

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

T★A★P★S®

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

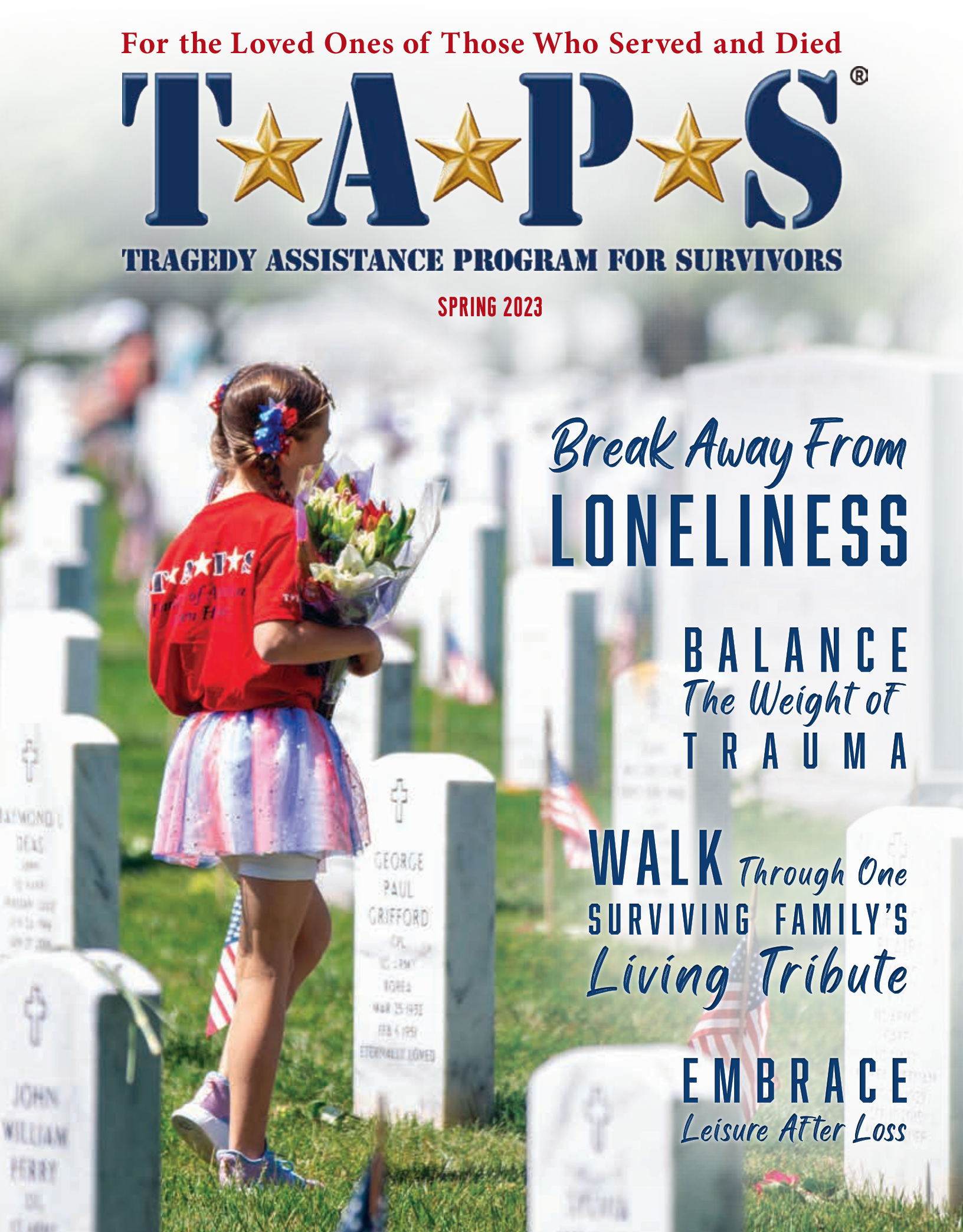
SPRING 2023

Break Away From
LONELINESS

BALANCE
The Weight of
T R A U M A

WALK *Through One*
SURVIVING FAMILY'S
Living Tribute

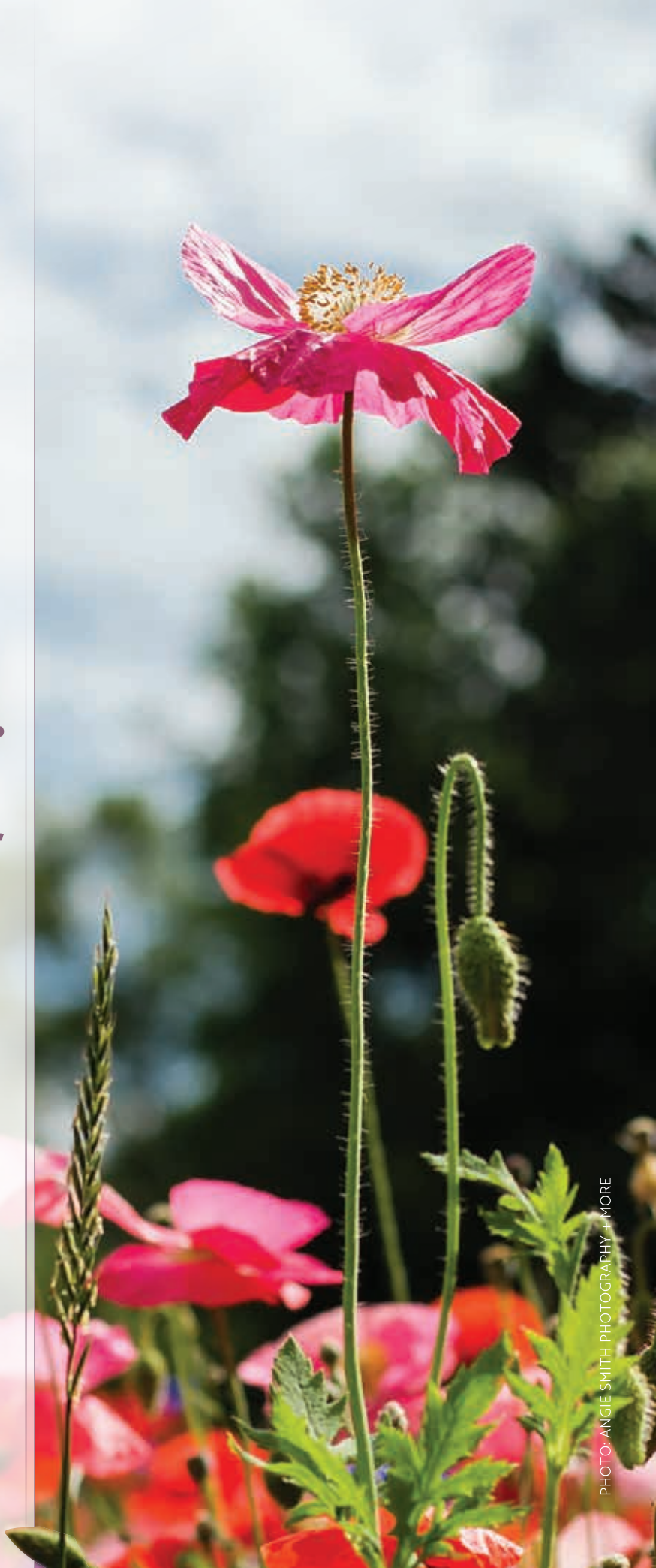
EMBRACE
Leisure After Loss



*“After a period,
peace blooms,
slowly and always
irregularly. Spaces fill
with a kind of
soothing electric vibration.
Our senses, restored, never
to be the same, whisper to us.
They existed. They existed.
We can be. Be and be
better. For they existed.”*

.....

*Maya Angelou,
Excerpt from “When Great Trees Fall”*





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**CONNECT WITH US
24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK**

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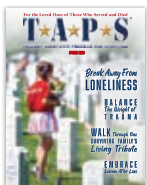
**SHARE YOUR STORY
BRING HOPE TO
FELLOW SURVIVORS**

editor@taps.org
taps.org/shareyourstory

TAPS PROGRAMS & SERVICES

- 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline
- Survivor Care Team
- Peer-Based Support Network
- Community-Based Care
- Casework Assistance
- Education Support
- Suicide Loss & Illness Support
- Care Groups
- Online Community
- TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®
- Survivor Seminars & Good Grief Camps
- TAPS Togethers
- Women's Empowerment
- Men's Program
- Young Adults Program
- Youth Programs
- Sports & Entertainment Events

For full descriptions, see pages 18-19.



ON THE COVER

A Good Grief Camp attendee carries flowers through Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day 2022 as part of the 28th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp.

COVER PHOTO: TAPS ARCHIVES

About TAPS

Caring for the Families of America's Fallen Heroes

We are a family of military survivors ready to embrace and connect all who grieve the death of a military loved one with resources, services, and programs. TAPS provides support to survivors 24/7, regardless of the manner of death, the duty status at the time of death, the survivor's relationship to the deceased, or the survivor's phase in their grief journey.

