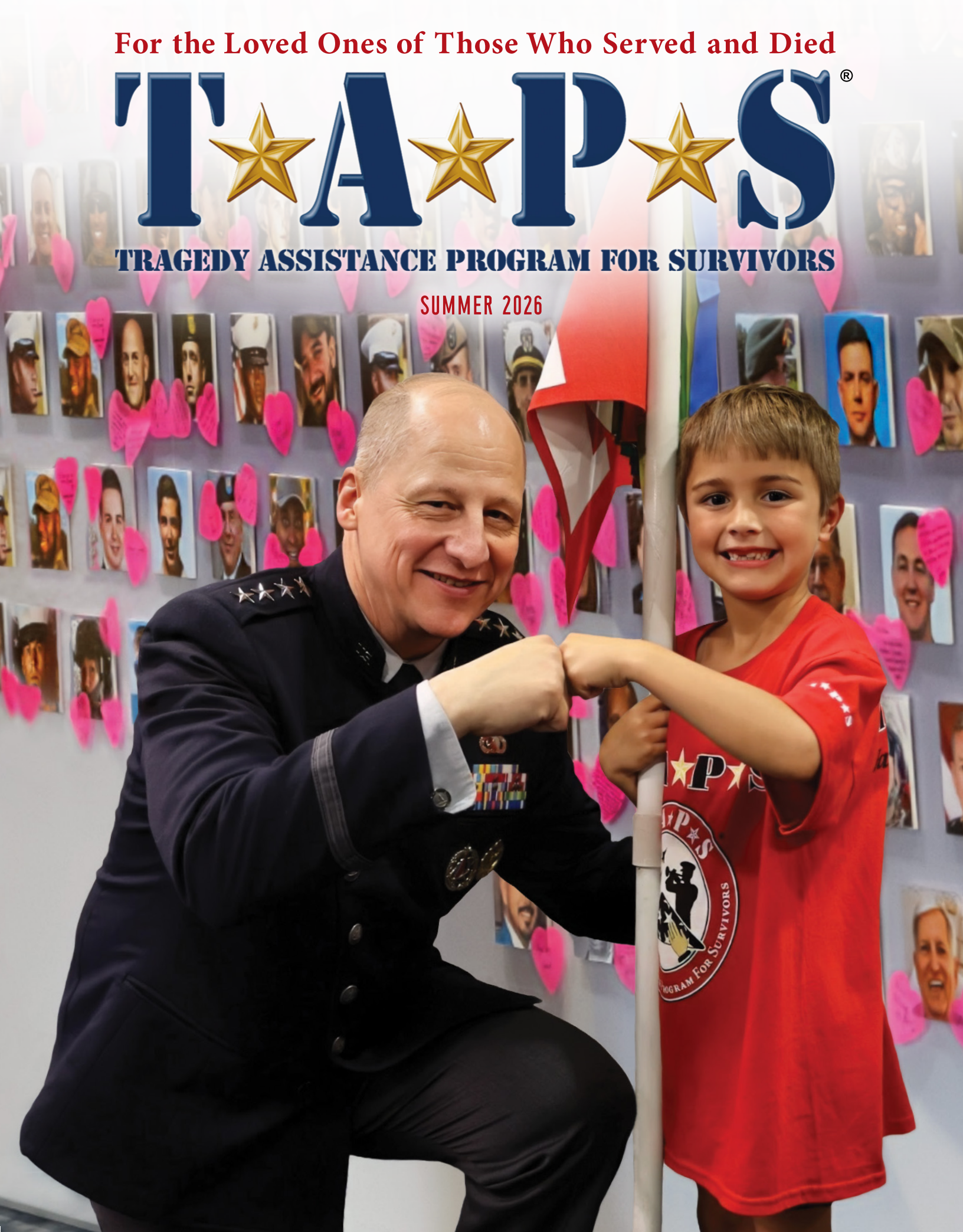


For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

TAPPS[®]

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

SUMMER 2026



**"This is your grief journey, but it is never yours alone.
Somewhere, someone understands.
Somewhere, someone feels this too."**

– Jenna Lowthert





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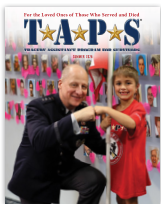
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Education Support
Suicide Loss & Illness Loss Support
Care Groups
Online Community
TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®
Survivor Seminars & Good Grief Camps
TAPS Together
Women's Empowerment
Men's Program
Young Adults Program
Youth Programs
Sports & Entertainment Events
TAPS Together

* For full descriptions, see pages 18-19.



ON THE COVER: General Michael A. Guetlein, Director of Golden Dome, at the TAPS Good Grief Camp with Ian McLaughlin, honoring the life and service of Ian's father, Army Staff Sgt.

Ian P. McLaughlin, KIA Afghanistan, January 2020.
PHOTO: TAPS ARCHIVES

About TAPS

Caring for the Families of America's Fallen Heroes

TAPS is the national nonprofit organization providing compassionate care and comprehensive resources to all those grieving a death in the military and veteran community. TAPS provides support to survivors 24/7, regardless of the manner of death, the duty status at the time of death, the survivor's relationship to the deceased, or the survivor's phase in their grief journey.

At TAPS, we welcome every survivor impacted by a death in the military or veteran community. We are proud to work alongside the world's leading experts in grief, trauma, peer support, and childhood bereavement through our Advisory Board and professional partnerships. Together, we combine decades of research and real-world experience to create programs and support proven to help survivors find connection, healing, hope, and strength as they learn to grow with grief.

At TAPS, we:

Honor and Remember the lives of our military loved ones and celebrate military survivors as the living legacies of their service and sacrifice.

Empower survivors with healthy coping skills, resources, and opportunities to connect in the comfort of their home, their community, their region, and the nation to grow with their grief.

Connect all those grieving a military death to a nationwide network of peer-based, emotional survivor support and critical casework assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Educate using research-informed best practices in bereavement and trauma care for survivors, and we advocate on behalf of survivors with policy and legislative priorities.

Create Community with survivors to provide comprehensive comfort, care, and resources where they live, when they need it, and in a manner comfortable for them.

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TAPS exceeds industry standards for financial accountability and outperforms most charities. We are proud to have received many of the top nonprofit charity ratings available today. Our donors should be confident they are supporting an organization that is financially healthy, accountable, and transparent.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

7 DEAR TAPS

Gratitude and comfort from survivors like you

8 FINDING LIGHT IN THE DARK

Turning toward each other in uncertain times

10 TAPS PEER MENTORS: GRIEF, GROWTH, GIVING BACK

Reaching out a hand to other survivors

11 TAPS' OWN, AMY MINGUS, NAMED FIRST RECIPIENT OF THE US ARMY'S NEW LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Honoring service within the survivor community

12 WHEN THE MAILBOX MAKES YOU CRY

Reminders of loved ones in unsuspecting places

TAPS SURVIVORS GATHER IN ZION NATIONAL PARK FOR A HEALING RETREAT SURROUNDED BY STUNNING LANDSCAPES AND A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT. PHOTO: TAPS ARCHIVES

**14 GRIEF RUMINATION SPIRAL – PART 4:
A GENTLE REFRAME PRACTICE**

Stepping out of the spiral with a simple coping strategy

**16 HEALING FROM TRAUMATIC LOSS:
WHERE TO START WHEN EVERYTHING HAS SHATTERED**

Gently moving forward one breath at a time

18 PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

TAPS support for your grief journey

20 GROWING UP TAPS: THE STORIES THAT SHAPE US

Carrying childhood loss into adulthood with purpose

22 YOU ARE NOT JUST A WIDOW – YOU ARE STILL YOU

Rediscovering “you” after loss

24 THE SPIRITUAL PATH TO HEALING

Nurturing our spirituality

26 A YEAR TO REMEMBER

Recognizing a milestone for America

27 SAFE, FINANCIALLY SECURE, AND SCAM-AWARE

Guarding against common financial scams

28 A LOOK BACK AT THE 2026 TAPS FAMILY REUNION

Community, connection, and remembrance over Memorial Day weekend

30 TAPS TOGETHERS

Exciting updates to a favorite TAPS program

**31 FINDING SOPHIA. FINDING COMMUNITY:
MY FIRST TAPS WEEKEND**

A happy ending and a bright beginning

33 UPCOMING EVENTS

Events happening soon

35 OTHERS OUT THERE JUST LIKE ME

Finding comfort in each other





To Our TAPS Family,

Memorial Day has passed, and with it, a weekend when so many of us gathered to remember, to honor, and to be together. For those who joined us at the National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp, it was a gift to see you, to share time, and to stand side by side in both grief and love. These moments of connection remind us that even in loss, we are never alone.

While the country turns toward summer, we know that remembrance does not come and go with a single day. It lives quietly within us, in the ways we carry our loved ones forward, in the stories we tell, and in the community we build together. That is the spirit behind this issue of the *TAPS Magazine*. It is offered as a place of reflection, of connection, and of gentle encouragement for wherever you are on your journey.

We are also living in a time when the world around us can feel uncertain. News of conflict may stir emotions or bring memories to the surface. If that is true for you, please know that you are seen, and you are supported. For those carrying fresh grief, especially connected to current events, we are here, ready to walk beside you with care and understanding. In moments like these, we lean into one another, just as this TAPS Family has always done.

