

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

T★A★P★S[®]

Comfort and Support Since 1994

MAGAZINE

FOR THE LOVED ONES OF THOSE WHO SERVED & DIED



VOLUME 21 • ISSUE 4

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

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★ **About TAPS Magazine** ★

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national nonprofit 501(c)3 Veterans Service Organization which publishes *TAPS Magazine* in furtherance of its mission to support survivors whose loved one died while serving in the Armed Forces.

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



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Printed in the USA

TAPS®

Comfort and Support Since 1994

TAPS offers help, hope, and healing to all those grieving the death of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces of America.

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

T*A*P*S PROVIDES

- ★ The National Military Survivor Helpline
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- ★ Good Grief Camps for Children
- ★ Connections to Community-Based Care
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- ★ Education Support Services
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- ★ Quarterly *TAPS Magazine*

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COVER PHOTO BY
Chelsea Marlow

A TAPS surviving widow contemplates the barren landscape and looks forward to opportunities for renewal and hope in the New Year.



For more information on TAPS programs or services please visit: **WWW.TAPS.ORG**

Let Us Hear From You



Tell us what you think, send ideas for future topics, or submit an article. Write to us at editor@taps.org. Your TAPS family is waiting to hear from you. ★

National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar

I wasn't really sure where I'd fit in this new family; our story is pretty complicated. But, if I had any doubt in my mind before tonight whether we belong here, it's completely gone. Right away at check in, as hundreds were gathered and milling about, I started to feel overwhelmed with us. Fate drew me into someone with almost an identical story. My mind is blown, and I am relieved to have found a kindred spirit.

Jessica Windwalker, Wisconsin
Survivor, former spouse of
BU3 Jason DeRosier

TAPS Provides Comprehensive Care

I contacted one of the therapists TAPS suggested. She is an absolute lifesaver. She is magnificent, exactly what I needed. The package from TAPS was also a godsend. I still use the material daily. I could not have gone through this without TAPS. I know people say that, but I truly was on the "edge" of life and living. TAPS not only saved me, but gave me direction of how to cope with my grief and knowledge to understand my situation. I can never adequately express my appreciation and gratitude.

Carol Kelly, Oklahoma
Surviving spouse of
George Carson



Team TAPS Marine Corps Marathon Experience

The MCM weekend was one of the most meaningful experiences I've had in a long time. From walking through the expo to meeting members of Team TAPS and hearing stories of their friends and families, to the inspirational pasta dinner and through the amazing marathon itself. The weekend was everything I expected it would be times ten!

From the day I arrived, the TAPS family felt like such a fellowship. You welcomed me, my family and Matt Coutu's story and legacy with such kindness, we couldn't help but feel like long-standing members of the family. I never thought I would leave DC more patriotic than when I arrived, but that was definitely the case.

Thank you to the whole TAPS team for answering my questions and all of your support as I prepared for the race. I will continue to share the TAPS story and all of your great work. TAPS will forever be a part of my family.

Scott Bookman
Team TAPS Runner and Fundraiser

Childhood Grief Webinar

I want to thank you so much for putting together such an informative webinar. There was so much information in that one hour, it's unbelievable. Not only did I get help in handling my granddaughter, but I got help with my struggles of losing her dad. Thank you TAPS for helping our families.

Patricia Henry, Florida
Surviving mother of
SGT Kyle Henry

teams4taps Premiere Boxing Champion Event

I wanted to thank you for the opportunity to attend the fight yesterday. To have that experience was amazing and relaxing. TAPS never fails in helping to keep me afloat during very stressful times. It's a beautiful reminder that someone is here for me and you guys help keep my dad alive. There's sometimes no diction at all that can be used to describe feelings, but thank you so much again. I really enjoyed myself.

Tearsa Thomas, Maryland
Surviving stepdaughter of
SRA Gilnord Charles

TAPS Wisconsin Care Group

Today's meeting was difficult for me on several levels. I realize that I have much work to do in helping my daughter through her losses, more so than expecting her to help me. After listening to the story of other siblings, as a parent I am sadly guilty of the same issues as other parents; i.e, feeling that losing Julieanne was more my loss than her sister's or her dad's or anyone else that loved her. I will make every attempt to reconcile this with my daughter if she will allow me this grace. Thank you for facilitating your own courageous comments and modeling the same for others today. (**Written to the WI Care Group facilitator, Glenn Weaver.)

Julie Rutili, Wisconsin
Surviving mother of
PFC Julie Shanahan



editor@taps.org

Unity is What Makes Us Stronger

By Amy Dozier ☆ Surviving wife of SFC Jonathan Kilian Dozier

To My TAPS Family,

We have had quite the journey together, haven't we? Thank you for being there for me in my darkest hours and in my brightest accomplishments. We have grown so much and found our way to accomplish things we never imagined. Yet, the world around us recently seems a sad and scary place. The discontent and lack of purpose in *others*, serves to remind me, yet again, how important it is to find my balance amid the storms that pass. You all help me find my way to safe harbor by being the buoy that keeps me afloat in rough waters.

I used to think grief was a step-by-step process; that once I was "all done" I would be "better" and back to "normal." I've learned this is a massively fallacious concept. Grief is a shadow that follows us around, taking on different shapes and sizes at any given time. External events buffet us and cause us to doubt the route of our grief journey.

Let's face it, grief is a part of who we are since the death of our loved one and it doesn't go away. Guess what? That might actually be a good thing. Our grief milestones are the breadcrumbs on our ultimate path to healing. It is a reminder that we are so incredibly lucky to have fully loved.

There have been a lot of changes in our community over the last year. As a result, I saw the tone of our hearts greatly change. What happened to some of our Gold Star Families—and in Chattanooga, at the Navy Yard and beyond—could happen to any one of us. I'm so fearful this tornado of negativity has stirred up a lot of emotions in many, especially those who have suffered a traumatic loss.

When devastation occurs in the lives of one of our own, it happens again to all of us. We feel their pain so deeply that

it can also bring the raw emotion of our past experiences to the surface again.

In those moments, we feel the need to only move forward, that doing so is the only way to accomplish something positive. I recently struggled with the idea that we need to also take steps backward in our grief. When the shadow of grief is cast over us, we can do one of two things: either see it as all of our old emotional junk dragging us down, or turn it into a springboard for action. I hope we choose the latter outlook as we face a New Year.

We must find a unity of purpose to unlock the future potential that still awaits each of us. I know I can't find it without you to walk beside me.

It's quite possible, however, that we may need a little extra encouragement as we use these little backwards dance steps to fuel our march forward.

That is why I count on my greatest support network—you. You get it. You get me. And every once in awhile, I find myself back at my therapist's office, not because I am weak, but because I have the courage to open my heart and sort out the many emotions that flood it. Scary? Yes. Imperative for my continued growth? Absolutely.

I'm learning that there's a great relief that comes with a clean slate. New beginnings allow us to start over with different perspectives and expectations. Perhaps one of the greatest lessons I'm learning is that starting fresh means saying "I'm sorry" for not letting others in to help when I thought I could do this by myself. Be mindful of this as you navigate your own "new." Let people love you. You're worthy of the best kind of love.

I realized that our potential does not stop because our loved one is gone. Indeed, do they not watch over us as we take fledgling steps into tomorrow? Do they not still see us as we cross the finish line of a race or the graduation stage with a new diploma? We must find a unity of purpose to unlock the future potential that still awaits each of us. I know I can't find it without you to walk beside me.

I am so grateful to have you to talk to; to laugh and cry with; to share stories with. Look at how far we have come on this road. It's beautiful how we actively turn tragedy into a story that helps others and us to heal—even if it sometimes seems slow going. We have each other and we have so many resources to help us through this storm.

While grief may never leave us, we can help put it to rest occasionally by grounding ourselves and being honest. Look around you right now and list five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. Do it again. Take your time. This is grounding. This is you controlling your body in space right now and connecting with the earth below you. Close your eyes, breathe in and let yourself feel whatever is in your heart. Sit with that for a moment and know that you are okay. Exhale. You're still okay even if it hurts. I promise.

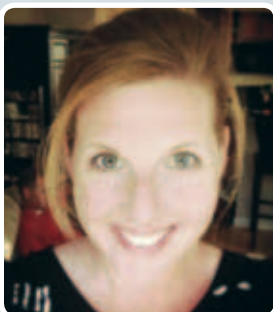
If there is ever a day you doubt yourself, remember this: you are amazing because you are here; you are so worthy because you try. You always have the capacity—and the permission—to rewrite your story when you feel it isn't quite the way you want it. You have potential! Some days the focus is simply keeping your head above the water. Other days include reminding yourself your track record of getting through the hard times is currently at 100%!

Maybe you'll find an "accountability friend" who will help push you through your challenges as you find greater strength. Find your person—or your people—who listen to your heart. Make your best effort to be present in every moment and every feeling. Part of getting through the hard times is living it as it's

happening. You may cry, but at some point, you'll realize there is strength in letting go of all those tears. Again, what you choose for you and don't let anyone make you doubt your inner voice.

My prayer for you in 2016 is that you find that one thing that reinforces your

purpose here on earth. You have so much to share and I can't wait to see the great things we all do! This journey is difficult, but oh, it is every bit as beautiful because we have each other. Take care of you in 2016 and know that you are loved by so many in your TAPS Family. ★



About the Author

Amy Dozier is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Public Affairs with a concentration in nonprofit and community service leadership. She is a volunteer with TAPS. Amy finds solace in pouring her heart onto paper and hopes to provide support to others the way TAPS has given support to her family.

Seven Grief Strategies for the New Year

By Bradley Stetson, Ph.D.

The old saying is true: "If there is an elephant in the room, introduce him." No good purpose is served by denial, yet we are very good at it. And when it comes to facing the pain of our grief with eyes open, we often turn away instead. But when we have a psychological elephant in the room of our mind, we should acknowledge him, and plan a way to shrink him down to a manageable size then get him on his way. If we've had a loss recently, the new year provides a good opportunity for us to be honest about the pain of our grief, and resolve in the months to come to be proactive and do the necessary grief work to begin addressing the elephant in the room.