At TAPS, we open our hearts and resources to the world with our award-winning programs and services to support all military bereaved. TAPS works with leading experts in the fields of grief, bereavement, trauma, and peer support to integrate decades of research on military grief into action to help heal hearts.

At TAPS, we:

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

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

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

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

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

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



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PHOTO: 2022 TAPS Sedona Women's Empowerment Retreat attendees gather in the labyrinth for a photo. The female survivors in attendance tap into their own strength and lean on each other to grow with their grief.

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To Our TAPS Family,

Welcome to our spring issue of *TAPS Magazine*. This is our hug mailed straight to you. And, like the sun that rises a bit higher in the sky and the blossoms that start to appear on the trees during springtime, I hope you feel the warmth and hope contained in these pages.

At TAPS, we understand that grief moves through us on its own time, not giving care to the forces around us or any schedule we might have. But, every bit as resilient as the springtime blooms, we can turn our faces toward the sun, feel the warmth, witness the rebirth all around us, and take a moment to just breathe.

This year, not long after the cherry blossoms bloom in Washington, D.C., I hope you'll join your TAPS family for our 29th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp happening over Memorial Day weekend, May 25-29, in Arlington, VA. This is our annual family reunion where you'll experience hope and healing and have the opportunity to honor your hero while making precious new memories all alongside fellow military survivors. We hope to see you there! But, if you can't make it to the National Survivor Seminar, please visit our calendar to see our Regional Seminars, TAPS Togethers, Care Groups, Family Camps, and the many other ways we — together, as a family — gather to remember the love, celebrate the life, and share the journey.

In the meantime, this magazine is your guide to all the TAPS programs, services, and events we have lovingly prepared for you. The articles in this issue were carefully collected for you; thank you for reading and for feeling the love and care we are sending you. You are part of this TAPS family. We are your "safe space," an understanding ear, your advocate when you need someone in your corner, and your comfort on those difficult days.

We look forward to growing with you this year, helping you find your strength, honoring your loved one, and finding just the right moment to bloom.

With a warm heart,

Bonnie Carroll



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES

Dear TAPS...



MEASURE OF LOVE

“I just wanted to reach out and thank you for talking with me yesterday. It was a true blessing to speak to another survivor. You really helped me understand so much of this journey of grief. The waves have been tumultuous today with little opportunity for air. I know it’s a terribly long road ahead, but knowing this wonderful organization is here for me is the life preserver I need. Today, I received that beautiful box from TAPS with so much incredible information. I immediately used the magnetic frame, and it sits now on my fridge with Charlie’s smiling face inside. The incredible pain I feel is — I guess — the true measure of love. As Queen Elizabeth once said, ‘Grief is the price we pay for love.’ Thank you again.”

Carola Becker

Surviving Spouse of
Charles Becker, U.S. Coast Guard Veteran

NEW LIFELONG FRIENDS

“The Montana Men’s Retreat was an unforgettable and life-changing experience for me personally. I was surrounded by men who were able to understand and had also experienced the crushing loss of a loved one. Not only were we able to grieve and lay our feelings out without judgment, we learned to receive the support of men who will be lifelong friends. I was able to learn how to cope with my grief and to step into it — how to value solitude and avoid isolation. By far, this has been the most helpful seminar that I have attended. Jon, Matt, and Jason were amazing facilitators, and along with the incredible staff and setting, it was a truly life-changing event. I only hope I can attend more men’s events to meet with the great friends I made and to make new friends. My deepest thanks to TAPS for allowing me to attend this retreat — I know that I am not alone in expressing how this event helped me heal and cope with loss. I saw the changes in men all around me. What a blessing.”

John M. Fritz

Surviving Father of
PO1 John Paul Fritz, U.S. Navy

SPACE TO REFLECT

“I would like to recognize the staff on the Charleson Women’s Empowerment (WE) Retreat in March 2022 — Erin Jacobson, Emily Muñoz, Diane Lesko, and Elizabeth Sergent. These ladies were caring, compassionate, and eager to share, listen, and cry when needed. Their transparency and authenticity set the tone for opportunities to engage and feel a sense of connection. As a team, they were magical. The retreat workbook was a valuable guide that directed the flow of the event and stimulated thought-provoking questions, suggestions, and inspirational poems. Since returning home, I have referred to it several times, and I will come back to it often. One particular activity that was especially meaningful to me was the time of silence. The creation of space to reflect and absorb the content of the preceding days and the opportunity to walk on the beach, hear the ocean roar, and inhale the fresh air, restored meaning and purpose for me on a deeply personal level...I am so grateful for all TAPS does for the families of the fallen. God bless you as you continue to bless and care for such a large family.”

Cheryl Kurtz

Surviving Grandmother of
SPC Joseph Cemper, U.S. Army



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES



Visit taps.org/deartaps to submit your TAPS experience and share hope and encouragement with others.

TRADITIONS



ROSEVILLE, CA

DALLAS-FORT WORTH, TX

AUSTIN, TX

SAN ANTONIO, TX



TAPS TOGETHERS

**WHEREVER YOU ARE,
TAPS IS THERE**

TAPS.ORG/TAPSTOGETHERS

TAPS Together are an opportunity to bring that sense of community you feel while you're surrounded by your TAPS family to your local community. These events can be anything from meeting for a cup of coffee at your favorite local spot or hiking together on a nearby trail to attending a community event, gathering for a seasonal social, or anything else you can dream up that creates space to share powerful experiences and meaningful conversations.

TAPS Together are one-day, organized social events led by TAPS staff or a survivor like you with the goal of growing our TAPS peer-support community while you grow your local circle of support.

IN THE

Making



PITTSBURGH, PA



PHILADELPHIA, PA

WASHINGTON, D.C.

"I was so pleased to host the 2022 TAPS Friendsgiving event at TAPS HQ in Arlington, VA — the first event at HQ of this size since the pandemic began in 2020. The event was a huge success, as it brought together over 20 local DMV families for a day of laughter, games, food, and thanks. For half of our families, it was the first time meeting many of the attendees, which was a beautiful treat to see. And, many of the kids shared that it was the only time they would get to hang out with other kids their age for the holidays."

CLYNTON TREWYN, 2022 Military Mentor of the Year

FAYETTEVILLE, NC

"I was happy to see kids playing with one another and survivors connecting, sharing memories, their stories, and enjoying themselves."

MARA BANDY, Surviving Sibling of U.S. Army SPC Jose Melendez, Jr.



ALL THROUGHOUT NOVEMBER 2022, TAPS FAMILIES GATHERED TOGETHER IN A SERIES OF NATIONWIDE TAPS FRIENDSGIVING EVENTS. THESE SEASONALLY THEMED TAPS TOGETHERS WERE NOT ONLY A TRADITION IN THE MAKING FOR THOSE WHO ATTENDED, BUT THEY WERE A CHANCE TO SHARE TIME, STORIES, AND PLENTY OF SMILES. TAKE A PEEK AT HOW SOME OF OUR TAPS FAMILIES SPENT THEIR FRIENDSGIVING, AND LEARN MORE ABOUT ATTENDING OR HOSTING A TAPS TOGETHERS EVENT NEAR YOU ANY TIME OF THE YEAR.

2022 TAPS EVENTS

TAPS Friendsgiving gatherings were just one component of the 1,000-plus events TAPS hosted last year. Take a look at our event recap from 2022, and join your TAPS family at one of our many 2023 events.

1,000+
TOTAL 2022 EVENTS

450+
CARE GROUPS

190+
TAPS TOGETHERS

130+

SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT EVENTS

And so much more, including regional seminars, Men's Programming, Women's Empowerment, Young Adults, and Youth Programs

**The 2022 totals were not finalized at the time of publication; numbers shown are approximate.*

29TH ANNUAL
NATIONAL MILITARY
SURVIVOR SEMINAR
& GOOD GRIEF CAMP

MAY 25-29, 2023 • CRYSTAL GATEWAY MARRIOTT, ARLINGTON, VA

YOU'RE INVITED

WHAT TO EXPECT

Check-in for the 29th Annual TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp begins Thursday, May 25 at 11 a.m. at the Crystal Gateway Marriott. The Good Grief Camp Zone will be held Thursday night, and the adult seminar opening ceremony will start at 11 a.m. on Friday, May 26. Events conclude on Monday, May 29 following the Arlington National Cemetery Memorial Day ceremonies and the National Memorial Day Parade.



Each Memorial Day weekend, Americans pause to reflect on the costs of freedom. Whether you recently lost your hero, have lived many years without them, or are somewhere in between, the TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar is designed to meet you where you are in your grief. Spend the weekend with your TAPS family, honoring your fallen hero alongside fellow military survivors, amid the monuments and memorials of our nation's capital. Together, we will share our loved one's stories, say their names, celebrate their lives and service, and draw strength from one another that we will carry forward into a future rich with purpose, pride, and hope.



The National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp are open to military survivors of all ages, with age-specific programming and care for adults, young adults, and youth. If you cannot be with us in person, we encourage you to attend our live workshops virtually.