As our nation approaches its 250th anniversary, there will be many moments of reflection on service, sacrifice, and the ideals that bind us together. For our community, those reflections are deeply personal. We know the true cost of freedom. We live it. And we honor it not only in remembrance, but in the way we care for one another and carry forward the legacy of those we love.

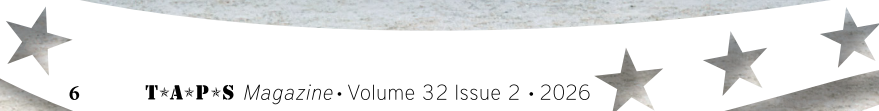
This summer, I encourage you to stay connected in whatever way feels right for you. Spend time with your TAPS Family. Join a TAPS Together or Care Group, reach out to a peer, watch a webinar in the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®, or simply pick up the phone and call our 24/7 Helpline at 202-588-TAPS (8277). We are here, now and always.

With love and care,

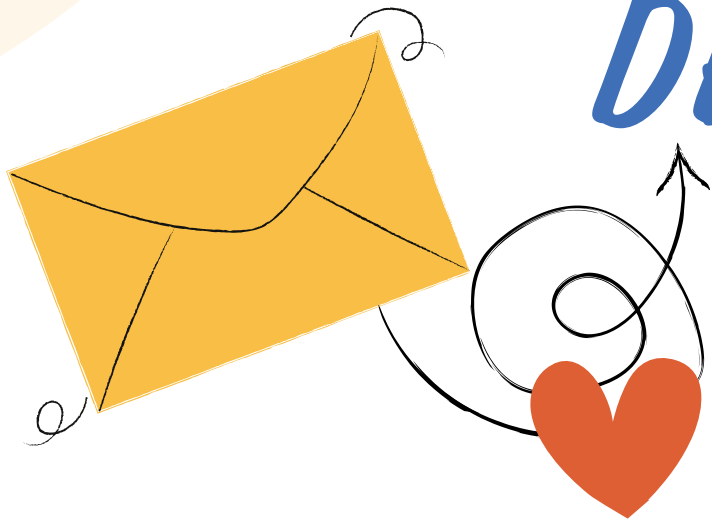
Bonnie Carroll,
TAPS President and Founder



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES



DEAR TAPS



INSIGHT

“The weekend at the seminar really helped me. I gained insight as to why my body is aching and my joints are hurting. I didn’t know grief could impact my immune system. It was so informative, and it was helpful to hear other stories. I had the freedom to cry without anyone looking at me funny, but I could still laugh.”

Gayle McBurney ★ Surviving Mother of Retired U.S. Army MAJ Natalie McBurney

EMPOWERED

“I would like to express my appreciation to you and our TAPS surviving grandparents’ family for all the support and love I receive every month. I find myself embraced by you and my fellow grandparents, who understand — so well — my grief and struggles. I leave each meeting feeling empowered to be kind to myself and to continue keeping my beloved grandson’s memory alive through acts of kindness. As always, I look forward to our next meeting.”

Shoshana Samuel-Siegel ★ Surviving Grandmother of U.S. Army PFC Noah Samuel-Siegel

INVALUABLE

“Now that time has passed since the retreat, I realize it did much more for me than I knew at the time. I don’t know whether it was the insightful leadership, outdoor exercises, bonding with the other men dealing with their own losses, or a combination of these things. I just know that my emotional roller coaster has eased somewhat. The depths of the hard days aren’t as deep, and I don’t spend as much time there. I’m still grieving, and I know my journey through this is far from over, but the retreat was invaluable to me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for having this program.”

Alden Hingle ★ Surviving Spouse of Retired U.S. Army LTC Janice Stone

SOLACE

“My family and I traveled the four hours to Branson, Missouri, for the TAPS event at Silver Dollar City. I was overwhelmed with sorrow and grief as I boarded the tram to enter the park, but once we were greeted by kind TAPS representatives who gave us dog tags with my son’s photo, my tears eased. Later in the day, I sat with my family and looked around the huge hall filled to the brim with families just like us. We all belonged to a club we never wanted to belong to, but, alas, there we were, listening to speakers and finally listening to our loved ones’ names being read as their photos flashed on the screen. It brought me solace to stand and honor our son. We met others with dog tags as we walked through the park. We didn’t have to say anything to each other; we just knew we weren’t alone in our sorrow. It was a lovely event and a fun family day, full of camaraderie.”

Sherry Polito ★ Surviving Mother of U.S. Navy PO2 Vincent Polito

PHOTO: TAPS ARCHIVES



Share your own
TAPS experience.

Email Editor@TAPS.org
with “Dear TAPS” in
the subject line.



Finding *Light* in

"M a'am, I regret to inform you..." His words hung in the air. The Air Force colonel's voice caught in his throat; he bowed his head, unable to finish his own sentence.

"Oh no, who was it?"

Desperately questioning, I closed my eyes and held my breath. My mind flooded with images of my husband, David, and the 24 men he was leading in Afghanistan. Those boys were his heart. He loved them like sons and brothers. Though he was only their flight commander, I imagined him grieving the loss of any one of them as if his own flesh and blood had been killed. I was the Key Spouse for the squadron, a liaison between command and the spouses. So, I was certain they were there to get me as support for someone else's notification.

As I opened my eyes, the man in uniform standing on my front porch in the early morning light lifted his gaze to mine.

"Heather, it was David. He's been killed by a suicide bomber."

My husband would be one of 239 active-duty hostile casualties reported by the Defense Casualty Analysis System in 2012, one of 5,020 between 2004 and 2014. Around the time of my husband's death, TAPS reported that hostile combat casualties constituted between 20 and 25 percent of losses that brought survivors to the program. With the passage of another decade and the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, that number dropped to

just 3 percent in 2024. In 2022 and 2023, there were no reported combat losses due to hostile action. But by April of 2026, seven had been reported — more than the previous four years combined.

The decline and now recent uptick have likely gone unnoticed by most. Those may just be statistics to some. But to TAPS families, those numbers catch our breath and our attention. Current events, like we've seen recently in the news, can trigger grief from an old loss. Survivors, especially those whose loved ones were killed in action, can be left feeling like they are experiencing their loss all over again for unexplainable reasons. If you're a survivor in need of support, regardless of how long ago your loss occurred, remember it is never too late to reach out.

We are once again at war. As the headlines have begun to list off names of the fallen, I've found that fateful moment on my porch replaying in my head. My friend Pam, the surviving spouse of Army CSM Kevin Griffin, who was KIA with David, commiserated with me via text recently: "It's almost like I am standing in their shoes again. It [has] definitely stirred things up and brought old pain closer to the surface for a bit. I have a heavy ache and a lot of compassion for the families who are just now entering this world none of us asked for."

If you're a survivor in need of support, regardless of how long ago your loss occurred, remember it is never too late to reach out.

★ 202-588-TAPS (8277) ★



the *Dark*

Heather Gray Blalock
Surviving Spouse of U.S. Air Force
Maj David Gray

of time to process my loss and adjust to the new normal that inevitably eventuates.

Because of that, I personally believe one of the most valuable things survivors can do with grief is to allow the experience to be a bridge connecting you to others traveling the same painful road. Another friend and retired Air Force officer, Dana

of military tragedy and military-connected grief. With that in mind, TAPS carefully partners mentors and survivors with similar experiences.

I was unaware of the program in the days immediately following the notification of my husband's death. It would be several years later, when my children (young when their father died) began needing specific support for their grief, that I leaned heavily into TAPS. While at a Good Grief Camp for my kids, I was encouraged to explore the idea of being trained as a Peer Mentor. Having served as one for many years now, the opportunity to support another has given an added sense of purpose to my grief. We need not waste our suffering, but use it as a conduit for ministering to others in need of support. Though the path of grief is painful, we find light along the way; we learn about loss, life, and ourselves; and we come to anticipate sharp curves and bumpy terrain. As we wrap our arms around new survivors as a nation, let us — members of the old guard — use our light to ensure no new survivor grieves in the dark.

*“If everything
around you
seems dark,
look again,
you may be
the light.”*

– Rumi

Lyon (surviving spouse of Air Force Capt David Lyon, KIA), aptly states it thus: “It doesn't matter what we think or feel about what's happening in Iran. The new survivors need us, and we must always be at the ready regardless.”

As Gold Star Spouses — and more broadly as surviving families — we can attest that grief never truly leaves; we just learn to carry the weight of it as we move through life. In some ways, though, it feels like Pam and I are part of the old guard, so to speak, and a new generation of survivors is being formed. I have had lots

The TAPS Peer Mentor program is one of the ways Gold Star Spouses and other survivors do just that. The program equips volunteers, at least 18 months past their loss, with the tools and skills needed to mentor fellow survivors who are looking for support. Many well-meaning supporters will say they understand. But TAPS truly understands the unique aspects

★
**Call the 24/7
TAPS National Military
Survivor Helpline at
800-959-TAPS (8277)
any time to reach
compassionate
peer support.**



TAPS Peer Mentors:

Grief, Growth, and Giving Back

Ken Naglak ★ Surviving Father of U.S. Navy ABHAN Joseph Naglak



Helen Keller once said, "The world is full of suffering...it is also full of the overcoming of it." That is a powerful sentiment from someone who overcame so much. In grief, we certainly face suffering, along with sadness, fear, guilt, anger, and plenty more.