1 *Write yourself a comforting and encouraging letter.*

Imagine you had a friend for whom you cared deeply, and imagine that friend just experienced the death of someone they love very much. You would want to help them, comfort them and encourage them. Now substitute yourself for that friend. You are worthy of being comforted and encouraged, too. Write yourself a letter saying the same things you would say to a good friend. Then, read the letter, put it away for a few days, then read it again. Do this for a few months and then write yourself a second letter, and so on. This is an act of self-compassion, treating yourself as gently as you would treat someone else. Avoid thinking you are so 'strong' or 'solid' that you don't need help and tender compassion. That is a misunderstanding of strength and personal fortitude. Feeling intense sorrow and bereavement is not a sign of weakness; to the contrary, it is a sign of deep humanity and personal capacity to love.

If we've had a loss recently, the new year provides a good opportunity for us to be honest about the pain of our grief, and resolve in the months to come to be proactive and do the necessary grief work to begin addressing the elephant in the room.

2 *Buy a big calendar, and use it.*

One problem bereaved people face is the feeling that one day drags into the next, always the same. Grieving people also sometimes are pressured by well-meaning people into doing activities they really don't want to do. An 'appointment calendar' can solve both of those problems. Large calendars, like a desk calendar, give you room to write. As the New Year begins, sit down with the calendar, and start filling your days with appointments.

Appointments with whom? Most importantly, with yourself. Without taking yourself out of social circulation, you can pen in valuable "self-time." The simple act of reserving time for yourself empowers you to breathe and reflect as the New Year unfolds. Appointments like "movie with me" or "journaling with me" make it possible for you to always tell others, when asked to go somewhere or do something, "Let me check my calendar, I may have an appointment." This way you can decline in a socially graceful way. If you want to accept someone's invitation, you can always break an appointment with yourself.

3 *Move your body, move your mind.*

As you adjust to your life without the physical presence of your loved one who died, it's vital you get outside and move. Notice, I didn't say, "exercise," since for some people that may sound daunting. There is no need to make it a big undertaking. Pick short, achievable goals, like a short hike, a walk around the block, a bike ride to the park.



Keep these jaunts short, as this will give you a sense of accomplishment, and you will derive the physical and psychological benefits of having enlisted your body in your ongoing encounter with grief.

4 *Realize that you do not need to "understand" your grief right now.*

When I coached Little League, I established the One Minute Rule. It was this: If anyone gets hit by a baseball, whatever the person hit by the ball says for the first minute after being hit is OK. Screaming and accusations were common after being hit by the baseball, but everyone knew that you got a free pass for a minute. And they knew that after a minute the person had to be ready to move on. Well, bereaved people get a lot longer than a minute, or a month, or a year, to integrate their experience into the rest of their outlook on life. So don't feel anxiety about fully grasping what has happened to you. Time will help clear your mind, and you will eventually be able to address your loss, the pain it has brought you, and the changes in your life that have ensued.

5 *Decide that in the New Year, you will begin to focus a bit more on others, as a part of your loved one's legacy.*

This is a valuable change you can make in your life. We all need to get out of ourselves and focus on other people and their problems. Sometimes, this helps us gain a fresh perspective on our own life. As you do this, you will no doubt talk with new people, and when the opportunity presents itself tell them about your loved one who has died. You don't have to tell your loved one's life story or anything like that, just mention them in passing. You may feel more comfortable talking about your loved one with people who didn't know him or her, and it is valuable to begin to talk out loud—in the past tense—

Avoid thinking you are so 'strong' or 'solid' that you don't need help and tender compassion. That is a misunderstanding of strength and personal fortitude. Feeling intense sorrow and bereavement is not a sign of weakness, to the contrary, it is a sign of deep humanity and personal capacity to love.

about your loved one. It may be shocking to hear yourself talk about them in the past tense, but it will help you integrate their death into your life.

6 *Listen to the music.*

A recent study I saw asserted that sad people who listen to their favorite music that matches their mood report feeling better. Music is therapeutic and soothing. Throughout history, music has been central to the expression of human values and sentiments. Make a short list of some songs of different types that you have always liked. Then go to youtube.com and listen to them or order them online. If you are not accustomed to doing that on a computer, ask a friend to do it for you. Just get the music playing so you can listen. As you do, let your mind take you where it will, and after a while I'll bet you'll feel relaxed and even renewed.

7 *Wishing you well.*

As the New Year begins, write down what your loved one would want for you in the New Year. Trouble imagining what that might be? It's probably the same you would wish for your loved one, had you been the one that died. Make a list of a few states of mind, attitudes or commodities that your loved one would want for you to attain as you move forward without them. For example, my husband would want me to look toward the future, and not be paralyzed by mourning. Or, my sister would want me to buy those expensive boots we used to talk about. Then, choose one of those outcomes and pursue it. Look back at your list after a few months, and check off the outlook or object you now

have. Deliberately choose to achieve something your loved one would want you to have in this New Year. By doing so, you will honor their memory.

So often we think of grief as something that happens to us, instead of something we do. This is unfortunate, since passivity and inaction will not help us to engage the new reality of loss in our lives. This is not to say that grief is a "problem" we can solve, or a "condition" we can make go away, but it is to say that we can be active participants in our emotional well being. By purposefully facing our sorrow, and calmly, carefully thinking about what we can do to help integrate our sorrow into our larger life, we can contribute to forging our new identity. And this is a powerful choice to make as a New Year and our new lives dawn. *

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About the Author



Brad Stetson is author of *Tender Fingerprints: A True Story of Loss and Resolution* and *Living Victims, Stolen Lives: Parents of Murdered Children Speak To America*. He's written widely on various social topics and on the psychology of grief. He is a funeral officiant in Southern California. www.bradstetson.com

Grief Reactivated

By Ashlynn Haycock ★ Surviving daughter of
SFC Jeffrey Haycock and SRA Nichole Haycock

My father died almost 14 years ago of a heart attack while training to deploy. I was just 10 years old. I went through denial, anger and depression. Eventually, I came to accept the loss. After going through those steps, I thought it was over; I was finally done grieving.

Even though the process did not occur in any prescribed order or in the way some say it should have, I felt I reached important milestones in my grief journey. Just like other survivors, I still had moments around anniversaries, holidays and birthdays that were tough. But, for the most part, I felt that I had moved on—that my grief was gone. What I didn't understand was that it was just hibernating. It never goes away and occasionally it rears its ugly head. I learned that it is OK when this happens.

The husband of my mother's best friend, whom I love like an aunt, died. He was an Army veteran who died suddenly of a heart attack. He was not much older than my father had been when *he* died from a heart attack. In addition, he left behind a 12-year-old son, about the same age I was when my dad died. It felt as if the grief I buried so deep inside me ripped open again. I wanted nothing more than to support my aunt and cousin, but it was hard to be there when internally I was being torn apart. I have experienced other losses in my life since my dad's passing, but none triggered this visceral reaction from me.

It was like everything happening to my cousin was happening to me. When he had to tell his friends his dad had died, it was a flashback to when I had to do the

same thing 14 years ago. When he had to bury his dad, it felt as though I was burying my dad all over again.

I thought I must be losing my mind because in no way could this be normal. That is until I was at an event with my TAPS colleagues and someone else mentioned having similar feelings. After much discussion, I learned there was a term for this feeling – grief reactivation. It is a type of secondary loss similar to what you feel on anniversaries, holidays and major milestones missed by your loved one.

Gaining this knowledge turned out to be a healing experience for me. It taught me even more about my grief and loss. Some of the most important things I learned from this experience are

- Grief doesn't end, because love never ends. I will never stop grieving my father because I will never stop loving him. He taught me to ride a bike, took me to cheer classes and held me when I cried. Even though I won't be able to create new memories with him, that does not mean that my old ones will go away. Almost everything in my life could be taken from me, but my love for my father is something that cannot be changed.
- The concept of a timeline for grief is a lie. Even 14 years out, I still have days where I do nothing but lie in bed and cry. I also have days where I get up, go to work and function like a normal adult. Everyone grieves differently. There will be things in life that reactivate your sense of loss. It may become easier to find your new normal but your grief will never completely go away. That's OK.
- Reactivation is not a step backward—it's a step forward. When your grief reactivates, especially after several years of being in your new normal, it can be confusing.





How can you possibly be going backward when you have made so many steps forward? The simple answer is you're not. The fact that you realize your grief has been reactivated is a huge step in the right direction because you know how to deal with it. Chances are the things you found helpful after your initial loss are going to be helpful now. For me, I find going to counseling, the gym and writing are the most helpful tools. Since I know these outlets helped me, I know I can count on them again to get through my reactivation.

- Remember that person who you could call in the middle of the night immediately after your initial loss? Chances are that person can be a good support for you during your reactivation. TAPS also has resources in place to offer care on those dark nights of loneliness. The TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline is answered 24/7 and is a great tool when

you need someone to talk to or walk you through the next steps.

When reactivation feelings wash over you, it can leave you feeling raw—even gutted again, and this is all right. It may confuse people as to why you are suddenly back in the dark valley of when your loss first occurred. That is also all right. Grief is a personal journey with no prescribed timeline. Each one of us must find our way.

While reactivation may be confusing, it is a normal experience. Find ways to focus on your love of the deceased, not the death. Do things to honor them and that you think would make them proud. Remember to breathe in your daily quest to move forward. You have an amazing support system. Your TAPS family loves you and understands your loss. They are a phone call away for a listening ear or a virtual hug across the miles. *

About the Author



Ashlynn Haycock graduated from American University in 2013 with a bachelor's degree in political science. Before joining the TAPS staff, she attended Good Grief Camp as a child for seven years and as a volunteer mentor for four years. She now serves as the Education Support Services Coordinator, helping survivors access education benefits.

Prepare Yourself for the Holidays

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

“Oh that it were possible, after long grief and pain, to find the arms of my true love around me once again.”

~ Alfred Lord Tennyson

Because the person who died is no longer there to share the holidays with you, you may feel particularly sad and vulnerable during Christmas, Hanukkah and other holidays that are special to your family.

Don't overextend yourself during the holidays. Don't feel you have to shop, bake, entertain, send cards, etc. if you're not up for it.

Sometimes old holiday rituals are comforting after a death and sometimes they're not. Continue them only if they feel good to you; consider creating new ones as well.

Keep in Mind the Rule of Thirds

Take inventory of whom you want to spend holiday time with and whom you don't. Always try to keep in mind the “rule of thirds.”

One third of the people in your life will turn out to be truly empathetic helpers. They will have a desire to understand you and your unique thoughts and feelings about the death. They will be willing to be involved in your pain and suffering without feeling the need to take it away from you. They will believe in your capacity to heal.

Another third of the people in your life will turn out to be neutral in response to your grief. They will neither help nor hinder you in your journey.