Scan the QR code or visit taps.org/national to begin registration or to find event details. Please check that you select the correct button, In-Person Registration or Virtual Workshop Registration.

ADULTS

If you are grieving the death of a loved one in the military, whether a family member, friend, or fellow service member, you are invited and encouraged to join us for a weekend of activities, expert-led workshops on grief and loss, and small-group sharing sessions.

You'll meet and connect with fellow survivors while participating in special events throughout Washington, D.C. No matter where you are in your grief journey, support and connection await!

YOUNG ADULTS

TAPS has a program designed specifically for 18-30-year-old surviving children or siblings during the National Military Survivor Seminar weekend. This program focuses on the five pillars of growth: Personal Development, Financial Stability, Communication, Career Development, and Service to Others.

While exploring practical life skills, this program strives to help each participant create a well-rounded life full of hope, healing, and growth.



GOOD GRIEF CAMP

Children and teens ages 5-18 will explore their grief and embrace healing among peers in a safe space led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health, and education; Youth Programs staff; and volunteers. Children will be grouped according to where they are in their grief journey, and each group will be led by trained Group Leaders and Senior Mentors.

Good Grief campers will receive three TAPS t-shirts to wear during camp. Shorts and tennis shoes are encouraged so your child is comfortable during activities.

CHILD CARE

Children 5 years old and under who are not yet attending kindergarten will be cared for by trained, licensed, and insured caregivers throughout the seminar in a designated suite with age-appropriate toys, games, and arts and crafts.

BECOME A PEER MENTOR

During the seminar, TAPS will conduct Peer Mentor training sessions for adult military survivors who are at least 18 months beyond their own loss and are ready to support others. Completing this training provides you with added support for your own journey while partnering closely with us to care for survivors who share your loss.



If you're interested in attending the Peer Mentor training for adult military survivors, register for the in-person training as part of your seminar registration. Once registered, you will be contacted by the TAPS Peer Mentor Program staff.

taps.org/becomeapeermentor

leisure (n) / lei • sure / (lē'•r, le'•r)

: free time, although not idle time

: personal freedom from responsibilities of work, daily tasks, etc.

: the freedom and the capacity to live and experience life within our values

recreation (n) / rec • rea • tion / (rek'rēā'sh•n)

: what we do during our leisure time — activities done for enjoyment

play (n, v) / (plā)

: act of engaging in activities without inhibition with the intention of having fun



Letting Leisure In After Loss

Rachel Hunsell ✨ TAPS Outdoor Engagement Program Manager

Surviving Sister of LCpl J. Kyle Price, U.S. Marine Corps

As human beings, we feel an intrinsic need and desire to move our bodies, explore our minds, and experience the world around us. However, when we experience loss, we are often shaken to our core, requiring us to pause, re-examine parts of our lives, and find meaningful ways to move forward.

When my brother died, and after subsequent losses since then, the thought of fun and true, free expression felt foreign to me in the wake of death. How am I supposed to have fun if he never can? How am I supposed to play games, laugh, and be free if he never will? How am I supposed to go out and experience the world without him, without people I love so deeply?

The experience of being in the world, in this “new normal” — as many around me began to define it — didn’t feel like me. What I thought I knew was no longer tangible, although I kept reaching for the glimpses. It took courageous vulnerability and finding my way into the wilderness with my fellow

survivors — people who understood me — to get curious, not just about the world, but about myself, to regain my relationship with a full and possible life.

So what does it mean to feel free and curious? To open yourself up to exploring life’s possibilities? To experience the world with a sense of wonder and play? How do we access this kind of joy, pleasure, relaxation, and their sister emotions while carrying such pain and grief?

First, we must identify what it is that we seek before we can move in any direction, which asks us to get clear about what we value. What are those intrinsic motivators pushing us forward? What do we enjoy doing when nothing else holds us back? Do we want to feel connected to others? To nature? To art? Do we want to experience mountaintop views? Be able to walk or run a mile? Sing a song? Write poetry? How do we want to feel when doing these things? Curious? Courageous? Authentic? Connected to our faith? Family-oriented?

Grounded? When we identify our values, we connect to our life source and what makes us who we are.

This time in our lives, when we are recreating and playing while rooted in our values, is what we’d define as “authentic leisure.” This is not simply void time where we aren’t working or doing daily tasks. Authentic leisure is the capacity to move between restful experiences and accomplishing those tasks by engaging life in a way that honors and reflects our personal strengths, interests, and abilities. It’s living this life authentically for our individual selves and doing so in a way that honors our loved ones.

However, as we all know too well, real barriers exist to these experiences: physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. **So, the second step toward the leisure lifestyle we yearn for comes by identifying our barriers.** These most certainly will look different for each of us, and they can be faced by simply starting to list challenges you’ve experienced when



you've wanted to recreate and enjoy your leisure time, but didn't or couldn't. Some may write guilt or anger about our loved ones not being present; others may note physical or psychological disabilities that prevent us from recreating. But, it's important to honor and recognize that our leisure is connected to our loved ones.

As we continue to identify these barriers, we may **begin to see the ways in which our values and leisure experiences are connected to our loved ones**, opening up opportunities for healing, understanding, and reconnection. It is in these pockets of light that we can give ourselves permission to play and recreate — or simply allow our imaginations to explore memories that bring smiles and laughter. These acts are a salve and allow us to make connections we'd otherwise kept in the darkness of our grief.

Part of our work at TAPS is to provide spaces to explore these connections to our loved ones alongside our peers, a place where others understand the valleys and

mountaintops we face on our path after loss. When we connect with others who can empathize, our leisure time isn't solely focused on what we might attach "positive emotions" to, but it can become a place where both grief and joy can exist alongside one another.

There are countless ways to experience our leisure within our values, but as survivors on a journey of healing, **allow these moments of play and recreation to open your heart, connect you with your loved one and each other, and ground you in your intrinsic motivations and values.** If you let it, leisure can create opportunities for what may have felt impossible and bloom into a life full of possibilities.

TAPS Outdoor Engagement is here to support you as you design a realistic recreational lifestyle that honors life after loss, remembering that the love you shared with your person lives on just as you do. Visit our event calendar for more information on outdoor recreational activities in 2023!



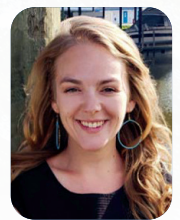
taps.org/events

ACCESS THE WEBINAR:



Understanding the Healing Powers of Recreation, Leisure, and Play

About the Author



Rachel Hunsell is the program manager for Outdoor Engagement at TAPS and the surviving sister of LCpl J. Kyle Price. Through her work with TAPS, she helps fellow survivors weave the therapeutic power of nature into their grief journeys.

PHOTOS: RACHEL HUNSELL; ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/SMILEUS

Mark Your CALENDARS

UPCOMING TAPS EVENTS

Make plans to join your TAPS family at one of our many upcoming in-person events. Visit taps.org/events for even more opportunities, and check back often — new events will be added throughout the year.

» If you need assistance with registration, you can contact our TAPS Helpline at 800-959-TAPS (8277).

REMEMBER THE *Love,*
CELEBRATE THE *Life,*
SHARE THE *Journey.*

TAPS NATIONAL SEMINARS



MAY 25-29

**29TH ANNUAL NATIONAL
MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR
& GOOD GRIEF CAMP**

Crystal Gateway Marriott
Arlington, Virginia



OCTOBER 6-8

**15TH ANNUAL NATIONAL MILITARY
SUICIDE SURVIVOR SEMINAR
& GOOD GRIEF CAMP**

DoubleTree Boston North Shore
Boston, Massachusetts



TAPS REGIONAL SURVIVOR SEMINARS & GOOD GRIEF CAMPS



MARCH 31 – APRIL 2
MOUNTAIN REGIONAL
Hyatt Regency Aurora
Denver, Colorado



JULY 7-9
NORTHWEST REGIONAL
Davenport Grand
Spokane, Washington



AUGUST 25-27
NORTHEAST REGIONAL
Hyatt Regency
Buffalo, New York



SEPTEMBER 15-17
SOUTHERN REGIONAL
Marriott Riverwalk
San Antonio, Texas



OCTOBER 27-29
WESTERN REGIONAL
The Westin
Long Beach, California

CAMPS, RETREATS & EXPERIENCES



APRIL 14-17
TENNESSEE FAMILY CAMP
Bolivar, Tennessee



JULY 19-23
ROMANTIC PARTNERS PACIFIC
NORTHWEST FISHING RETREAT
Forks, Washington



AUGUST 9-13
GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS
PARENTS RETREAT
Bryson City, North Carolina



AUGUST 9-22
MOUNT KILIMANJARO EXPEDITION
Arusha, Tanzania
SURVIVOR SELF-FUNDED EXPERIENCE



OCTOBER 23-27
SEDONA WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT
RETREAT
Sedona, Arizona



NOVEMBER 1-5
MIDWEST OUTDOOR FAMILY RETREAT
Carbondale, Illinois



JANUARY 8-29, 2024
ACONCAGUA EXPEDITION
Mendoza, Argentina
SURVIVOR SELF-FUNDED EXPERIENCE



SPEND SPRING OUTSIDE



4 WAYS TO CONNECT YOUR CHILDREN WITH NATURE THIS SPRING

Andy McNiel, M.A. ★ Senior Advisor, TAPS Youth Programs

Hundreds of studies conducted around the world, reaching more than 290 million people, revealed spending time in nature has significant benefits to physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Whether you live in the city or the country, nature is always accessible; by simply finding green space nearby, planting a garden, or nurturing plants in your home, each member of your family can reap nature's positive effects. As spring settles in and the weather permits, find a way to bring your children outdoors and into nature.