It's not about leading or fixing; it is about compassion, curiosity, and honoring another's spirit in the face of tragedy. While some moments might stir our own grief, they also remind us of the human spirit's true resilience — they confirm Helen Keller's promise. In a world full of suffering, people can and do overcome it.

How can we ever overcome these feelings and move forward with meaning, without the person we lost? That is the essential question. For me, the answer was TAPS. Today, it still is.

We are all more alike than we think. We all struggle and search for meaning. Being a Peer Mentor is one way to connect with others on similar paths. It's a way to make sense of the life we still have without the person we lost. And, through the process of mentoring, we honor the memory of those we've lost, who will always hold a place in our hearts.



TAPS met me where I was in deep grief and, through their resources and events, I began to understand what I was feeling. Their Online Groups and in-person Care Groups, of which I am a frequent attendee, surrounded me with empathy and support. The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® has helped me grow and become a different person.

If you're considering becoming a TAPS Peer Mentor, I encourage you to be brave and follow that compassionate curiosity. In helping a fellow survivor overcome the pain of loss, you may just find that you're able to overcome aspects of your own loss.



Becoming a TAPS Peer Mentor, though, brought meaning in particular connection. Each time I connect with a survivor facing similar loss and carrying similar grief, I have a chance to learn something about myself, nurture my own grief while supporting another, and honor my son, Joe — a man who would help others any way he could.

Are you ready to reach back?

Adult survivors, if you are 18 months or more beyond your loss and you feel ready, you are invited to complete the online Peer Mentor application. Once your application is reviewed, a member of our team will connect with you. The Peer Mentor team, fellow Peer Mentors, and our training and resources will support you each step of the journey.

What is Peer Mentoring all about?

When you're ready, becoming a TAPS Peer Mentor is an opportunity to lean forward and help someone in need, as others have helped you. It means holding space for another person as a companion, a friend, a confidant. We are not therapists, but have learned to be present for another person, listen with our hearts, and empathetically bear witness to a fellow survivor's personal grief journey.



➤ TAPS.org/PMApply



TAPS' OWN, AMY MINGUS, NAMED FIRST RECIPIENT OF THE U.S. ARMY'S NEW LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

SGT Woodlyne Escarne & SGT Zack Stine

Mrs. Amy Mingus, wife of the 39th vice chief of staff of the Army, is the first person to receive a new award recognizing the contributions of Army spouses — the Julia Compton Moore Spouse Lifetime Achievement Award. The award's namesake is courtesy of one of the most influential military spouses in Army history, a spouse whose tireless advocacy fundamentally changed the Army's approach to family readiness and survivor assistance.

Julia Moore, wife of LTG Hal Moore, was instrumental in bringing major changes in Army policy. When families received news of battlefield losses during the Vietnam War, she comforted them and would later urge the Army to use a more caring notification process. Because of her work, a uniformed officer and chaplain now deliver this news in person. She also helped create Army Community Service, which supports soldiers and families on every Army post.

The award was presented to Mrs. Mingus for her longtime advocacy for Army Soldiers and Families, including support of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, during the retirement ceremony of her husband, GEN James J. Mingus, on Feb. 6, 2026. Reserved for spouses with at least 30 years of caring, unpaid dedication, the award celebrates those whose leadership and commitment have left a lasting mark on the Army community. During the ceremony, GEN Mingus spoke on the shared dedication of service he and his wife provided.

"I'm leaving the office, but I'm not leaving the Army; the Army gave me a lot more than I deserve. I wouldn't trade a single day in uniform knowing that I was a part of something bigger than myself. If you're still serving, take care of each other and take care of families," said Mingus.

The citation on the award for Mrs. Mingus reads in part: "For distinguished service

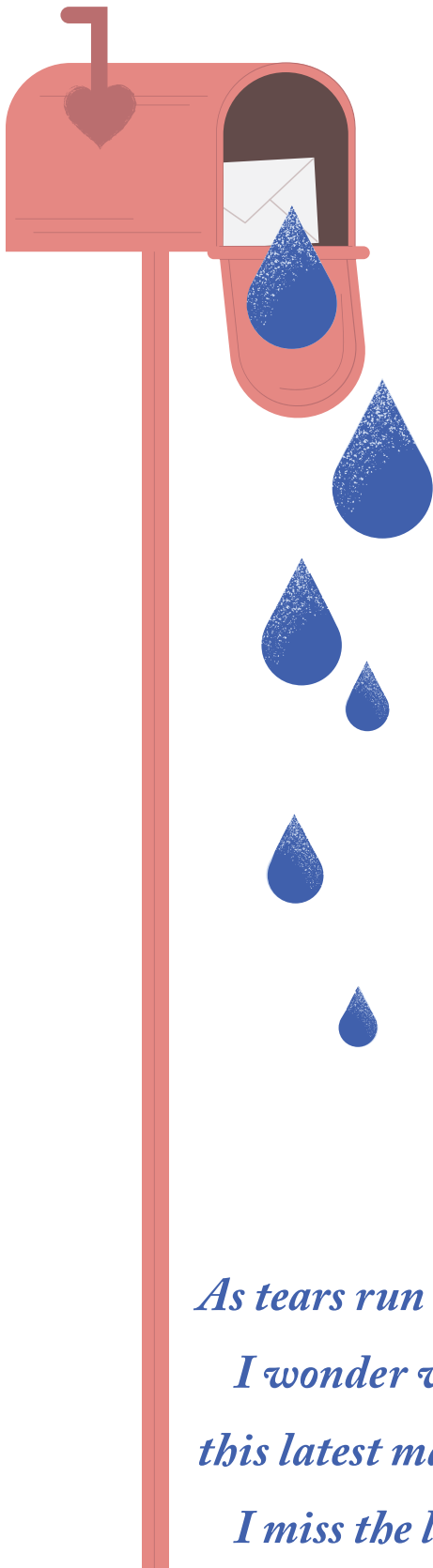
in support of the soldiers and families of the United States Army. Mrs. Mingus' steadfast support and tireless efforts have significantly enhanced the lives of soldiers, spouses, and families across the United States Army."

Eligibility for this honor depends on impact. Nominees must have led lasting improvements in areas such as survivor care, advocacy for military-connected children, creation of quality-of-life programs, or strengthening family readiness. The Julia Compton Moore Spouse Lifetime Achievement Award now stands as the Army's highest honor for the unseen heroes who have dedicated their lives to that principle.

This article was excerpted from "US Army establishes new lifetime achievement award honoring Julia Compton Moore," originally published by Army.mil on Feb. 17, 2026.

When the Mailbox

Brenda Elving ✧ Surviving Mother of Navy PO2 Michael Elving



One of the hardest parts of grief — one rarely talked about — is junk mail. It's an unpredictable ambush from the mailbox that leaves me in tears for the rest of the evening because I, too, miss him, T-Mobile.

Sorting through the day's mail, I'm reminded of how he used to shuffle through envelopes and advertisements sarcastically:

- "What do you mean, I have to pay for my own maintenance on a used car?!"
- "Oh, yes, I'd love to spend \$2,000 on a new phone with fewer features than my current one."
- "I know I haven't been in for an appointment lately. I'd love to come in, but I'm at the mercy of military medical."

As tears run down my cheeks, I wonder what fresh bit of sarcasm this latest mailing would have sparked. I miss the laughter of those moments.

My fourth child of six, Michael was always the sharp one. Never the leader of our homeschool exploits, he was a key player, with laser-focused insight into any challenge. He'd set big goals and achieve them almost as soon as the ink dried. He had absolute integrity and a dry wit, with a knack for finding the truth and humor in any situation, always perfectly timed to make us laugh and think at the same time.

*As tears run down my cheeks,
I wonder what fresh bit of sarcasm
this latest mailing would have sparked.
I miss the laughter of those moments.*

Here, There, and Everywhere

Grief has a way of sneaking into life's smallest corners. Tuesday's mail, the SPAM display at the grocery store, no everyday, mundane sight, smell, or sound is a safe space. The sound of a motor just outside can trigger our tender hearts to think that he's home until our brains remind us he's gone.

God, I miss him. Tears well up.

A holiday gathering or a "typical" Tuesday, we all feel it — the absence of his voice, his wit, his humor. This isn't just another deployment. It's the way things are now.

Time doesn't make loss easier, but it does change things. Grief's sharp edges eventually dull, letting us touch memories with more love and less pain. Laughter returns, ever so slowly, and threads back into daily life. Eventually, the threads of laughter, routine, and some amended normalcy begin to intertwine. The pattern is different, but the threads weave back together again.

Grief doesn't follow schedules or commands. Nor does it fade neatly with the seasons. It shows up when it wants to, and sometimes it feels like it will never leave. The devastation we feel is a reflection of how deeply we loved. It means that Michael mattered enough to leave a clear echo that time can't erase. It means the same for your loved one, too.

When people ask how I'm doing, I struggle to answer. Nothing less than integrity will honor his memory, but the struggle is too deep for most people to fathom. There are good days that feel out of place. There are numb days, and even joyful days. They live beside a constant ache.