And the final third of people in your life will turn out to be harmful to you in your efforts to mourn and heal. While they are usually not intentionally setting out

to harm you, they will judge you, try to take your grief away from you and pull you off the path to healing.

Seek out the friends and family members who fall into the first group. They will be your confidants and momentum-givers on your journey. When you are actively mourning, try to avoid the last group, for they will trip you up and cause you to fall.

It's Okay to Say No

You may lack the energy as well as the desire to participate in activities you used to find pleasurable, especially soon after the death of someone you love. The fancy term for this is “anhedonia,” which is the lack of ability to experience pleasure in things you previously found pleasurable.

It's okay to say no when you're asked to help with a project, attend a party, or make a change you're not ready to make.

When you say no, explain your feelings to the people who've invited you. Be sure to thank them for the invitation, but also be honest about your grief. Remember that expressing your grief outside of yourself – or mourning – is essential.

Realize that you can't keep saying no forever. There will always be that first family reunion, birthday party, holiday dinner, etc. Don't miss out on life's most joyful celebrations.

Look for the Surprises and Gifts in Your Day

Stop reading this and look around you where you are right this moment. Really try to look at the same things you see each day, but through a different set of eyes. What are you grateful for that is within your view? See it with awe. Look at the face of someone you love and rejoice that he is in your life.



Whatever comes into your path today, consider it a gift. Take a moment to receive the gift and appreciate the giver. Embrace the warm feelings that come from being connected, from the link to gratefulness. Say “yes” and “thank you.”

Bil Keane, creator of the Family Circus comic strip, said, “Yesterday’s the past, tomorrow’s the future, but today is a gift. That’s why it’s called the present.”

Gather New Memories of the Person Who Died

You can no longer create new firsthand memories of time spent with the person who died. That is a painful reality to acknowledge and embrace.

But you *can* gather memories from others who knew and cared about your special person. The more you ask them to share their memories, the more likely that you’ll be gifted with memories that are new to *you*.

Talk with or write to your loved one’s childhood friends, teachers, and neighbors. Strike up conversations with fellow service members or past civilian co-workers. Tell them you’re on a mission to collect new memories – for yourself and perhaps also for other friends and family members who are hurting.

Consider jotting down notes in a special notebook you designate for this purpose. Or ask permission to record the conversations with a simple, free audio app on your phone.

Be prepared to hear stories that evoke happiness and love as well as anger, sadness, regret, and other challenging emotions. Gather up all of the new memories and savor them. They are precious.

Express Your Gratitude

Despite the tragedy, you are probably, underneath the hurt, grateful for many things in your life. When you feel mired in painful, sad feelings, try making a list of that for which you are grateful.

You may be grateful for your children or partner, for your siblings, for your parents, for your friends. You may be grateful for your job or your education. You might

also try naming the little things that make you feel grateful: the way the sun danced on your countertop this morning, the peace you felt after going for a walk, the song you just heard on the radio.

Don’t forget to express your gratitude to those who offered help and comfort at the time of the death. Military personnel, battle buddies, medical workers, friends, even complete strangers may have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help you or someone in your family.

Sometimes it helps to express your gratitude to the person who died. Write her a letter telling her what she meant to you and the lessons you learned from her. Tell her how grateful you are that her life, though too short, was joined with yours.

Choose to Live

Sudden, violent death often leaves mourners feeling powerless. You were powerless to prevent the death, and you’re powerless to reverse it. But you can regain a feeling of power by deciding to take control of the rest of your life.

Will you merely exist for the remainder of your days, or will you choose to truly live?

Many mourners take up a new life direction after an unexpected death. Has the death given you a new perspective on life? How can you choose to act on this new perspective?

What did the person who died love in life? How can you help nurture that love in the world in an ongoing, positive way?

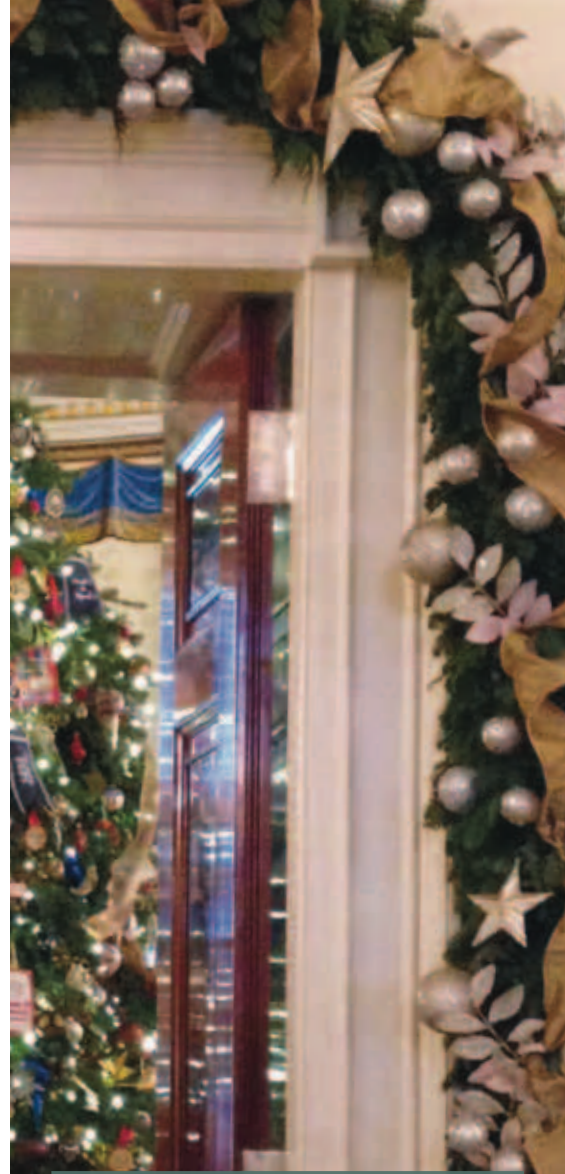
Sometimes choosing to live simply means living mindfully with an appreciation for all that is good and beautiful and with a deep, abiding kindness to others.

As a wise person once observed, “When old words die out on the tongue, new melodies spring forth from the heart.” *

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Excerpted from *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (Companion Press, 2015)

.....



TAPS is proud to announce our new book of comfort and care, written with love for all who are grieving a loss in the military.



If you haven't received your copy yet, please email info@taps.org today.

Finding Joy in the Holidays

By Bunnie Jacquay ★ Surviving mother of SGT Cody R. Legg

Have you found joy? It is especially hard as the holiday season approaches, but occasionally I catch a glimpse. The stores are filled with decorations, the mall is filled with children waiting for a chance to speak with Santa, and my heart is filled with an overwhelming sense of dread as it battles my brain for control.

As a divorcee who has buried her only child, it is easier to think of these days as just another date on the calendar. There will never be grandchildren filling the house with laughter or rushing to wake the household; there is no one to tease about the tangled tinsel or bare spot on the tree. There is just me—and I am left trying to find joy.

I know what everyone expects of me, yet I struggle to find where I fit in this holiday scenario. “You should decorate,” they say. “It will make you feel better.” “Come spend the day with us,” they say. “You shouldn’t be alone.” And while I appreciate the kindness and love they offer, I long for “my” family.

A couple of years ago, I gained survivor sisters and a survivor brother who live nearby. We became our own neighborhood support group, often meeting for dinner or attending events together. Essentially,

we formed our own little TAPS Parent Retreat environment. This was especially helpful as we traversed the holidays without our children.

Understanding the difficulty of the approaching holidays, we decided to spend Christmas Eve together. We cooked dinner and honored our sons with empty place settings at the dinner table (complete with a beer for each of them), played games, shared stories, and had a grown-up sleepover. When we awoke the next morning and emerged from our rooms, we found it easier to face Christmas morning with the shared understanding of the journey and the ease of not having to wear a mask to face the day. We surprised each other with small gifts, and now we have matching pajamas for our own Christmas Eve Retreat.

Every year, I gather my courage and face the holiday boxes. Each year the boxes seem less intimidating. Two years ago, I actually managed to bring a box into the house, where it sat—unopened—and then was carefully tucked away for another year. Last year, the sixth year of my grief journey, I bought an artificial desktop tree and lovingly hung the special ornaments I have received so far during my journey —

ornaments honoring my son, honoring his military service, and reminding me once again of how the pride in his service and sacrifice overshadows the grief.

I have ventured out of my cocoon and am visually reminded that no matter how much mesh, spackle and paint I apply to the hole in my heart, the ache still exists. This isn’t what I envisioned, but it is now my reality, my new normal.

My TAPS family also continues to grow as I attend different functions. My fellow survivors have provided the sanity check that allows me to move forward and face each day. Together we can laugh, cry, comfort and understand, sometimes with no more than a look. Together, we realize we are not alone. Things will never be normal again.

What is it about grief that leaves us so empty and hollow? We all know it is part of the circle of life, but even if one is prepared it doesn’t make it any easier. I once thought that the only way to truly realize how much you miss someone is for them to be gone. Isn’t that the meaning behind “absence makes the heart grow fonder?” I’m not sure that is truly what is meant, but there is a ring of truth to it. Don’t we miss them even more when we no longer



have them near? Somehow the hole in our heart patches and we carry on, but we are no longer as sturdy or invincible as we once were.

In brief moments, you come to a realization, even if it causes you pain, that in some way helps you to turn a corner and pick up again without looking back all the time. You do what you can, the best that you can; that's all one can ask of a person. You realize that when you laugh a little, enjoy a book, or hum a tune you have not forgotten your loved one, but instead you have found the strength to carry on – the will to be their historian. And who better to serve as their historian!

I tell anyone who will listen that he is my favorite subject. Hearing my son's name may bring tears to my eyes, but it also brings music to my ears. Please don't stop me from hearing the beautiful music, for it soothes my soul and warms my heart. How lucky we are to have had a love so great that it enriched our lives forever.

The business of life is the acquisition of memories. There is a box of Christmas decorations filled with memories that are all associated with my son, Cody, and I have promised myself that this year I will make friends with those memories and be comfortable with joy. After all, they are meaningful and most precious to me, so why not give myself a gift? Personalized ornaments, ornaments celebrating milestones and occasions, Christmas stockings, those special decorations and ornaments that he delighted in arranging, all bring the flood of emotion and grief but are well worth the prize. I will make the choice to allow joy to seep back into my life by celebrating Cody's life rather than focusing on his death.