Mindfulness in Nature

Mindfulness is the practice of being present in the moment you are in. We spend much of our time worrying about all that has happened in the past and everything we have yet to do in the future. Though we cannot ignore our current responsibilities and all the things in the past and future that need our attention, mindfulness allows us to take breaks throughout our day to refocus, relax, and destress.

When we combine mindfulness with nature, the benefits increase. Find a tree (or trees), and sketch it out. Neither you nor your children must be great artists for this to work. Simply look at every detail and, in your own way, that feels good to you, sketch what you see. Or, you may simply focus on the details, taking them in and thinking through them in your mind.

You might also pay attention to different types of birds in nature. Typically, they are all around us, yet in our busyness, we do not notice them. Take the time to notice. Zero in and observe their behavior. As you slow down and pay attention to what is happening around you in the moment, you take a break from other stressors in your life and your children's lives. Enjoy the physical, mental, and emotional benefits.

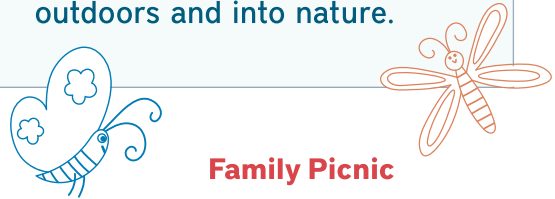
Walking in Nature

Spend an hour or half a mile walking in nature in the woods or at a park. Walk slowly and absorb your surroundings. You can talk and share during your walk, or you could suggest that everyone be quiet and soak in their surroundings. After the walk, you might find a space to sit in the green space and talk about what you observed as you focused your attention on all that was around you.

Plant a Garden

Finally, consider planting a garden outside your house, condo, or apartment, or potting some plants inside your home. You can combine this with a memorial of your person to honor their life and service. In whatever way you choose to do this, include your kids in the processes of picking out the plants, preparing the soil, and doing the planting. Make it a family effort to care for the plants or garden as you watch growth happen over time.

Nature is a powerful medicine that almost always works. It most often costs nothing and has no negative side effects. As spring permits where you live, find ways to get outside with your family. You will be glad you did, and the positive physical, mental, and emotional impact this will have on each of you will be all the reward you need.



Family Picnic

A picnic is a great way to get outside, and there are plenty of ways to interact with one another and nature along the way. Spend time together planning each part of the adventure, including packing a lunch with simple foods — sandwiches, trail mix, fruits, and other healthy options. Plan where you will go together by looking at green space options nearby. Pack your lunch, and bring your blanket. Take a Frisbee, kickball, or any other favorite outdoor game, and spend time together.

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES; DVIDS; ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/KISIKA, LEXI CLAUS, SULUKHANA BOONYARITHRIPONG



MILITARY CHILD

ACKNOWLEDGE THE SACRIFICE YOUR CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS HAVE MADE THIS APRIL

April is the Month of the Military Child, and while there are many ways to recognize military children during this month — like wearing purple on Purple Up Day, April 15, there are also opportunities to celebrate our surviving children and teenagers at home by acknowledging their sacrifice and connecting them to their military family.

their military family, a connection that is often lost after the death of their military person. If you have active-duty or veteran service members in your life, make time for your children to interact with them. Whether friends or family, have these individuals acknowledge the sacrifice your children have made.



Acknowledging your child or teen's sacrifice as a military child can provide an opportunity to honor their person who died, but also recognize the grief they faced or continue to face following their person's death. One of the best things we can do for our children in their grief is to demonstrate that we see their grief and care about them. You might ask them how their life has changed since their loss or how their person's death has changed them.

Often, life offers opportunities to connect with our children about their grief and about how their lives have been impacted. The Month of the Military Child is one of those opportunities to honor your person's sacrifice, recognize your children's sacrifice, and help them keep the important connection to their military family.

At TAPS, we have seen the benefits of children and teenagers connecting with their military heritage. At our Good Grief Camps, children are paired with Military Mentors to provide the undivided attention of a caring, loving adult throughout the weekend. These Military Mentors also provide a connection to



TAPS YOUTH PROGRAMS

TAPS Youth Programs provide safe spaces for surviving children to honor their loved one and explore their grief all while experiencing fun, adventure, mentorship, and camaraderie with peers, mentors, and caring professionals.

Visit taps.org/youthprograms to learn more and browse events, including Good Grief Camps, family campouts, online groups, and online workshops.



TAPS.ORG/PROGRAMS-SERVICES

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

TAPS®

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES



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

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



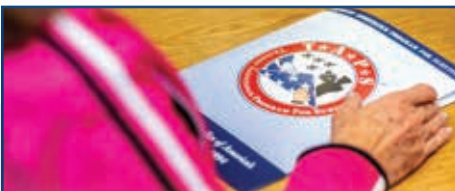
PEER-BASED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT • TAPS.ORG/PEERMENTORS

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



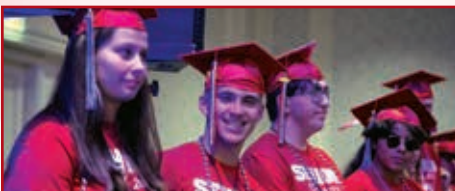
COMMUNITY-BASED GRIEF SUPPORT • TAPS.ORG/GRIEFCOUNSELING

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



CASEWORK ASSISTANCE • TAPS.ORG/CASEWORK

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



EDUCATION SUPPORT • TAPS.ORG/EDU

TAPS Education Support services empower survivors in pursuit of post-secondary education by connecting them to benefits, resources, and scholarship information that meet their financial needs and educational goals.



SURVIVOR CARE TEAM • TAPS.ORG/SURVIVORCARETEAM

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



SUICIDE LOSS SUPPORT • TAPS.ORG/SUICIDE

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

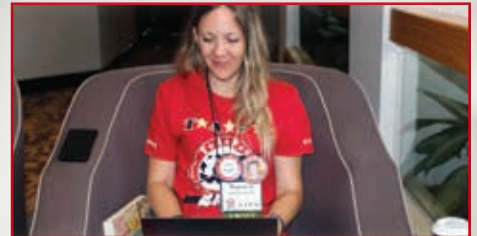
ILLNESS LOSS SUPPORT • [TAPS.ORG/CAREGIVER](https://taps.org/caregiver)

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

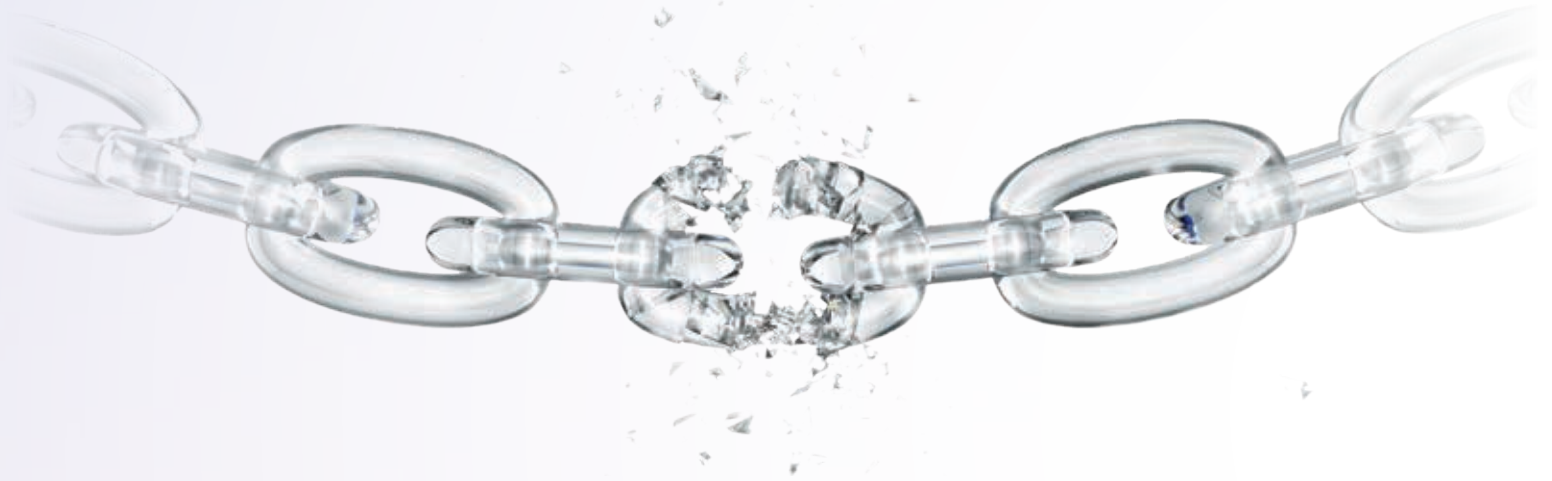
Stars4TAPS and teams4taps collaborate with the entertainment industry and sports organizations across the country and in the U.K. to bring joy, healing, and incredible memories to surviving military families as they honor their fallen heroes.