I need to keep something of him alive. I make his favorite pie and take it to the church potluck. I take a drive down a

Makes You Cry



*Healing will never mean
“getting over” loss.
It means learning how to
carry memories without
losing our balance.*



PHOTOS: BRENDA ELVING

country backroad because that's what he would do the minute he had a clear space on his calendar. Those simple acts let me stay connected to him — and to who I am because of him.

Healing will never mean “getting over” loss. It means learning how to carry

memories without losing our balance. It means discovering how to laugh, how to return to family gatherings and traditions, how to feel joy without guilt. It means finding ways to keep our loved ones woven into our stories — because they're forever part of our stories; they can't *not* be.

Write for TAPS

We all have a story, and each story has a place at TAPS. To share yours, email

[» Editor@TAPS.org](mailto:Editor@TAPS.org)



GRIEF RUMINATION SPIRAL

Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT ★ TAPS Advisory Board

It's about loosening the tightness, letting a little light in, and giving yourself a different way to relate to what hurts.

Sometimes a thought shows up again and again — like a knot in the mind you can't untangle. In part three of this series, we explored helpful vs. harmful grief-related thoughts. Now, we'll put one of those into practice: gently shifting the way we hold a painful thought.

This isn't about finding silver linings or making yourself feel better than you do. It's about loosening the tightness, letting a little light in, and giving yourself a different way to relate to what hurts.

WHEN A THOUGHT IS TOO SHARP

Grief thoughts are often emotional echoes. They sound like:

- *It's my fault.*
- *I should have known.*
- *I'll never be OK again.*

These aren't just sentences. They carry weight. They shape how you feel in your body, how you move through your day, and how you speak to yourself. Sometimes, they need to be heard. Other times, they need to be softened.

GRIEF RUMINATION REFRAME PRACTICE

Choose one thought you've been repeating — something that stings when it shows up.

Then try the following steps.

1. Name the thought.

Say it clearly, like you're holding it in your hand. Write it down if that helps.

Example: "I failed them."

2. Acknowledge what it's trying to do.
Every thought has a purpose. Even painful ones are trying to protect you, explain something, or make sense of chaos.

Example: "This thought is trying to help me feel in control. If I had done something differently, maybe this wouldn't have happened."

3. Shift the tone, not the truth.

Now try a gentler version of the thought. Keep the emotional honesty — but let go of the cruelty. Even a small shift opens up space to breathe, pause, and soften.

Example: (Original) "I failed them."
(Reframed) "I wish I could have done more. I didn't have all the answers, but I showed up the best I could."



PART 4:

A GENTLE REFRAAME PRACTICE

This is the fourth and final article in the “Grief Rumination Spiral” series, originally published on HeatherStang.com in May 2025. Parts 1-3 were published in the fall 2025, winter 2025, and spring 2026 issues of TAPS Magazine.

4. Say it to yourself with kindness.

Read the new thought back, slowly. Imagine saying it to a friend. Imagine a friend saying it to you. What do you feel in your body when the words change?

A FEW MORE REFRAMES TO TRY

- *“I’ll never be OK.” → “I’m not OK right now, and that’s allowed. I don’t know what’s ahead.”*
- *“It’s all my fault.” → “I wish I had control, but I did not cause this. I’m grieving, not guilty.”*
- *“Nothing matters anymore.” → “It’s hard to care about anything now. And still, I’m here.”*

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES



A FINAL THOUGHT

This isn’t about replacing your grief. It’s about giving it a little more room to breathe.

You don’t have to reframe every painful thought. But when one loops too tight, too sharp — try softening it, even if just a little.

It might not fix the pain. But it can help you carry it with more compassion.

MORE TOOLS FOR THE GRIEF JOURNEY

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® is a leader in grief education, and you can access its live webinars, course series, and archived content at no cost. Visit TAPS.org/Institute for more healthy grief tips from experts and TAPS staff members.



About the Author

Heather Stang, M.A., C-IAYT, and 2025 Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) Clinical Practice Award Recipient, is the author of several publications, including *Navigating Loss: Wisdom and Self-Care for Times of Grief* and creator of the 8-step *Mindfulness & Grief System*. A certified yoga therapist and thanatologist, she blends mindfulness, expressive arts, and evidence-based grief care. Heather hosts the *Mindfulness & Grief Podcast*, serves on the TAPS Advisory Board, and offers grief support and training for professionals.

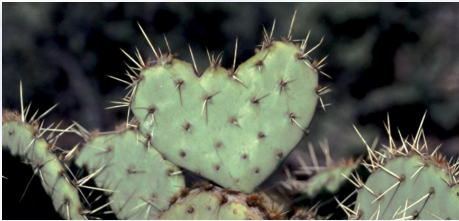


» TAPS.org/Institute



HEALING FROM TRAUMATIC

Michele Edington ✨ Surviving Significant Other of U.S. Air Force Veteran William Gentry



Grief isn't just an emotion; it's every emotion...on max volume. Those who have never experienced life-shattering grief might find it hard to empathize. That's why healing is sometimes thrust upon us before we understand what grief even means. It's not that the world around us is trying to be cruel, but rather, the world just can't fully understand what we're going through.

Add trauma to the equation, and the emotional roller coaster of healing begins to feel more like a rock tumbler. Instead of moving forward, we feel confined to a small space, at the mercy of the other rocks bouncing off of us, while everyone else carries on at their own normal pace.

When experienced together, grief and trauma — two equally painful upheavals on their own — can devastate the lives we've built at their foundation. All we can truly do when there is no light at the end of the tunnel is use our other senses to feel around to find our way through the dark. Before any true growth and healing can begin, we need to go back to the basics and relearn how to care for ourselves in the gentle way we deserve.

HOPE IS EVENTUALLY REALIZING *that we are still here.*

Traumatic Grief in the Body

One of the hardest truths of traumatic grief is that we don't heal by forgetting. We'll never really forget the traumatic images stamped on our subconsciouses. We actually heal by learning how to carry.

At first, the weight is unbearably heavy. It lives in our chests, stomachs, nervous systems, and even the skin around our eyes — growing dry from crying. Everything feels raw and loud. The world feels unsafe, and we're in survival mode long after the danger has passed. Trauma rewires the nervous system completely in response to an overwhelming situation. Though panic, dissociation, and exhaustion might not feel like protection, they're how our bodies protect us from trauma. Our bodies are doing the best they can, just like us.

Healing Starts Here

Healing begins when we allow our bodies to feel safe again, even in tiny moments. For me, that started with a whole lot of therapy. Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, or EMDR, helped untangle memories that felt frozen in place. Cognitive behavioral therapy gave

language to thoughts I didn't realize were running my life. Breathwork through yoga and meditation taught my body that it was allowed to come back into the present. Healing doesn't look the same for everyone, unfortunately. What worked for me might not be what you need.

Some people find solace in movement, like walking, yoga, swimming, or lifting weights. Others find it in journaling or art. Dopamine hobbies — working with tactile textures to feel grounded in the present — can also help. Some people find peace in gardening, music, prayer, or quiet mornings with the perfect blend of tea. There's no wrong method and no way to magically "fix" traumatic grief. We can start by finding small anchors that bring us back to our bodies and into the present .

Timelines and Waves

Another important part of healing is letting go of the idea that grief follows a neat timeline. As much as we'd like to control the timing and process, setting time limits and expectations for grief won't help. Time means nothing in the vacuum of grief, and feeling pulled between wanting time to move faster so

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GRIEF: WHERE TO START WHEN EVERYTHING HAS SHATTERED

we can feel better and fearing we'll feel further from the person we lost because time is moving too fast is normal.

We might feel OK one day and completely undone the next. Anniversaries can sneak up on us. Certain smells, songs, or places can knock the wind out of us — even years later. This doesn't mean we're moving backward; it just means grief is layered. Healing happens in waves, and we have to be patient with those waves.

Connection

Trauma isolates us by convincing us that no one will understand — that we're too much or our pain is inconvenient. We must reach out anyway. Whether it's a support group, therapist, trusted friend, or another survivor who simply knows what we're going through, connection reminds us that we aren't facing traumatic grief alone. We can think of trauma like walking on thin ice: It's best to spread our weight around to avoid cracking the ice.

Post-traumatic Growth

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, things begin to change. The pain doesn't disappear, but it squeezes our chests a little less over time. We start to breathe again and experience moments of laughter that finally don't feel

like betrayal. We discover that love doesn't end just because someone dies. Instead, grief teaches us that love isn't fragile. It survives unimaginable loss.

Hope arrives quietly and shows up in small victories. It might look like a morning where it feels possible to get out of bed. It might be the softening of a formerly sharp memory. Hope is eventually realizing that we are still here. Healing doesn't mean returning to who we were; that person no longer exists (and it's OK to mourn that person, too).

We are becoming someone new, someone who knows the depths of pain and still chooses to live. We're becoming someone with a deeper capacity for compassion, who understands how precious and fragile life truly is.

It's OK not to feel strong right now. It's OK to feel hollow, tired, and broken into pieces so small that finding them again seems impossible. Surviving this already proves something genuinely remarkable about us.

One breath at a time, let's allow ourselves imperfection and rest. We will heal on our own time and remember that life will be waiting for us when we're ready. And, even on days when it doesn't feel like it, we are not alone, and we are doing a remarkable job navigating the rock tumbler, the dark tunnel, and grief's waves.



