

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

TAPS



VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 2

ABOUT TAPS

TAPS Magazine is dedicated to the brave men and women of our armed forces who laid their lives on the line, and made the ultimate sacrifice in service to America. The quarterly magazine is written by and for surviving family members and friends. It is our hope that you will find comfort and connection in these pages as you continue your journey of grief.

Who We Are

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is a national non-profit 501(c)3 Veteran's Service Organization. TAPS is America's front line resource for all who are grieving the death of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces. Since 1994, TAPS has provided comfort and care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

What We Do

The mission of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is to provide ongoing emotional help, hope, and healing to all who are grieving the loss of a loved one who died in military service to America. TAPS is dedicated to providing the best care possible by offering grief and trauma resources, casualty casework assistance, crisis response and intervention, and long-term peer-based emotional support to survivors regardless of relationship to the deceased, branch of service, or circumstances and geography of death.

T★A★P★S

SUPPORTS the military family through a national network of those who have lost a loved one in the Armed Forces and are now standing by to lovingly reach out and support others when a death occurs.

OFFERS the very best resources available to military survivors across America a national network of grief support groups and services.”

EDUCATES survivors about grief and the traumatic effects following the sudden death of a loved one. TAPS provides educational reading materials to help survivors realize that they are experiencing “normal reactions to abnormal events.”

SPONSORS the National Military Survivor Seminars and Good Grief Camps in locations across America, designed to help rebuild shattered lives and give survivors the chance to help each other heal.

PUBLISHES a quarterly journal focusing on vital issues facing military survivors, sent free of charge to survivors, commanders, chaplains, casualty staff and care givers.

OPERATES a national toll-free help and information line 24 hours a day with support available through TAPS' Board of Advisors, leading experts in grief and trauma.

CARES about and supports all survivors including spouses, significant others, children, parents, siblings, friends and co-workers. Call us for more information at 1-800-959-TAPS (8277) or visit our Web site at www.TAPS.org.

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TAPS Magazine is published quarterly by the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Inc. (TAPS), 910 17th Street NW Suite 800 Washington, DC 20006. It is sent free of charge to survivors, their friends and family, service members, and professionals who work with U.S. military survivors.

In accordance with our goal of compassionate care, TAPS seeks articles that reflect the theme: Remember the Love, Celebrate the Life, Share the Journey. Submissions will be considered based on their promotion of hope and healing. Authors should avoid topics that are political, partisan, or exclusive to their own personal situation.

To submit an article, request permission to reprint a previously published article, or subscribe to TAPS Magazine, please email info@taps.org.

Fed. Tax ID: 92-0152268 CFC #11309

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"War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things; the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much



worse. A man who has nothing for which he is willing to fight; nothing he cares more about than his own personal safety; is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free, unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.

- John Stewart Mill -



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!

800-959-TAPS

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TRICARE TALK



Presented By TriWest Healthcare Alliance



TRICARE Coverage for Surviving Spouses

Have questions about continued eligibility for TRICARE benefits? Here's how it works:

Surviving Spouse Coverage Continues

"Transitional survivor" benefits continue for three years after the sponsor's death, with the same coverage and costs as active duty family members (ADFM). TRICARE Prime, Extra and Standard options continue after the three-year mark at the same level as military retirees.

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- ★ Visiting a uniformed Services personnel office
- ★ Calling 1-800-538-9552 or 1-866-363-2883 (TTY/TDD)
- ★ Faxing address changes to DEERS at 1-831-665-8317
- ★ Mailing address changes to the Defense Manpower Data Center Support Office,
Attn: COA, 400 Gigling Road, Seaside, CA 93955-6771

Dedicated West Region TAPS Liaison Available

Did you know that TriWest has a dedicated TAPS Liaison available to assist TAPS families in the TRICARE West Region? This is in addition to the customer service provided through our toll-free 1-888-TRIWEST line. If you need assistance with a unique or ongoing TRICARE issue, we invite you to contact our TriWest TAPS Liaison at 1-800-871-5079, extension 42191.

Proud Supporter of TAPS

TriWest Healthcare Alliance is proud to partner with the Department of Defense to provide access to cost-effective, high-quality health care for 2.9 million members of America's military family in the 21-state TRICARE West Region. We're equally proud of our affiliation with TAPS and its mission through support of the annual Memorial Day Survivor Seminar and regional camps held throughout the TRICARE West Region.



SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE

Peer Mentor Profile

The heart of TAPS is the Peer Mentor Support network— survivors who have been trained and are willing to offer support to other survivors who are more recently bereaved. At TAPS we strive to match survivors with Peer Mentors whose losses are similar, although ultimately wounded hearts find solace with each other, even when circumstances differ. TAPS is grateful to its Peer Mentors— those special people who are able to reach through their own pain to help others cope with theirs.



Chad Weikel

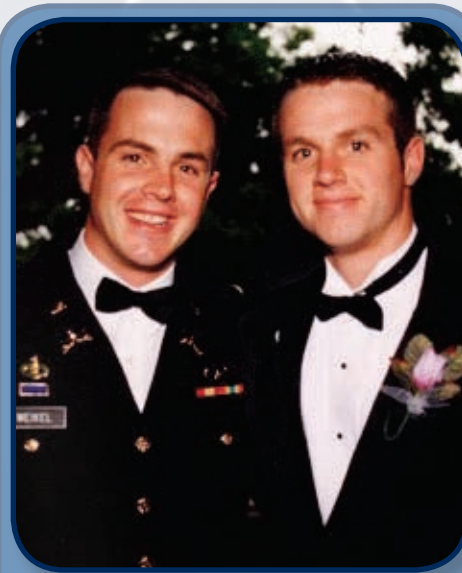


People talk a lot about losing a spouse or a child, but the general populace often overlooks the mourner who has lost a sibling. Many siblings feel disenfranchised, and rightfully so. The relationship that was supposed to last from birth to old age is gone. The person who was to help them bury their parents has been buried. At TAPS we have a large number of siblings, and therefore a great need for sibling peer mentors. One of our sibling mentors is Chad Weikel, proud brother of CPT Ian Weikel, who was killed in action in Baghdad on April 18, 2006.

Chad found TAPS through Google. "After all my friends and family had stopped calling it became pretty quiet. Pretty lonely. The one source of support that didn't stop was TAPS. I remember Bonnie and Stephanie calling just to check in with me. That was amazing - and helped me through a very, very dark time."

After attending the National Survivor Seminar in 2007, Chad decided he would do everything he could to help TAPS' mission. "I had gotten so much from TAPS, it was a no-brainer for me to try and give a little back." As a result, he volunteered to become a peer mentor to other Gold Star Brothers. He has also served with TAPS at two regional seminars at Ft. Carson (where

he and his brother grew up), as well as volunteering at Snowball Express '07, and serving as a group leader for the teens at the TAPS Good Grief Camp '08.



Chad Weikel, right, pictured with Ian Weikel at Ian's wedding

In his words, "The most valuable experience for me has been the connection with other Gold Star Siblings. They have been a lifeline to me for the last two years."

For Chad, the best part of mentoring is seeing siblings and teens open up for the first time. "Feeling those emotions is such a critical piece to the grieving process. I'm always amazed at the

courage people have, to share their story and their emotions with TAPS mentors." The hardest aspect is that it brings up so many personal emotions. For instance, when Chad talks with a recently bereaved Gold Star Brother, "it takes me right back to that time for me. It would be much easier to hide under a rock and pretend everything was okay. But I know that doesn't work - and I'm so proud to be part of the TAPS team."

One of the biggest pieces of losing his brother, Ian, was trying to figure out what's next. Chad says, "I'm not the same person I was before losing Ian, and I never will be. My life changed forever on April 18th, 2006. Ian was my big brother in every sense of the word. Looking back, I now know how important it was to me that I made him proud. I know that he's proud of the work I've done with TAPS."

