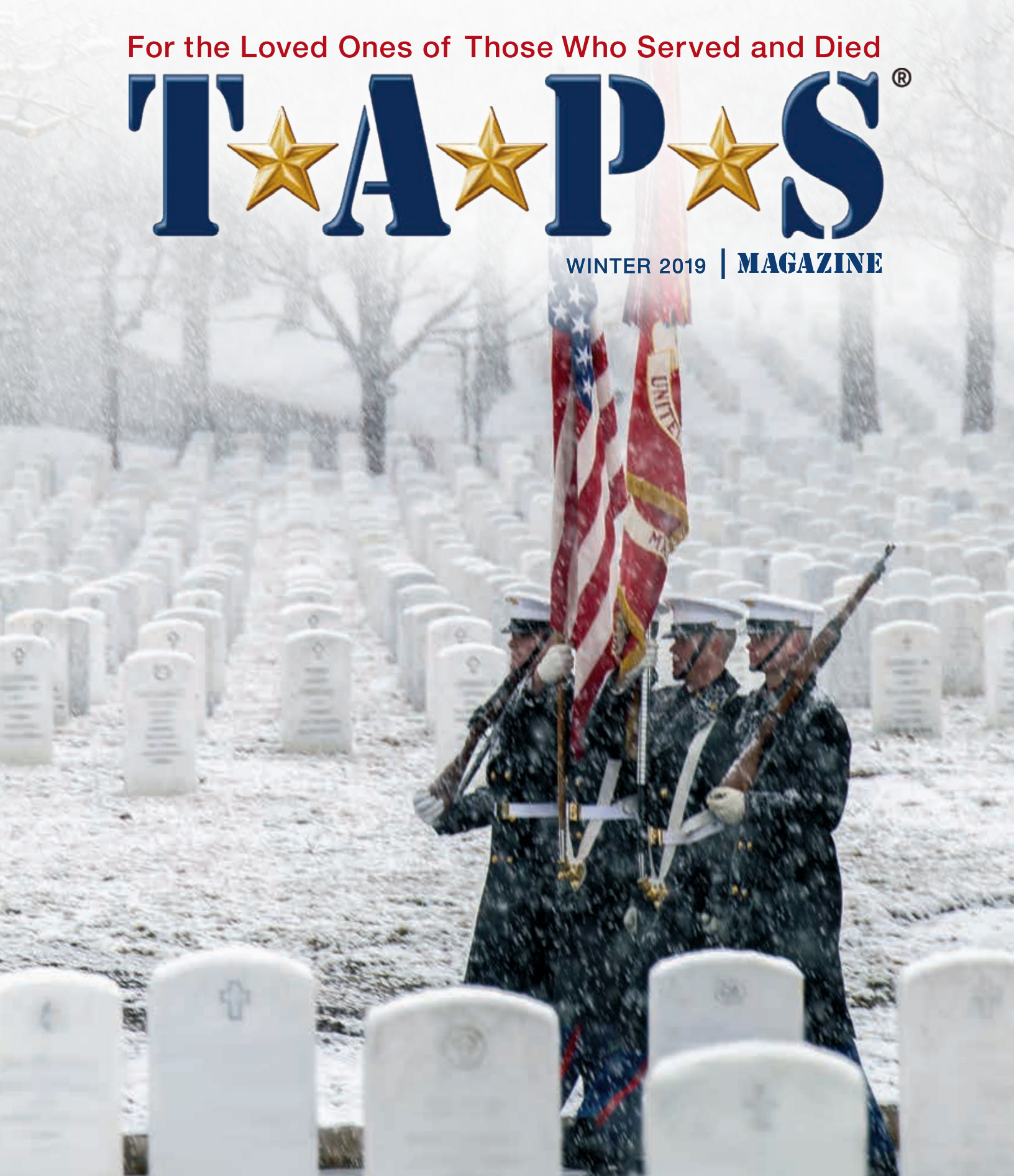


For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

TAPS[®]

WINTER 2019 | MAGAZINE



25TH ANNIVERSARY ★ THE YEAR OF "FIRSTS" ★ RIPPLES ON A POND
7 WAYS TO HELP GRIEVING CHILDREN DURING THE HOLIDAYS

LOVE IS THE *Language* WE SPEAK

Dear TAPS Family,

The holidays are a time when the world focuses on family. For our TAPS family, it is a time when we come together to support each other, to recognize that this can be a difficult season, to share coping strategies, to offer love and let you know you aren't alone — ever.

Our lives have been forever changed by the loss of someone we love so much. The holidays aren't going to be the same, but that doesn't mean we can't carry forward the love and joy of our heroes. There are times when we just want to get through this season, or run away to a place where we can just hide. Or we may want to be fully immersed in it all and embrace the love of friends and family.

There's one thing we know — there is no "right way" to grieve and wherever we find comfort and peace, it's all okay. Be where you need to be, and do what feels right to you. Make new traditions or do the things your loved one held dear.

My husband died along with seven other soldiers in an Army plane crash in the month of November, so I was facing Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year's Eve right around the corner. It was a blur that first year, with friends trying to help but really having no idea what I needed — mainly because I didn't know what I needed, except to have my husband back. Over time, it began to feel more comforting to remember traditions. Watching "White Christmas" curled up on the couch with hot chocolate and cookies had been something Tom and I loved to do together, and there came a time when this felt good to do again, kind of like a connection to our love.

In the pages of this issue you will find that there is hope, you will read stories of love, you will learn coping strategies, and you will know that you are not alone wherever you are in your grief. TAPS is a family where legacies live and love is the language we speak.

With hugs,



Bonnie



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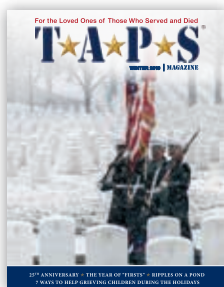
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THANKS TO DONORS

My family and I have benefited so much from TAPS. The love and care shown to my family has been a godsend. Without these wonderful companies that donate, TAPS wouldn't be able to offer so many amazing programs for survivors.

Christina Romero

Surviving spouse
Maj. Benny Romero, U.S. Army

TAPS INSTITUTE

Dr. Kenneth Doka's 1 1/2 day workshop, "Helping Individuals and Families Coping with Grief: Best Practices for Bereavement Professionals," was informative and engaging, combining a thorough overview of grief and bereavement with helpful, practical, and therapeutic interventions. His presentation encompassed a wide repertoire, including lecture, stories, and group participation. I hope the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing will hold more of these excellent events, which are immensely helpful for all professionals who work with the bereaved. Everything about the workshop was first rate.

Sherry Schachter, PhD, FT

Executive Director Emerita of
Bereavement for Calvary Hospital

HELPING OTHERS

I am most thankful to TAPS for reaching out to me. It has been a painful journey, but with my TAPS family, I am able to live one day at a time. I shall continue to keep my son's memory alive through helping other parents in our TAPS family who are going through the same pain.

Teresa Edoja

Surviving mother
Pfc. Joseph Edoja, U.S. Army

TIME TO HEAL

I sit here this morning reflecting back on our weekend with our TAPS family. As much as I love attending these events they are extremely draining and will take me a couple days to get over. I am exhausted mentally but I would not change it. I have learned so much about myself and others and where I am and need to be in this grief journey. I have learned that it's okay to not be okay. It's okay to open up and need people.

This weekend I have learned I am not okay. I need help and cannot do it on my own, even though it kills me to admit that. I will now take time for me, my self-care and will not feel guilty about it. Thank you to all my wonderful TAPS

family, both new and old, who were there for me this weekend and helped me realize it's time to heal me. I love you all.

Rachel Jones

Surviving spouse
Staff Sgt. Christopher Jones, U.S. Army

SHARING TAPS

It is so nice to be able to pass TAPS on to others. TAPS is such an important part of our lives and has been the thing that has helped us move on and to look at the world and see the beauty it has to offer. You have given us strength to carry on.

Ruth Wiley

Surviving mother
Lt. Col. James "Jim" Wiley,
Army National Guard

THANKFUL

So humbled to be apart of this program. So honored to have met so many amazing people along this journey. Thankful for the opportunity to continue my service to my country via this program. Thankful for the families who've touched my life.