My fellow survivors in our Care Group are fond of saying, "There's another Bunnie-ism" when I throw out a thought for them to ponder. All I know is that I make a choice every day to always conduct myself in a manner that will neither disgrace or dishonor my son's memory. For as long as I celebrate his life and share memories with others, he will never be forgotten.



Last month, I held a glass of water in the palm of my hand and asked a simple question, "How heavy is this?" After several guesses, my answer was this: "The weight of the water is irrelevant for it represents grief, and the longer you hold onto it the heavier it becomes." Our task is to allow those grief bursts to bubble over the rim, to gradually and gently lighten the burden as we traverse this journey. None of us will be the person we were before, and we cannot change the past. The beauty of TAPS is that you are not alone; we are all here for you. You can't run away from your life; it's yours and it's precious. You just have to claim it. If you keep putting one foot in front of the other and keep at it, eventually the fear wears away. You must be willing to continue to live your life so that their sacrifice will not be forgotten. Do not insult them, but rather honor them – gather your strength and live to fight another day.

You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have. So this year, I will not only bring the boxes of decorations into the house, but I will open them and find joy. ★

About the Author

Bunnie is a TAPS Peer Mentor and facilitator of the San Diego Care Group, but more importantly, the surviving mother of SGT Cody Legg. Along her grief journey, she finds herself surfing through the calm and chaos of daily life. Over time, she is learning who she was and finding how to fit into her new normal. She chooses to embrace the change, knowing that Cody's legacy is perpetuated through her commitment to finding joy.

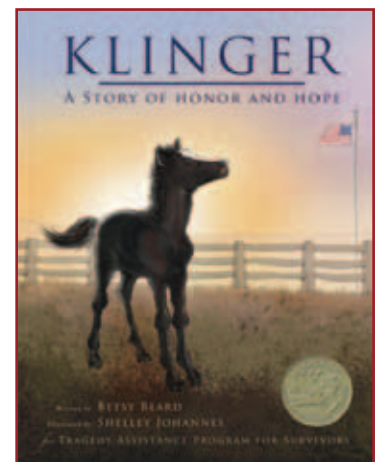
Online Store and Ways to Support

Holiday Shopping:

Trying to avoid the stress of crowded stores and holiday traffic? Do your holiday shopping from the convenience of your home and support TAPS at the same time. The TAPS online store offers a variety of comfort gear for everyone on your shopping list. Best of all, every purchase helps TAPS continue its mission of providing compassion and caring for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

Online Store:

Let TAPS help wrap you in comfort and warmth all season long with our gear. The TAPS store offers everything from hoodies and pajamas to blankets and travel mugs. Find books and toys for children, too. Visit www.taps.org and click on TAPS online store in our left navigation bar. Enjoy free shipping and handling through the holidays.



1. Team TAPS 26.2 Blue Athletic Shirt 100% Polyester
Sale Price \$12.50
Women's V-neck Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Men's Crew Neck Sizes: S, XL, 2XL

2. Angels Watching Over Me Shirt: \$20
Women's and Unisex Crew Neck Shirts
Available in a Variety of Colors

3. Baseball T-shirt: \$25
Unisex ¾ Sleeve Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL

4. Klinger Plush Toy: \$10

5. Klinger Book: \$15

6. Klinger Book and Plush Toy Gift Set: \$20



Other Ways to Support:

iGive: Sign up on www.igive.com and select TAPS as your charity before shopping online. The iGive portal takes you to more than 1,200 participating online stores ranging from fashion and beauty to electronics and toys. A percentage of what you spend is donated to TAPS. There are no costs or hidden fees for this service.

Amazon Smile: Planning to shop on Amazon? Use www.smile.amazon.com and choose Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors as your charity before making purchases. Amazon donates 0.5% of your purchases to TAPS.

Combined Federal Campaign: If you're a federal employee, you can donate to TAPS through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) workplace giving program by automatic paycheck withdrawal. Make sure to indicate the TAPS CFC donation ID code 11309 on the CFC donation form distributed to you by your federal agency employer.

eBay: Buying or selling on eBay? Log on to www.charity.ebay.com and select Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) as your charity. Sellers can choose a percentage of each sale they wish to donate.

TAPS Direct Donations: Consider making a memorial donation to TAPS in honor of your loved one this season. Visit www.taps.org/donate to contribute to the TAPS mission and support our program and services. *

7. Pajama Bottoms: \$32

Unisex Adult in Multiple Colors and Prints
Sizes: XS, S, M, L, XL, XXL

8. Youth Sweatshirts: \$25

Unisex Youth Sizes: XS, S, M, L, XL

9. Hooded Sweatshirt Strength

Adult: \$40

Men's Crew Neck Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL

10. Expandable Bangle Bracelet: \$25

Three Style Options

11. Tank Top: \$25

Women's Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL

2016 Schedule of Events

JANUARY

- ★ **Joint Base Lewis McChord Regional Seminar**
January 8-10 • **Tacoma, WA**

FEBRUARY

- ★ **Mount Kilimanjaro Expedition**
February 2-18 • **Kilimanjaro, Tanzania**
- ★ **Islandwood Moms Retreat**
February 4-7 • **Bainbridge Island, WA**
- ★ **Hawaii Regional Seminar**
February 26-28 • **Oahu, HI**

MARCH

- ★ **Alaska Widows Retreat**
March 2-6 • **Anchorage, AK**
- ★ **Grand Canyon Hiking Expedition**
March 9-13 • **Grand Canyon, AZ**
- ★ **Colorado Regional Seminar and Good Grief Camp**
March 11-13 • **Denver, CO**
- ★ **Arizona Womens Empowerment Retreat**
March 15-20 • **Sedona, AZ**

APRIL

- ★ **Louisiana Regional Seminar and Good Grief Camp**
Louisiana
- ★ **Florida Parents Retreat**
Destin, FL

- ★ **California Whitewater Expedition**
California

MAY

- ★ **Florida Siblings Retreat**
Destin, FL
- ★ **Smoky Mountain Hiking, Zip-lining and White Water Rafting Expedition**
Smoky Mountains, TN
- ★ **National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp**
May 26-30 • **Arlington, VA**

JUNE

- ★ **Mountain Climbing Training Course**
Mount Shasta, CA
- ★ **Atlanta Widows Retreat**
Atlanta, GA
- ★ **Wisconsin Regional Seminar and Good Grief Camp**
Milwaukee, WI
- ★ **Islandwood Family Campout**
Bainbridge Island, WA

JULY

- ★ **California Adult Children Retreat**
Dana Point, CA



★ Ft. Hood Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Fort Hood, TX

★ Grand Tetons Kayaking Expedition
Grand Tetons, WY

★ Southern California Widows Retreat
San Diego, CA

★ Southern California Good Grief Campout
San Diego, CA

AUGUST

★ Montana Widows and Sisters Retreat
Bozeman, MT

★ Tennessee Family Campout
Tennessee

★ Atlanta Regional Seminar
Atlanta, GA

★ Alaska Parents/Siblings Retreat
Anchorage, AK

★ North Carolina Good Grief Campout
North Carolina

SEPTEMBER

★ Dude Ranch All Population Retreat
TBD

★ Montana Mens Retreat
Bozeman, MT

★ Machu Picchu Expedition
Machu Picchu, Peru

★ Northern California Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
California

★ Arizona Womens Empowerment Retreat
Sedona, AZ

OCTOBER

★ National Military Suicide Survivor
Seminar and Good Grief Camp
Tampa, FL

★ Colorado Moms Retreat
Colorado Springs, CO

★ Mt. Everest Base Camp Expedition
Mt. Everest, Nepal

NOVEMBER

★ UK All Populations Gathering
London, England

★ Hawaii Womens Empowerment Retreat
Hawaii

★ Baltimore Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Baltimore, MD

DECEMBER

★ New England Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Connecticut



Finding Your Inner Warrior

TAPS Launches 2016 Health and Wellness Initiative

By Emily Muñoz ★ Senior Advisor, Strategy and Communications

The pain of loss may make it difficult to find energy for anything other than half-hearted New Year’s resolutions. Too drained to go through the motions of identifying goals and possibilities, we never quite make it to the point of unwavering *belief* in what is yet to come. It is as though grief has robbed us of the power to invest in the future, believe in fullness, and commit to living richly.

The feeling of being comfortable in your own skin is elusive after any kind of loss or uncertainty. We feel doubtful and out of sorts – as if we are beside ourselves, watching the disintegration of the core around which we identify and orient. Our loved one died, yet we are the ones who may be lost, aimless and broken. Yearning for the good old times and weary of uncertain tomorrows, we wonder how we will ever have enough strength for the journey.

TAPS knows that strength for the journey is an important way we can help and inspire each other. We are proud that 2016 heralds the start of the TAPS Health & Wellness Initiative, a multi-dimensional program aimed at empowering survivors to reclaim feelings of wholeness and well-being. Our focus is on motivating and coaching survivors to feel seen, understood and healthy at the core—to facilitate experiences where purpose, life, and personal strength simply click.

Eventually, this program will encompass six dimensions of whole-person wellness, but our early focus is on the intersections of spiritual, emotional, physical and social health. In addition to a strong focus on self-care, community-building, and restorative therapies, we’ll incorporate opportunities for thoughtful movement. As we retrain the mind, body and spirit, we open up possibilities and present new challenges, guiding each other to believe

investments in self and others are worth it. We’re starting programs for all fitness and mobility levels, from survivors who have never run a single step, to those who are ready for a triathlon or orienteering race challenge.

Our 2016 program asks you to find and connect with your inner warrior, the part of you that’s committed not just to surviving, but to thriving. Find the part of you that wants to make your loved one proud. Together we will step out of our comfort zones and back into the world. We’ll climb out of bed, onto roads and over mountains. We’ll build strength, resolve and courage for daily life and exceptional adventures.

Together we will

ENCOURAGE full-body wellness, self-care and healthy living,

LEARN together at training camps and special sessions as we become comfortable with our ability to set milestones and achieve them,

PAIR participants with coaches to help us stay on track,

BUILD communities and peer support systems centered around shared goals,

FIND different forms of courage and do things we never thought we could,

USE what we’ve learned about making it as survivors to push through obstacles, doubts and fatigue,

RISE to the challenges of our drastically changed worlds, and

RECLAIM power, perspective and possibility.

This year, as you toast the good old times and the familiar ache threatens, know that the ache is also your call to self-care. Grief depletes us, leaves us empty and wanting -

yet, even in early grief, there are still ways to nurture and care for body, mind and spirit. When we are paralyzed with grief, and movement seems impossible, self-care sets the stage for taking personal power back. Let us help you invest in building strength for the journey—whether it’s through rest, healthy sleep techniques, nutrition, aromatherapy or physical exertion. There’s a difference between “good tired” and “grief tired,” and we want you to know that we’re here to help you find that “good tired” again when you’re ready.