When asked how Ian figured into Chad's decision to mentor he told us, "Ian was always so concerned with service. He organized food drives in high school, soccer drives for kids in Iraq, and he was a servant leader to his men - ultimately laying down his life for them. Maybe that's why I, too, want to serve. I still want to grow up to be like my big brother." *

Chad enlisted in the United States Army on June 4, 2008.

Ben Stein Honored At Pentagon for Exceptional Public Service

Story by Samantha L. Quigley, American Forces Press Service



Photo by Samantha L. Quigley, Department of Defense

Ben Stein, actor, writer and economist, accepts the Office of the Secretary of Defense Exceptional Public Service Award from Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England on April 15, 2008. The ceremony took place at the Pentagon before the inaugural TAPS Honor Guard Gala held in Washington. TAPS also honored Stein during its Gala.

On the Home Front: WASHINGTON, April 16, 2008

(AFPS) -- A jack of many trades and master of the deadpan delivery, Ben Stein yesterday added one more title to a list that already includes actor, economist, educator and writer: that of exceptional public servant.

For his contributions to the men and women of the armed forces, Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England presented Stein with the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Exceptional Public Service Award during a ceremony at the Pentagon.

The award also was presented to Bonnie Carroll, chairman and founder of TAPS, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors. TAPS is a national organization for all those who have lost a loved one serving in the military.

"We don't have too many opportunities in the building to really recognize great Americans who are hugely supportive of this building and our military," England said. "You both have been absolute yeomen in supporting the [military], and this is our day to say, 'Thank you for your great work on behalf of our military members and their families.'"

Stein, perhaps best known for his role as the monotone economics teacher in the hit movie, "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," has written books and screenplays, studied law and shed light on injustices in American society. He's also no stranger to Washington and politics, having served as a speechwriter for presidents Nixon and Ford, though he makes it clear in his biography that he did not write the line, "I am not a crook."

He's also a fervent supporter of the military, and despite his iconic status, his comments often belie the humility he feels for individuals who wear the uniform and their families.

"My work is incredibly trivial and unimportant compared with their work," Stein said. "My whole 63 years, [what I've done is] not as important as what a man or a woman going out on patrol in Basra or Ar Ramadi or An Nasiriyah does in five minutes, maybe five seconds."

One of his latest public acts of gratitude to the military is the book "The Real Stars." It's an answer to a question Stein, who has a home in Malibu, Calif., hears frequently regarding living among the real stars. His verbal answer to askers is that he doesn't live among the real stars, but highly paid entertainers.

Stein admitted receiving the award was an honor, but he continued to deflect the gratitude back at the service-members and their families.

"[What I do for the military,] it's nothing compared to what the military does for me," he said. "People whine and moan about their taxes. People whine and moan about jury duty - I must say I try my best to get out of it - but the people who give their lives and the families left behind, what could we possibly do to recognize them adequately?"

"There's nothing we can do to recognize them adequately," Stein said, answering his own question. "There is no adequate way that we can thank [the military], and we are just at your feet and in deep, deep, deep gratitude."

While nothing may serve as an adequate thank you to the service-members who make the ultimate

sacrifice, Stein, who serves as a TAPS honorary board member, said the organization works hard to take care of the families left behind. The group's founder, Carroll, agrees.

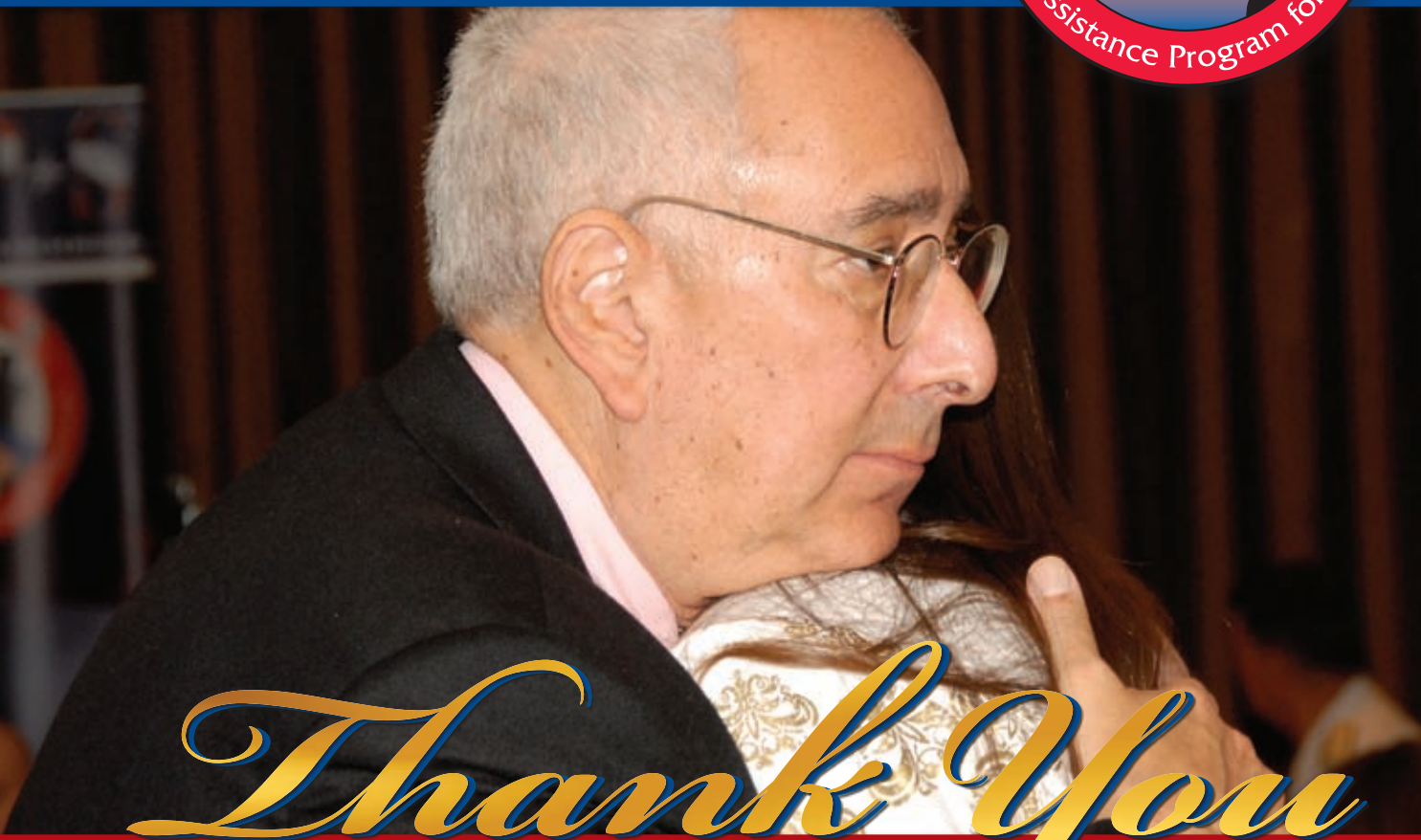
"Families who have lost a loved one serving in the armed forces have made a tremendous sacrifice," she said. "Through TAPS, we've come together to help each other heal, to remember the life and the love that we've lost."

"Our loved ones died, but they [also] lived, and they made an incredible contribution," Carroll added. "They served with pride, and we are proud of them today."

She knows that all too well. Her husband, Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Tom Carroll, was killed in 1992 when his military plane crashed. Seven other soldiers lost their lives in that crash.

The ceremony at the Pentagon concluded just hours before Carroll and her TAPS organization honored Stein at the inaugural TAPS Honor Guard Gala in Washington. On behalf of TAPS, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Navy Adm. Mike Mullen presented the TAPS Honor Guard Award to Stein for his support of the organization and its families.