Articia Hunter

PNSN, U.S. Navy and TAPS Military Mentor



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Our Mission

The Tragedy Assistance Program
for Survivors offers compassionate
care to all those grieving the death
of a military loved one.

TAPS is here

24 HOURS A DAY / 7 DAYS A WEEK

- ★ National Military Survivor Helpline
24/7 at 800.959.TAPS (8277)
- ★ National Peer Support Network
- ★ Connections to Community-Based Care
 - ★ Casework Assistance
 - ★ Emergency Financial Assistance
 - ★ Education Resources and Support
for Post-Secondary Education
- ★ TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing
 - ★ Grief and Trauma Resources
- ★ Seminars, Retreats, One-Day Gatherings
 - ★ Sports & Entertainment Events
- ★ Good Grief Camp for Children/Teens
 - ★ National Military Mentor Program
 - ★ Young Adult Program
 - ★ TAPS Online Community
 - ★ TAPS Magazine

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We welcome your thoughts about content in our magazine or any
experience you have with TAPS. Letters and other content may
be edited for publication. Please write to us at editor@taps.org.

SHARE YOUR STORY

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

JOIN US ONLINE

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You'll find our blog and Online Community with chats and message
boards for connection to others from the comfort of home. Learn more
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and for survivors. To subscribe, send a request to online@taps.org.

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7

WAYS

TO HELP GRIEVING CHILDREN DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT

Grief during the holidays serves up a perfect storm where joyous memories crash against reality and expectations, something that is especially tough when it's a child who's grieving. I know this firsthand. On October 18, 1977, my uncle Doug died by suicide. I was 7 years old.

While I don't remember the specifics of the Thanksgiving and Christmas that followed, what I do remember is that everyone tried to act normal when our situation was anything but. Even though her son had just died a month earlier, my grandmother cooked the full meal, invited the whole extended family, and tried to carry on. Of course, that was her choice, and maybe doing something "normal" brought some comfort to her. I now know that her lifelong coping strategy for my uncle's death was denial, and my sense is that staying busy was her way of avoiding a deep pain. I wish it could have been different for her, for all of us, but it wasn't.

My main memory of that holiday season was feeling confused and sad — mainly because no one was really talking about Doug. I wanted to talk about my uncle, and it felt strange that he was hardly mentioned. My mother and I discussed him in private, but as a family, there was no acknowledgment of the person that was no longer there.

I find it interesting that we recognize National Children's Grief Awareness Day just a week before Thanksgiving. That is exactly when I could have benefited from it when I was a kid! So I thought, in honor of this special cause, and for the grieving child I have inside and the heartbroken families that are trying to get through a difficult time of year, it's a good time to reflect on ways we can help our children deal with their grief during the holidays.



7 Ways to Help Grieving Children During the Holidays

1. Allow this year to be different. Trying to pull off the perfect holiday celebration will likely only cause you and the child more stress. In addition to the grief a major loss brings, there are secondary losses as well. If you are facing financial hardships, allow there to be fewer gifts this year. If you don't have the energy to cook a meal for the whole family, order out, go to someone else's home, or make reservations. Children are sensitive to your stress so don't take on more than you can. There are many tips below that will help you include the child in the conversation and planning.

2. Understand the developmental perspectives of death for children. Research performed by Maria Nagy segments children's perspectives of death into three categories, though the age ranges are a guideline and will vary from child to child. Use this information in tandem with what your child tells you about how they view the loss to find age - and worldview - appropriate ways for your child to express what they feel.

Ages 3 to 5: Death is a physical relocation, and the deceased exists somewhere else.

Ages 5 to 9: Death is often personified, and can be avoided.

Ages 9 to 10: Death is universal, inevitable, and irreversible.

3. Balance new and old traditions. If a child's mother died and is the person that would usually read "The Night Before Christmas" to the family on Christmas Eve, what do you do? Skip it? Have someone else read it? Instead of trying to figure it out on your own, ask the child what they want to do. There isn't a right or wrong answer, and this way you empower the child to share their feelings with you as well as tap into their own ability to do grief-work. This allows you to keep traditions that work, let go of those that don't, and create new ones because you want to, not because you have to.



about the deceased person's passions while continuing their legacy. This will

4. Don't pretend the death didn't occur. No one forgets that someone they love is missing. Pretending that everything is fine will not temper the pain. Instead, it will add confusion to what is already a disorienting situation. Instead, talk openly with the child about how you both feel, and how you miss them this year. This sends a clear signal to the child that talking about their feelings is encouraged, and that you are a safe person they can lean on.

5. Ask them how they would like to remember their special person during the holidays. Whether creating a holiday decoration using photos of their special person, writing a letter to put in the deceased person's stocking, letting the child set a place at the dinner table where the empty chair will be, or baking their favorite cookie recipe, there are countless ways to weave memories into family gatherings. Let the child weigh in on what they would like to do, and you will have a great opportunity to teach them the power of remembering.

6. Consider age-appropriate volunteer opportunities in honor of the special person. If the person who died supported a cause, see if you can make that part of the holiday season. Donate money or goods to their favorite charity, volunteer at your local soup kitchen, hand out water during a 5k or find some other event where you and the child can learn more

benefit you, the child, and the people the organization serves. After all, this is the season for compassion.

7. Stick to routines while allowing for some flexibility. Grieving children benefit from a normal routine, but the holidays alone can disrupt schedules, especially with school breaks, travel, and holiday events. To whatever extent is possible, try to keep a steady routine, especially with meals and bedtime. But don't be overly rigid. If the child starts talking about why they miss their person at 8:55, and bedtime is at 9:00, no need to cut them off. Balance their regular schedule with an awareness of what they need in the moment.

Most of these tips are useful for grieving children, not only during the holidays but throughout the year. Keep in mind that, other than loving them and allowing them to share their memories and needs, there are no hard and fast rules, just guidelines. ★

Heather Stang is the author of "Mindfulness & Grief" and a member of the TAPS Advisory Board. She holds a masters degree in Thanatology, and is a certified yoga therapist. Visit mindfulnessandgrief.com to learn more about her classes and book.

Christmas

WITHOUT Chris

Ami Neiberger-Miller | Surviving sister of Army Spc. Christopher Neiberger



Last photo taken of all four Neiberger siblings together - just before Christmas, 2006.
L TO R: ROBERT NEIBERGER, AMI NEIBERGER-MILLER, ERIC NEIBERGER, CHRISTOPHER NEIBERGER

PHOTO COUTESY OF DR. RICHARD NEIBERGER

THIS REFLECTION WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN 2014 AND IS REPUBLISHED HERE WITH AN UPDATED POSTSCRIPT

My brother, Army Spc. Christopher Neiberger, was killed in action in Iraq in 2007 at age 22. The last time we saw him was at Christmastime when he came home from Iraq on leave eight years ago. All of the last photos of our family together and the last times we spent together were at the holidays.

After his death, the holidays became very painful. We were always the kind of family that had a holiday routine and after he died, many of the things we had always done together hurt. The stockings my grandmother made for us years ago — that used to be hung by the chimney with excitement when we were kids — were so painful to look at, no one could even get them out of the box. It seemed like our joy was gone.

We can't always predict how the holidays will affect us. Those first holidays were awful. My stepchildren were out of town on Christmas that year, and we were rushing to get everything ready for our holiday celebration with them on the day they got back. I was crying so hard as I wrapped their presents that I had to call my husband, who was out doing errands, and ask him to come home. I was a wreck. I so desperately

wanted to give our children the holiday they always had, but I was not up to it.

Cooking was hard, too. When I tried to cook for my stepchildren and husband around the holidays, I would burst into tears. All of the food reminded me of my family and what I had lost. I was so grateful that first year that my sister-in-law invited us over for Thanksgiving dinner, even though I was miserable and it was only a few months after Chris died. We visited the cemetery that morning on the way to her house. Over time, it got better, and I could cook again.

Over the years, we have tried many things: being together at the holidays, leaving town for the holidays, and being apart for the holidays. We even took a cruise for Thanksgiving two years ago as a family, which was something I would have never even considered in the past.

Some of the family traditions that we stopped after my brother died have returned to us in new ways, because of the arrival of our daughter, who is now 4 years old. When she arrived, there was recognition in my family that we collectively wanted her to have happy

memories of the holidays and to experience the traditions that mattered to us. But we had to find new ways to do them. Those old stockings assigned to each of us in our childhood remain in the box, but we have new ones now.