All Ways, Always

TAPS has lifelong support in place to light your way through grief. Peer support, local gatherings, and healing retreats — explore all that and more at

» TAPS.org

HOPE IS EVENTUALLY REALIZING THAT
we are still here.



 [TAPS.org/Programs-Services](https://www.taps.org/Programs-Services)

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died.

TAPS®

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES



TAPS NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR HELPLINE • 800-959-TAPS (8277)

A caring network of peer professionals is standing by to provide emotional support, connection to resources and programs, a listening ear, and open access to all that TAPS provides. Survivors can call any time, day or night. We always answer, we always have time, and we always care.



PEER-BASED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT • TAPS.ORG/PEERMENTORS

At TAPS, survivors help survivors heal. Survivors at least 18 months out from their loss can receive training and join our national network of Peer Mentors. Newly bereaved survivors are closely matched with a Peer Mentor based on manner of loss and relationship to their loved one to help them navigate their unique needs in the aftermath of loss.



TAPS TOGETHERS • TAPS.ORG/TAPSTOGETHERS

TAPS Togethers events bring survivors together in their local communities to connect, share, and build meaningful memories rooted in honor and remembrance. TAPS Togethers events are hosted in communities across the country: at coffee shops, National Parks, and more. No matter what type of connection you are seeking, there is a TAPS Togethers for you.



CASEWORK ASSISTANCE • TAPS.ORG/CASEWORK

Our casework team provides compassionate, customized support to surviving families in alignment with TAPS partners and third-party resources. Caseworkers can connect survivors to pro-bono legal assistance, emergency financial resources, state and federal benefit information, and private social-services support to guide families toward long-term stability and self-sufficiency.



EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES • TAPS.ORG/EDU

TAPS Education Support Services empowers survivors in pursuit of postsecondary education by connecting them to benefits, resources, and scholarship information that meet their financial needs and educational goals.



SURVIVOR CARE TEAM • TAPS.ORG/SURVIVORCARETEAM

Survivor Care Team members are surviving military family members with extensive professional training in peer-based support, traumatic death, suicide prevention and postvention, and grief support. These skilled listeners assess the needs of the newly bereaved, create safe spaces for sharing, and empower the pursuit of the healthy coping skills and long-term support systems TAPS can provide.



SUICIDE-LOSS SUPPORT • TAPS.ORG/SUICIDE

Death by suicide can leave behind a wake of powerful, complicated emotions and questions that shape a unique grief journey. TAPS provides compassionate support and hope for all suicide-loss survivors and safe spaces to honor and grieve. Survivors are gently guided toward a path of healthy grieving, healing, and growth.

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES; ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/CATLANE

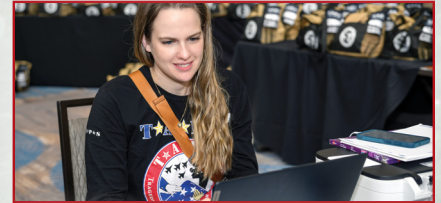
ILLNESS-LOSS SUPPORT • [TAPS.ORG/CAREGIVER](https://taps.org/caregiver)

TAPS ensures families whose loved one died from illness are recognized, cared for, and aware of pertinent benefits. We advocate for improvements in caregiver support and raise critical awareness about the unique needs and situations of military caregiving families, including the effects of toxic exposure. TAPS also provides healing peer connections and programs that support healthy next steps for caregiving survivors.



ONLINE COMMUNITY • [TAPS.ORG/ONLINECOMMUNITY](https://taps.org/onlinecommunity)

Our online community brings the meaningful connections of TAPS directly to survivors, wherever they are. Online groups are peer-led, facilitated sessions where there's never pressure to share, but always an opportunity. TAPS workshops and online series build supportive communities that learn and process new information together and create space to share perspectives in an effort to find inspiration, clarity, and connection.



WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT • [TAPS.ORG/EMPOWERMENT](https://taps.org/empowerment)

TAPS Women's Empowerment programming provides surviving women with the tools and confidence to shape their identity, spirituality, and goal setting in their lives after loss. A combination of in-person and online events foster a vibrant, compassionate community where participants treasure opportunities to be each other's teachers, confidants, cheerleaders, and friends.



MEN'S PROGRAM • [TAPS.ORG/MEN](https://taps.org/men)

The TAPS Men's Program was designed by men, for men. It paves the way for men to grieve their way, at their own pace. Surviving men lean on each other, share perspectives, grow stronger by elevating one another, and honor the legacy of their military and veteran loved ones.



YOUTH PROGRAMS • [TAPS.ORG/YOUTHPROGRAMS](https://taps.org/youthprograms)

Though their lives are impacted by grief, young TAPS survivors know their lives will also be marked by camaraderie, mentorship, emotional maturity, adventure, and fun. TAPS Youth Programs — led by experts in child development, children's grief and loss, mental health, and education — provide safe spaces for surviving military children (ages 5-18) to explore grief and embrace healing at Good Grief Camps and Family Camps. Online programming is also available for parents and guardians of grieving children.



YOUNG ADULTS PROGRAM • [TAPS.ORG/YOUNGADULTS](https://taps.org/youngadults)

Five pillars of growth — Personal Development, Financial Stability, Communication, Career Development, and Service to Others — guide military survivors, ages 18-30, as they grow with their grief. Through in-person, multi-day experiences, and online group discussions, young adult survivors connect and engage with others to create a well-rounded life full of hope, healing, and growth.



TAPS INSTITUTE FOR HOPE AND HEALING® • [TAPS.ORG/INSTITUTE](https://taps.org/institute)

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® is a leader in training and education for grief professionals and bereaved individuals and families. The institute provides no-cost grief and bereavement programming through webinars, webcasts, and other events on a variety of topics, such as understanding and responding to suicide; children's grief; coping with loss; wellness workshops; and preserving memories of lost loved ones. Professionals can access academic programs and a wide range of continuing education credits.



SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT • [TAPS.ORG/ENTERTAINMENT](https://taps.org/entertainment)

Stars4TAPS and teams4taps collaborate with the entertainment industry and sports organizations across the country and in the U.K. to bring joy, healing, and incredible memories to surviving military families as they honor their fallen heroes.



COMMUNITY-BASED GRIEF SUPPORT • [TAPS.ORG/GRIEFCOUNSELING](https://taps.org/griefcounseling)

The right mental health or grief professional can guide military survivors to discover their strengths, develop coping skills, navigate relationships, and explore secondary losses. TAPS carefully connects survivors to the right mental health professional, trauma resources, and support groups, all within their local community.



THE STORIES THAT *SHAPE US*

Zoe Charles ★ Surviving Daughter of U.S. Army CPT Shawn Charles



Loss is often described as something that breaks you, but when it happens in childhood, it feels less like a break and more like growing up with a space that can never quite be filled. It becomes a quiet, constant companion, shaping how you see the world before you even have the words to understand it. It's the feeling of reaching for a hand that isn't there, of missing someone in moments you don't yet realize will matter forever, a soft, aching absence that grows up with you.

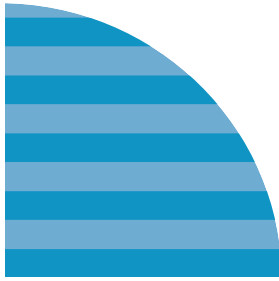
I was 7 years old when my father died of stomach cancer. At that age, I didn't fully understand what cancer was. I didn't grasp the complexity of illness, the language of treatment, or the finality of death. What I understood was simpler and far more confusing. One day my dad was there, and then he wasn't. The world kept turning.

Grief didn't arrive as a single, overwhelming wave. Instead, it showed up in fragments — empty seats at school events, unanswered questions, and quiet moments when I could've used his guidance.

I missed him in the obvious moments, like the father-daughter dances, learning to drive, and going on my first date, but grief weaved its way into my identity in subtler ways, too. I became more observant, more aware of other people's pain. Like other surviving children, I learned resilience — not by choice, but because I had to.

For a long time, I carried my grief quietly. As a child, it was difficult to articulate what I was feeling. How do you explain a loss you don't fully understand? How do you express longing for someone whose voice you're starting to forget? How do you talk about something when none of the other kids around you have any idea what you are feeling?

GRIEF DIDN'T ARRIVE AS A SINGLE,
OVERWHELMING WAVE.
INSTEAD, IT SHOWED UP
IN FRAGMENTS



As I grew older, my understanding of my father's illness deepened. I began to see not only what I had lost, but what my family had endured. Cancer didn't just take my father; it touched every part of our lives. The hospital visits, the uncertainty, the emotional toll — it extended far beyond the person diagnosed. And that realization became a turning point.