Sometimes we need to summon the inner warrior to make it through the day, and some days that inner warrior will drive us a little further. Wherever you are in your grief journey, Inner Warrior Program is about strengthening your own resolve and building your own capacity. Together, we’ll become the best possible living legacies.

.....
Visit www.taps.org/innerwarrior or email innerwarrior@taps.org to learn more about how to get involved in 2016.
.....

“I don’t know how to start something like that.”

You don’t have to know – we know, and we’ll start it together.

“I’m too tired. I’m too exhausted to do anything other than collapse.”

The benefits of movement are psychological and physical. Besides, we’re all like that – we just need a nudge.

At the heart of wellness is **CARE**. When we feel as though we have lost everything, it is hard to invest in ourselves and the world around us. There is often a loss of pride in accomplishments, a drifting sense of living on top of the world, not in it.

Part of healing is starting to believe that the little things matter. After devastating loss, this can be one of the most difficult

“But I’m scared. What if this is another thing at which I fail?”

No part of this initiative is about just one goal. Our community will be affirming, motivational and supportive. And besides – new challenges await. Aren’t you ready to be the good kind of scared?



things to trust - that the outcome won't always be a disappointment. We need to claim a stake in life again. *We have to care.*

Part of that is taking pride in your life, and part of it is taking care of yourself. The care program is overarching. It's about wellness, accountability and investment. We will learn how to enrich even the hardest days, reframe purpose when we need to, and nurture habits that will make us strong for any part of the journey.

When this re-investment in the world suggests motion, our introductory program will encourage you to **MOVE!** We are often stuck in mental, emotional and physical ruts, going over unanswerable questions as we wear out our recliners and entertain feelings of purposelessness. Our move program will encourage personal growth and physical wellness by fostering close peer connections throughout a transformative training process.

Participants in the move program will be able to attend an introductory camp and walk through the basics of starting a health and wellness program with a coach. We will offer webinars and online communities as we choose a goal race to run/walk. Most importantly, we'll deepen connections with people working through similar struggles, fighting to keep moving, daring to reclaim a sense of self and purpose, and giving each other goals and reasons to get out of bed and off the couch.

The **STRETCH** track is for those who are active and need a different challenge. Maybe you've found a way to be comfortable even in this horribly changed life, but now you realize you might be living smaller than intended. The stretch track involves training the body and the mind to go a little bit further, dig a little bit deeper, bear a little bit more purposeful discomfort. Survivors who want to stretch their emotional and physical capacities will have the opportunity to participate in:

- Ragnar relays
- GoRuck challenges
- Adventure races and
- Triathlon/marathon camps.

These will help us develop endurance, gain strength and flexibility, change habits, and start believing that possibilities and limits, must be extended and stretched. We'll go farther, live bigger and find more of ourselves—and we'll do it as a team.

Ready to do more than you ever thought you could? Sometimes we need to pass beyond the limits we're holding in order to take hold of something bigger. To get you comfortable with gear, fitness, and your teammates, the **REACH** track will incorporate:

- Orienteering
- Mountaineering
- Longer-distance triathlons
- Multi-day adventure races
- Backcountry hiking
- Multi-sport trips and training camps.

All of the reach events require a degree of commitment that prioritizes training, preparation, whole-body wellness and accountability. And, like all the other tracks, you won't be doing this alone. You'll be surrounded by other survivors working to accomplish what once seemed outside our limits.

As we **care, move, stretch, and reach**, we rely on our strength and that of those around us. Along the way, we will rediscover parts of ourselves we had forgotten—more of who our fallen heroes loved. They loved us for our persistence, our courage and for our willingness to live their legacies as lives of purpose, power and adventure. They saw more in us than the darkness of our grief may allow us to see in ourselves. But not for long. Our goal with the Inner Warrior program is for participants to be able to say, "We see what they saw."

TAPS invites you to invest in your wellness and purposefully choose to embark on the journey of improvement and empowerment. We're going to be tired and a little smelly, but aren't we already? And we will see what our fallen heroes saw. Strength. Worth. Warriors.



You are cordially invited to attend

22ND NATIONAL

MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR & GOOD GRIEF CAMP FOR YOUNG SURVIVORS

★ MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND ★

May 27 to 30, 2016

Arlington, VA

Join your TAPS family for a weekend of connection, reflection, and inspiration at the 22nd National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp. Together, we'll create a sacred space in which we can honor our loved ones, learn from each other and share the reverence of a day that binds us all.

Throughout the weekend, we'll look to our heroes for inspiration, using what we know about love and loss to consider how we're living.

We'll look more deeply into our own processes, reflecting on our own strengths and learning how we can give and accept support, and contemplate how we'll approach the next part of our grief journeys.

Knowing the relief of being understood, we'll look to each other with empathy and open hearts.

Our programming will encourage meaningful connections, cultivate strength for exploring emotions and resources, and lift your spirits.

Remember the Love ★ Celebrate the Life ★ Share the Journey

2016 National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Start planning now to join us over Memorial Day weekend.

Registration opens December 1, 2015.

Go to www.taps.org/National to register.

Open Hearts, Open Arms, Sacred Spaces

REGISTER FOR OUR FAMILY REUNION

Registration is now open and can be accessed through our website at www.taps.org/National. Your registration fee of \$195 assists TAPS in covering the cost of selected meals, workshops, materials and transportation to all off-site events during the four-day conference. The registration fee of \$75 for children attending the Good Grief Camp assists with the cost of meals, transportation and other camp materials.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

We encourage you to arrive and check in with us on Thursday evening, as Friday morning begins early with special sessions for all survivors that you won't want to miss. Friday check-in will be available in the morning, but we want you to have as much time with your TAPS Family as possible before our opening session and keynote address. Our event concludes Monday afternoon after attending the National Memorial Day Observance at Arlington National Cemetery or the National Memorial Day Parade.

YOUR HOME FOR MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

All events and workshops for the National Military Survivor Seminar take place in, or depart from, the Crystal Gateway Marriott on Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington, Virginia. Additional rooms are available at the neighboring Crystal City Marriott. The closest airport is Washington Reagan National Airport, or DCA, and free shuttles to the hotel are available.

To make your hotel reservation, visit the seminar webpage at www.taps.org/National to get our special conference rate of \$139 per night. The last day you can register for the seminar and reserve a room at this guaranteed rate is Tuesday, April 26, 2016.

Scholarships for registration fees and hotel costs are available if you are facing financial challenges. Please visit www.taps.org/National for more information or call TAPS at 800-959-TAPS. The last day to apply for scholarships is Tuesday, April 26, 2016.

A limited number of donated flights to and from Washington, DC are available from the Fisher House Foundation's Hero Miles program. You may apply for donated airfare only after you have registered and payment is received for registration fees. The last day to apply for Hero Miles is Thursday, March 31, 2016.

To learn more about the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp, visit www.taps.org/National.

- Are you an adult survivor at least 18 months beyond the loss of your loved one?
- Are you ready to listen to another adult survivor's grief story without focusing on your own grief?
- Have you taken care of yourself in order to meet the needs of others?
- If you answered, "Yes," you may be ready as a TAPS peer mentor!

Peer Mentor Training

To become a part of the TAPS Peer Support Network, there are three steps, including completion of a full day of classroom training, which will take place Thursday, May 26, 2016. If you are interested, please register for the Peer Mentor Training as a part of general registration and visit the Peer Mentor Program webpage: www.taps.org/BecomeAPeerMentor

2016 National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Join us as we *Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, and Share the Journey.*

FIRST-TIMERS

Whether you come alone or bring loved ones, we will welcome you into our TAPS family with open arms. We want you to feel comfortable and supported, so we offer an orientation session on Friday morning during which TAPS staff and peer mentors will share an overview of the weekend. You'll feel right at home! Additional groups for newcomers will meet Friday afternoon. Even if you're some years out from your loss, prioritizing these "first-timer" sessions will help you feel grounded and connected. You'll have a chance to meet other first-timers and learn to recognize caring staff who will be with you the whole way. After getting into the swing of things on Friday, you'll be able to choose sessions that make the most sense for you and spend time connecting with new friends.

RETURNING SURVIVORS

Returning survivors are able to take advantage of new programming options as well as some of our important and traditional workshops. We're tailoring relevant programming for all parts of the grief journey. In addition to familiar topics such as understanding complicated grief and coping with new family dynamics, we will introduce you to new speakers and workshops. As grief changes, so do our perspectives. We also encourage you to experience familiar speakers and workshop leaders from changing vantage points—what didn't speak to you one year might really resonate the next.

YOUNG SURVIVORS

TAPS Good Grief Camp for young survivors is America's premier program for children and teens whose parent or sibling has died in military service. In our unique model, children are paired with trained mentors who support them as they explore their feelings, learn coping skills, and have fun in a place where they feel connected with other children who experienced a similar loss. Because children grow and face different developmental stages, each with its own new challenges, children aged four to 19 are encouraged to attend. Childcare is offered for children three years old and under.

"Nationals was a building block on the foundation of my other TAPS experiences. Previous connections were strengthened, new connections were made, and the fabric of my life was deepened with strength and peace as a result of my experiences there." ~ from a surviving father



Look to us, Look to Each Other

CONNECTIONS

Small sharing groups offer gentle, supportive discussions. Some groups are topic-based, while others are reserved for specific relationships. Regardless of the topic or structure, these sessions are led by trained facilitators. The guiding principles for sharing groups include receptive sharing and listening and respectful peer support.

NEW PERSPECTIVES

We've listened to your suggestions, and our Retreats team is planning some exciting off-site activity options. Whether it's rock climbing, kayaking, guided visits to museums or any of the exciting ideas that are in the works, each off-site session is an intimate, small group experience that encourages you to look deeply into yourself, the people around you, and the world in which we live. You'll connect with new people, find space for reflection and movement, and return to the hotel with new energy.

INSPIRATION FOR YOUR INNER WARRIOR

As part of our Inner Warrior Program (see page 20), we will host speakers and activities based around whole-person approaches to health and wellness, including special emphasis on lifestyle and well-being. Inner Warrior sessions will include movement-based sessions (bring sneakers!), workouts, and introductions to group events and expeditions. We will help you take care of yourself, keep moving, regain your sense of purpose and adventure, and challenge you to be the best version of you, no matter where you are on the grief journey.