TAPS is a supporter of America Supports You, a Defense Department program connecting citizens and companies with servicemembers and their families serving at home and abroad. *



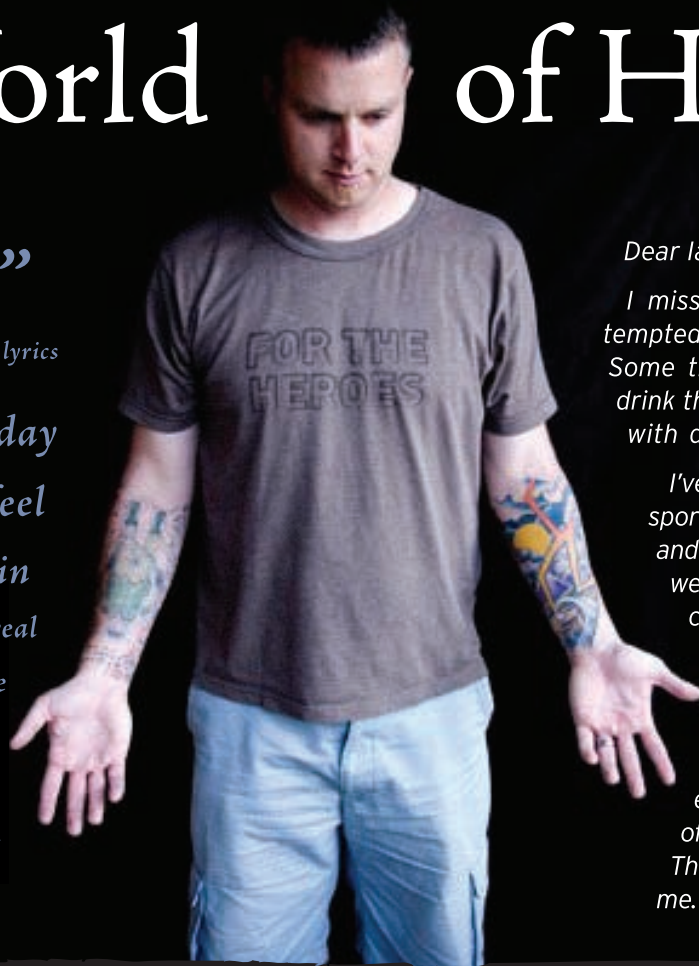
Thank You

A World of Hurt

“Hurt”

Nine Inch Nails – song lyrics

*I hurt myself today
To see if I still feel
I focus on the pain
The only thing that's real
The needle tears a hole
The old familiar sting
Try to kill it all away
But I remember everything.*



Dear Ian,

I miss you. Since April 18, 2006, I've attempted just about everything to try to cope. Some things work. Most don't. I've tried to drink the hurt away. I've tried to numb myself with drugs. They provide no real comfort.

I've channeled my anger into rugby, the sport you loved. It's been a welcome release and a new connection to you. You sure weren't joking about its brutality. In the off chance that Heaven has a rugby team, please save me a spot on your team.

I've been surrounded by the love of my friends and family, especially my wife's. It's the only way I get through each day. I've connected with dozens of other Gold Star Siblings through TAPS. They are the one group who understands me. They have saved my life.

I've volunteered my time to mentor Gold Star Sons. It's the one activity I've done in the last year that I know you are proud of me for doing.

I've spent time with your wife and son. It's so clear why she was the one you couldn't live without. Your boy turned two last week. I see so much of you in him. He has your eyes and your smile.

I also turned to tattoos early on. Remember when we got those tattoos together when you were 18 and I was 16? They were the Japanese symbol for courage and we placed it over our hearts. You stopped with that one tattoo. I kept going.

Shortly after you died, I knew I wanted to get a memorial tattoo for many reasons. Part of me wanted to have you with me wherever I went. Part of me wanted the world to know that you are a hero and I am incredibly proud of

my big brother. Those are the reasons that are easy to talk about.



The harder reason to talk about is that part of me wanted to feel the pain. I was filled with so much pain inside, so tattooing was just an outward demonstration of that. I've had both arms filled with images, thoughts, and memories

of you. It has taken over 30 hours in the chair. In the first few months, I felt nothing. I had many other tattoos before these memorial sleeves, so I knew what the process was supposed to feel like. But, in the months immediately following losing you – I felt nothing. Nothing at all.

It wasn't until about six months after losing you that I started feeling the sting of the needle again. I still wonder why I couldn't feel those first few sessions. I think my body was still in shock, both psychologically as well as physically. Once that shock began to wear off, the pain returned. I've never been so happy to feel pain. To me, it meant one small step forward in this grief journey. I was still months away from feeling joy again, but at least pain was progress. The pain was a reminder that I was still alive, whether I wanted to be or not.

On my right arm:

★ A full portrait of you, in your full combat gear. You're holding your cavalry saber and are surrounded by spirits. I tell some people that the ghosts are there because you were the commander of 7/10 Cavalry, Ghost Troop. But the real reason is that this is my vision of where you are today. I believe you are in heaven and you are still fighting evil. Is that true?

- ★ Your company flag, which you helped design.
- ★ Your Bronze Star with Valor.
- ★ My Gold Star.

★ On the back, I drew up a design in the weeks following Arlington. They are all of the emotions that overcame me. Hate, rage, despair, brokenness, pain, fury, fear, aloneness, lostness, and agony. They are burning with an intense fire. But... they also come together to spell out the word HOPE. These are the emotions I live with every day. They are the most visible; but I don't mourn as one without hope. I know where you are, and one day I intend to join you there. That gives me hope.



★ Above you it reads, "I fought the good fight. I finished the race. I kept the faith." You were able to say that when you were called home. I wonder if I'll be able to say the same.

On my left arm:

- ★ Why didn't you ever get that lion tattoo you wanted? I got one for you. It represents you - and you're guarding two gold stars, your wife and son.
- ★ The heart was done in Austin, TX. It reminds me of all the great times we had on 6th Street. It also symbolizes how my heart was ripped out that day in April - and I wear it on my sleeve for the world to see.

★ On the inside is a landscape. It represents what life was like before I lost you. Life was full of joy and passion. I loved it all - and I lived to experience it all. The lightning represents when that life was shattered on April 18. The landscape also represents my vision of what heaven is. It's everything that's so beautiful about this world multiplied by infinity, the waves of the ocean, the power of the storms, the awe of the mountains, the life of the sun - and the lightning represents the barrier between my life on this world and my life in heaven. Every once in a while, I get a glimpse of heaven. I see it in the love of my wife, in the sunset behind the Rockies, in the laugh of your boy. Again, these things give me hope. ★



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Ian. I love you.

I miss you every day.

I'm so proud of you, and I always was!

I can't wait to see you again.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

By Chad Weikel

Proud brother of CPT Ian Weikel,
Killed in action on April 18, 2006, in Baghdad

Changing the Language of Grief:

A New Century's Challenge By: Darcie D. Sims, Ph.D., CHT, CT, GMS

We need to create a new language for grief... a language that speaks honestly of grief's pain and crushing despair. We need a language that speaks of the painful promise and of the hope that is cast by the memory of love given and received. We need to create a language of hope, not a language of grief.

Perhaps we can create a language where **Denial** is merely a river in Egypt and not a statement of despair or criticism. Denial is such a harsh and inaccurate word. It does not belong in the language of hope. When we are faced with difficult steps on our journey, we sometimes wish to postpone our progress. We want to sidestep the painful step. Perhaps we are not yet ready to deal with reality or perhaps we feel afraid, unsupported, unskilled, or unprepared to face the unfolding of a new life. "I **won't** deal with it!" "I **can't** cope with it!" "I **don't** want to face it." Words that each of us has echoed again and again as we traveled the path of grief.

And so, instead of facing it (whatever "it" may be), we wish to move it to the side, placing it just out of our line of sight, slightly out of focus. For a time, sometimes a loooooong time, we can

keep whatever we do not wish to deal with out of focus. We can postpone reality, for a little while. It is easier to pretend, for a time, that my child is away at camp or my spouse is on a long business trip, instead of facing the bitter reality of death. And yet, I know what it is that I am pretending. How could I ever forget?