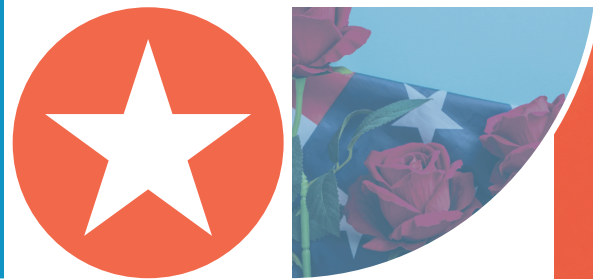
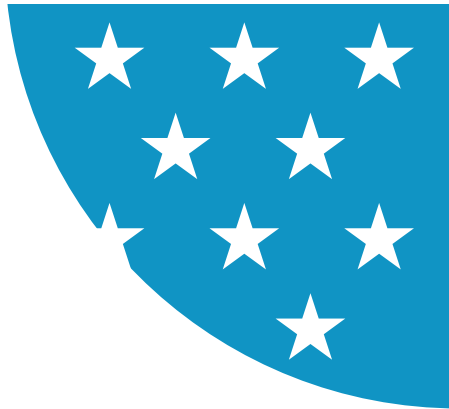
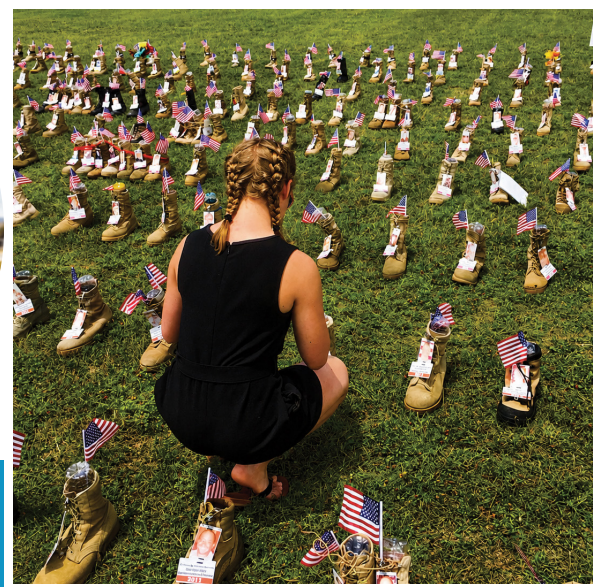
I recognized that other families were walking a similar path — children sitting in waiting rooms, parents trying to stay strong, loved ones navigating a world that suddenly felt fragile. I understood the isolation, confusion, and the need for support that often wasn't there. Out of this understanding, Beyond the Ribbon was born.

Beyond the Ribbon is more than a community service initiative for me. It reflects my own experience. It exists to support families going through a cancer diagnosis, not just medically, but emotionally, and practically. Because cancer doesn't just affect the body; it reshapes entire families.

This work connects me with people at some of the most vulnerable moments in their lives; children — who remind me of my younger self — quietly trying to make sense of something far too big for their age; and parents carrying both strength and fear in equal measure. In these interactions, I find purpose. What once was a source of pain has become a source of connection.

But healing does not follow a path, and grief doesn't simply disappear when you find purpose. It evolves. There are still moments when I wonder what my life would have been like if my father had lived. What advice would he have given me? What would he think of the person I've become? Those questions don't have answers, but they've shaped the way I move through the world. I live with intention, with empathy, and with a deep appreciation for the relationships I do have.

One of the most meaningful ways I've processed my grief is through storytelling. Writing *Daddy's Star*, my children's book, was both a personal and emotional journey. I wanted to create something that I didn't have as a child. This book was meant to be a gentle, honest way to understand loss.



A story that tells children it's OK to feel confused, sad, even angry. It's a story that reassures them that love doesn't disappear, even when someone is no longer physically present. In many ways, *Daddy's Star* is a conversation between my younger self and the person I am today. It's an offering to children navigating grief and the adults who want to support them but may not know how.

If losing my father taught me anything, it's that grief and love are deeply intertwined. The depth of our grief reflects the depth of our love, and that love doesn't end even when it is difficult to remember his voice or his smell. It changes form. It becomes memory, motivation, and sometimes, a quiet strength that carries you forward.

I often think about the idea of legacy. For a long time, I thought my father's legacy was something I had lost along with him. But I've come to realize that legacy isn't just what someone leaves behind. It's what continues through the lives they've touched. In that sense, my father's legacy lives on in everything I do. I continue to build his legacy in each hospice visit, each fundraiser, each speech I give. It lives in Beyond the Ribbon, in every family we support.

It lives in *Daddy's Star*, in every child who finds comfort in its pages. And it lives in me. His legacy lives in the resilience I've built, the compassion I carry, and the purpose I've found.

Losing a parent at a young age is a story I never would have chosen. But it's the story that shaped me. And while it began with loss, it continues with connection, meaning, and the belief that even the deepest pain can be transformed into something that helps others feel less alone. Because in the end, grief doesn't have to be the end of the story. Sometimes, it's where the story truly begins.



TAPS.org/YouthPrograms



TAPS.org/YoungAdult

YOU ARE NOT JUST A WIDOW



If my husband had let me, I would have accompanied him to every doctor's appointment, sat in the exam room, taken notes, asked follow-up questions, and probably scheduled the next visit before we left the parking lot. I loved that man with the enthusiasm of a full-time project manager. If he so much as sniffled, I was ready with a thermometer, a spreadsheet, and a second opinion. He used to laugh and say he hoped he'd go first, then joke that I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I wasn't supervising his vitamin intake. And I'd laugh, too. It was one of those lighthearted things you can say when forever still feels negotiable.

Looking back at those conversations now, though, they really do ring true. I lost my identity when my husband died. It didn't hit me until I was sitting in the front row of his funeral. In my book, *Saying It Out Loud*, I describe it this way:

"I had gone from dealing with my dad's sudden passing to getting married, to having our daughter, to then facing Andy's death just a month after I had finally gone back to work. Through all the stories and anecdotes, through the long week leading up to this service, I learned exactly who Andy was. But who was I?"

Saying It Out Loud began as a project for my daughter, Adalyn, who was 16 months old when my husband passed. I wanted to document everything we went through that whole year and capture who Andy was on paper because I knew she would forget over time. I ended up chronicling my attempts to process things most people in my life couldn't understand, but things any widow reading this surely understands.

It's easy to get wrapped up in our spouse's identity. We share interests, goals, and experiences, both personal and professional. Though my husband was in the Army Reserves, and I related more to his civilian career, it's easy to see how military service becomes a major part of a marriage — part of a family dynamic where everyone serves and sacrifices in some way. Military service aside, I was probably referred to as "Andy's wife," instead of "Amy," more often than not.

I was left in a pure identity crisis after he died.

WHO AM I?

Discovering who I am now started with slowly taking care of myself — one small thing a day, like drinking a full glass of water.

Then, I built on that by getting back into the gym, getting my strength back, diving into my faith and what I truly believed, filling my body with nutrients, and even figuring out what clothing styles I liked. I slowly started to love myself again.

I realized how lost we can get in marriage, motherhood, and now grief. I realized how much I was "talking the talk" and not "walking the walk" when Andy was alive. I was going through the motions of life without truly knowing who I was. Figuring out who Amy was — who she is — had to start with loving her — loving me.

I found confidence in bravely saying "yes" to all the experiences I could. With growing confidence came growing love for myself. I learned that I could travel alone, take a little trip with my daughter, or attend a wedding alone and be OK.

"I LEARNED EXACTLY WHO ANDY WAS. BUT WHO WAS I?"



- YOU ARE STILL YOU

Amy King
Surviving Spouse
of U.S. Army Reserve
CPT Anderson King

Now, I'm confident in who I am, confident in just being Amy.

STILL ME

Death really is the closest thing to a restart that we get in life. It spins our world upside down, leaving us with no choice but to stop and reidentify ourselves. That version of who we were before the death of our loved one is gone. We will never be that version of ourselves again. But with care and love for ourselves, we can slowly get to know the new us.

Andy still is — and always will be — such a huge part of my life, but not everything. I'm learning to make room for me.

If you also find yourself grieving your spouse and questioning who you are now, just know that your identity didn't die with your spouse. It just got lost. Your story didn't die either.

You are not just a widow. You are still you.



Find Your Way With TAPS

TAPS Women's Empowerment program can help you discover purpose, community, and rediscover you. Whether you're searching for widow-only events or opportunities open to all women, healing TAPS retreats and the consistent support of an online peer community await.

» TAPS.org/Empowerment





THE *Spiritual*

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. ★ TAPS Advisory Board

When someone we love dies, it is like a deep hole implodes inside of us and leaves us gasping for air. I have always said we mourn life losses from the inside out. To eventually catch our breath, we need to nurture ourselves physically, emotionally, cognitively, socially, and spiritually. In my experience, it is only when we are spiritually nurtured (inside and outside) that we discover the courage to mourn openly and honestly.

Spirituality INVITES US TO:

- Slow down and turn inward
- Feel deeply and believe passionately
- Get to know our authentic selves
- Celebrate diversity
- Open ourselves up to the mystery

Practicing spiritual self-care doesn't mean feeling sorry for ourselves. Rather, it means allowing ourselves to have the courage to pay attention to our special needs. It is in spiritually nurturing ourselves — allowing ourselves the time and loving attention we need to journey through our grief — that we find meaning in our continued living. That is why, if I could, I would encourage all of us in the midst of grief to put “nurture my spirit” first on our daily to-do lists.

THE *Mosaic World* WE LIVE IN

Our world has gotten much smaller religiously in the last 50 years. Eastern religions and spiritual practices arrived in the U.S. and Canada a little more than 150 years ago. Then, in the 1960s, we saw books, lectures, and workshops from folks like Thich Nhat Hanh and Ram Dass, who invited us westerners to

explore Eastern spiritual practices. This influx of Eastern traditions and practices brought new life to spirituality in North America.