Looking back, I would say it was important to lean on others for help and support. You may be trying to muscle your way through the holiday season, but grief can bubble up and disrupt even the most steadfast resolve. Be gentle with yourself and cut yourself some slack. Do the things you are comfortable doing and plan an "out" in case it's too much for you.

It is okay to change things if that feels right to you, and it is okay to keep them the same, too. If one person in a family insists on a particular tradition, assess the collective impact of it. Realize not everyone may know how he or she will feel about something until they are experiencing it.

If we are gentle with each other and supportive of what we all need, it makes going through grief at the holidays a little easier. We have held onto our customs as a family, but had to re-think our holiday traditions. It is still a work in progress for us.



POSTSCRIPT: Now five years later, Ami shares how their holidays are better than those early years:

We still have to be careful about what we do as it can be a sensitive time for all of us. The memories of my brother who died and that last Christmas he was home can seem more vivid at the holidays, but we are making new memories too.

Our daughter is older with her own expectations for the holidays. As a foster family, our holidays sometimes include

more children, and some of those kids may have been through their own traumas. As a family, there's a desire to provide a joyous holiday for all of the kids who live with us and to help them get through the holiday too. But that also makes our holiday even busier.

I find I have to be deliberate about finding a way to include my brother for myself. I might place a wreath at the cemetery on his gravesite or make a donation to a nonprofit in his memory, or tell a story about a family holiday event to my children.

If the extended family is spending Christmas at my home, I find it best to have a solid plan for our activities that is worked out in advance. My home is closer to Arlington National Cemetery, where my brother is buried, and other family members can't routinely visit from out of town. If their trip is brief, then we need to discuss ahead of time who wants to go to the cemetery and figure out when it will happen.

Even though it's been 12 years since my brother died, we are still figuring it all out. And that's okay. ★

Twenty-Five Years of TAPS

A Testament to Love

TAPS is a love story

Its inspiration was love. It continues to be a testament to love.

Love given, love received, love shared. It grows and strengthens — spreading its light to the darkest of places.

In November 1992, eight soldiers perished in a C-12 crash in Alaska, including Brig. Gen. Thomas C. Carroll, commander of the state's Army National Guard. Gen. Carroll's widow, Bonnie, and the seven other widows found the most powerful comfort from each other.

"Tom's death was devastating and debilitating in every way and there was no place for me to come together with other military surviving family members and find a community of hope and understanding. The only ones who understood what I was going through were the other widows who had also lost husbands in the same crash. We all understood each other because we were walking similar paths in our grief."

BONNIE CARROLL,
TAPS FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT

Twenty-five years ago, there were no smartphones, no Google. There was no national organization with the mission to provide support and resources to those grieving the death of a military loved one.

Bonnie Carroll's vision changed the landscape for military families. On October 17, 1994, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) was born.

TAPS Stands With You

Grief and death are not subjects people wish to think about, much less discuss. Yet, they are aspects of life that do not discriminate. Grief and death touch us all at some point in our lives. And when a death occurs in the military, TAPS stands ready to reach out with comfort and connection to resources that offer help, hope and a community of support.

Since our founding, TAPS has been there 24/7/365. We have helped over 90,000 military survivors by providing a national network of peer-based emotional care; access to round-the-clock support through our National Military Survivor Helpline; connections to resources in communities across the country; and thousands of programs that have helped our families navigate their grief journeys.



We stand side by side with our military and partner organizations to give families the care they deserve. We are there in the beginning and for the days, weeks, months and years that follow. TAPS is there when the hurt is too heavy to carry, when hope is renewed and when survivors are empowered to carry forward our nation's legacy — and to be living legacies for their loved ones.

As a family of survivors we have stood together at the Pentagon Family Assistance Center in support of those affected by the terrorist attacks of 9/11. We extended our hands and our hearts to those who lost loved ones at the Fort Hood shooting. We have run marathons in honor and remembrance of our heroes through TeamTAPS; we have



gathered in small coffee shops at TAPS Together and sports stadiums as part of teams4taps. We have taken our experience and extended our time and care to another through the TAPS peer mentor program. We have bridged the miles through our online community and embraced our futures with renewed empowerment at retreats and expeditions. We have done all this in support of the mission to honor those who have served and sacrificed for our nation, to celebrate their lives and to share the grief journey with love and compassion.

Love and Grief Transcend Borders

Love is universal. Love is eternal. It transcends borders, language, and time. Through TAPS International, we have become a model for other countries to form groups offering compassionate care and companionship for their own military survivors.

And now as a global family, survivors stand together. Together with a solemn pledge that no one will ever have to face the heartache alone — a pledge that there will always be someone to listen and to lean on, someone who will enter into a space of pain without fear and be a comforting presence.

“More than 20 years ago, I found myself alone as a young widow, living away from home — completely shattered. Through the compassionate outreach of TAPS, I found a new home very early in my grief. Connecting with other young widows was at the time so surreal and at the same time completely normalizing to the situation.”

KELLIE HAZLETT, SURVIVING SPOUSE OF MAJ. MARK NICKELS, U.S. MARINE CORPS

“When I first came here to the TAPS group I was hopeless. I was desperate to find just one person like myself. Never did I think I would find this new family who not only is just like me but have been there for me in my deepest darkest hours and were the ones who have extended their hands to pull me up off my knees. You all have been the ones that have carried me in times that I could not walk on my own.”

PEGGY SCALLORN, SURVIVING MOTHER OF AIRMAN 1ST CLASS CODY SCALLORN, U.S. AIR FORCE

“No organization is probably as responsible for that sense of confidence that we have that our families would be taken care of than TAPS.”

GEN. JOSEPH DUNFORD, U.S. MARINE CORPS
19TH CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS

TAPS is a love story. For 25 years, wherever there is grief and hearts that need to be comforted, the TAPS family has offered love and compassion. For 25 years, we have been a place of hope for all those grieving the death of a military loved one, regardless of the relationship to the deceased or the cause of death.

Our mission continues. The number of surviving family members coming to TAPS for support has risen each year and is projected to increase again for 2019. Our programs have been benchmarked as best practices and, through the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing and other programs, we have fostered a broader awareness in bereavement care of military families and in suicide prevention. TAPS is now leading the way in developing a program to specifically address the needs of survivors who grieve the death of their loved one to an illness.

From love, Bonnie Carroll created TAPS. From the love of her husband Tom, from the love of her fellow travelers along the grief journey. For 25 years, there has been a home for grieving hearts. Those hearts have joined together to form a family; a family of strength and honor. A family of love. ★

#LoveLivesOn #WeAreTAPS

Ripples on a Pond

Understanding and Coping with Secondary Loss

Kenneth J. Doka, Ph.D, M.Div

After her son Michael died in Afghanistan, Lydia told me, “I not only lost my son, I simultaneously lost all his friends.”

Lydia had not realized the almost sacred place those friends occupied in Michael’s life and her own. “Ever since grade school, they were always over. They even went on trips with us. It was a tradition that they came to our house to watch football on Thanksgiving. On Christmas Eve they showed up for our annual potluck. Yet now that Mike died, I never see them. After the funeral they disappeared. I miss their connection with Mike of course, and I also miss the fun we shared.”

Have you ever thrown a rock into a still pond? After the rock hits the water, ripples move through the water in ever-widening circles. A death can affect your life as if it

were a pond, sending ripples outside the initial impact of loss. Those ripples move through our lives: our relationships, our traditions, and our daily routines. When someone we love dies, it affects our whole pond. We call those ripples that go beyond the loss of the loved one secondary losses. Secondary losses can feel especially painful during the holiday season, as survivors face an empty chair at the table or changes in a cherished annual ritual.

Rod experienced the secondary loss of one of his best friends. The relationship started to fray not long after Rod’s sister Meg died by suicide. Rod and Carl were more than friends; they were combat buddies and brothers in law. It was Rod who had introduced Carl to Meg. But now Rod resented Carl for dating another woman less than a year after Meg’s death.

He realized that he unfairly blamed tensions in the marriage for his sister’s death and even felt guilty that he had set them up eight years earlier. Yet he missed his friendship with Carl and seeing his nephew and godson, who was a powerful reminder of Meg. He missed being certain of where he would be on New Year’s Eve because when they all returned from service, the three of them had always happily rung in the new year together.