Breaking Away

FROM LONELINESS

Emily Muñoz ★ TAPS Program Innovation Director
Surviving Spouse of CPT Gilbert A. Muñoz, U.S. Army 7th Special Forces Group



Grief is inherently about interrupted connection. We are separated from someone we love. Loneliness, then, is logical. I just didn't expect it to show up, years after the searing had turned to scarring. When it did, it was because, in my early grief, I leaned so much into the hope that the universe still held joy and purpose for me, that eventually

this would all make sense. But loneliness showed up, clutching and persistent, exacerbated by widening divergences between what I saw as the richly layered, purposeful lives of others and my hollow trajectory as a childless, pathologically busy, urban single. (That's also the world's worst online dating headline.)

I thrive on being engaged and involved, but I also need solitude to recharge. Yet slowly my ability to distinguish between soul-nurturing solitude and creeping "aleness" started to degrade. Instead of recharging, I was retreating. And I felt guilty about it: I was ashamed for living in a strange half-light, for not making connections that let me be all in. That's not, as the French novelist Emile Zola said, "What I came to do." I came to live out loud. I want an abundantly textured life. Our loved ones' sacrifices require it.

Grief is, in many ways, the pain of separation. This is often exacerbated by the body's primitive desire to hide and isolate or to change environments completely. As we process, we are self-referential. We have to turn inward, to curl up into our pain. When we are ready to turn outward, we're faced with figuring out who and what is still there. As Jim Lovell, commander of Apollo 13, is heard saying in the flight loop transcript, "Tell me what on the ship is still good."



PHOTOS: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/HAYRI ER/MARTIN-DM/DELMARINE DONSON/PEOPLEIMAGES

“IF GRIEF IS ABOUT SEPARATION, IT STANDS TO REASON THAT HEALING IS ABOUT *integration and connection.*”



Every time we emerge from the fog, we're checking to see what parts of our lives are consistent. Who has moved? Who's gotten married? Whose kids have graduated? Who can I still relate to? Who isn't frightened by my vulnerability? Who has enough space for part of my burden? Who won't have to get a babysitter if I want to go to the movies with someone? Who can take time off work without financial risk? Will I have to wear real pants? Do I even have any real pants?

If grief is about separation, it stands to reason that healing is about integration and connection. It's about “anti-loneliness.” But the more I healed from the pain of loss — the more I stitched my life back together, the more I understood the second- and third-order effects of what happened to me. As I was healing in the direction I needed to, the rest of the world didn't stop and wait for me as I tried to claw my way back to a path that wasn't mine anymore. I did make my way back to the land of the living, but I didn't expect to be lonely there.

The paradox of loneliness is that it's universal. Everyone has been, or will be, lonely. It's something we can all understand, even if it manifests differently for each of us. The sharp and bitter grief of child loss may leave parents feeling like strangers in relationships and around other families. Children can experience loneliness as feeling different, excluded. Single parents lose hope of having adult conversations — much less relationships — and are hit with the loneliness of a quiet house, whether it's when the bus leaves for elementary school, college, or basic training.

Loneliness, having hidden behind the closed physical and emotional doors for so long, is now being viewed as a widespread and serious health concern. A 2018 nationwide study by health insurer Cigna found that nearly 50 percent of 20,000 respondents considered themselves lonely. This is not situational loneliness. It's more than having one's feelings hurt or feeling sad for a few hours to a few days. This loneliness is persistent and often debilitating. Research shows that it can be as damaging to one's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It increases the risk of heart disease, substance use and abuse, and a host of other diseases and disorders.

This means that the battering down of the emotional hatches — whether it's the result of elected isolation or unintentional disconnection — is not good for our

physical and emotional health. Both isolation (having few relationships or infrequent contact with others) and loneliness (feeling alone or disconnected) present significant health risks. Face-to-face interaction improves mood and immune system functioning, lowers the risk for disease, and improves feelings of connection to a community.

We have suggestions that can help fight feelings of loneliness, but the most important thing to remember is: If you feel like you don't fit in or that life has left you behind, you are not the only one. You do not have to be lonely in your loneliness. Instead, you can use the feelings of wanting to belong and share experiences and adventures to bridge the gap to others who are feeling the same way. Allowing yourself to feel vulnerable



“OUR CHARGE IN OUR GRIEF IS TO FACE THE FEELINGS OF LONELINESS AND SEEK OUT THE CONNECTIONS THAT *inspire us*, THAT MAKE US BETTER.”

about your loneliness may be the most important way to drive it away.

At TAPS, we often say that grief changes our address books. As some people stand with us, others drift away. This analogy isn't about asking you to tear out pages or mark out names. In fact, our charge in our grief is to face the feelings of loneliness and seek out the connections that inspire us, that make us better. Our charge is to use what we have learned in our pain and isolation to add to our address book — to reach out and ask people into our lives. Here are 10 ways to get started.

1. FIND A CAUSE. Sebastian Junger, author of *Tribe*, explains that the feeling of purpose that results from active engagement in a cause can have positive effects on mental health. Junger further explains how the dynamics of shared mission and unity

contribute to these improvements. When we don't feel needed, we lose direction, focus, and self-worth. If you don't think there's anyone who needs you, look again. Volunteer opportunities abound, and we all thrive when we feel like we're a part of something.

2. RESIST PASSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA SCROLLING. Social media, when used in certain ways, can deepen your connections with people. If you're using social media, use it as a communication tool, not a comparison tool.

3. RECOGNIZE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A RUT AND A ROUTINE. A functional routine sets you up to feel good about your day — it holds a great deal of potential energy and feels like emotional scaffolding on which you can construct a good day. If you're in a rut, on the other hand, you may feel

defeated or stuck. Once you identify what parts of your life feel like movement and which parts feel like going through the motions, shift away from doing things that don't nourish your soul just because that's what you've always done.

4. WHEN YOU'RE WITH PEOPLE, PUT YOUR PHONE AWAY. On a vacation with friends, we all agreed not to have our phones at the table after food was served. If we broke the rule, we had to donate to charity. Not only did it build community and accountability, but it also felt great to step away from a habit that didn't connect us as people or to the world around us.

5. IDENTIFY WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK. There are things that we all keep in our back pocket as ways to put off healing and connection, even though it's what we so desperately need, want, and deserve. For me, it was a messy home — an apartment that was always the task hanging over me that I “should do” before I did anything else — and that prevented me from welcoming others in. If it's an obstacle like that, put on your jet pack and free yourself from what is holding you back.

You can't dedicate space to connection if you don't have any in your life, so the same thing applies to your schedule. If you keep yourself so busy that you can't connect in a way that helps you feel less lonely, something has to give. It isn't easy to take time for yourself, and unless you have the space to take it — mental, physical, emotional, professional — it's unlikely to happen. Evaluate where you can carve space, and follow through.



“You always have a family WHO SEES YOU WHERE YOU’VE BEEN, WHERE YOU ARE, AND WHERE YOU WANT TO GO.”



6. LEAVE YOUR HOUSE. Go to the park. Go to a coffee shop. Expand your world just a little. Start walking around the block every afternoon.

7. MOVE MORE. Join Team TAPS or a local running, walking, or cycling club, and learn how to find community through healthy movement. Invite friends over, roll out some mats, and cue up a yoga or Pilates workout on your TV.

8. SEEK OUT OTHERS WITH SIMILAR INTERESTS. My local coffee shop has a Tuesday night men’s knitting circle. If there are places with a Tuesday night men’s knitting circle, there will be someone around you who has at least one interest similar to yours. Drag a friend with you. Start a book club. If you invite someone to do something and he

or she doesn’t want to come, offer another option. Say yes when someone invites you.

9. TALK TO PEOPLE DURING EVERY INTERACTION. Say hello to people walking their dogs. Call a cashier by his or her name. Get to know the people who are in your neighborhood and build a sense of being seen and known. Research shows that it isn’t necessarily the heart-to-heart connections that stave off the effects of loneliness. Casual connections help too.

10. USE THE POWER OF YOUR TAPS FAMILY. If you are new to your loss, these may seem impossible goals. But know that the time will come when making steps in this direction will not only be possible, but desirable. TAPS will be there each step of the way and is a safe space to take those

first steps. Through our Care Groups, health and wellness programming, seminars, TAPS Together, our Sports and Entertainment program, Helpline, and more, you always have a family who sees you where you’ve been, where you are, and where you want to go.