REFLECTION & CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Grief can leave us with a true void—a spiritual or emotional blank space. Our workshops meet you on the path to healing and include topics that explore diverse methods of expressing grief through art, writing, music, meditation and yoga. They will rekindle the part of you that needs the energy of creative release while guiding you to sooth your spirit.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Special events in Washington, D.C. and Arlington, VA offer enriched ways to experience: military traditions, remembrance ceremonies, musical and sporting events against the landscape of the Nation's Capital. Friday night special events include the Marine Corps Evening Parade, VIP Pentagon Tour, and Moonlight Monuments Tour, but will also include memorable opportunities if you'd like to stay closer to the hotel. On Monday, TAPS families are guests of honor at the National Memorial Day Observance at Arlington National Cemetery, and a limited number of slots are available for those who want to walk in the National Memorial Day Parade. Space for many of these activities is limited, so register early.

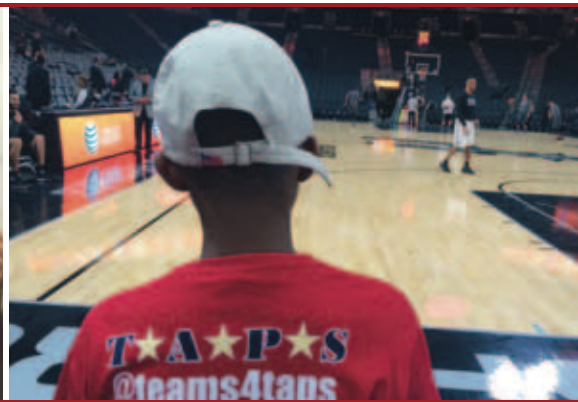
SURVIVOR SANCTUARY

The Survivor Sanctuary, set aside as a quiet place for adults, is a retreat for sitting, reflecting, and processing—a space to take a break and draw apart for a time to renew your spirit and find balance.



teams4taps Marks Second Anniversary

"Of all the coincidences that led me to attend a teams4taps game with my favorite team, the Cleveland Cavaliers, was definitely my brother looking out for me and reminding me he's still around looking down on me from heaven. Here's to you Joshua and a special thank you to TAPS!"



The teams4taps program celebrated its two-year anniversary in November. The occasion set in motion an exciting end-of-year schedule of team engagements. Across America, survivors and their heroes were honored both on and off the playing field. And the momentum continues - in 2016, teams4taps is poised to expand relationships with professional sports teams. With each interaction, more dreams come true for TAPS families, and teams and their fans gain a deeper understanding of what it means to care for the families of fallen heroes.

What started as an idea on a sleepless night on a base in Kabul is entering its third year of creating meaningful opportunities for TAPS families. A trip to Afghanistan focused on peer support and its advantages led teams4taps director Diana Hosford to consider the potential for TAPS families with special sports memories to feel like "part of the team." What if there were a way to bring children together with professional athletes? What if the special moments among families, spent cheering on their favorite teams, did not have to be more

bitter than sweet? What if TAPS could help surviving family members celebrate the life of the one they loved and lost by helping them create new memories? What if family members, able to go behind the scenes, on the fields, and up close with players and referees, could connect with their fallen heroes while making new memories? TAPS quickly realized - while surviving children could be particularly impacted by these experiences - that fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, wives, fiances, and friends could all be united through sports relationships. teams4taps was born from this opportunity.

The groundwork of teams4taps was laid with its first big success, the 2013 Washington Capitals Courage Caps program, which demonstrated that fans - along with sponsors and team partners - were on board with doing something big to support families of the fallen. Six days of hat and t-shirt sales solidified the foundation for continuing support from major professional sports teams and resulted in \$93,000 for TAPS. With an enthusiastic support base, grateful

recipient families and a campaign with demonstrated success, teams4taps began to develop relationships with other teams local to the National Capital Region headquarters.

Knowing that long-term success would depend on successful relationships on many sporting fronts, teams4taps raised both funds and awareness for the TAPS mission while bringing TAPS families together with players and representatives from the "hometown" teams - Washington Redskins, DC United, Washington Nationals, and the Kastles - in addition to establishing relationships with the Washington International Horse Show and the Citi Open. Having found great success with the one city, all teams approach, teams4taps was poised to grow nationwide.

New relationships quickly followed, as major sports teams stepped up in Baltimore, Salt Lake City, New York, Oakland, Boston, Philadelphia, San Diego, Phoenix, Seattle, Atlanta and many others. teams4taps now manages relationships with over fifty teams - all who open their



training practices, stadiums, courts and locker rooms to surviving families. Coaches, staff and players spend time with survivors, listening to stories of how their hero loved a team. In 2015 alone, almost 2,000 TAPS survivors attended a teams4taps event across the country.

While the program has expanded nationwide, it's also continued to grow where it started - with Courage Caps. In 2014, Telos expanded their generous support of TAPS, funding the entire Courage gear line. Monumental Sports & Entertainment Foundation lent their expertise in hat and t-shirt production and design, and the resulting Courage gear was available online, at games and at team stores. TAPS has been the proud and grateful recipient of the proceeds from these sales.

Ongoing partnerships with Telos Corporation and Monumental Sports & Entertainment Foundation, together with the Washington Capitals and the Washington Wizards, have continued to benefit both loyal fans and surviving military families. The Courage Caps program raised more than \$148,000 for TAPS this year. The value of the Courage Caps program far exceeds monetary donations by also increasing awareness of the TAPS mission. It highlights the courage exhibited by the grieving military families TAPS supports on their journey to find comfort, care and healing.

Similarly, the value of a surviving family member's experiences at a game far exceeds that of a ticket. Behind-the-scenes, VIP

experiences and player meetings help surviving family members celebrate the life of a hero and the love of a game. Jason Kriz is just one of the many survivors who has been affected by teams4taps. "All the coincidences that led me to attend a teams4taps game with my favorite team, the Cleveland Cavaliers, was definitely my brother looking out for me and reminding me he's still around looking down on me from heaven," Kriz said about his experience.

Do you have a memory of attending a game, collecting player autographs or never missing a kick-off with your hero? Your stories and experiences help us shape the development of future team relationships. Tell us about your hero and the team they loved by emailing teams4taps@taps.org. *



A Recipe for Holiday Wellness

By Nancy L. Heinrich, MPH

Holiday traditions are part of a family's collective memory.

What was your favorite holiday tradition growing up? Was it making and decorating cookies with your mother? Singing carols with neighbors? Decorating the house?

Holiday traditions are part of a family's collective memory. Traditions define families and communities. Children depend on them like they do the security of their favorite blanket. Traditions ground us and give us a solid base so we can be who we are as adults, live our lives with great passion and purpose, and do good things for other people. Make this the season for celebrating your family's traditions while creating new ones.

The fact is that the winter holidays cause stress for most people. Figuring out how to get through the holidays can be a dreaded chore instead of a joy. For some people, ignoring the holidays instead of embracing them may seem like the only option. When kids are in the house, however, the choices we make as adults – good or bad – can impact our little ones for the rest of their vulnerable lives. They deserve to have a great holiday. At the same time, the holidays are the perfect time to teach kids about the joy of doing random acts of kindness for other people.



Keep the holidays simple, healthy and fun this time of year. Let's make the 36 days between Thanksgiving Day and New Year's Day the healthiest time of the year for you and your loved ones.

It is impossible to be stressed out when you make cookies.

After all, "stressed" spelled backwards is "desserts." Cookies make great desserts! Making cookies is always something kids look forward to, especially when frosting and sprinkles are involved! A holiday tip is to use more of the healthy ingredients and less of the bad. All kids deserve access to good foods, less processed sugar and health literate parents and guardians. Awareness of the added sugar in foods and deciding to cut back on added sugars is a powerful step you can make now toward better health in 2016. Teach your children to read food labels and become aware of hard to pronounce ingredients. If you can't pronounce it, don't eat it!

This year, set aside time to make holiday cookies. Select your family's three or four favorite cookie recipes, and make a shopping list of the ingredients you need to have on hand for *The Cookie Party*. If you call something a *party*, it is always *fun*.

Here are three suggestions to make your favorite cookie recipes healthier. For most recipes, you can reduce the sugar by about one-third and maintain the flavor and texture. Also, consider using a whole grain flour instead of enriched flour. Refined flours have been stripped of the bran, which is the outer coating containing the B vitamins that our brains need. Some of the flours I love to bake with include oat flour, millet flour, coconut flour, and my newest favorite, almond flour. These are ideal for anyone who has a gluten sensitivity or celiac disease.

A third way to make your favorite cookie recipe healthier is to replace up to half the butter in the recipe with one of the following: applesauce, canned pumpkin, mashed bananas or ground flax seeds. Schedule a test run before *The Cookie Party*. Pick out one recipe and make two half batches. Make each half with a different fat substitute. Ask the kids to be the official taste testers and let them decide which version to make.

Still your minds and walk for an hour in silence.

For making new and healthy holiday memories, go outside and play! Playing in nature is one of the healthiest things you can do for both your mind and body. Frank Lloyd Wright said, "Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you."

Do your kids suffer from a nature deficit, spending too much time on computers and video games and not enough time outside? The healing power of nature is reason enough to do something different this year. Teach children to respect nature by active participation, whether it is taking them kayaking, learning the "stingray shuffle" along the Intracoastal Waterway shore, or going for a walk in a state preserve. Sometimes one of the healthiest things we can do is to still our minds and walk for an hour in silence, listening to the sounds of the animals around us and observing how the wind moves through the trees. Afterward, invite everyone to share their observations with each other.

Make a list of three places within an hour's drive of where you live. It can be places you love to visit or places where you have always wanted to go. Choose a favorite state, county or city park. Opt for a nearby beach, mountain or botanical garden. Even a local farm or forest is a good option. One of my favorite ways to



Create a personal relationship with wellness by bringing healthier ingredients into your family's favorite recipes, engaging in the beauty and healing power of nature, and ensuring a healthy mind through connections with those you love.

explore nature is to connect with wildlife refuges when I travel. They are protected areas, often isolated and always beautiful. There are more than 560 refuges across the nation, and most metropolitan areas have one within an hour's drive. To locate a national wildlife refuge near you, check out www.fws.gov/refuges.

Explore the healing power of nature.