For Kendra, the death of her son in a training accident affected her relationship with her daughter-in-law Tracy. To be honest, the relationship between Kendra and Tracy had always been tense. Kendra had thought her son Ty should wait until he had finished his service before marrying. Now that Ty had died, she missed her grandchildren and hoped to repair a

How can we respond to these secondary losses?
Sometimes, it can be simple — just by reaching out.

problematic relationship. The primary loss of Ty rippled through Kendra's life because she now felt the secondary loss of her relationship with Tracy, though rocky, and her grandchildren. With the holidays approaching, her emotions grew even more intense. Kendra wanted to shower her grandchildren with gifts as she always had when Ty was alive, but now she was simply stockpiling presents because she felt Tracy wouldn't allow her closeness or generosity. Kendra began wanting to avoid holidays altogether.

REACHING OUT IS A POSITIVE FIRST STEP

How can we respond to these secondary losses? Sometimes, it can be simple — just by reaching out. Lydia did that. On the anniversary of Michael's death, she invited his friends for a memorial barbeque. Most came. She spoke to the group and reminded them that she not only missed Michael but also all of them. She told them how much a part of Michael's life — and her life — they had been. They all shared memories and cried together. The barbeque has now replaced the

Christmas Eve potluck and is now an annual event. Even better, Michael's friends often stop by Lydia's house to visit the family whenever they are in town, even at Thanksgiving to watch the games.

Sometimes secondary losses cannot be fully restored. Rod reached out to Carl but found he had little interest in reviving their relationship after all. There was too much hurt. He now sees his nephew when he is visiting with Rod's parents and appreciates that Carl supports their closeness.

For Rod, the loss of his relationship with Carl—a ripple in the pond—is one that he must both acknowledge and grieve. But Meg's death has also resulted in his finding strength with peers who have experienced similar losses. He now realizes that his new friendships are just as strong, perhaps even stronger, than his with Carl had ever been.

For Kendra, the mere act of reaching out and speaking honestly with her daughter-in-law Tracy was difficult. But she courageously took the first step. She and

Tracy eventually met for coffee at Kendra's insistence and hashed things out. "We found we shared a love of Ty and that Tracy wanted her children to grow up knowing and being close to their grandparents. I will not say it is the easiest relationship in the world, but we manage. We now share stories about Ty often and are becoming closer. Last year, Tracy let us to take the kids to Disney when they were off from school. It is working." ★

Kenneth J. Doka, Ph.D., M.Div., is a TAPS Advisory Board Member and Senior Bereavement Consultant to Hospice Foundation of America. He is past president of the Association for Death Education and Counseling and is the 2019 recipient of its Lifetime Achievement Award. Dr. Doka is a mental health counselor and ordained Lutheran minister.



HUNDREDS OF MEMBERS
OF THE TAPS FAMILY
TRAVELED TO PHOENIX
OCT. 11 – 13 FOR A WEEKEND
OF HOPE AND HEALING AT
THE 11TH NATIONAL MILITARY
SUICIDE SURVIVOR SEMINAR.

PHOTOS: TAPS STAFF, MIKE HANAFIN, JULIE KELLY, WILL SELLECK, MICHAEL WHITCHURCH





As always, great care was taken to ensure workshops and sharing groups met the needs of survivors at every phase of their grief journey, including those who are still stabilizing after their loss, those active in their grief work, and those who have begun to experience post-traumatic growth and find meaning in their loss.

Guest speakers included Dr. Frank Campbell, a longtime friend of TAPS who encouraged survivors to “remember the dash,” referring to the life years between the birth date and death date on a loved one’s headstone. Dr. Jennifer Ashton, chief medical correspondent for ABC’s “Good Morning America,” joined TAPS Vice President Kim Ruocco for a “fireside chat” about her own journey following the death by suicide of her ex-husband, Rob. Special guests from the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs attended to show their support for groundbreaking TAPS work on suicide prevention and postvention. TAPS advisory board member Sharon Strouse, a suicide survivor who specializes in art therapy, once again hosted the Artful Grief Studio, where family members could work through their grief while making dolls, books, and other works of art.

Close to 150 children attended Good Grief Camp, where they were paired one on one with Military Mentors. Singer-songwriter Brett Jones, another longtime friend of TAPS, along with Danny Wells and Ray Herndon, provided guitar lessons to kids and Military Mentors, who performed a special rendition based on “Achy-Breaky Heart” at the closing dinner. At the dinner, families made paper bag luminaria, which were placed around the pools in remembrance of their loved ones.★



THE YEAR OF “FIRSTS”

Managing the Holiday Season

Stephanie Frogge, MTS | TAPS Staff Associate, National Military Survivor Helpline

**“I started small. I accepted invitations to small gatherings.
I tried my best to participate in the holiday fun,
allowing myself to say “no” when I needed to rest my heart.**

**Our families were an integral part of the healing in that first year
and they helped me understand the importance of showing
our daughter the value of tradition.”**

Amy Dozier

Surviving spouse of Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan K. Dozier, U.S. Army

For the recently bereaved, the year of “firsts” is an immediate challenge. Each holiday, significant event, personal milestone and family tradition can throw a spotlight on the unremitting ache of our beloved’s absence. We may be in the midst of emotional overload and depleted energy, but the calendar tells us that we’re expected to have some response to holidays and occasions.

Mid-November through early January immerses us in music and messages, signs and symbols, advertising and activity that cannot be avoided even if we don’t celebrate a particular holiday. Most cultures have one or more holy days during this period and many secular events such as New Year’s Eve take place as well. Social scientists and mental health professionals have long recognized the reality of holiday-related stress prompted by doing too much, spending too much, overindulging, maintaining unrealistic expectations, spending time with extended family members or any activities that take a physical and emotional toll.

For those whose loss occurs during the holiday season itself, there’s the additional trauma of knowing that special days will be forever associated with the death of a loved one. Having to manage details when people may be on vacation or otherwise unreachable, businesses closed or services temporarily unavailable increases the stress. As difficult as it is to cope with trauma when everything and everyone else is going about their normal business, the contrast is even greater when everything and everyone around you appears to be in the midst of happy celebration.

There is no right way to feel during this time. Some survivors may actually fare well the first year. As the Hospice Foundation



of America notes: **Numbness is a natural protection when facing any kind of trauma.** Detached from the reality of the loss, you may function pretty well at first. This can be confusing to the people around you, who expect full-blown grief and suffering you may not yet feel. For those who were carried through the first holiday season on the sluice of shock, don't be surprised if the second year is more challenging.

No matter where you are in your grief journey, techniques for managing stress are relevant. There's no downside to taking good care of ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, and spiritually in all the seasons of our life. But for those in acute crisis or the depths of grief, something as banal as "get plenty of sleep" just doesn't seem especially important even if it really is pretty good advice.

The following ideas come from TAPS survivors who know first-hand what it's like to manage the holidays in the midst of acute grief. Adapt what is appropriate to your situation; disregard what isn't.

The worst thing that could happen has already happened. Against this reality the fact that the biscotti didn't get baked, the cantor role fell to someone else, or cousin Helga is angry that you didn't come to her party matters far less than it might otherwise. The ramifications of not doing this year the things that you've done in the past are actually very small, especially compared to the load you're carrying right now. No one's life is going to be ruined if you don't put up the tree.

"No" is a complete sentence. Many of us believe that telling someone "no" will be more palatable if we explain why we're declining. Practice saying to yourself, "Thank you. I'm not going to be able to do that this year." No explanation necessary. If someone is obnoxious enough to ask why, or is unwilling to accept your answer, the issue is with them, not you. Simply repeat, "Thank you. I'm not going to be able to do that this year."

You are not responsible for someone else's feelings. Holiday traditions and rituals

are important to everyone and when your coping strategies bump up against someone else's idea of how things "should be," there may be some backlash — as insensitive as it sounds (and is). If Opa's mad because you're not going to Christmas Eve service or everyone's sulking because you didn't bring your baklava or the third vice-president of the civic association resents having to pick up the slack for the holiday fundraiser, you are not responsible. Don't explain. Don't apologize. Don't feel guilty. You've got more than enough on your plate.