I would like to replace the word **denial** with the word **postponement**. It is a more honest word. It accurately describes exactly what we do with a reality we are not quite ready to experience. We simply move that reality to the side, keeping it slightly out of focus, holding it there until we are no longer able to keep it there, or until we feel ready to tackle the new reality.

Before you can deny anything, you first have to acknowledge it, and once you acknowledge it, you can postpone it until you are ready or able to cope. It takes a lot of energy to keep things out of focus for very long, and so eventually most of us run out of energy to keep things in fantasy land. Slowly we bring whatever painful reality we must face back into focus and we begin the healing task of coping.

Denial is a river in Egypt. It is **not** a lack of coping, but rather an accurate and creative way of **postponing**, until I feel more secure, more skilled, more supported. Spring does follow winter and just as the daffodils rise to greet a new season, I, too, will move from postponement to acknowledgment and then to action. I, too, will face my despair and my grief, in my own time.

So, as we exchange the word **denial** for the word **postponement**, let's also forever ban the word **lost**. We use that word to describe everything that changes. "I **lost** my child." "I **lost** my job." "I **lost** my spouse, my car, everything!" We lose things: car keys, houses, jobs. But never, never do we lose people! They die or leave, but we do not lose them or the love we shared. Our loved ones have died, but they are forever and always a living and loving part of who we are! We cannot lose their love!

As long as we are changing the language, let's think about replacing **acceptance** with **acknowledgment**. Acceptance, to me, means agree with, and I will **never** agree with what has happened to me! But I can work towards **acknowledgment** of what



a language of hope not a language of grief

has happened. As I begin to feel safer, more supported, more knowledgeable about the grief process and feel more skilled at grieving, I can allow whatever I have cast into **postponement** to resurface and begin then to resolve my grief. We can change the words we use.

*Let's make up a new language...
A language of hope!
Move away from acceptance and run towards acknowledgment!*

And then, perhaps we can change one more word in the language of grief. Can we get rid of the word **recovery** and use **healing** instead? Recovery is a medical model word, designed to describe broken bones, not hearts. We recover from a broken arm or the chicken pox. We don't get over the death of someone we love. We get through it, one moment, one hour, one day, one hurt at a time. **Healing** is a hopeful word.

There's only one more word I'd like to banish from the world of grief and bereavement. Let's get rid of **closure**, too. There is no such thing as closure in grief. The only thing that closes at the funeral or the cemetery is the casket! Perhaps we can speak of closing a chapter in our life just as our loved one closed a chapter in his life, but the idea of ending a relationship just because death got in the way, is rather silly. You don't stop loving someone just because they died! We will continue to love forever.

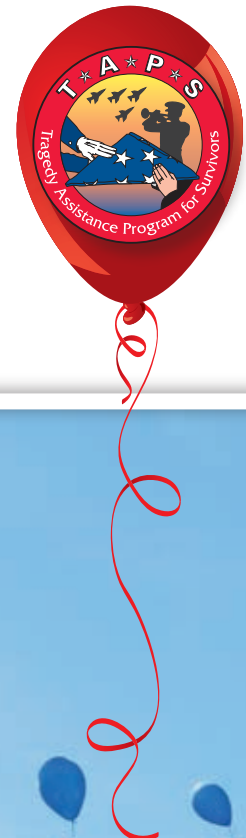
Those who have gone leave their footprints on our heart; indeed, our soul.

They are forever threads in our fabric, memories in our hearts, love in our beings. They are now, and always will be, a living and loving part of who we are!

Yes, in this new century, we do need a new language. We are diminished by grief, replenished by love, held by hope. I want a language that reflects that hope, a language that reminds me of the coming spring and of the waiting dawn. I want a language that speaks to me of joy remembered, of love given and received, of life lived, not lost.

Join me in creating a new language that more accurately portrays the journey of grief towards healing and hope. Healing doesn't happen all at once, nor does a language get changed quickly. Just as winter ebbs and flows, and the other seasons rise and fall on the tides of our emotions, the words we speak will continue to dictate our journey. And so it seems more hopeful to speak of **postponement** instead of denial, **acknowledgment** instead of acceptance and **healing** instead of recovery. *

May love be what you remember the most!



www.GriefStore.com

The Grief Store contains grief resources and memorial items. The Grief Store is a division of Grief Inc., an international Seattle-based grief consulting business run by Darcie and Tony Sims, long-time TAPS volunteers.



Grief Inc.
4227 S. Meridian, Suite C-363
Puyallup, WA 98373
Phone: 1-888-564-6018

Inaugural



HONOR GUARD

Gala 2008

The inaugural TAPS Honor Guard Gala was held in Washington, DC on April 15, 2008 to benefit the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). The black tie dinner at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium was hosted by CNN journalist Kyra Phillips. The keynote speaker was Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Attendees included corporate donors and TAPS supporters, as well as forty family members representing fallen service members from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The 2008 Honor Guard Congressional Award was presented to Senator Kit Bond by Taylor Heldt, age 10, who lost her father in 2005 to a roadside bomb in Iraq. An award was presented to Ben Stein by Admiral Mike Mullen.

The funds raised will support TAPS programs and services for bereaved families who have lost loved ones serving in the Armed Forces. TAPS is the national veteran's service organization that provides peer-based emotional support, grief and trauma resources, seminars, case work assistance, and 24/7 crisis intervention care for all who have been affected by a death in the Armed Forces. Services are provided free of charge. *

For more information go to www.taps.org or call the toll-free crisis line at 800.959.TAPS.





Hope Springs Eternal... ♦ ♦ ♦

By Betsy Beard

Not many people can understand the full impact of opening your front door to find two men in dress uniform standing uncomfortably on your front porch. It's a sight none of us ever wanted to see. It tears you apart. It stops your heart. You can't breathe. Everything comes to a... well, to a dead stop. At the time it happened to me, my brain had no ability to register the compassion that brought those two men to my doorstep, the respect for my son that prompted the visit, the gentleness and dignity with which they broke my heart.

I refused their offers of help and their proffered hands. I just wanted them to leave. Moments after they were gone, I thought, "What could two soldiers in North Carolina possibly know about events in Iraq, halfway around the world?" They really had no details, no evidence, no incontrovertible facts. And, what if they were imposters, perpetrating a cruel and vicious hoax on my family? That certainly could be the case. So I called the base they said they came from, and after a number of polite and courteous telephone transfers, I found myself speaking with a major in the Casualty Affairs Center.

It was not yet 7 AM, and God only knows what time her workday had started. But I told her about the two uniformed men, and asked if she knew anything about it. She asked for my name and I gave it to her, tears in my voice. Then she started to cry and said "Yes, Ma'am, I sent those men to you..." I hated that she confirmed Brad's death, but it had to be true if she was crying, didn't it? My first alternate reality

bubble had burst in that instant, but my brain was willing to devise more. Anything to keep the cold, hard truth from settling down and staying. There was still hope...

The next day I was notified that my son's mortal remains had arrived in Dover, Delaware. But really, how could they know it was Brad? I mean, obviously, someone (a very large someone) who looked like my son, and was 6'4" and 230 pounds, had borrowed Brad's uniform and was stationed where Brad was supposed to be, with Brad's battle buddies... and somehow this person also was wearing Brad's dog tags. It all seemed quite clear to me. My logic was flawless. The United States Army was confused. I'm sure it had happened before. I decided that I would be gracious and forgiving when they discovered their error, in spite of the extreme emotional distress they had visited upon our whole family.

So I called the mortuary in Dover and asked to speak with the person who had actually seen this body they were claiming was Brad's. When he came on the line, I asked him if there were any tattoos on this body, but he stopped me before I could describe the tattoos that Brad had been so proud of: on each shoulder the Kanji characters for "Freedom Fighter." The attendant went to check and came back with the horrible news that each shoulder bore an oriental character in black ink. Another shadowy figment of my carefully constructed alternate reality had been exposed to the light of truth in that instant. I was discouraged, but not finished.