While our differences still define us, our potential to borrow meaningful spiritual practices from each other unites us. The great equalizer — death — invites us to be enriched by learning from each other.

I recognize that spirituality and religiosity are not necessarily synonymous. In some people's lives, they overlap completely; their religious life is their spiritual life. Other people have a rich spiritual life with few or no ties to an organized religion. Obviously, each of us needs to define our own spirituality in the depths of our own hearts and minds. The paths we choose will be our own, discovered through self-examination, reflection, and spiritual transformation.

It is in spiritually nurturing ourselves
— ALLOWING OURSELVES THE TIME AND LOVING ATTENTION
WE NEED TO JOURNEY THROUGH OUR GRIEF —
THAT WE FIND MEANING IN OUR CONTINUED LIVING.



PATH TO HEALING

THE "Switch"

Someone with wisdom once observed, "Spirituality is like a switch. Everybody has one; it's just that not everyone has it turned on." Sometimes, experiences of grief and loss turn off our switches. Sometimes our switches feel stuck, or worse yet, non-existent. Our "divine spark" — which gives our lives meaning and purpose — feels muted.

When my switch is turned on, even in the midst of grief, I can still befriend hope, and the most ordinary moment can feed my soul. Spirituality is anchored in faith — expecting goodness even in the worst of times, not fear — expecting the worst even in the best of times.

Spirituality reminds us that we can and will integrate losses into our lives, see the goodness in others, and know that there are many pathways to heaven.

THE Openness OF A CHILD

If we ever doubt our connection to spirituality and the world around us, we can try approaching life with the openness of a child: Embrace the pleasure of simple sights, smells, and sounds that greet our senses.

I truly believe that acknowledging our hearts are broken is the beginning of healing. As we experience the pain of loss — gently opening, acknowledging, and allowing — the suffering diminishes, but never completely vanishes. In fact, resisting the pain can potentially be more painful than the pain itself. As difficult as it is, we must relinquish ourselves to the pain of grief. As Helen Keller said, "The only way to the other side is through."

Yet, going through the pain of loss is not in and of itself the goal in our grief journey. Instead, it is rediscovering life in ways that give us reason to get our feet out of bed and to make life matter. The death of someone precious to us is not something we will ever "overcome" or "let go of" — it doesn't call out to be resolved or explained, but to be experienced.



Subscribe to **Daily Reflections** from TAPS to receive comforting emails and encouraging words from Dr. Wolfelt.



About the Author

Longtime TAPS supporter Dr. Alan Wolfelt serves as the director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is a member of the TAPS Advisory Board. He has written many books that help people mourn, including *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (coauthored with TAPS President Bonnie Carroll) and *Loving From the Outside In Mourning From the Inside Out*, from which this article is excerpted. Visit CenterForLoss.com to learn more about grief and order Dr. Wolfelt's books.

A YEAR TO REMEMBER

Americans across the nation will celebrate 250 years of independence on July 4, 2026. From hometown parades, firework displays, family vacations, and cookouts, patriotism and gratitude will be on full display.

As survivors, we hold a sacred place in the 250-year history of the United States because the story of our nation cannot be told without the names of those who defended it and sacrificed for it.

Our loved ones are part of this long list of heroes — generations of service members who stepped forward in times of war and peace to defend our ideals, our freedoms, and our future. What we know well in the TAPS Family — what every military survivor from the Revolutionary War to the present day knows — is that freedom always comes at a cost.

As communities and families come together this Independence Day, TAPS is proud to be an America 250 partner. Together, we ensure that remembrance remains a part of this year's celebration.

We understand that pride and grief can exist side by side. We hold them both each and every day. Our loved ones' names are etched in stone and are forever part of our nation's history. This summer, and always, we carry their legacies forward in meaningful ways. Through TAPS — through us — future generations will know their names and hear their stories.



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES; ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/FINEVECTOR

SAFE, FINANCIALLY SECURE, AND SCAM-AWARE

THE USAA EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION®

It's easy to think scams are just happening to other people, or — in the midst of grief — it's easy not to think of them at all. But a recent Bankrate survey reports that 40 percent of Americans experienced a scam or financial fraud in 2024. As a survivor, you may be at greater risk due to the difficult reality of living with grief, loss, and changes to income and benefits.

SPOT WARNING SIGNS

Scams can be sophisticated, and recovery can take months, but knowing common warning signs can help you avoid them.

Scammers may:

- **Make unsolicited or unexpected contact** by phone, text, email, or social media, asking for money or personal information.
- **Pretend to be a trusted source**, like a financial institution, government agency, charity, company, or even friends and family. Don't rely on caller ID to verify identity.
- **Pressure you to act quickly** through limited-time offers, threats, or emergencies.
- **Use emotional manipulation**, like fear, sympathy, excitement, or embarrassment.
- **Make odd payment requests** — cryptocurrency, wire transfers, gift cards, or payment apps are big warning signs.

KNOW TOP SCAMS

Imposter scams ask you to move money, share codes, or click unusual links by impersonating your financial institution or other trusted organizations or people via calls, emails, or texts.

Phishing, smishing, and vishing scams aim to trick you into revealing login credentials or personal information, often through urgent messages or fake websites.

Job and money mule scams include fake employment opportunities designed to steal your information or involve you in illegal money transfers.

Investment and cryptocurrency scams lure victims with the promise of fast or guaranteed returns.

Romance scams begin by building online relationships to gain trust before requesting money. Warning signs include refusing video calls or in-person meetings.

It's worth noting that military families and surviving military families are frequent targets for identity theft, imposter scams, predatory loans, and phishing.

The USAA Educational Foundation is a nonprofit, tax-exempt IRS 501(c)(3) and cannot endorse or promote any commercial supplier, product, or service. The content of this article is intended for information purposes only and does not constitute legal, tax, or financial advice.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Act immediately if something feels wrong or after engaging with an unusual call, text, or email.

1. **Stop all contact with the scammer.** Do not reply to messages, click links, or send additional money or information.
2. **Secure your accounts.** If you shared passwords, change them immediately. Consider enabling security features, like two-factor authentication.
3. **Contact your financial institution immediately** to secure your finances and recover losses.
4. **Report the scam** to protect others: the FTC, FBI IC3 (internet scams), your state attorney general, or the U.S. Postal Service (for mail scams).

Scams are an unfortunate reality of life, even in the vulnerability of grief. Understanding common tactics, warning signs, and how to prevent and respond to threats all help you take control and protect your finances and your family. Find more consumer protection tips at [USAADF.org](https://usaadf.org), or call TAPS at 202-588-TAPS (8277) with questions and concerns about scams targeting the survivor community.

Remember, scams can happen to anyone. If you are victimized, be kind to yourself and use the resources available to protect yourself and your finances.

PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST SCAMS

1. **BE ALERT.** If asked for money or personal information, pause and think.
2. **SLOW DOWN.** Think before acting. Scammers thrive on speed and hate delays.
3. **VERIFY INFORMATION** through official channels, not links or numbers provided in messages.
4. **NEVER SHARE** personal information (passcodes or financial information) unless you are certain you know the identity of the person you are dealing with.



A Look Back AT THE 2026 TAPS FAMILY REUNION

The 32nd Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp was a time for honoring our heroes, building community, and making memories together. *We hope to see you next year over Memorial Day weekend.*

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES





TAPS® TOGETHERS

Grief can feel isolating, but you don't have to face it alone. TAPS Togethers bring military survivors together in-person in your local community to connect, share, and build meaningful memories rooted in honor and remembrance. With options for every step of your grief journey, from Connections and Community Partnerships to Experiences and Services, there's a way to get involved that feels right for you. Join us.

CONNECTIONS

If you want to connect with fellow military survivors in a low-pressure environment, TAPS Togethers Connections are a great place to start. These recurring, simple events are an opportunity to get honest about your grief journey with others who understand, or simply share a "normal" conversation over a cup of coffee. If you're looking for deeper connection and support, join a TAPS Togethers Caregroup Connection for intentional, ongoing gatherings with survivors who have experienced a similar loss.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

As a military survivor, you are a part of something greater: a community that has made incredible sacrifices in service to our country. Through TAPS Community Partnerships, you can connect with the broader military survivor community, supported by businesses and organizations that acknowledge and honor your sacrifice. These sponsored events, including visits to monuments, parades, and even days at amusement parks, are rooted in honor and patriotism.

EXPERIENCES

Grief can change the way we interact with the outside world — it can drain our energy to engage in activities, go to events, or try new things. Participating in TAPS Togethers Experiences can help remind us that there are still things to learn and discover. Join fellow military survivors for an art workshop, a community outdoor adventure, a guided tour, a movement class, or a cooking lesson (just to name a few!).

SERVICE

Your loved one lived a life of service. Through TAPS Togethers Service, you can honor their legacy by serving others, whether volunteering at a food bank or assembling care packages for deployed troops. As you stand side-by-side with fellow survivors to honor your hero and help your community, you'll find connection, purpose, and strength together.

FIND A GATHERING NEAR YOU!