"This year" isn't the same as "every year." Even as you're saying no to holiday requests or grieving the loss of holiday traditions that will never be the same, try to be mentally open to the idea that you can revisit some of these things in the future. Christmas / Kwanza / Boxing Day will be awful this year. Not baking / not hosting your annual open house / not attending a party will be terrible this year. Being alone will be rotten this year. And this year is really all you need to cope with right now.

Lean on your "second string" support system. Bereaved people are often disappointed with the lack of support they receive from family members. Remember they are grieving too and, just as you have very little left to give, that's true for them as well. For a time, you may need to look elsewhere for support and care. Your childhood friends, individuals from your faith community, a good therapist, your TAPS support, or a caring co-worker may be able to serve as grief companions early on in your journey more effectively than family.

Leave. Or don't. Some survivors find a complete change of environment during the holidays to be a useful coping strategy. Removing yourself from the setting of holiday traditions may well make your loved one's absence a little less acute. If the idea appeals and you have the wherewithal to do something different, give it a try. One important caveat: with the possible exception of a cave somewhere, there is no place on earth where you can go and not be reminded of the holidays. The first day of Hanukkah is always going to be on the 25th day of Kislev, regardless of where in the world you are. You may succeed in avoiding the

familiar, but you're probably not going to succeed in avoiding the holidays altogether.

If you have kids, much of this isn't going to be helpful at all. If there are children involved, you're going to want some semblance of a traditional holiday for their sake. Whatever you decide to do, be okay with the fact that it's not going to be "the same." The children already know that. If they're old enough, let them help you decide how to navigate the holiday season. If they're little, trust that whatever you're able to pull off will be enough. Delegate as much as possible. Yes, people are busy this time of year, but most of them are willing to help if you give them some ideas. Ask your friends for help with shopping, wrapping, basic decorating, transportation and traditional foods. And remember that there's no gift large enough or holiday experience spectacular enough to "cure" a grieving child so don't even try.

Do something nice for someone else. This is actually one of the great paradoxes of grief. When you have the least to give emotionally, it actually helps to do a kind thing for someone else. We're not talking about big gestures here — just hand a five-dollar bill to someone obviously down on their luck, identify something that belonged to your loved one and give it to someone you know will treasure it, or arrange to have a bag of pet food delivered to your local animal shelter.

Be very gentle with yourself. Refer back to the first tip: the worst thing that can happen has happened. Be as good to yourself as you can possibly be. Touch base with your health care provider, lean on your support system, stay hydrated, and try not to think too far into the future. And remember that TAPS is just a phone call away day or night, 365 days a year. ★



The Trauma Healing Diet

Excerpt from: The Transformation | Dr. James Gordon

Books on trauma, even the very best of them, have little or nothing to say about the damage that trauma and chronic stress do to our digestive tract, and how that damage compounds the toll trauma takes on our mind, our brain, and the rest of our body. This is because everything we eat – and I mean everything – can either enhance or hinder trauma healing. I want you to know which foods are best for you but also why they are. That way, as you choose your foods and prepare your meals at home or order them in a restaurant, you'll have a clear sense of what's good for you.

How the Diet Works

This Trauma-Healing Diet is designed to significantly decrease the level of stress that trauma causes and to help reverse the damage it may have done to your brain as well as your gut and the rest of your body. Eating in a trauma-healing way will reverse the inflammation caused by trauma. It will ease you away from the comfort: food addictions that trauma may have caused - cravings for sweet, fatty, salty concoctions that provide jolts of sugar, reduce high levels of cortisol, stimulate the production of the feel-good hormone dopamine, and increases the level of calming, mood-enhancing serotonin. The diet will help you lose weight that stressed eating may have put on. It will improve your mood and the way your mind works. And keeping to a Trauma-Healing Diet will go a long way to preventing the chronic illnesses that so often follow in trauma's wake.

Eat Whole Foods

When food is processed, it loses vital nutrients and most of the nourishing fiber that goes with them. Meanwhile, it's being contaminated by the toxic chemicals —

preservatives, colorings, and flavorings — that seduce our eyes and taste buds, prolonging shelf life, amp up profits for manufacturers, and compromise our health.

Make Non-Starchy Vegetables a Major Part of Your Diet

There is an amazing, colorful variety of health-promoting vegetables, all with vastly different tastes and textures. All contain antioxidants, which offset the effects of stress, as well as soluble fiber that our gut needs to function properly.

Include Starchy Vegetables

The sweet potato, a starchy vegetable that is rich in antioxidants and phytonutrients, is a wonderful alternative to white potatoes, pasta, and rice.

Fruits

Fruits are high in sugar, but they are gut- and mind-healthy – if eaten in moderation.

Eating Organic

Organic foods are definitely better for you. A number of studies have shown that an organic food diet is less carcinogenic.

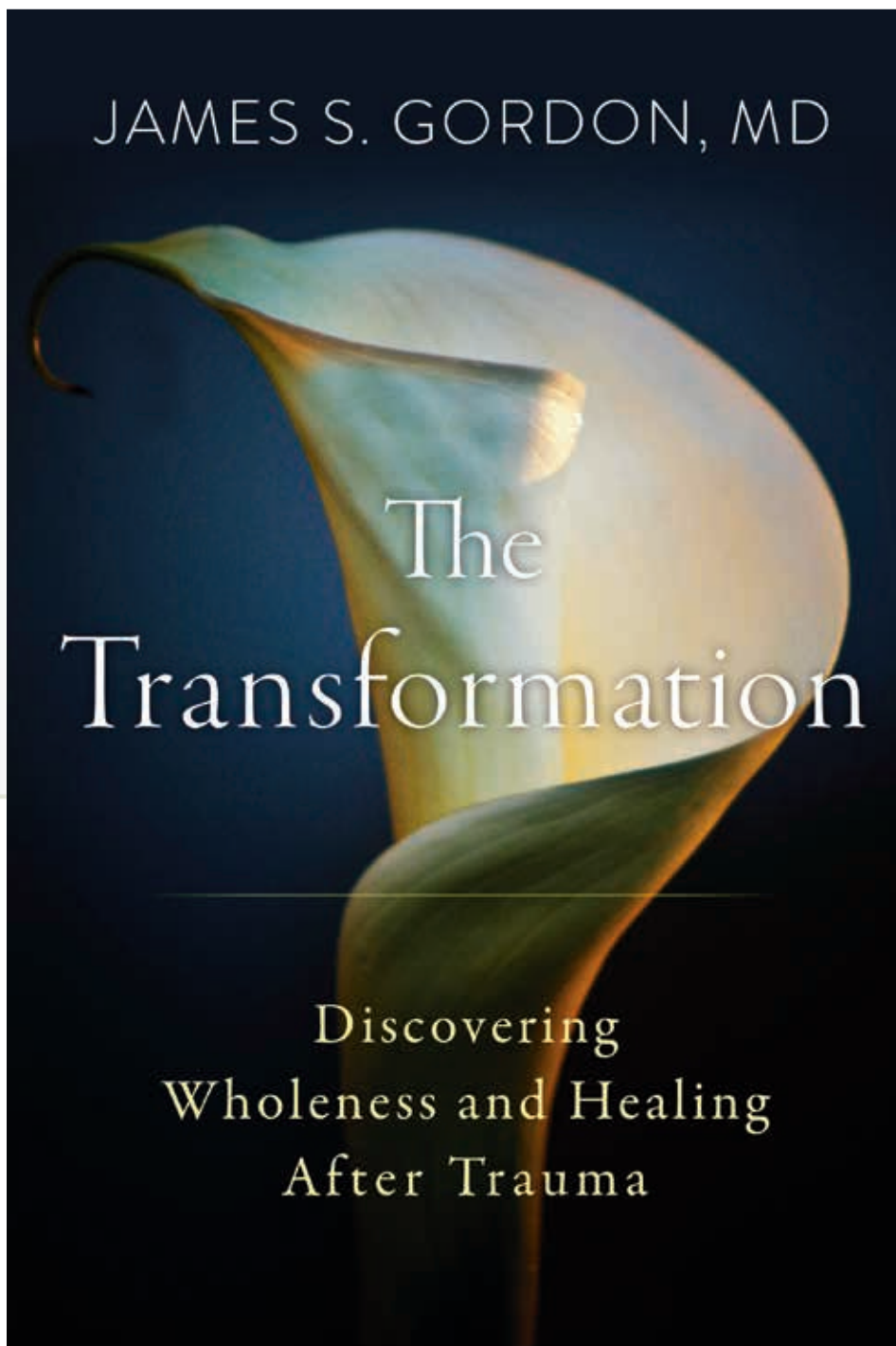
And many of the pesticides and herbicides that are typically used on plants may have negative effects on our brains, our mood, and our thinking processes. However, organic fruits, vegetables, and grains can be expensive. You can stretch your food budget, while sparing yourself health risks, if you use the guidelines prepared by the Environmental Working Group (EWG). The EWG strongly recommends putting your organic food money on the “dirty dozen,” the fruits and veggies with the most pesticides. These include: grapes, peaches, cherries, pears, kale, strawberries, spinach, nectarines, apples, tomatoes, celery, and potatoes. You can safely eat the nonorganic versions of other fruits and vegetables.

