress, conflict, noise,

etc.) also add to feelings that life is out of control. This means that hurt can also feel like panic and anxiety, regardless of how much healing takes place, there will always be something that's lost and that can never be replaced. As we build lives without our loved ones, though, we integrate them into what we're doing and who we're becoming.

Pain, at its very heart, is intolerable discomfort. The limit of how much you can endure will change over time. This isn't because you're “getting over” anything; it just means that you're adapting to do what you're supposed to do — survive. It doesn't mean that you love or miss the person any less, it's just an indication that you have learned to find power and purpose in what hurts the most. ★

SIGNS THAT THE WAY YOU'RE HURTING ISN'T HELPING

- ★ You are having trouble identifying how and why pain changes
- ★ You're suffering, but you're not finding a way to express that you're hurting
- ★ You are using pain as a distraction
- ★ You aren't able to breathe through it
- ★ You are unable to control your reactions to pain
- ★ The pain keeps you stuck
- ★ You haven't sought care for emotional wounds that could be healed
- ★ You use pain as an excuse to avoid things that could enrich your life.



Ready to Mentor – Ready to Heal

Finding Purpose through Helping Others

Cella Logan | Surviving Spouse of Cpl. Daniel J. Logan, U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

At a 2019 regional seminar in Jacksonville, Fla. I became a TAPS Peer Mentor. I felt ready to help guide other survivors through their journey of loss, heartbreak, unknowns and the life of widowhood. At that time, I was only 5 months into my new career as a Military Spouse Advocate with the state of Florida. I work with active duty spouses helping them find their purpose, mentor them and get them acclimated in a new city and state. The more I got out of my shell and gained confidence to share my life, the more I realized I was not only ready to mentor other

military spouses and survivors but I was also ready to heal. Every day I see the struggles and triumphs of these families and while I may be helping them, they in return have helped me to again find purpose and strength in my life.

Serving as a TAPS Peer Mentor has taught me that I'm stronger than I realized. The experience of losing a spouse, becoming a widow and a single parent changes your world completely. Though I have always been pretty independent throughout my life, I grew to embrace being a family of four

and being comfortable with the simplicity of our life. I got to experience what love was through the good times and also the struggles of marriage with small children and my husband who was living with PTSD and TBI (traumatic brain injury). After my husband's death I went into action mode and kept myself busy and put the grief work aside so I could continue to show the world "I got this." Yes of course I did some work to get through my loss but that first year I was still not understanding that my husband was really gone.



CELLA'S SON NATHAN HELPED PLACE FLAGS AT A NATIONAL CEMETERY.



ONE OF CELLA'S FAVORITE PHOTOS.
THE FAMILY SHARED A LAST
BASEBALL GAME TOGETHER.



CPL. DANIEL LOGAN IN IRAQ.



CELLA AND HER
CHILDREN ENJOYING
A HIKE TOGETHER.

In May 2019, 21 months after Daniel died, I attended the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp in Arlington, Va. I was introduced to the Veterans Affairs Director of Survivor Relations. Through our conversations she had asked me if I would like to share my husband's experience with the VA, my experience as a caregiver and as a survivor to help others in the future. I sat with her team for four hours and everything shifted after I released some of the feelings I had bottled up. I knew from that day on I wanted to advocate for other survivors, and I wanted to help others who needed that support just like I needed it two and a half years ago.

My boys and I had finally created normalcy two years after my husband's death and then COVID-19 changed everything in a blink of an eye—not only our life but so many people around the country and world. Experiencing the sudden loss of my husband was life changing and in a weird way prepared me for this pandemic. I learned it was OK to ask for help. I had my TAPS family there for me immediately, my church family stepped in when needed and I had my sister tribe whenever I needed to vent and cry. My oldest son was diagnosed with a learning disability right after Daniel's passing and I knew that he and I were going to struggle at home.

I suddenly became a teacher, a stay-at-home single mother, a referee to a toddler and a grade schooler, a personal chef and was now working from home full time. How was I going to make this work without our life falling apart again?

What I have now that I didn't have two years ago was my designated self-care day with therapy. The end of last year I started telehealth with Cohen Veterans Network to help process my grief, work through some depression, anxiety and gain tools to live life as a single parent and life with grief. I continued to utilize telehealth not only for myself but for my boys. We had a community of people helping us virtually, but I had to initially have the strength to ask for that help.

Seven weeks into this quarantine life we have adjusted and have had to be creative. My boys have become pros in Zoom and Microsoft teams. They are artists now from their daily art classes from Art for Kids Hub on YouTube, they have weekly Zoom calls with their best friends, they now talk more to family in California, and they look forward to doing their daily dances and yoga with GoNoodle and Cosmic Yoga. We make the effort every day to walk around our neighborhood and go to the beach to make sure we're getting enough fresh air and exercise.

I connect with other survivors and mentees in the evenings when there is downtime to relax. Some evenings I'm able to get on a TAPS chat, other times I have calls with my widow sisters and most recently there has been a group of us chatting about our monthly book of choice.

Becoming a Peer Mentor has been healing in so many ways—something I honestly didn't expect. I get to listen more now rather than have to tell my story all over again. I help motivate survivors to find their purpose, heal, and help them surround themselves with a supportive 'family' they never expected to have after losing part of their own family. Mentoring has changed my goals for myself and my two boys. I have been motivated to finish my degree in social work and pursue my goal of going to law school.

Peer support is so important not only for other survivors to know they're not alone in this journey but also for ourselves. It gives us purpose again in our life. Mentoring and being a mentee helps you to grow and evolve. In my life as a surviving spouse and TAPS Peer Mentor, my heart heals when I get to help another survivor know there is hope, love and comfort in her life. ★

Join Your TAPS Family

Stay Connected with our Virtual Gatherings

WEEKLY SESSIONS:

MONDAY

Parent Chat ~ 2ND MONDAY

Writer's Chat ~ 2ND MONDAY

TUESDAY

General Support Chat

Women's Empowerment Circle

Sibling Chat ~ 2ND TUESDAY

Women's Chat ~ 4TH TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

Women's Empowerment: 'We Create' Circle

General Support: Daytime

Widow/Widower/Significant Other ~ 2ND WEDNESDAY

Peer Mentors ~ 3RD WEDNESDAY

Men's Chat ~ 4TH WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

Women's Empowerment Alumnae Circle

Suicide Loss is ~ 1ST & 3RD THURSDAY

FRIDAY

Women's Empowerment: 'We Downshift'

Young Adult Chat ~ 1ST & 3RD FRIDAY

For session details and times, visit taps.org/onlinecommunity

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7. Goodr Sunglasses - \$23.99
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9. Love Lives On Perfect Tee - \$25.00
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of a military loved one.



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We find our way in the dark
Using light from the lives of others.
Their sufferings and celebrations
Are like constellations in the midnight sky,
Orienting patterns above the horizon.
Tracing their paths through the night,
We connect our stories to one another;
Circling together, we turn toward morning.

Rev. J. Lynn James