Because... It's possible Brad never actually got those tattoos. I never saw them. Those close-up pictures from Korea could have been someone else's shoulders, someone with a recent vaccination, wearing Brad's shirt. There could still be the hope of mistaken identity. It happens all the time in war movies, and after all, Hollywood could be right once in a while, couldn't they?

In spite of all my wild rationalizations, we were truly devastated. And all this time we were the ones making funeral arrangements, not someone else, as I so desperately wished. We were the ones with the travel orders to Arlington, Virginia. However, on the same day that I verified Brad's tattoos, I found a newspaper account written by an embedded reporter in Ramadi. It contradicted the information in the Department of Defense Press Release that listed Brad as killed in action along with two others from a different battalion in his brigade. Finally, I was getting some corroboration for my hopeful alternate reality. An eyewitness account, no less.

I wrote a letter to the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. And then I got a call from the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army and the Secretary of the Army: an apology for the wrong wording of the press release. Brad was killed in a different incident that day. Why were all these men so persistent in shooting down my theories, my hopes, my dreams? It's not as if I were inventing some strange fantasy. I was simply questioning their facts, their reports, their reality. Because, their version was too unbearable.

...true or false?

And so, that next week found me in a funeral home in Arlington, standing at the end of a long aisle that led to an open casket. It seemed very far away, the soldier's profile barely visible from my end of the room. My feet moved me toward the casket, but I didn't seem to get any closer. My visual perspective remained constant, hovering above the scene from the far end of the chapel. But in fact, I was actually holding the cold, gloved hand of the body in the casket, although I felt so very far, far away. I desperately wanted to be miles away, light-years away, a lifetime away.

In the casket was a person who was Brad-but-not-Brad. A shell of a living, laughing, loving, helpful, hopeful person. A facsimile of my son. Could it be a husk left behind when the aliens abducted the real Brad? Or a wax figure created by the army with the help of Madame Tussaud, so that Brad could serve in some secret military mission? Well, whoever did this, for whatever reason, forgot one really important detail, I thought in triumph. Where were all the moles that should be freckling Brad's face?

So... this isn't Brad, then! I took my handkerchief (purchased expressly to take to this funeral since I never use handkerchiefs) and rubbed the spot where a mole should have been. The mole appeared, leaving a heavy smear of makeup on the handkerchief. Then another, and another, and another, until all Brad's moles were visible. Oh, dear God, no... not this lifeless travesty, this mockery of our hopes and dreams and future. Not this cold, hard shell of the warm, loving son we had raised

for twenty-two years. It had been two weeks since our notification, and reality just kept intruding, and burying my every hope.

And now, it has been three years since we had to walk away from that shining, awful casket, perched above a deep hole in the earth of Section 60 of Arlington National Cemetery. Three years... and I still wish him home. But I have run out of alternate realities, fantasies, and fictional happy endings. (I think.) My most stubborn flights of fancy can't seem to withstand the relentless advance of time...

★ Time in which I thought I saw him on a beach in Cancun, but was afraid to go any closer and find out...

★ Time in which I couldn't find Brad's name on any of the flight manifests when his brigade returned from Iraq, even though I printed every manifest and read the names aloud...

★ Time in which I spoke face to face with every single member of Brad's chain of command, but never once saw Brad lurking behind them, waiting (with a grin on his face) to jump out and shout, "Surprise!"...

★ Time in which I have written letters that I can't mail, and have repeatedly called his cell phone, only to hear him say, "Hey, I'm sorry I missed you. Please leave a message and I'll get back to you as soon as I can." But he never does...

★ Time in which I have left his favorite shirts and coolest jeans in the dresser drawer, but he hasn't worn them...

Time after time after time in which we should have exchanged countless hugs and jokes and gifts, but he just isn't here...

And now it is 2008... a long time to live after my heart stopped beating. And I wonder, how long will it be before I really and truly accept that he isn't coming home? Will I ever accept the unacceptable? When will the hideous knowledge that my brain recoils from actually filter down into my heart? When will I stop thinking about how badly we want him back, and how unfair it is that he was taken? How many calendar pages must I flip before it stops feeling like an event that occurred last week?

I guess only time will tell. And in the meantime, I am grateful to those who are still willing to spend time with me, and allow me to talk about the time I did have, the time that was not nearly long enough. The hope of seeing Brad again on earth is dim beyond recognition, but perhaps it will be replaced with the hope (and even joy) of seeing others we still know and love here on earth... time after time after time. I mean, hope springs eternal, right? *



★ Brad Beard ★

14th Annual National Military Survivors Seminar



2008



We call ourselves the club no one wants to join... the initiation fees are far too high: the death of someone we love. Someone who was serving in the military at the time of death.

We also call ourselves a family. We were born into this family by circumstance or fate, but it wasn't our choice. And although we didn't choose each other, and sorrow when new members are added to the family, we find comfort and solace with one another. And so, on Memorial Day weekend of each year, we come together to do what families do. We laugh together. We cry together. We hug. We eat. We talk. We are silent. We watch out for each other's kids. We tell stories. We share insights. We struggle to find meaning in this drastically changed world. We come to know each other better. We realize we are not quite as alone, quite as isolated in our grief as we had thought.

The big difference between this family (our TAPS family) and other families is that we are allowed to talk about our heroes who have died.

In fact, we are encouraged to do so. We are fiercely proud of our loved ones: sons and daughters, spouses, parents, siblings, friends, and significant others. All of them were willing to put themselves in harm's way to defend us, our nation, our way of life. Together, we commemorate their lives. For a whole weekend we can speak of them without anyone averting their eyes or trying to change the subject. We find the deep understanding of empathy. We share the searing, aching void of our loss. We form bonds that will not easily be broken.

We attend workshops and seminars, receiving information on coping skills, military benefits, and creative activities that honor our heroes. We even find things to laugh about, together. We know that in this safe haven, no one will think we have "gotten over it" just because we laugh. And we know that no one will find us strange when the tears spill over, and our voices choke with pain.

This year we were honored with the presence of many who came to speak, to teach, and to learn. Among our featured guests were Ben Stein, Lt. Gen. Carter Ham, and Dr. Darcie Sims. Our annual banquet was enlivened by the company of the 3 Redneck Tenors, who took time from their touring schedule to share their music, their down home humor, their infectious love of life, and their heartfelt appreciation of the sacrifices of our families. They even adopted a new "mama," our own Edie Tunstall, who was invited on stage to share an a cappella rendition of Amazing Grace, while the tenors provided backup vocals. Although it may have seemed rehearsed, this addition to the program was completely spontaneous.

The activities and the speakers and the menus may change from year to year, but one thing is constant. We find we are increasingly able to "Remember the love, Celebrate the life, and Share the journey" as we gather in honor of our loved ones in our nation's capitol for the Memorial Day weekend. *

For More Seminar Photos Visit <http://www.taps.org/photos/>





Good Grief Camp Comforts Children Of The Fallen

By Phyllis Armstrong

CRYSTAL CITY, Va. (WUSA) - They stand together, hug their mentors, and hold tight to their bears and balloons. The 300 children find a way to laugh and play even with grief in their hearts.

"I miss my Dad. He played with me a lot. He teach me how to ride my bike," says J. J. Kelly.

The 7-year-old from Stafford County and his 10-year-old brother, Paul, are spending the weekend at the TAPS Good Grief Camp. Their mentors are helping them handle losing a father in Iraq.

"It's helped me, like to teach you how to relax with your emotions," says Paul Kelly.

"They go through a lot of anger, a lot of sadness, a lot of fear..."

says Eric Lichtenberg, Paul's mentor. "But the thing I found most about them is they're extremely resilient."

The two brothers are among the 300 children preparing to launch balloons with special messages written to someone who died while serving in the military. Some surviving parents say being in the camp makes their kids feel like they are not alone.

"She's the only child in her class at school who has lost her father," says Carole Hilton of Chesapeake, Virginia. "She comes home and says, 'Mom, they're just like me. I'm not the only one anymore.'"

Hilton's three children lost their Dad, Lt. Lawrence Hilton, while he was serving in the U.S. Navy.