Plant Protein

Make beans and other legumes (lentils, chickpeas and soybeans) a foundational part of your diet. Seeds and nuts are excellent sources of protein and are rich in the fats we need for brain health.

Fish: Your Best Friend for Animal Protein

Fish are rich in the anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids that make the



membranes of brain cells more flexible, optimize the transmission of electrical signals from one cell to the next and promote maximal resilience and enhanced mood.

Meat

Instead of making meat a habit let it be more of a treat. Cutting way down on meat will improve the balance and health of your microbiome, the gut bacteria that can help you repair trauma induced

decrease your body's burden of pro-inflammatory omega-6s, and contribute to your overall well-being.

A High-Dose Supplements

For many years, I've been recommending high-dose multivitamin and multimineral supplements for traumatized and stressed people. When we're stressed, our body's demand for many nutrients increases. Recent research after an earthquake in

Dr. Gordon is the founder and executive director of the nonprofit Center for Mind-Body Medicine (cmbm.org) in Washington, D.C. and a TAPS Advisory Board member, as well as a Clinical Professor at Georgetown Medical School. To find out more about his Trauma-Healing Diet and other helpful techniques, you can read his new book, "The Transformation: Discovering Wholeness and Healing After Trauma." His book is available on Smile.Amazon.com. If you select TAPS - Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors as your designated charity, a portion of sales go to support TAPS programs.

New Zealand clearly shows that a high-dose multivitamin and multimineral supplement can help with anxiety, depression, and intrusive memories.

A Final Word

Sometimes you'll quickly feel the benefits of the Trauma-Healing Diet. Sometimes the effects will be gradual and subtle. The shift to a largely organic, whole-food, plant-based, high-fiber diet is likely to make you feel more relaxed and energized in a week or two. Significantly decreasing highly processed food and sugar, particularly in somebody who's been a comfort-food junkie, can have similarly rapid results. Eating wisely and sticking to the diet I've outlined, decreasing or eliminating alcohol and tobacco, combined with everything else you're learning and using, is a reliable path to sure and steady trauma healing. Even if you don't immediately feel that your new diet is making a difference, you can know that it's providing a firm foundation for your comprehensive trauma-healing program. And it's putting you on the royal road to long-term good physical, emotional, and mental health. ★

Join Your TAPS Family

TAPS INSTITUTE FOR
HOPE AND HEALING

SEMINARS

» For more information, visit taps.org/events

DEC. 3, 2019
Understanding the
Role of Medication in
Coping with Grief and Loss
LIVE WEBINAR
12 PM - 1 PM ET

JANUARY 28

Myths and Realities
of Divorce after
Loss of a Child
LIVE WEBINAR
12 PM - 1 PM ET

FEBRUARY 11

Grief River:
A Nature-Inspired
Map for Understanding
Grief and Loss
LIVE WEBINAR
12 PM - 1 PM ET

NOV. 22-24, 2019
Northeast Regional
Seminar and Good Grief Camp
New Brunswick, NJ

JULY 10-12
Western Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Los Angeles, CA

2020

FEBRUARY 21-23
Southern Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Dallas, TX

AUGUST 21-23
Midwest Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Columbus, OH

SEPTEMBER 18-20
Northeast Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
East Brunswick, NJ

MARCH 27-29
Mountain Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Colorado Springs, CO

OCTOBER 16-19
National Military
Suicide Survivor Seminar
Boston, MA

MAY 22-25
National Military Survivor Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Arlington, VA

NOVEMBER 13-15
Central Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
St. Louis, MO

JUNE 12-14
Southeastern Regional Seminar
and Good Grief Camp
Jacksonville, FL





Visit www.taps.org/institute
for more information



Support **THE MISSION,** Honor **THE LEGACY**

Add Your Loved One to Our Memorial Wall at Our National Headquarters

TAPS National Headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, is America's home to the families of our nation's fallen heroes. We honor America's legacy of service and sacrifice with our Hero Tribute Wall, which is proudly and permanently displayed at the entrance. Join the Headquarters Campaign to honor your military hero and help us raise funds to support the critical services TAPS provides across the country.

 <p>Remembrance: \$250</p> <p>Remember your loved one with this 4" x 5" tile.</p>
 <p>Tribute: \$500</p> <p>Create a tribute to your loved one with 8" x 5" tile.</p>
 <p>Salute: \$1,000</p> <p>Salute your loved one with this 8" x 10" tile.</p>
 <p>Honor: \$2,500</p> <p>Honor your loved one with this 16" x 10" tile.</p> <p><small>* Personalize these tiles with a picture and an inscription.</small></p>



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**100% OF YOUR DONATION SUPPORTS
TAPS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

Grateful for the Gift



I didn't go for two years because I didn't think anyone could relate to my unique situation. But when I went, I found not only one person who went through almost exactly the same thing, but several! It took such a huge weight off my shoulders that I had been carrying alone for years and didn't have to.

I also love having a place my kids can go and really open up with other kids who know what they're talking about and have felt the same things. The Good Grief Camps are truly special and you guys do such an amazing job with every single event!

ELIZABETH SCHLOEMANN
Surviving spouse of
Capt. Andres Schloemann,
U.S. Army National Guard

The friendships. There's nothing like being able to get advice from, vent to, and feel the support from someone who has been in your shoes.

DANIELLE BALMER SWEET
Surviving spouse of
Tech. Sgt. Ryan A. Balmer,
U.S. Air Force

Knowing that TAPS is there for me day and night has helped me most of all. I participate in the chats, attend seminars, and I have gone on one retreat. I have all of my TAPS buddies to help me through and know that I am not alone.

SANDRA L. STONE
Surviving mother of
Staff Sgt. Joshua C. Stone,
U.S. Marine Corps

Initially it was the phone calls. Reaching out on a steady basis, even if I couldn't pick up the phone...I knew you were there. Now, it's just knowing you are there... whenever I need you.

COURTNEY WOOD JENSON
Surviving sister-in-law of
Sgt. Chad Jenson, U.S. Marine Corps

The compassion and love of fellow survivors. I get this on display every month at our Care Group that I help facilitate and through peer mentorship. Leaders in TAPS have become my mentors too.

CHRISTOPHER JACHIMIEC
Surviving brother of
Adam Jachimiec, U.S. Marine Corps

My TAPS family. Each and every single person I have met has had a profound impact on my life. Thank you! Thank you for accepting me as I am. I am so eternally grateful for you all!

NICKI WINFREY
Surviving ex-spouse of
Staff Sgt. Bryan P. Pitney, U.S. Army

Feeling that I'm not alone. Meeting other siblings with similar experiences means the world to me. They help me grieve in a healthy way and understand that my feelings are 'normal.' I always leave a TAPS event feeling almost whole again. The love and support has saved my life time and time again.

NICOLE ZIMMERMAN
Surviving sister of
Michael D. Schunk Jr., U.S. Navy

Feeling like I found "my people." I did not join TAPS until 15 years after my brother was killed and I joined the TAPS Run and Remember marathon team. It was the night before the run, at the TAPS dinner that for the first time I felt like I was among people who "get it." Everyone is so welcoming. Truly family.