About the Author



Emily Muñoz is the Program Innovation Director at TAPS. She facilitates activities offering a healthy and active healing path for survivors. Emily came to TAPS following the death of her husband in 2005.



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES

TAPS IS WHEREVER YOU ARE

TAPS CARE GROUPS

TAPS Care Groups bring the feel of TAPS to your community. Our monthly meetings provide the most therapeutic atmosphere we can offer — a safe space to talk, time to listen, and the comfort of knowing you are not alone. Care Groups are hosted by a volunteer TAPS Mentor, volunteer mental health provider, or both. Meetings are loosely structured to provide plenty of time to talk, listen, and find comfort in the camaraderie of fellow survivors. Drop in occasionally or attend every month; either way, you will always be welcome.

WANT TO KNOW HOW TO GET STARTED?

Scan the QR code below or visit taps.org/caregroups, then click “*Find a Care Group*.” You’ll see Care Groups organized alphabetically by state, and you will also see a quick snippet of what to expect, like whether or not the group meets online or in person, and what day of the week the meetings occur.

Once you find the TAPS Care Group nearest you, click the blue “*Calendar*” button for a more detailed view of each upcoming Care Group meeting, including the time and location of each meeting.

If you need more information or support finding the right TAPS Care Group, email caregroups@taps.org, or call 800-959-TAPS (8277).



taps.org/caregroups



TAPS ONLINE CONNECTIONS AND SERVICES

TAPS meets you anywhere you are in grief, and thanks to our online groups and educational workshops, we can also meet you anywhere you are physically, including your own home. Find groups and sessions that speak to you.



taps.org/onlinecommunity

ONLINE GROUPS

Our Online Groups are recurring peer-led, facilitated sessions where there is never pressure to share, but always an opportunity. Whether you attend once or regularly, you will always be welcome. Groups are organized by relationship to the deceased, cause of death, and peer group, so you are sure to find the right fit. Find the group that meets your needs, and sign up for your first meeting.



taps.org/onlinegroups

WORKSHOPS AND ONLINE SERIES

Learn something new while building community through TAPS. We offer opportunities throughout the year, like theater labs for both families and adults, an online series in grief leadership, and webinars on grief and loss. Browse our upcoming courses, and register.



taps.org/workshops

THE WEIGHT OF TRAUMATIC LOSS

*Trauma Expert and Vietnam Veteran, Dr. Charles Figley,
Shares His Views on Overcoming Primary and Secondary Trauma*

Charles R. Figley, Ph.D. ★ TAPS Advisory Board Member

Editor's Note:

The words on trauma that follow are written with the veteran — the battle buddy — in mind, but combat is not the only route to traumatic grief.

As you consider the symptoms of direct and indirect trauma and the weight that is often distributed across many shoulders in the wake of a traumatic loss, I encourage you to reach out to the TAPS National Military

Survivor Helpline at 800-959-TAPS (8277)

for the compassion and resources that will help you navigate your traumatic grief.

Like the other thousands of Vietnam War veterans, I landed in South Vietnam in March 1965, less than two years after I graduated from Springboro High School in Ohio. Despite the immortal words of GEN William T. Sherman in 1880, “War is hell,” no one was saying anything about war or hell in 1965 in Da Nang, in the former Republic of South Vietnam. Instead, it was a continual buildup while I was there. Years later, I found myself in a rather liberating experience while writing about my experiences in a chapter of *Mapping the Wake of Trauma: Autobiographical Essays by the Pioneers of Trauma Research* — working through several stressors I thought I left behind in Vietnam.

Counterbalancing the Emotional Weight of Trauma

I quickly learned about trauma and its weight — the weight of the memories and powerful accompanying emotions that can overtake us in seconds, at times. These webs of emotion are strong, and it can be challenging to carry the emotional weight of trauma because we are unaccustomed to it.

After learning that my good friend and fellow researcher, Dave, died in combat in October 2011, I felt numb and a mixture of other sensations beyond my everyday experiences. This grief reaction lasted through his burial at Arlington. I began to adapt, but the emotional weight of Dave dying continued.



...we are **sometimes startled** by our own strength

Counterbalancing the emotional weight of trauma is not entirely ridding yourself of it. Instead, like slightly shifting a child riding on your back for mutual comfort, we find the counteraction that works. We counterbalance the painful realities. And, in the process, we are sometimes startled by our own strength and how much we can comfortably handle, despite the initial shock of the traumatic event. It is the ongoing management of these painful memories that makes us resilient.

Primary Trauma Symptoms

The “big six” symptoms must be mentioned. They are the symptoms experienced most frequently by those who are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They may also impact you if you lost a loved one or a battle buddy in a traumatic way, or if you survived a traumatic event.

Intrusion, or re-experiencing symptoms, can emerge in the form of involuntary memories, distressing dreams, or flashbacks of the traumatic event. No matter the type of intrusion, this symptom makes you feel like you are reliving the triggering traumatic experience all over again.

Avoidance of trauma reminders can cause unexpected emotions and reactions. In anticipation, you might avoid reminders of places, people, and things that provoke memories of the traumatic event. This can include sometimes avoiding or withdrawing from conversations associated with your military service or the trauma-connected experience. Avoidance is what makes seeking support or treatment difficult because it may seem more comfortable to avoid reliving the experience.

Alterations in mood and cognition can lead to a cognitive bias — investing lots of time, attention, and energy into eliminating perceived (real or imagined) threats. Once safe at home after military service, you may perceive everyday activities and situations as dangerous and remain vigilant to future traumatic events or threats, even if one doesn't exist.

Alterations in arousal and reactivity (i.e., hypervigilance), marked by being on edge, can quickly turn into reckless behavior. If experiencing this, you may become agitated or feel the need to be “on guard,” and have difficulty sleeping. Essentially, you are unable to turn off your fight-or-flight mode, which — if left unchecked — can lead to self-harming behaviors.

Depression or a major depressive disorder — a feeling or mood of extraordinary sadness, confusion, and feelings of hopelessness — can impact your mood, your thoughts, and your actions. It is a general feeling of hopelessness and sadness interfering with, and inhibiting, your day-to-day life.

Major changes in appetite, weight, sleep, and energy (fatigue), and difficulty concentrating and making decisions can be brought on by any of the first five symptoms, or a combination of them.

Secondary Trauma and Compassion Fatigue of Supporting the Traumatized

Supporting traumatized people — either formally or informally — is both an honor and a responsibility. When is death not traumatic? Death strips away our defenses. No one has it worse than survivors who experience traumatic stress directly, as noted above. Yet, the supporters of the traumatized are also vulnerable to traumatic stress. Family, friends, and teammates can experience traumatic stress indirectly, through empathy, compassion, and acts of support.



and how much we can comfortably handle...



The symptoms of primary and secondary traumatic stress overlap considerably. And, while exposure to neither type of traumatic stress (direct or indirect) automatically guarantees that the dosage of distress will lead to a diagnosis of PTSD, it could. It is important that caregivers and supporters know how best to care for themselves and others, in addition to the survivor who directly experienced trauma.

Compassion fatigue, on the other hand, has been defined as a combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion associated with caring for someone in significant emotional pain or physical distress.

The formal caregiver's reduced capacity or interest in being empathic or bearing the suffering is the natural consequent reaction from knowing that a person suffered or experienced a traumatizing event. Thus, compassion fatigue is a hazard for anyone caring for someone who endured trauma or who is navigating traumatic grief. Post-traumatic supporters and caregivers can exhibit several symptoms, including hopelessness, a decrease in experiences of pleasure, constant stress and anxiety, sleeplessness or nightmares, and a pervasive negative attitude.

A FINAL NOTE

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms — or if someone close to you is experiencing one or more symptoms — I encourage you to act, to reach out to TAPS. Military veterans specifically tend to rely on their families to help sort out the emotions linked to war experiences. But, we have far more resources than past generations, including the expansive care of TAPS, that can directly connect us to mental and emotional support from trained care providers.

TAPS will continue to support and advocate for all survivors, including battle buddies and veterans who have sacrificed so much for so long. I encourage you to continue the momentum toward prioritizing mental and spiritual health and well-being. Seek the help you need, and encourage fellow veterans and survivors to do the same. We are so much closer to the ideal military and veteran mental health force now than when I joined the Marines in 1963; take the opportunity to lighten your pack amongst the community of support in your corner.

About the Author

Charles Figley, Ph.D., is the Tulane University Paul Henry Kurzweg, MD Distinguished Chair in Disaster Mental Health. In addition to donating his time and talent as a TAPS Advisory Board member, he directs Tulane University's Traumatology Institute and is a full-time professor in the university's School of Social Work. Dr. Figley is a Vietnam veteran, and throughout his career dedicated to trauma and trauma psychology, he has published more than 28 books. A complete list of his work is available at charlesfigley.com.