"It makes me feel sad and I get jealous when I see other Dads and kids having fun," says Laura Hilton, a 7-year-old.

Sylvia Norman brought her daughters, Brooke and Nicole. Commander Michael Norman was killed in an air show crash in California 6 years ago.

"We need to be together with other families who have lost a loved one, and share, and cry, and laugh," says Norman.

Emily Munoz is Brooke's TAPS mentor. She lost her own husband in 2005. Capt. Gil Munoz died right after coming home from Iraq.

"My husband and I did not have children. This is a way for me to feel like every kid is ours a little bit. I can really show them some of the love I'm not able to give to my husband anymore," says Munoz.

The children and their TAPS mentors share some of their thoughts with balloons released with messages of love.

"That I love him and that he will be always on my heart," says Laura Hilton.

"I wrote, I miss you," says Paul Kelly.

When his little brother, J. J. was asked why he sent up a balloon to a special place, he said, "Because I miss my Dad so much." *



14th Annual National
Good Grief Camp
2008



Dealing with the

MEDIA

By Ami Neiberger-Miller, APR

For many surviving families who have lost a loved one in the military, our interactions with the media are interwoven with our experiences in the days immediately after our loved one dies. We encounter the reporters on our front porch, field phone calls from the Associated Press, and might even scan pictures to share.

As a seasoned public relations professional, I am no stranger to this type of intense scrutiny from the media. I have faced attack ads and rallied supporters for threatened programs. After Hurricane Katrina, I handled an avalanche of media attention at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children for the largest missing child recovery effort in our nation's history.

But in August of 2007 it wasn't my client facing the media maelstrom. It was my family. I was on vacation at the beach getting ready for an evening barbecue when I received the devastating news that my 22-year-old brother, U.S. Army Specialist Christopher Neiberger, had been killed in Iraq.

As we drove to my parent's home in Florida, a decade of media relations training kicked into auto-pilot in my grief-numbed brain, and we began to talk as a family about what approach to take.

My parents decided that talking with the media about Chris's life was okay, so we opted to speak with reporters, but with clearly defined limits. My brothers and I told funny stories about Chris to our hometown paper. Per mother's orders, no on-camera TV interviews

were done those first few weeks. The TV station made do with our minister, scouting buddies, and a phone interview with me.

Some of the out-of-town media behaved like attack dogs. Satellite TV trucks stalked Neiberger's statewide - my aunts, uncles, and cousins - even lying to them. These reporters were ignored. Our hometown media helped distribute information about the memorial fund we'd set up, which allowed the community to participate in grieving a boy who grew up among them and became a hero.

Reporters thanked us for allowing access during this stressful and horrible time - and the resulting accounts told the story of the brother I knew. I believe our openness contributed to our hometown media downplaying (and ignoring) the presence of the Westboro Baptist Church protestors, who gathered outside the memorial service.

A few months after Christopher's death, I wrote a guide to help military families facing tragedy and dealing with a flurry of media attention. It's available in the Resources section on my website (www.steppingstoneLLC.com). Several casualty officers have contacted me about the guide, saying they find it helpful and are using it with recently bereaved families who are experiencing a media onslaught.

Now I work with TAPS as the public affairs officer, and I talk with many surviving families about their experiences with the media, and about opportunities to share their stories in the press. Here

are a few tips for surviving families on talking with the media:

How you interact with the media, is always up to you. It is ok if your family does not want to talk to the media now, tomorrow, or ever. Don't feel like you have to talk to the media, simply because other families have done so.

Weigh each request for an interview individually. Consider the proposed story idea and the attitude of the reporter who called. Was the reporter respectful? Lackadaisical? Did he sound empathetic and sincere? Think about how you feel doing an interview in the time frame proposed.

Know who you are talking to. Look at the media outlet's website and see what kind of stories they've done. Often the reporter will have a biography online for the reporter, and you can see other stories they've produced. You can ask to see questions before an interview and discuss the angle.

Consider your family before agreeing to an interview. Think about the impact of media coverage. This is particularly important for families with children, and families that have experienced the pain of suicide. How will your family feel about seeing this on the news?

Always exercise caution with requests from the media to talk with children. For some children, talking about their Daddy is healing and a way to honor them. For others, a media interview adds to their trauma. A parent, guardian, or trained professional, should be present if a child is being interviewed by a reporter.



Ami Neiberger-Miller is accredited in public relations and works part-time as the public affairs officer for TAPS, in addition to owning a thriving public relations and design practice near Washington, DC.

Ami can be reached at ami@taps.org.

Direct the interview where you want it to go. For many families, talking to the media is a way to honor their loved one and the remarkable life lived. It can be helpful to write up ahead of time key points you want to make, to review key dates in your loved one's life, and to consider which photos to share.

The interview will go better if the reporter is sensitive to the family. At TAPS, we recommend that before reporters talk to family members, they review the tip sheets and self-study materials published by the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (www.dartcenter.org). These guidelines offer advice to reporters on how to talk with trauma survivors.

Get tips on how to do a media interview if you are anxious. It's normal to be concerned about how you might appear, especially if the interview is on-camera. I'm glad to send you my tip sheet on how to prepare for an interview. Just drop an email with "Media Interview Tips" in the subject line to ami@taps.org.

Realize that most reporters are not out to get you. Most reporters will focus their stories around your loved one, your memories, and how your family is doing now. Many will be genuinely sympathetic to your family and will want to produce a story that pleases you. More than 95% of the reporters we deal with through TAPS are empathetic to the family, and try very hard to tell the family's story. We don't allow the other 5% to talk to families!

Consider how you will handle questions about war and politics if they come up. Many families have differences of opinion about politics, so this can be a minefield. Personally, I find it best to keep interviews centered on my brother's life and his love for the military. If you don't want to say anything, you should never say "no comment." Another option: "I think the real point that I am trying to make is that my loved one cared deeply about his career in the military."

Previously agreeing to an interview, does not mean perpetually agreeing to talk to the media. The nature of traumatic grief is such that a person who is capable of being interviewed one day, may not be comfortable with an interview the next day. It is okay to back out of an interview if you are not up to it or have second thoughts.

Do what feels comfortable, when it comes to deciding on an interview location. For elderly parents or a widow with children, there are sometimes safety concerns about the media filming their home. You don't have to agree to an interview in your home. You can do it somewhere else, in-studio at the station, or at a public park.

Use caution when approached for a book or film project that is not done by a reputable news outlet, as well as any free-lance writers who do not have in-hand an assignment letter from a reputable magazine. There are folks who want to write books, publish stories, and make movies about surviving families. Sometimes these people are visionaries. Sometimes they have pipedreams and no training

or experience in writing or filmmaking. Sometimes they are voyeuristic, and occasionally they are exploitative. Use caution before agreeing to cooperate with a lone ranger.

Never assume that your Facebook/ MySpace/Blog or anything else you put online is out of the public eye. Unfortunately, whatever is posted on those sites is in a public domain. If you don't want a picture to be on TV, do not put it on your Facebook profile.

Select the family photos you want to share, and then stick to a set package. Many families do not want their entire family photo album scattered across the Internet. Select a few standard photos that you like and are willing to share, and provide the same set every time you talk to the media.

Any photos taken by a media outlet are copyrighted by that media outlet. You can ask to get copies of the photos and footage. Many media outlets will give this to you for free. Some charge families for copies of photographs. These photos are often sold online through photo databases. You can talk with the media ahead of time about what will happen to the photos, and how the rights for the photos will be managed.

While working with the media may be challenging at times, it can also help us honor the people we love and miss so very much. There's a reason why people have jobs like mine - it's not always easy to work with the media. There are a lot of things about it that can't be predicted or controlled. Even so, remember that when asked to talk with the press, it is always your choice. *



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Dawn Rowe, Widow of Captain Alan Rowe, USMC

Marine Corps Marathon





I AM NOT



A RED HAT LADY

By Denise G. Frickey

My name is Mrs. Denise G. Frickey. I am not a Red Hat Lady, though I certainly own several.