If you have a child who is in fourth grade, be sure and check out a very special opportunity from the National Park Service. Fourth-graders are invited to become ambassadors and help celebrate the National Park Service's 100th birthday next year. These children can participate in the "Every Kid in a Park" program, which runs until Aug. 30, 2016. Go to www.nps.gov and click on the "Kids" tab to learn more. Your fourth-grader can get a voucher for an annual pass that entitles them and their family to free admission to national parks and other federal lands and waters for an entire year. What a great way to celebrate the outdoors! Set the date for your outdoor adventure, make a picnic lunch and dress appropriately. Now go outside and play!

A wonderful way to bring wellness into your holidays is to do something for someone else. Make a pot of butternut squash soup and a pan of cornbread to share with a neighbor who lives alone.

Ask your children to make a card to give when they help deliver the meal. Little things can mean so much to someone who may be spending the holidays alone.

A favorite thing to do when friends with children come to visit is to go to the local Humane Society and volunteer for a couple of hours, spending socialization time with dogs and cats waiting to be adopted. If you have a young child who is learning to read, ask them to pick out a favorite book to read to a cat or dog. The children connect with an animal who brings no judgments or expectations. Sharing their favorite story with an animal can raise a child's self-esteem. Another idea is to check out local resources for equine-assisted therapy. Connecting with horses has proven to have healing properties by creating a sense of emotional well-being, especially for those dealing with anxiety or post-traumatic stress.

Make a conscious choice to find joy in the holidays. Commit to do whatever it takes to be healthy. Create a personal relationship with wellness by bringing healthier ingredients into your family's favorite recipes, engaging in the beauty and healing power of nature, and ensuring a healthy mind through connections with those you love. Have fun this holiday season by celebrating old family traditions while making new ones! *

About the Author



Nancy L. Heinrich, MPH, is an epidemiologist, diabetes educator, author and parent. She founded Growing Healthy Kids, Inc. in 2009, a nonprofit organization which creates solutions to prevent, halt and reverse childhood obesity and obesity-related diseases. Growing Healthy Kids designs and deploys programs (such as the 4 Sisters. 5 Cities Wellness Project and Kids. Kitchens. Kayaks) and advises companies on wellness policies. She teaches people about the joy of healthy eating and playing outside. Nancy writes "Wellness Wednesdays," a weekly article for parents (www.GrowingHealthy-Kids.blogspot.com). She lives in Vero Beach, Florida. Her favorite vegetable is kale.

Surviving the Holidays Without You

Navigating Grief During Special Seasons

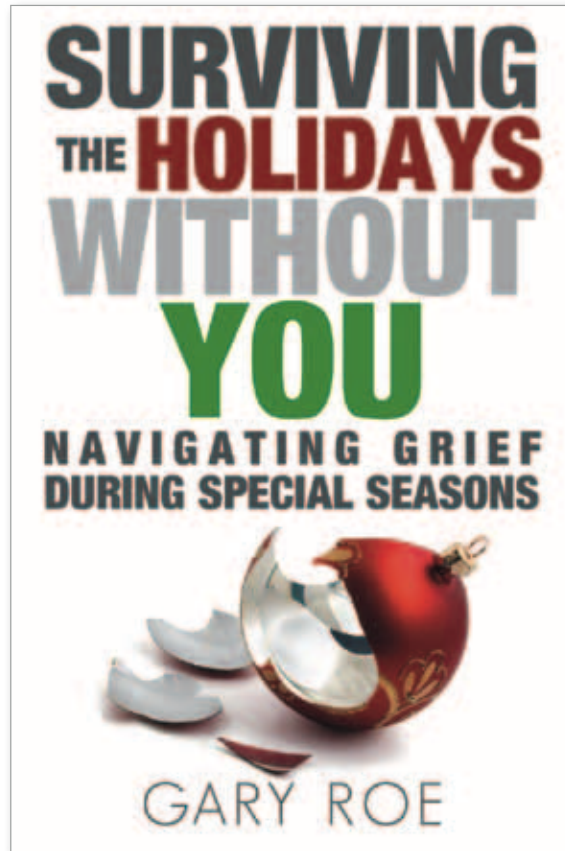
Book Review by Kelly Griffith ☆ Surviving sister of MAJ Samuel Griffith

After my brother died in December 2011, I didn't know what to do when I woke up on Christmas morning. His death was still real. I didn't want to have Christmas without him. So, I didn't. The second Christmas without Sam physically here, I wanted to find a way to honor his life and still feel him near me. I wish I had read Gary Roe's book, *Surviving the Holidays Without You: Navigating Grief During Special Seasons*.

In this easy to read book, hospice chaplain and bereavement specialist Roe shares how you can move through the holiday season with your loved one in a new way. It's so nice to read that I don't have to go on without my brother. Instead, I carry him in my heart. It's validating to read that I'm not crazy for being extra sad on those special days when he should be with my family to celebrate life with us.

Roe's book is reassuring in his relatable story of the loss of his father. With bullet points and short chapters, the book is easily digestible and will give you ideas on how to not just survive the holidays, but heal and grow through this season.

Although he writes some tough statements about reality, e.g. you have to feel the pain



to get through it and no one can ever totally understand your grief because it's unique to you, he also shares hope throughout the book. Roe says your holidays don't have to revolve around your expectations or those of others. Instead, you can have grace for yourself and your family. You can include new rituals into these special days

and months, and you can keep the rituals your loved one always enjoyed the most. He also shares some general grief and life tips that are helpful. Communication and decision making as a family is healthy to your relationships. And real strength lies in knowing your own heart and being honest with yourself.

Finding "safe people" with whom to surround yourself is a good idea every day of the year – not just at the holidays. It reminded me of the safe people I have met through TAPS, those people who will listen to my journey without passing judgment or giving advice, those people who are there just to love me, those people who are "rest stops" on this long road of grief. They are gifts that grief brought me.

If you are not a believer in the Christian faith, you can skip the last chapter of the book. However, Roe does a great job of sharing God's love for the grieving. He doesn't say our losses happened for a reason. Instead, he opines that God is there to comfort us through our grief and has a plan for our future. He even mentions that God is bigger than our anger and frustration – something so many bereaved Christians struggle with as they try to find comfort in their faith after a loss. *

Holiday Emotions Only Your #tapsfam Understands

If you've ever seen the movie *Elf*, you know that there are times you just might not "fit in." Whether you need to dig into the holidays or to completely disconnect from them, there's no place that grief takes you that your #tapsfam doesn't understand. We've lived through the extremes, and we've made it through the melancholy in between—you will make it, too.

What we've learned by living is that continuity can be comforting. We seek and find our loved ones in family traditions. On the other hand, especially in early grief, the instinct to do something new and different can be a lifeline. By changing the frame of reference, we remove comparisons to the holidays we wish we were having.

But really, the problem is more complex, more emotional, and can spin us into overload. As Charlie Brown famously said, "I think there must be something wrong with me, Linus. Christmas is coming, but I'm not happy. I don't feel the way I'm supposed to feel."

Charlie Brown is not alone. When the world wants us simply to celebrate, our experiences demand something *more*. Sometimes, that something more is a way to reorient and get ready for the next year. But the "something more" is often perspective and connection. Do any of these sound familiar?

- When people ask you what's on your wish list, your first reaction is to say, "The Resurrection Stone from Harry Potter," "my life back," or "a hot tub time machine."
- That *A Charlie Brown Christmas* may become one of your favorite

holiday movies—because you feel a little bit like Charlie Brown.

- That it's sometimes hard to sing to the end of "Frosty the Snowman"—because we just cannot handle the additional loss. (Shout out to Disney for the better snowman solution in *Frozen*.)
- Why we know that holiday wishes accompanied by "happy" and "merry" are well-intentioned, but—as much as we want them to—they just might not *apply*.
- Why the "family update letter" may not be as fun to write—or read. So it may not happen. Even if it does happen, you might not say what you really want to say.
- Why the tolerance for family or friend arguments is either very low or very high. It's often easier to pick a fight and be angry than bear the pain and ache of sadness.
- Why we would rather sometimes volunteer than celebrate. Sometimes we just need to give the love away to someone who really, really needs it. In moments of giving, we also see that we still have a place in this great big world.
- Wrapping paper and tape are, in fact, out to make your life even more miserable. And, yes, everything was easier "before."

The paper folded better and the presents were prettier in earlier, less difficult years. Yes, it did and yes, they were. Buy gift bags or dump the unwrapped lot at your local charity wrapping kiosk and walk away with boxes, bows and a hug.

- When you decide this is the year you're going to attempt holiday cooking again, only to find yourself lost in the baking aisle or in tears in the deli section. You decide to hedge your bets and end up ordering Chinese again.
- You don't get around to mailing out holiday cards on time, or at all—and then you finally buy them late, when they're on sale. You justify all this by saying, "what is time, anyway..."
- When you miss the holiday stamps at the post office and are left with only the Valentine's Day stamps, you not only mark two stressful holidays off your to-do list, but you tell people you're finally being honest about your emotional state by mixing messages.
- That the best gifts are understanding, grace, and maybe bereavement pants from the TAPS store.

We understand that the struggle is real. If you're new to grief, or if this is yet

another holiday season without your loved one, what scares or worries you most about the holidays? What surprises you as harder or easier than you thought as the years move along? Talk to us by sharing your feelings and experiences at the "Your #tapsfam Understands" Facebook event. We'll leave the light on and welcome you with a hug and open arms. *



Spotlight on Service

★ Casey Callanan ★

Volunteers are an important part of the TAPS family.

We are grateful for the time they donate in support of our mission. Volunteers, we salute you!

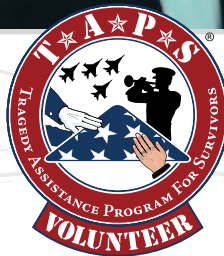
It was a week after the conclusion of the 18th Annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp when we received an email that read, "My name is Casey Callanan, and I live in Arlington, Virginia. I applied to be a volunteer earlier this week and completed the training online. I was hoping I could get some information on what the next step in the process might be, so I can be involved in some of TAPS efforts."

As an organization that enlists the help of volunteer support, we receive emails like this daily, but it's all too difficult to gauge a person's level of commitment on a single strand of static text in an email. Little did we know when receiving that email that Casey would become one of the faithful – a volunteer who commits to any hard task he's given.

Casey has volunteered with TAPS since 2012 and has remained a strong pillar of support even after moving from Arlington, Virginia, to Baltimore, Maryland. Casey's efforts, commitment and activity have only increased since he began volunteering with TAPS.

Casey's interest to get involved with TAPS was spurred by a speech delivered by Vice President Joe Biden during the 18th Annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar.