...it can be **challenging** to carry the emotional weight of trauma because we are unaccustomed to it.



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES





POPPY

Joan Donaldson ★ Surviving Mother of SGT Mateo Donaldson, U.S. Army

When our son, the late SGT Mateo Donaldson was in high school, he and his brother, Carlos, maintained a bee business of 100 hives. The bees pollinated our blooming blueberry bushes, and our sons also rented their hives to a pumpkin farmer. During a family discussion, the lads explained how after the spring flowers and orchards bloomed, a nectar valley limited their bees from finding adequate food. We tossed out various solutions, and after researching the issue, we decided to plant wildflowers that would provide food in June for their hives.

After preparing the soil as if we planned to sow rye, my husband, John, used a seed drill attached to a tractor to plant a five-

acre meadow of red poppies, daisies, and blue bachelor buttons. The following year, the flowers created a stunning landscape that fed the bees. For several years, John sowed up to 20 acres of wildflowers, and our sons' hives thrived. Even after they left home, we continued the tradition, turning fields near our home into a lovely site.

Mateo joined the Navy, married his wife, Mayme, then switched to the Army, and he served a tour in Afghanistan. Depression and PTSD stalked him. Because he knew how to drive tractors, Mateo became the manager of the farm at Fort Lewis, including their beehives, and we hoped the outdoor activities would help heal him. But, on Feb. 19, 2015, he took his life

and was buried in our local cemetery that borders our farm.

In the fall of 2019, John and I decided to plant wildflowers in the field next to the cemetery as a memorial to our son, hoping that a beautiful sight would bring peace to other grieving families. John sowed our usual mixture of red, white, and blue flowers. In June, the red Flanders poppies dominated the meadow sprinkled with daisies and bachelor buttons.

Then Covid invaded our country. As we worked on our farm, we spied folks taking photos or just standing there gazing at the flowers. A retired art teacher painted a sign, explaining that the wildflowers were a memorial to our late son.



FIELD



PHOTOS: ANGIE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY + MORE & JOAN DONALDSON

A television reporter learned about the landscape, and we agreed to an interview. Standing by the poppies, we explained our son's suicide and our hope that the memorial would remind others about the need to help our veterans and service members suffering from PTSD. The evening the feature aired, the reporter texted me that the clip hit the number-one spot in viewed videos. Before long, other stations across the country had picked it up, and by morning, we learned that the Associated Press had nabbed the story that now aired around the world.

Because people were homebound due to Covid restrictions, thousands of visitors walked the path that John mowed around the meadow. At all times during the day,

artists painted, photographers set up their equipment, and some men flew drones. Because the story had rippled across the country, some folks drove over five hours to view the poppies.

At times, John and I felt overwhelmed by the crowds, but then the messages and letters arrived: "My husband suffers from PTSD, and he sat and looked at the poppies all afternoon. I haven't seen him this peaceful in years." One Gold Star Mother wrote about her son dying when the USS Cole was attacked. The most poignant message came from a female vet living in Georgia who confided that twice, she had almost taken her life. But after watching the television story, she wanted to plant wildflowers and

keep bees. I gave her the TAPS Helpline (800-959-TAPS (8277)), shared how to create a wildflower garden, and encouraged her to investigate the program Hives for Heroes, which provides training in beekeeping. Finally, a local veterans group offered to provide a military salute to our late son. Standing by the shimmering poppies, the trumpeter played taps, and the vets fired their guns as tears ran down my cheeks.

The death of a loved one always resounds in our hearts. Every June, visitors continue to gaze at a sea of red poppies as they sparkle and sway in our meadow. Their beauty brings hope, healing, and peace to those who mourn.



LEST WE FORGET

TEAMS4TAPS BRINGS 2 FAMILIES TOGETHER TO HONOR THEIR HEROES

Kristi Stolzenberg ★ TAPS Magazine Editor



“EACH FRIEND REPRESENTS A WORLD IN US, A WORLD POSSIBLY NOT BORN UNTIL THEY ARRIVE.” - ANAIS NIN -

Great loss has a way of making the world feel larger than you ever noticed. You wonder if anyone will ever understand your pain, or — perhaps more practically — if you’ll ever be able to explain the extent of your grief to a world that kept turning the day yours stopped.

TAPS has an undeniable ability to make the vast world feel small again. It has a way of breaking intimidating situations into

manageable steps because you are connected with a network of peers journeying through life after loss with you.

Imagine, if you can, stepping out onto the pitch of a professional football club as a child. It’s much larger than you pictured. You’re suddenly aware of how small you are next to the towering team of professional athletes. The roar of the crowd, the heat of the lights, the comforting (though still

intimidating) hand of the pro footballer in yours, keeping you rooted in the moment and on course — it’s enough to make even the bravest hearts beat a little faster. But, an arm’s length away is another brave kid feeling everything — the excitement and the butterflies — right along with you. Though you haven’t known him long, you know him well because, like you, he knows sacrifice; he speaks the language of grief; and he is walking this walk with you.



HONORING THEIR DADS IN A BIG WAY

Chris Frison and Connor Savage had never met prior to the TAPS Scotland Experience that brought them under the lights of Ibrox Stadium in Glasgow on Nov. 9, 2022. Chris, 11 at the time, and Connor, 9, joined the team on the pitch ahead of kickoff as just one component of the Rangers Football Club Remembrance Day game.

TAPS coordinated with Rangers FC and the Rangers Charity Foundation to bring Chris and Connor to the game, along with their moms, Mikki Frison and Lynzy Savage, to honor their dads, who were both killed in action in Afghanistan. Chris and Connor overcame their nerves together to serve as the mascots for the Rangers FC Remembrance Day fixture. The footballers rallied behind the boys, donning red poppies and pins in honor of fallen heroes.

But it wasn't just the athletes and incredibly accommodating Rangers staff who looked at Chris and Connor and saw strength and sacrifice. The stadium, typically roar at game time, fell silent prior to kickoff, and a tifo spanned the Broomload Rd. end, reading "Lest We Forget" as the boys boldly stood on the pitch, their moms beaming with pride as they watched the opening ceremony. Connor's mom, Lynzy, shared that "Connor was so nervous" when the boys walked down to the tunnel to meet up with the team, "but when he returned, he was ecstatic! Watching Connor overcome his nerves to be the mascot and have such a wonderful experience was a highlight for me."

CONNOR AND LYNZY'S STORY

In 2013, Lynzy was pregnant with Connor, and her husband, Cpl William "Sav" Savage, 2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, was deployed in Afghanistan. By April 2013, Sav had served 10 years in the Army and completed two tours in Iraq, and three in Afghanistan. But, Connor — born two months later, in June 2013 — never got the chance to meet his dad, who Lynzy describes as "the life and soul" of their family. Sav was killed by an IED, along with two other soldiers, in Helmand Province.

Though Lynzy wishes Connor could have known his dad, she shares that they are similar in many ways, always calm in a crisis and handsome. Although Sav enjoyed sports, she admits he was "terrible at soccer to the amusement of his fellow soldiers!" Connor plays every sport he can, including soccer and flag football.

Years later, in 2019, Connor and Lynzy first came to TAPS, having learned about it through a British charity with a similar mission to support bereaved children of British Forces soldiers, Scotty's Little Soldiers. Lynzy shared that even before the Scotland Experience in November 2022, TAPS positively impacted both her life and Connor's — "he has made lasting friendships and has such support, and I know if I ever need any help or advice, TAPS is always there to listen, help, and guide."

CHRIS AND MIKKI'S STORY

Mikki and her husband, U.S. Army 1LT Demetrius Frison, welcomed their son, Chris, in November 2010. The family of three spent just seven weeks together before Demetrius' deployment to Afghanistan, and Mikki remembers that in those seven weeks, Demetrius did everything he could as a new dad. "If Chris cried in the middle of the night for a diaper change, he would get up and do it, and tell me 'No, I've got this...I want to do all these things while I'm still here.'"

His service heart made him a natural leader in the Army. Mikki shares that Demetrius "lived by the infantry mantra, 'Follow me.' He was always out in front. He always said that if anything was going to happen, it was going to happen to him, never his men." Just one month after his promotion to 1LT, Demetrius died in Khost Province from wounds suffered following an IED blast.

Like Connor, Chris loves playing soccer — he's been playing since he was 3 years old. Mikki imagines how proud her husband would be watching his son be this "small-but-mighty" soccer superstar. "He would definitely be beaming. I can hear him saying, 'That's my son out there...that's my boy.'"

NEVER ALONE WITH TAPS

As Chris and Connor made their way out of the tunnel together onto Ibrox Stadium on Nov. 9, they didn't face it alone. They faced it together. They faced it with support from the players, staff, and fans all around them. They honored their heroes in a big way — a way that is pretty cool for two young soccer players. And that is what TAPS strives to do for everyone who lost a military or veteran loved one — we want you to know that with TAPS, you are never alone. We walk this journey with you, supporting you each step of the way, honoring your hero, recognizing your sacrifice, and helping you create precious friendships and memories along the way.