Those hats, symbolic of my "Life is For the Living" philosophy, inspired this little piece on how I began to cope with my son's death. You see, on January 6, 2005, our big, beautiful, blue-eyed boy, 20-year-old Sgt. Armand Luke Frickey, was rudely blown up with six of his brothers-in-arms in their Bradley, near Taji, Iraq. Eighteen days later, still wearing my purple hat, ashes in his widow's hands, family dispersed, we returned to Denver. I sincerely regretted my promise to God that I would not take my own life. I forgot how to laugh.

Somewhere along the way I began to discover that, with my husband Vance, our older son Eric, grandson Brandon, and a friend like no other, Francine, I still had a life to live. For Easter, Francine took me hat shopping for outrageous confections of feathers and bright colors, and had my husband photograph us. We looked like enormous Easter eggs, and I had my first good, genuine laugh in many weeks.

Francine let me talk about the things I regretted, including some items on my personal to-do list. I've always been adventurous, and pretty fearless about trying things-consequently I have put several doctor's children through private school over the years. Francine, though far less impulsive, has dared many a madcap adventure for my sake over the last 40 years. Ultimately, we declared a Midlife Crisis Year. Since I plan to live to be 104 and be a problem to my descendants, 50 really is Middle Age.

First Francine took me on a trip to Taos and an impromptu pilgrimage to see Santa Fe religious sites, to drink in the beauty of the Sangre de Cristos, and have a good cry. I wore a brilliant orange hat with a trailing scarf around the brim. I bought a future Easter Hat,



white with black and white beads, crystals and feathers. Francine surprised me with a horseback ride in the Roosevelt National Forest. The owners insisted the fat ladies ride on half-Clydesdales, and mounting was a feat that was worth the price of admission. I laughed so hard I almost fell off of Googly, the glass-eyed black behemoth they assigned me. I settled into remembered riding skills as comfortably as though I still rode everyday. Francine, terrified, did not. I have a wonderful photo of us coming up the first hill, me in my tan bush hat, smiling and relaxed, she close behind, helmet askew, horse and rider with whites of their eyes showing. That was truly an act of love.

Later on we went white water rafting on the Colorado River. I fell in at the beginning while entering the raft: best to get these things over with early, you know. I did NOT lose my hat! I have a wonderful shot of me jumping off a cliff into the river dressed in hot pink, ponytail streaming, the only person over 30 to do so. We rode in a hot

air balloon, even though Francine is afraid of heights. Our balloonist was a marvelous older gentleman and natural raconteur, and we watched the sun come up over Boulder in a perfect sky. I had no hat that day: my unconventional headgear was a glorious multicolored balloon, shared with my oldest friend, and a belief that my son was smiling on us from the beauty of nature that he loved, at the bright colors and Mother and Godmother he loved.

We have attended teas everywhere we could, at the tea house in Boulder, at the Brown Palace, where we sat by the pianist, ate wonderful dainties, and giggled at the other older ladies in their hats and finery chatting companionably, at Glen Eyrie.

We went to Central City to the Opera House, just to say we had been there, but couldn't control our unseemly amusement at failing to fit our matronly rear ends into opera seats clearly meant for much less abundant sitters than ours. We left early, but had fun anyway.



At my Company's Leadership weekend, we spent a day at a team building exercise on an obstacle course. My friend Cliff took a wonderful picture that he dubbed Iwo Jima. In it, I am decked out in climbing gear & helmet about 12 feet up a pole, with my co-workers boosting me from below, belaying me on the ropes, and cheering me on. I didn't make it to the top, but I cherish that picture, because it's such a tribute to the teamwork and striving that keeps me going. Everyone in that picture is smiling.

I have been able to collect pictures of 2 old friends, fat ladies in hats, at teas, at play, and share them thanks to my husband, who keeps such things for me, and has been amazingly supportive and open to the vagaries of a free-spirited wife. I continue to honor my son's memory with joy to temper the tears, with new memories to add to the old, with new experiences, and new hats.

This year, I hope to climb an indoor rock wall, and jump out of a perfectly good airplane. I wonder if they have a neon green helmet for me to wear... *



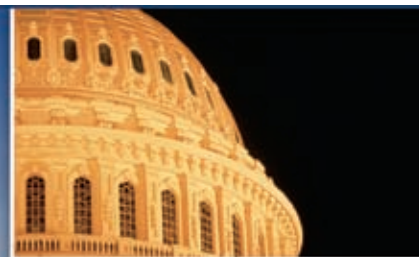


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If You Saw the Pile of Roses

May 24, 2008 by Francie Dembowski

*If you saw the pile of roses,
Gently laid upon the ground
By the families for the heroes
Soldiers who laid their own lives down
To try to make things better
In this world before they'd go
If you saw the pile of roses
And the tears that over-flowed.*

*There were families of the fallen
They were looking everywhere
For the face of that one soldier
They knew was no longer there.
There were wounded, crippled soldiers
Mangled legs, and missing arms
Head all scarred from surgeries
And eyes that stared afar.*

*Other heroes, stood encircling
Soldiers supporting those within
Standing tall and proud and strong
Suffering silently from within.
These soldiers felt such sadness
They'd lost friends and felt such grief.
They carried wounded warriors.
They love their country.
They long for peace.*

*They are heroes beyond measure
So young, brave, kind, and strong
They'll grow to be our veterans
With God's grace, before too long.
So please honor all our heroes,
Fallen, wounded, young and old*

*All those who guard our country
Our cities and our homes.
Just thank them for their service
And the sacrifices made
If you saw the pile of roses...
You'd know...
It's a price difficult to repay. **

Mom of one of many Who Gave All

Poem written after Memorial
service in Ft. Bragg

In memory of
PFC Robert H. Dembowski Jr.,
member of the Army 82nd Airborne,
killed May 24, 2007 in Iraq.

Suicide in the Military

By Barbara Rubel, MA, BCETS, CBS, CPBC

Suicide

I had the honor of presenting a workshop at TAPS in Washington DC this past May. I shared with those in attendance that my dad, a veteran, died by suicide while I was pregnant with triplets. Several attendees told me that their husbands and sons killed themselves while deployed. A few others mentioned that their brothers and friends died by suicide when they returned home. A teenager, wearing a button with her dad's picture said, "I am a suicide survivor, just like you. My dad killed himself." Being that one of every 65 Americans is a suicide survivor and that many survivors are family members and friends of those who served their country and then took their lives, this article will focus on the problem of suicide.

Suicide is a serious public health concern in the U.S. In 2005, 32,637 individuals died by suicide in the U.S, which is the equivalent of 89 suicides per day or one suicide every 16.1 minutes. Suicide is the third ranking cause of death for individuals between the ages of 18 to 24. The highest rate of suicide in the armed forces is for enlisted men 20 to 24 who have experienced a recent loss or catastrophic event. The U.S. Army confirmed that 115 active-duty soldiers died by suicide in 2007, with two more investigations still pending. 26% of those soldiers had never been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan (Pessin, 2008).

The U.S. military is predominantly composed of young adults from many races and ethnic backgrounds, primarily 85% male with about half of the troops between 17 to 26, an age group at high risk for suicide (Eaton, Messer, Wilson,

and Hoge, 2006). Using sources other than official records, Carr et al (2004) found 17% more suicides than were reported by the military and an additional 4% of deaths that were suspect, which suggests that errors in reporting and classification could possibly account for 21% additional suicides in the military.