"I was driving north on I-95 after work on the Friday before a sunny Memorial Day weekend I was planning to spend on the Jersey Shore in 2012," Casey recalls, when he first heard the Vice President's speech. "While messing around with my radio dial, the Vice President's voice suddenly gripped my attention. The radio station's voiceover explained Joe Biden was speaking



*Thank you,
Casey Callanan!*

at an event organized by TAPS. Having recently moved to the Washington area from out-of-state, I had no idea what TAPS was until that moment."

Casey still remembers to this day how the Vice President's speech captivated him like nothing he had ever heard on the radio before. "The storytelling from our Vice President was so vivid. It was a call to action for me," Casey said as it led him to do more research about TAPS, the mission and ultimately the families TAPS supports. Casey immediately saw that hope existed for those friends and families

who were dealing with an impossible loss. He saw that there's a community supporting each other, those dealing with similar realities. It was at that point he decided that he wanted to play a role in helping.

While the Vice President's message was the catalyst for Casey in making the decision to reach out to TAPS, there's a big part of him that inherently wants to give back to others. He was born in Providence, Rhode Island, but moved to the western suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, at a young age, where he was eventually raised. He's the son of a social worker, and growing up having had that exposure through his mother, there's always been a deep-rooted desire to dedicate his time and energy to causes he feels are worth fighting to support. "It's in my blood," Casey said. There's a passion that resides in Casey about TAPS, which is his driving force.

Casey's mother had a significant impact on him growing up. "When I was younger, in my teens, my mom would always be doing something to give back to the Chicago community in which we lived, whether it was for work, or a charity where she volunteered," Casey said. "She would always do what she could to include me and get me involved with the work she was doing." Casey noted that while he didn't think much of it when he was young, as he grew into a young adult, he realized that he truly wanted to give back and wanted to give his time. "She led by example; she didn't just talk about it. But she was attracted to those situations where there can be hope injected into the lives of other people," Casey said when reflecting on his mother. "When I became an adult, I wanted to give back and devote my spare time and energy for something



I believed in. My mom taught me to find a cause I cared about and to budget time for it." Simply put, that's what Casey did, and still does, for TAPS.

Casey has been a jack-of-all-trades taking advantage of his social prowess and professional skills to work for good. When Casey first came to TAPS as a volunteer, he was working as a Technical Writer in the Washington, D.C., area. Because of his writing expertise, Casey dedicated his time updating the TAPS Volunteer Handbook that is sent to volunteers across the nation.

Shortly after the completion of the Volunteer Handbook, Casey took a new position in Baltimore, Maryland, at the American Urological Association with its Marketing and Communications Department, and he started branching out to work other staffing areas within TAPS. Casey often utilizes his professional marketing skills to represent TAPS at various events. He helped with public engagement and awareness efforts at the Marine Corps Marathon Health and Wellness Expo where TAPS has an exhibitors booth to serve our runners

and at the 97th Annual American Legion Convention that took place in Casey's backyard of Baltimore.

Casey is always cognizant of the way he needs to carry himself and speak to the public while representing TAPS. He knows that he's an extension of those who receive services and support from TAPS, so he truly respects that position because of the impact it has.

Casey enjoys volunteering because of the diverse opportunities that allow him to explore all areas of TAPS, be a social butterfly and pull out his inner child. In 2013, Casey had the opportunity to volunteer with TAPS during our participation as a Corcoran Gallery of Art Exhibitor partner for the War Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath exhibit. At the event, Casey was able to work with children in attendance and assist them in making thank you cards for families of fallen service members. He also read *Klinger, a Story of Honor and Hope* to the kids. Casey described that as a treat to read to children because he rarely gets a chance to work with kids.

Additionally, Casey has also helped sell Courage attire during the TAPS Courage fundraiser, using his energy to work the crowds of Washington Wizards and Washington Capitals attendees.

Understanding his own limitations, Casey is able to excel as a volunteer. "While the scope of the actual healing I can provide is limited without me having served in the military or having experienced a profound loss, I can still make significant contributions to TAPS." For Casey, attitude is a big part of it. "It starts with having high energy and a smile. While volunteering is oftentimes very simple and uncomplicated, there is also an element of responsibility I take very seriously. Showing up on time and being reliable is a major part of that responsibility."

TAPS is fortunate that Casey's reaction to Vice President Joe Biden's speech at the TAPS event led him to volunteer. "He's a politician, but it wasn't about politics," and that's what resonated with him, Casey said about the speech. *

Friends of TAPS: Windy25

April marks the sixth annual Windy25 Memorial 5K and the 11th anniversary of the fateful Army helicopter crash in Afghanistan that forged the basis for lasting connection between TAPS and the Windy25 Memorial Fund organization. In our 2012 TAPS magazine feature piece about the group, we shared how survivor families from the crash found their way to TAPS and how the alumni of F Company, 159th Aviation Regiment, “Big Windy”, rallied around those surviving family members to provide caring love and support. Since that article, the scope of the Windy25 Memorial Fund and the depth of relationship between them, TAPS, and all Gold Star Families have grown and continue on a trajectory of hope and healing.

When we caught up with Craig Wilhelm, co-founder and president of the Windy25 Memorial Fund, he shared his vision for the future. The organization has a continued dedication to not only the families affected by the 2005 crash, but also those affected by the loss of anyone in service to our country. Wilhelm said, “We hope to continue illuminating the important TAPS mission to provide life changing care and resources to our nation’s military families and honor the legacy of those we lost in Afghanistan.”

This group of dedicated current and former military understands that when we call our fallen heroes by name and honor their memories they are with us. Telling their stories carries on their life legacy. The anecdotes and recollections are a beacon drawing other families affected by the April 2005 crash to come forward and connect with Windy25. Indeed, as the courageous and inspiring narratives continue to be shared and celebrated over the years they have far reaching effects.

Not everyone who perished in the crash was a member of the immediate unit roster,



some were passengers. In the aftermath of the accident, their family’s contact information was not made available to the Windy25 leadership. Yet, through efforts to honor those affected by the crash, some of those families still found their way to TAPS. Still others connected to the Windy25 alumni group through our first article and the group’s efforts. Wilhelm and his team hopes that through the help of the TAPS network and through our vigilance and quest to honor our heroes that the day will come where all 18 of the Windy25 families will have the opportunity to meet and share their stories together and with the support of this special group.

Wilhelm says what’s special about the growing group participants is the incredible “family” that’s been formed. Race brings together 50-80 of the unit’s soldiers and families in union to “encourage remembrance and honor by challenging survivors, loved ones, colleagues, friends, and strangers to participate in events that provide an atmosphere to rally around families who have endured so much and give them the platform to share their heroes’ life stories.” Participation in the new “life challenge” component is designed so “participation leads to community by creating friendships, bonds and hope while inspiring Gold Star Families to join and connect,” concluded Wilhelm.

What members of the unit have learned over the years is that partnering with similarly dedicated organizations is a two-way mission awareness booster that completes the circle between the TAPS Family and Windy25 survivors. Connection to a larger survivor community is a perfect example of the unit alumni’s commitment to honor their families through raising funds, awareness and inspiration for our nation’s Gold Star Families. The all-volunteer Windy25 Memorial Fund started as an idea in a living room. Through passion and focus it has raised over \$250,000 for TAPS in just five years through the dedicated efforts of its supporters. Their sustained efforts now include running and swimming events, as well as other partner engagements that support TAPS and other, like-causes. Wilhelm and his team say, “a great moment this year was seeing TAPS embrace survivors at the ground level of their grieving process. We are steadfast in our commitment to our hero’s personal stories and to provide life opportunities for their loved ones. Our drive to carry on our heroes’ legacy.

The next opportunity to participate with them is coming in the spring at the annual Windy25 Memorial 5K race in Las Vegas. It is a natural forum to engage survivors, runners, family and friends to pick up the torch and bring them together in support for one common purpose. Windy25’s continued partnership with TAPS enables a strong base for organizing the fundraising component of the race and invites runners of all levels to participate in the powerful event to raise awareness and money for TAPS. *

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Registration is now open for the April 9, 2016, Windy25 Memorial 5K Las Vegas. You can sign up or find more information online at www.windy25.org.
.....

Thank You to Our Donors & Sponsors

We are grateful to the Friends of TAPS whose event sponsorships, grants, memorial tributes, and personal gifts allow us to fulfill our mission of comforting and supporting the loved ones of those who served and died.

HERO

01/01/2015 – 11/10/2015

Colorado Celebrity Classic
Fisher House
The Hartwell Foundation

HSBC Technology &
Services (USA) Inc.
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New York Life Insurance Company
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PATRIOT

AIMCO Cares Charity Classic
BAE Systems
DynCorp International
E&B Natural Resources Gala
& Golf Tournament
Land of the Free Foundation

Lockheed Martin Corporation
Monumental Sports and
Entertainment Foundation
Oshkosh Defense
Red, White & Blue Gala
and Golf Tournament

SAIC, Inc.
The USAA Foundation, Inc.
UnitedHealthcare Military
and Veterans
United Service Organizations, Inc.
Washington Capitals - Courage Caps

EAGLE

Aaron Lewis Invitational Classic
Albemarle Foundation
Allen Family Foundation
American Legion Child Welfare Foundation
Banfi Vintners/Riunite
California Resources Corporation
Computer Sciences Corporation
DC's Dancing Stars Gala
Dolphin Limited Partnerships

EOIR Golf Outing for TAPS
Express Scripts, Inc.
The Hill
Got Your 6
H-E-B
It Takes a Community Foundation Inc
KGC Golf Event to Benefit TAPS
L-3 Communications
Linden Root Dickinson Foundation

Maguire/Maguire, Inc.
Naval Postgraduate School Foundation, Inc.
NFL "Earl Morrall" Golf Tournament
Northrop Grumman Corporation
SunTrust Robinson Humphrey
TriWest Healthcare Alliance
Washington Wizards-Courage Caps

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TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS
3033 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 630
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800.959.TAPS (8277) * www.TAPS.org



TAPS is a participant organization in the
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During this holiday season,

find comfort in knowing that our heroes are still part of us—our past, present and future. Gain perspective from the companionship and support of those who share in your loss. Commit to caring for yourself and being present with those around you.

In the New Year,

we wish you continued strength as you journey from the might-have-beens to the hopes of tomorrow. Know that your TAPS family cares deeply and never forgets your loved one's sacrifice. We walk beside you every step of the way.