LAURA HAISMAN SOWA
Surviving sibling of
Gary Haisman, U.S. Marine Corps

of Our TAPS Family



Hugs are one of the blessings I feel I have received from being a part of TAPS. I generally reserved my hugs for family but my first TAPS national showed me that I had an extended family. I shared so many hugs, laughs, and sometimes tears, which made me feel loved and welcomed. TAPS brings us together because of our tragedy and yet we find so many other commonalities that I have also been blessed by sharing experiences with some of the special people I have met at the seminars.

DEBROAH ADRINE
Surviving aunt of
1st. Lt. Stephen A Dumas,
U.S. Army

Knowing that there is always someone to turn to 24/7, who understands and cares and can be counted on — almost like the loved one, my dearest husband, who is gone. For me, it is hard to ask for help or support; but it is so very good to know it is there. Love to all.

BARBARA LOWTHER
Surviving spouse of
Charles Lowther,
U.S. Army

As a volunteer and Army mom to two soldiers, I was so grateful to give back to families who had experienced what we all knew to be a possibility for us. I was honored to meet Bonnie Carroll and to work with Jerome Tennille doing whatever was necessary. It kept me sane during my sons' deployments and I owe a great deal to TAPS during that time.

DOTTIE WEIXEL
TAPS Volunteer

My Marine daughter has been gone seven years today. I am eternally grateful for the support from TAPS at the beginning, and am uplifted by the continued connection. Even when others forget I am comforted with a note every year for her birthday and death anniversary. Sometime that's all that gets me through those rough days. Thank you TAPS.

GAIL MARSH
Surviving mother of
Master Sgt. Teresa Snow,
U.S. Marine Corps

I never thought that when we lost Chris eight years ago that there would be this wonderful new family that no one ever wants or asks to be in, to love us and help put us back together in a whole new puzzle. They love and support us unconditionally. They know and understand without words even spoken. That is such a huge comfort. We feel safe in this family to grieve and remember however we need to and that is more of a blessing than can ever be imagined.

RACHEL JONES
Surviving spouse of
Staff Sgt. Christopher Jones,
U.S. Army

My peer mentor was there when I really needed her the most. The support was amazing.

MARY KAY PINEDO
Surviving sister of
Staff Sgt. Vinson B. Adkinson III,
U.S. Army

EDITOR'S NOTE: Much of this content is republished from a discussion on Facebook. Follow TAPS on Facebook and other social media channels to participate in similar discussions (TAPSorg).

THE POWER OF SPORTS

BEYOND THE FINAL SCORE

August Cabrera | Surviving spouse of U.S. Army Lt. Col. David Cabrera

Texas A&M is a huge deal in the Cabrera family. Not only did our hero, Dave, graduate from there in 1992, but a sister, brother, and now nephew are all Aggies.

Dave and his first wife, Angela, were college sweethearts and now their two kids, Corbin and Gillian, both attend A&M. So when team4taps called to offer our family, our entire family, a chance to attend a Texas A&M home football game, I knew all four of Dave's kids, including our boys Max and Roanin, would be thrilled.

Instead of just a game, we were treated to a tour of the facilities including the training and weight rooms, a place of honor on the spirit walk to welcome the players, time in the TV production trailer, a visit to the broadcasting booth, a place on the sidelines during pregame, a front row seat for the presentation of the A&M Corps of Cadets, and amazing seats for the actual game.

As Max said a few days later, "Saturday's adventure made me feel like I'm more connected to Dad because now we share some of the same memories."

I couldn't have said it any better. Walking through the locker room, through the tunnel the players would run down a few hours later, and onto Kyle Field — on game day — was magical. There were moments watching all his kids revel in the experience that I was close to tears, knowing how much Dave would have wanted to be there with us.

But then, we realized he was there — in every player that fist bumped the kids on their way into the locker room, every staff member that answered questions, every sportscaster that let the kids into their booth. Each of them, by letting us into their world and honoring Dave, brought him a little closer to all of us.

Angela, an A&M grad herself, was especially moved by the experience and said, "To share about David in the place he loved with August and her two sons sounded like a dream. I am thankful that TAPS gave us the opportunity to bond with each other and allow for August and the boys to gain more understanding of this part of their fallen hero's story in a venue near and dear to David's heart."

Angela said the experience is one she will cherish forever. "Participating in the traditional A&M yells and the Aggie War Hymn, with Corbin and Gillian, was one of my all-time favorite experiences!" she said. "The fact that Max, standing in between his brother and sister, Corbin and Gillian, was an eager participant was the icing on the cake!"

Corbin, an A&M senior, went on to say, "The experience was amazing because, not only did I get to visit new parts of the university I love, but I got to see my little brothers finally start to understand why much of our family has decided to go here."

These kinds of experiences build unique bridges between the families of the fallen and those loved ones we've lost. Watching Aggies stand on their feet for four hours in the sun, listening to the practiced cheers of the crowd, feeling everyone's passion for their school, I finally understood part of Dave I had never fully appreciated. A&M is a force in itself, and now I finally get it.

This day together as a family is a gift for which we will always be grateful. ★



Cabrera family enjoying an exceptional day of honor, remembrance and the Aggie spirit.



On Senior Day 2019, the family of U.S. Air Force Capt. Kenneth Dalga were the special guests of UK Men's Basketball and the Athletics Department. TAPS Advisory Board member Bob Delaney escorting the Dalga family.



The power of sports is not only about points on the scoreboard and wins or losses. The games and the environment around sports is a place where we come together and create memories.

team4taps provides opportunities for families to re-experience the bond they know their hero had with a particular team. I saw it during my NBA years with families being guests of NBA referees at games. "I saw it in the eyes of USAF's Captain Kenneth Dalga's wife, Sarah, his son, Noah, brother, Nolan, and sister-in law, Sarah, at a University of Kentucky basketball game. And, then I witnessed it again when Lizzy Yaggy and her mom, Erin, along with Joey Ruocco visited with the LSU Men's Basketball Team in 2018 after their teammate Wayde Sims was killed."

Through partnerships with collegiate teams, the teams4taps program has been able to provide healing and moments of honor that serves families, teams and the fans with experiences they will remember well beyond the final score, proving that the power of sports is about far more than what happens on the field or court.

~ Bob Delaney

TAPS Advisor Board Member and Southeastern Conference (SEC) Special Advisor for Officiating Development and Performance



In November 2016, The University of Florida recognized the service and sacrifice of 12 TAPS families and their heroes at their "Saluting Those Who Serve" game.



In November 2017, Arizona State football honored twelve TAPS families at their "Salute to Service" game. Each family received an honor jersey from the Sun Devils coach.



The University of Oklahoma baseball team hosted five TAPS families in Spring 2017. Special honors were given during the game and a member of each family threw a ceremonial first pitch.

Fostering *Hope* in Ukraine

Transcending Borders Through Honor and Love

Mitty Mirrer | Surviving daughter of Capt. William A. Griffis, III, U.S Marine Corps

In mid-January, the city of Dnipro in eastern Ukraine felt festive. Walking along the snow-packed boulevards, storefronts played American Christmas music, cafes were busy, and an outdoor ice skating rink lit up the city block. As a first-time observer, you would hardly know that the frontline of Russia's ongoing proxy war in Ukraine was only a two-hour drive away.

"The Ukrainian flag is our symbol of hope and freedom," said our interpreter, Olha Prus, as she led our group of TAPS International delegates and Ukrainian military survivors toward a solemn reminder of the war's toll: a memorial called Remembrance Alley to the Deceased Heroes of the Revolution of Dignity and Anti-

Terrorist Operation (ATO). The mothers of deceased heroes, as they are referred to in Ukraine, came together with veteran ATO fighters and the Dnipro community to create the memorial — even while the shelling east of the city continued.

More than 13,000 Ukrainians have been killed in the conflict, a quarter of them civilians, and more than 30,000 wounded in the war in eastern Ukraine since the fighting broke out in April 2014, according to a United Nations Human Rights report released this year.

TAPS International was there to help government officials establish an organization of their own, one that would be modeled after TAPS and called TAPS Ukraine. Through TAPS International, a global family of all those

grieving the death of a military loved one is being created to honor the men and women who have died in the defense of freedom. All of this while forming partnerships around the world — essentially, to care for one another as a global community and grieve and grow as a global family.

Our small delegation walked across the snow-covered park toward the memorial. As I walked arm-in-arm alongside Ukrainian war widows and young mothers, mothers of deceased soldiers, and women who had volunteered in the war effort, I thought about how war reverberates through the generations.