Call: 202-588-TAPS (8277)

Email: tapstogethers@TAPS.org

Download: TAPS iPhone App



>>TAPSnews.org/App



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES

Finding Sophia, Finding Community:



MY FIRST TAPS WEEKEND



U.S. Coast Guard CAPT Michael J. Plumley, Ph.D., PE ★ Surviving Brother of U.S. Army SSGT David Plumley

I arrived at the TAPS National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar in November 2025 to honor the loss of my brother, SSGT David Plumley, who died three and a half years earlier. He was the only person I knew my whole life. He was my anchor — mischievous, smart, and prone to disappearing on unannounced adventures that left us all laughing when he finally came back. In so many ways, he was a pirate at heart. The memory of losing him brought me to TAPS two months earlier — inspired, yet apprehensive — to become a Peer Mentor. I told myself it was time to be there for others facing the unthinkable.

I completed the online Peer Mentor training last October, joined a Dare to Lead webinar the same week (shoutout to Cohort 22), and believed the in-person seminar would push my comfort zone just enough to walk alongside others in their grief.

What I couldn't know on the flight to the seminar was that the weekend would ask me to learn some lessons in real time.

The Call

On Friday morning of the National Military Suicide Loss Survivor Seminar, minutes after logging off the weekly Dare to Lead workshop and heading toward Peer Mentor training, my phone rang. My friend Em's voice shook:

“Sophia bolted out the door of my store... It's like she was looking for you. I can't find her.”

My chest tightened. Sophia — my pirate pup, a two-year-old mini Aussie Shepherd rescue — is the only other member of my household. The van that delivered

her arrived, by coincidence, on the third anniversary of my brother's death. She was perfect “first mate” material from day one, growing from a timid rescue into a joyful, mischievous companion, born for the sea.

This weekend was the first time I'd ever left her overnight. She had only moved in six months earlier, and now she was missing.

I put my phone away, steadied myself, and walked into training. Grief had trained me in a certain kind of silence — an instinct to keep pain to myself so I wouldn't burden others. So I sat tall, played it cool, and tried to remain present, recalling something my mom always says, “I can only handle one crisis at a time.” Inside, I was a wreck.

Being Seen

I happened to sit next to Betty — a longtime Peer Mentor and, from what I could tell, something of a TAPS celebrity. She didn't know me or what just happened. But when she asked, “How are you?” something in

her kindness cracked my silence.

“My dog just went missing.”

From that moment on, throughout the weekend, she seemed to appear a few times a day — gently checking in: “Any news?”

Each time I answered, “No,” but her presence steadied me. On Saturday, when we ended up at the same table, I joked, “Do I seem like trouble? Were you sent to keep an eye on me?” She laughed, and I did too. For a moment, I felt less alone.

Others I confided in responded with the same calm presence — no panic, just genuine support. I realized peer support, at its best, isn't about fixing anything. It's someone who knows this matters to you, who doesn't run even though they can't solve it, who helps by just being there.

Staying

During training, my mind was 2,500 miles east. I texted another trusted friend — a



blunt explanation of the situation and a plea: “Can you check? Should I get on a plane?”

She didn’t just check in. She left work and drove to the next town. By the time she called me back, she and others had already mobilized: friends walking neighborhoods, printing flyers, tracking leads, and urging me to stay.

“Don’t leave. We know what she means to you. We’ve got this.” They also knew what it meant for me to put myself on that plane to Arizona. Their commitment — to Sophia and me — held me together for the weekend.

The Search

Monday, I headed to the airport at 5:30 a.m. and landed back in Connecticut at 7:30 p.m. I grabbed a flashlight, bundled up for the cold, and searched until midnight — parking lots, streets, wooded edges — while managing intrusive thoughts that she was hurt, taken nowhere near me, or worse.

Tuesday morning at 5:30, I started again — 13 more miles through brush and thorns, calling her name.

Around 3:00 that afternoon, we got a tip: Someone had seen her four days earlier near I-95. It made no sense. It was loud, dangerous, and she hates traffic. I scoffed. But something — instinct or desperation — made me look.

I walked along northbound I-95, avoiding traffic and a fallen deer on the shoulder until I found an access point into the narrow wooded ditch between the north and southbound lanes — an island of brush pressed between walls of roaring traffic.

I pushed into the ditch, calling her name — nothing. My knee hurt. My phone hit 5 percent as the sun dropped lower in the sky.

Then — an explosion of movement! A small animal burst out of the brush. It bolted, then turned.

Sophia!

For a full minute, she trembled, staring at me across the ditch. I knelt and called softly,

my heart racing, treats in hand. Then something shifted — recognition.

She bounded toward me, Aussie shepherd butt wiggling. Relief washed over me. She was hungry, excited, strangely clean, and — aside from a few scratches — unharmed.

I hugged her, near tears, and called Em: “We need a ride.”

Lessons From the Weekend

As the adrenaline faded, I thought back to the seminar’s closing session — conversations about reentry and meaning. I realized I had lived a distilled version of what TAPS is all about:

- Grief often makes us afraid to speak up.
- Healing begins when we let someone in.
- Not everyone recoils when we’re vulnerable — the right people show up.
- Community can hold us when life becomes overwhelming.

I walked into the seminar to learn how to support others and honor my brother. I walked out having been supported myself — by TAPS members who checked on me with kindness, and friends at home who walked beside me through fear and uncertainty.

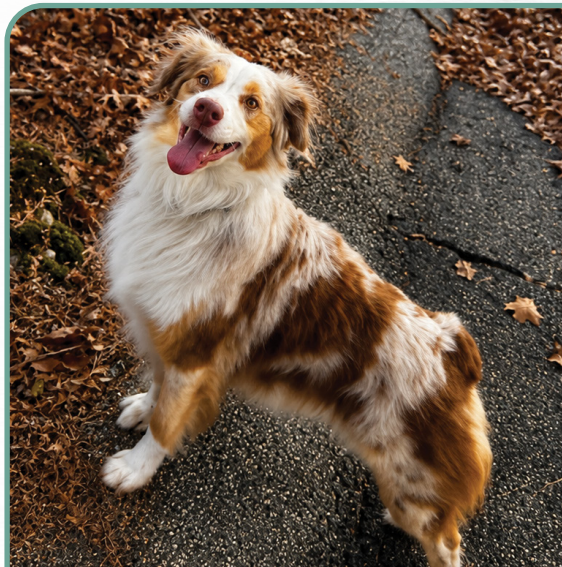
I emailed Betty to thank her and share the good news. She wrote back: “You should write this for *TAPS Magazine!*”

I came to TAPS for the knowledge. I stayed for the connection and compassion.

Sophia is home now, healthy, glued to my side, and gloriously unaware of the chaos she caused. I forgot to mention — she chewed through her leash five minutes after I put it on in the ditch. A mischievous pirate indeed.

As I continue my Peer Mentor journey, I’ll carry this with me:

We don’t heal alone. We heal when someone looks at us and says, “I’m here with you.”



Find Upcoming TAPS Events:

2026 National Military Suicide Loss Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Suicide-loss survivors, you are not alone, and you have a community who understands at TAPS. We invite you to join us for a weekend of healing and connection this August in San Antonio, Texas. Surround yourself with the same compassionate support that Michael experienced as you develop coping skills, learn from experts and peers, and gain an understanding of your complex grief journey. Learn more and register via the QR code. Registration closes Aug. 10, 2026.



National Military Suicide Loss Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

August 14-16, 2026

San Antonio, Texas

More Ways to Connect

While you're browsing our events page, take a look at additional opportunities to attend healing retreats and outdoor events, family-friendly events, and self-funded cruises. New events will be posted as details are finalized, so be sure to check back often!

Self-Funded 7-Night Eastern Mediterranean Cruise

October 18-25, 2026

Rome, Italy

Self-Funded 7-Night Alaska Adventure Cruise

September 3-10, 2027

Seattle, Washington

2026 Regional Seminars and Good Grief Camps

All military and veteran survivors are welcome to register for an upcoming regional seminar, in convenient locations across the country. Simply visit TAPS.org/Events, select your desired event, and complete the online registration. We hope to welcome you for a weekend of hope, healing, and connection.

Southwest Regional Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

July 17-19, 2026

Phoenix, Arizona

Southeast Regional Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

September 11-13, 2026

Jacksonville, Florida

Northeast Regional Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

November 20-22, 2026

Buffalo, New York



>> TAPS.org/Events



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Summer sunshine, a playful breeze,
Conjure mystical-magic memories
...of laughter and of special days.
They dance on beams of moonlit rays, twinkling stars,
...how I wonder where you are.

A favorite song, a familiar scent, creep into my emptiness,
...tears freely fall,
Do mundane chores, follow rote routines, because...
...because my son's not here anymore.

Some friends stay close; others drift away,
Does it matter if I "Have a nice day"?

I visit the plaque that honors him,
Sit on a bench and wonder why...
...why God needed him more than I.

Sorrowful steps take me through days that remain,
...one step, two, again and again,
I find different corners, travel different paths,
Go here? Yes; no, don't go there.

I stumble upon others, who share the same loss,
...feel the same aching grief, the same despair,
We talk; we cry,
Just as I, they wonder why.

Grief doesn't end; it still takes its toll,
...but I no longer feel I am alone.

There are others out there just like me.

Others out there just like me

Loretta Krause ★ Surviving Mother of Retired Army MAJ Michael Krause



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TAPS is the national nonprofit organization providing compassionate care and comprehensive resources to all those grieving a death in the military or veteran community.



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Remember the Love. Celebrate the Life. Share the Journey.



PHOTO: TAPS ARCHIVES