Lynzy shares that through TAPS, "Connor has made some great friends with his mentors and fellow Good Grief Camp buddies." She has made some life-long friendships as well. "These friendships we have both made are so special to us. It's amazing to share stories with people who understand what you've been through."

Lynzy, Mikki, Connor, and Chris, thank you for sharing your stories with us.



Scan the QR code to watch the video recap of the TAPS Scotland Experience with original music by Sharon Martin.

If you would like to honor your fallen hero through a favorite sport or team, send an email to teams4taps@taps.org.

team4taps

2022 REPLAY

Did your fallen hero have a special connection to a sports team, player, or league?

WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT!

Please share your story and photos with us by emailing teams4taps@taps.org or by submitting an online form via the QR code.



Thanks to the generosity and hospitality of sports organizations across the country and the U.K., TAPS helped surviving families honor their heroes and make incredible memories alongside their favorite athletes and teams. Take a look at some of our favorite teams4taps moments from 2022.



The San Francisco 49ers created a special experience for a TAPS family at their Nov. 13 Salute to Service game, which included a sideline meet-and-greet with tight end George Kittle, a good friend and long-time TAPS supporter.



As part of Atlanta United's 2022 Mission: TAPS program, TAPS families were hosted at their Aug. 6 Military Appreciation game as part of Salute Our Troops. Survivors took part in the pregame flag ceremony, and their fallen heroes were honored by the team at halftime.



D'Andre Swift of the Detroit Lions hugs Kathleen Johnson, surviving mother of SSG Natalie Barajas during practice on Nov. 5. The Lions organization welcomed TAPS families to attend practice and their Nov. 6 game versus the Green Bay Packers.



As part of their May 28 Military Appreciation game, the Atlanta Braves invited TAPS families to Truist Park where players Tyler Matzek, Luke Jackson, and Will Smith spent time with survivors before the game.



TAPS families are warmly welcomed by New England Patriots Owner, Robert Kraft, at their Nov. 6 Salute to Service game. During the game, Patriots players wore the initials of the TAPS families' fallen heroes on their helmets.



The surviving parents of Capt. Jeffrey Braden stand for the presentation of the colors and the national anthem before the Nov. 10 Atlanta Falcons game versus the Carolina Panthers. The Falcons generously hosted eight TAPS families for an incredible four-day, one-of-a-kind Salute to Service road trip.



Prior to tipoff, the Jeffries family, honoring LCpl Blake Edward Jeffries, gathers for a photo at the Feb. 18 NBA All-Star Game in Cleveland, OH.



"Take me out to the ballgame!" A young TAPS survivor watches as the Aberdeen Ironbirds take on the Winston-Salem Dash on July 1.



TAPS kids take a timeout during their MLB All-Star Clinic at Play Ball Park on July 17. The MLB hosted TAPS families at their 2022 MLB All-Star Week in Los Angeles, CA for a TAPS Kids Clinic, the MLB 2022 Draft, and the MLB All-Star Home Run Derby.



Surviving mother and bonus dad of PO2 Anthony Michael Dillard, Jr. received a personalized football honoring their son prior to kickoff at the Nov. 14 Philadelphia Eagles game.



As part of the NBA Referee Experience in Salt Lake City, UT, New York Knicks forward, Julius Randle, visits with TAPS families before the Nov. 14 game against the Utah Jazz. NBA Referees host TAPS survivors for special behind-the-scenes experiences before the game – which sometimes includes a player meet-and-greet!



Hosted at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, GA in partnership with the NFL, the TAPS 2022 Young Adults Summit provided personal-development activities, elevated learning experiences, service projects, community building, and more.



Pittsburgh Steelers mascot, Steely McBeam, poses with surviving family members of LCDR Louis Balot. The Steelers hosted TAPS families at their training camp on Aug. 18.



TAPS families huddle up during a visit to the Dallas Cowboys training facility on Nov. 30 where they received a VIP tour and a chance to see the team practice.



TAPS families are recognized and their fallen heroes are honored during the national anthem before the Orlando Magic game on Nov. 9.



Cleveland Guardian pitcher, Shane Bieber, chats with Mia and Ashton Green, the surviving niece and nephew of SGT Larry Kuhns, Jr. during the May 30 visit to Progressive Field. Terry Francona and the Guardians hosted and honored TAPS families for their Memorial Day game.



"If you build it..." TAPS families navigate through the corn fields surrounding the Field of Dreams in Dyersville, IA during the MLB Field of Dreams game on Aug. 11.



Three TAPS families are honored at Chase Field before the Arizona Diamondbacks game on Memorial Day.



TAPS families enjoy a Washington Capitals game on Mar. 15 versus the New York Islanders on Military Night.



The NBA welcomed TAPS families for the 2022 draft on June 23 at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, NY.



TAPS families take to the court at the 2022 U.S. Open during a unique opportunity to play on the same court as tennis greats!

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES; DETROIT LIONS; ATLANTA FALCONS

ATTITUDE

The Outhouse at Minus 23 Degrees Fahrenheit

Benjamin Wolfe, M.Ed., LICSW, FT ★ TAPS Advisory Board

EDITOR'S NOTE: *As the mercury rises and signs of rebirth and regrowth sprout up from the same ground that was cold and dormant just days ago, we turn our faces toward the sunshine and prepare for the warmth ahead of us. TAPS Advisory Board Member Benjamin Wolfe reminds us in the words that follow that there is no wrong time or place to reflect on our past experiences and prepare our hearts and minds for happiness ahead of us.*

It's warm inside the cabin with the wood stove roaring, and the thought of having to go outside to the outhouse is not real exciting. It is now minus 23°F outside, and it seems like a marathon run to the outhouse from the cabin. But, it is time! I get my hat on, gloves, now a jacket, and I take a big breath of warm air...I walk briskly to our outhouse — which is really not very far from the cabin. The wind is making the air feel a lot colder than it really is, but I will soon be in “enclosed” safety.

I think of Will Steger and Paul Schurke's attitude when they went to the North Pole by dogsled in 1986, where the temperatures were hot at minus 23°F, and they didn't have an outhouse to use. Now *that* is attitude. Each of us, for whatever reasons, follow different paths, and encounter different journeys. In the happiness we seek in life, we are reminded of the good things, but also of life's struggles and disappointments.

For some, those disappointments are a crisis. Responding to a crisis is also dependent on our attitude. The Chinese symbol which represents crisis has two meanings, one reflecting danger, while the other represents opportunity.

I'm now inside the outhouse and it's only minus 21°F on the wall thermometer. I can see my breath. Summer is all around me in the outhouse with our kayak and canoe paddles, and a few other things reminding me winter in Minnesota is about attitude. I now look at a Kemps ice cream container protecting the toilet paper, an important item when you have mice that spend more time in this facility than you do.

Responding to a crisis is also dependent on our **ATTITUDE.**

ATTITUDE is how we look at life — how we perceive the world to be, and the meaning we make of it.



I hear our small lake moaning and groaning under the ice. This is *not* summer!

Outhouses allow for contemplation...I reflect on my past. Over 33 years ago, while in the Peace Corps for two years in South America, I had an outhouse. Another year in Micronesia with the Peace Corps, I had a unique outhouse suspended over the Pacific Ocean and open to the entire world. Then, my wife and I had an outhouse for four years while teaching and living on a small farm in Australia. Where have I been in life? Where am I now, and where am I going? These are all questions one can explore in any location and at any time, especially at minus 23°F.

Attitude is how we look at life — how we perceive the world to be, and the meaning we make of it.

What are the gifts we receive, and what are the gifts we give?

A 92-year-old woman once said when asked to explain happiness, “Old age is like a bank account...you withdraw from what you’ve put in. So, my advice to you would be to deposit a lot of happiness in the bank account of memories.”

As I let my mind wander in the cold, I am reminded of how much I love the work I do and the gifts others provide me while walking with them on their journeys. I am honored, as are my colleagues, to hear patients’ and clients’ life stories, to hear of sadness, but also of wonderful relationships, and to see after a period of time, for many, transformation taking place. Someone once said there are five simple rules to be happy.

1. FREE YOUR HEART
FROM HATRED.

2. FREE YOUR MIND
FROM WORRIES.

3. LIVE SIMPLY.

4. GIVE MORE.

5. EXPECT LESS.

Ah, time to head back to the cabin. When you consider your past, present, and future, remind yourself that life is about attitude. I wish you well on your contemplations, wherever they may be!

Reprinted with permission from Essential Health, St. Mary’s Medical Center’s Grief Support Center in Duluth, MN.



About the Author

Benjamin Wolfe, M.Ed., is a grief, loss, and transition trainer and a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker and Fellow in Thanatology. He shares his decades of experience with TAPS as a member of the TAPS Advisory Board.



800-959-TAPS (8277) ★ TAPS.org

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

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*They walk beside
us every day.
Unseen, unheard,
but always near;
still loved,
still missed,
and very dear.*

- Alex MacLean -