My own father, a Marine, was killed in the Vietnam War hours after I was born. In 1970, my mother was notified in the maternity ward. Suddenly, she had a



newborn and my older sister, an almost 4-year-old, to care for on her own. At that time, there were no support groups such as TAPS in place to help thousands of grieving military families like my own.

Many years later, I grew to know that in sharing our stories with one another, we gain a powerful perspective: hope.

In 1997, my mother, sister and I traveled to Vietnam and met with women and children of that war. We wanted to know Vietnam as more than just a war, but as a people. In sharing with Vietnamese widows and their grown children who lived through the conflict, we learned that loss, healing and love truly transcend borders.

At first glance the Ukrainian memorial was a poignant public art display. Our group walked toward several billboard-sized photographs set in thick glass that emerged freestanding in the snow. The imposing images depicted the war and reflected the afternoon sunlight, as if to take on a mood of their own. “After our independence from the Soviet Union in 1991,” our interpreter explained, “we reversed the colors of our flag—blue is on top and symbolizes the sky, and yellow symbolizes Ukraine’s wheat fields.”

A grieving mother whose son died fighting for Ukraine reached for Bonnie Carroll’s hand as they stood together in the cold air in front of a large glass image of a soldier. Symbolizing the flag, the image reminded the woman of her son — a reflection of Ukrainian identity, a soldier walking through a yellow wheat field under a bright-blue sky, holding out his hand to touch the stalks of the breadbasket of Europe, as Ukraine is known.

The mother did not want her son to go to war, but nevertheless, like many young people who stepped up to defend their country, she said her son went anyway. Her grief was palpable when she explained that her other adult son, who had no outlet to express his sorrow for his brother, died of a heart attack 40 days after his brother was killed in battle. She believed the burden of his grief was simply too much to endure, alone.



Across the frozen park, Tetyana Khorolska held a long-stemmed red rose as she walked toward a panel that held pictures of the fallen who had served in her husband’s division: Dnipro 1, a battalion of volunteers early in the war. “My husband’s nickname in the Army would translate in English as ‘too Ukrainian.’ Anton loved his fellow Ukrainians.”

Many of those first volunteers who joined Dnipro 1 did not have military experience, and most of them were friends and neighbors to Tetyana. She helped organize funerals for 25 of the men who were killed in her husband’s battalion. “The men of Dnipro 1 are like my family,” she said. Tetyana touched her fingertips to her husband’s picture behind the glass. He was killed in 2014. She set the rose at the base of the memorial that reads, “Heroes Never Die.”

Tetyana’s two children took the news very differently. Her son, who is 13 years old, is only now able to acknowledge that his father is dead. It wasn’t until he went on an organized trip with children who had lost parents, just like him, that Tetyana said he finally accepted that his father had died in the war, too.

Tetyana’s daughter, 17-year-old Daria, said it was her mother’s strong will that kept her going. “At first, I couldn’t concentrate in school and it was hard for me to control my emotions. I struggled to pull myself together.” Daria showed me a picture of her father and pointed out that she has his eyes. She smiled and said she also shared his sense of humor. “I was tending my father’s gravesite with my mother, and my father loved McDonald’s coffee, so we brought him a cup while we visited.”

Her mother added, “Anton used to drink coffee and have a cigarette first thing, and he adored chocolate. So we brought all of this, I lit a cigarette for him while we were there together.”

As a mother and a widow, Tetyana knew early on that she faced two choices: “I could drown in my own grief, or try and live further and help others.”

In leading TAPS Ukraine, that is exactly what Tetyana and so many other volunteers in Dnipro are doing. By bringing together families who are touched by the ongoing conflict, there is hope.

A 10-year-old boy named Maksym told me he had never talked to another child about losing his father to war. At school, he was the only child whose father had been killed. As he sat next to his mother at a TAPS Ukraine gathering, feet dangling in an oversized chair, he struggled to hold back his tears. He wanted to share his one hope for other children: “I wish for good for my generation, and I hope with all my heart that no other child will lose their moms and dads.”

The boy adjusted himself in his chair and looked over expectantly toward his mother. She smiled at him through her own tears, as if her son had just taken a first step. ★

Mitty Mirrer is a graduate of the Columbia graduate school of Journalism and the producer and director of a documentary, "Gold Star Children." www.goldstarchildren.org

TAPS Online Store

taps.org/shop



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- 2. TAPS Pom Beanie - \$22
- 3. Brass Keychain - \$5
- 4. Gift Card - Various Amounts
- 5. Folded Flag Keepsake Box, 24k Gold - \$25
- 6. Lapis Bracelet with 20k Gold Charm - \$115
- 7. Lapis Mala Beads, Traditional
108-Bead - \$124 & 54-Bead - \$87
- 8. Love Lives On Infinity Scarf - \$22
- 9. Slouch Knit Cap - \$20
- 10. Born Brave Youth Tee - \$15
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All lapis jewelry is **25% OFF** using the code **TAPSFAM25**



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this holiday season*



12.



13.



14.



15.



18.



17.



16.



- 12. Plaid Tasseled Throw Blanket - \$39
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- 17. Remember the Dash Cosmetic Bag - \$16
- 18. Camelbak Chute Mag Vacuum Stainless Water Bottle - \$30
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- 21. Women's Fleece Lined Zip Up Jacket - \$60
- 22. Nine Line Remember the Dash Unisex Tee - \$25

19.



20.



21.



22.



With Grateful Hearts...



NEWTON RUNNING CO.

The Gatlin Brothers teamed up with Newton Running Co. to create a special shoe to support TAPS. Nearly 3,000 pairs were sold and a portion of the proceeds was given back to TAPS.



POTOMAC HUNT RACES

Held in the heart of Montgomery County's horse country, the Potomac Hunt Races is an annual tradition, celebrating the sport of steeplechase racing. TAPS was honored to be the beneficiary again this year.



PIRATES COVE/PUTTING FOR PATRIOTS

Putting for Patriots is an annual fundraising event conducted by the Pirate's Island, Jungle Golf and Pirate's Cove chains of adventure golf courses. For the 9th year, TAPS was selected as the charity that was honored.



WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW

TAPS is honored to have been the Official Military Charity Partner of the WIHS since 2010. On Military Night, we spend time with our favorite horse, Klinger, and cheer on participants of the "Jump for TAPS" Challenge, which raises funds for TAPS programs.



USAA

USAA employees can be seen at most TAPS seminars and youth programs working as volunteers to welcome our families with smiles and hugs.



NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

In 2019, via our partnership with the NFL, teams4taps was able to provide opportunities for survivors at 23 games and events with 14 different NFL clubs, along with the Pro Bowl and the UK Experience.



WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

Wounded Warrior Project is partnering with TAPS on our Suicide Pre- and Postvention programs and our working group on illnesses from toxic exposure. They also provided volunteer support for the Southern Regional Military Survivor Seminar in Jacksonville, FL.



MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

In 2019, 13 MLB teams hosted TAPS families at 27 games and events, including two games in London. MLB also hosted TAPS families and kids at two MLB All-Star Weekend Events in Cleveland, OH.



GIANT FOOD

Giant Food is a partner of TAPS' Survivor Care efforts – providing funds for TAPS Resource Kits, Casework Assistance and the 24/7 Military Survivor Helpline for TAPS families in Maryland, Delaware, D.C., and Virginia.



H-E-B

Each year, H-E-B provides valuable funding for the Regional Seminar and Good Grief Camp held in Texas. Thank you H-E-B!



YUENGLING

Yuengling spearheaded a mobile giving and in-store advertisement campaign to benefit TAPS and hosted survivors, peer mentors and staff in the oldest family-owned brewery in the country.



AMERICAN AIRLINES

Thank you so very much for American Airlines' gift of airline miles! Because of their generosity, TAPS has been able to reach more surviving military families and share the TAPS mission with more people around the globe.

Thank You
to all who support the TAPS Family!



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The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors offers comfort, care, and resources to all those grieving the death of a military loved one.



 TAPS is a participant organization in the Combined Federal Campaign, No. 11309

“The joy of brightening other lives, bearing each others’ burdens, easing each other’s loads and supplanting empty hearts and lives with generous gifts becomes for us the magic of the holidays.”

~ W. C. JONES