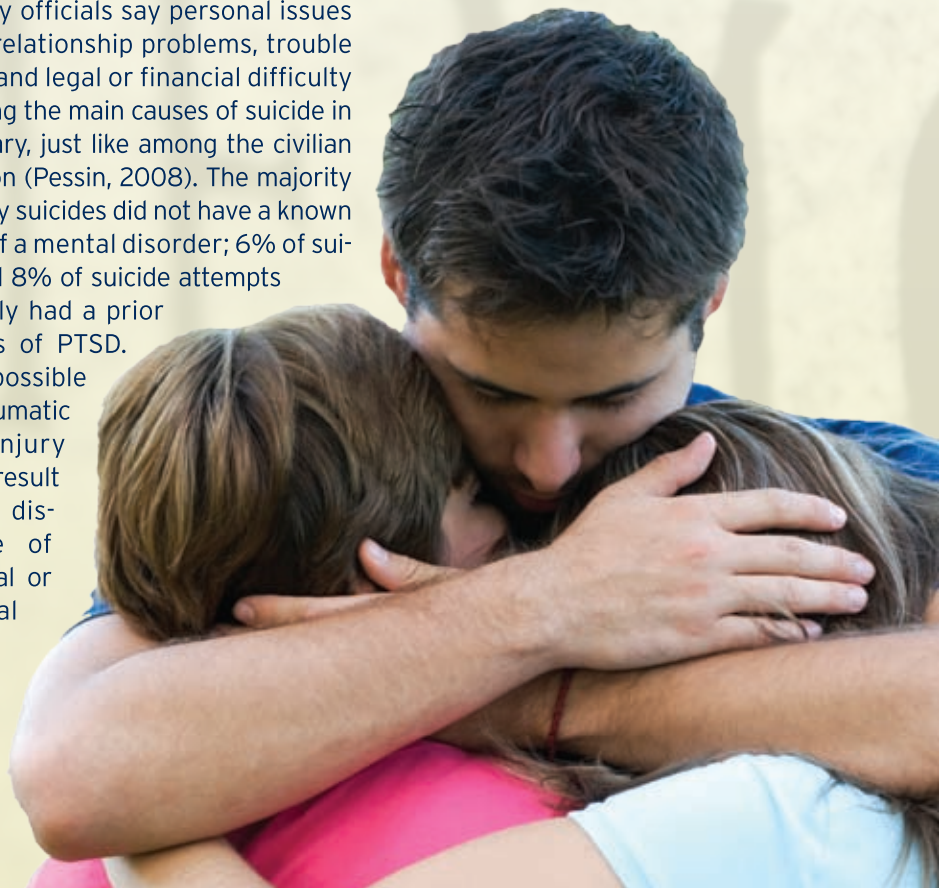
There are more than 200 behavioral-health professionals in Iraq, and the Army has just added more than 100 in the U.S. After conducting interviews and focus groups with experts and soldiers of all ranks, 55 recommendations were made to improve military suicide-prevention training. Soldiers want to know how to recognize problems and what to do to help their peers, but they are themselves reluctant to face condemnation from their peers.

Military officials say personal issues such as relationship problems, trouble at work, and legal or financial difficulty are among the main causes of suicide in the military, just like among the civilian population (Pessin, 2008). The majority of military suicides did not have a known history of a mental disorder; 6% of suicides and 8% of suicide attempts reportedly had a prior diagnosis of PTSD. It's also possible that a traumatic brain injury (TBI) can result in the disturbance of behavioral or emotional

functioning that puts an individual at risk for suicide. Though 50% of soldiers who completed suicide had a recent failed intimate relationship (ASER), suicide is complex and there is not one particular reason why someone kills himself.

Recently a bill was passed which directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a comprehensive program designed to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans. The bill would make available 24-hour mental health care for veterans found to be at risk for suicide. It would also develop an outreach and education program for veterans and families to recognize readjustment problems and promote mental health. *Public Law 110-110, 11/05/07.*

www.sprc.org/library/fedleg.update.pdf



- American Association of Suicidology: www.suicidology.org
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: www.afsp.org
- Griefwork Center, Inc.: www.griefworkcenter.com
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE): www.save.org
- Suicide Prevention Action Network USA: www.spanusa.org
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center: www.sprc.org
- Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS): www.taps.org
- Deputy Chief of Staff: Suicide Prevention: www.army1.army.mil/HR/suicide/default.asp

Suicide Survivors

Suicide survivors are the family, friends, and significant others of those who completed suicide. Based on the 760,338 suicides from 1981 through 2005, it is estimated that the number suicide survivors in the U.S. is 4.6 million. In 2002 alone, 13.2 million Americans were exposed to a suicide within the previous 12 months (Crosby & Sacks, 2002). In the first systematic review of suicide survivors' reactions compared with survivors of other deaths, no significant differences between suicide survivors and other bereaved groups were found regarding general mental health, depression, PTSD, anxiety, and suicidal behavior (Sveen, & Walby, 2008). Suicide survivors, however, report higher levels of rejection, shame, stigma, need for concealing the cause of death, and blaming than survivors of other deaths.

Suicide survivors have reported experiencing greater stigma (Cvinar, 2005, Jordam 2001), greater social isolation (Jordan, 2001), and increased guilt and shame (Bailey, Kral, & Dunham, 1999), and their mourning is unusual. Suicide may elevate their own suicidal risk factors due to the disruption in

attachment, any substance abuse involved, or genetic predispositions such as depression and bipolar disorder. Survivors may have elevated risk for developing complicated mourning (Jordan, et al 2004); therefore, many survivors find help by attending suicide survivor support groups, reading books on loss after suicide, and getting involved with organizations dedicated to suicide prevention.

Several years ago while doing a presentation in Kentucky, I had the privilege of meeting Carol Graham, the mother of Second Lt. Jeff Graham, (who died Feb. 19, 2004, when a roadside bomb exploded in Iraq) and Kevin Graham, (a top ROTC cadet at the University of Kentucky, who hanged himself on June 21, 2003). Recently, I spoke with Carol again and she said, "They were both really, really great sons. It wasn't like we had one bad son or one good son." As Kevin and Jeff's mom says, "They were both heroes." We need to remember all of our heroes and support those who mourn them. *



Barbara Rubel is the author of *But I Didn't Say Goodbye: For Parents and Professionals Helping Child Suicide Survivors; Death, Dying, and Bereavement: Providing Compassion During a Time of Need; and Compassion Fatigue: Vicarious Trauma*. Barbara Rubel's Website: www.griefworkcenter.com

Resources used in this article are available upon request via email at griefwork@aol.com.

Grief & Trauma Counseling



Vet Center

Q & A



Q What is... Bereavement Counseling?

Bereavement counseling is assistance and support to people with emotional and psychological stress after the death of a loved one. Bereavement counseling includes a broad range of transition services, including outreach, counseling, and referral services to family members.

Q Where is Counseling Offered?

VA's bereavement counseling is provided at community-based Vet Centers located near the families. There is no cost for VA bereavement counseling.

Q How can you Obtain These Services?

For more information on how you and your family may obtain counseling from the Department of Veterans Affairs, please call the TAPS National Office at (800) 959-8277.

Q Does VA have Bereavement Counseling for Surviving Family Members?

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers bereavement counseling to parents, spouses and children of Armed Forces personnel who died in the service of their country. Also eligible are family members of reservists and National Guards men who die on duty.

Resources:

Information is available about the VA's Readjustment Counseling Service Vet Centers.

www.va.gov/rcs

Sharing The Journey



The TAPS Online Survivor Forum By Ellen Andrews

There are good days and not so good days... days when a smile crosses our face, days when it is a challenge just to get out of bed. These rare days of solitude and days of needing to connect with kindred spirits.

Each Tuesday night, TAPS provides a safe and comfortable place for survivors from across the country to join together and share their day, share their challenges, share their smiles, share their journey. This forum is our weekly TAPS Chat room.

As soon as you enter, you feel hugs across cyberspace from survivors that attend each week. They are parents, spouses, siblings, loved ones. They share the challenges; they share loving and light-hearted memories. But the most prevalent aspect of the chat is the lifting of spirits. Being able to connect with others who relate to you in a way that no one else can, who respond to your question with yes, that is normal... I did that myself."

The journey through grief is different for each of us, but the compassion and understanding of others that are traveling that same journey provide a comfort and a strength that cannot be measured. That compassion and understanding flows each week in the TAPS Chat room.

Join us each Tuesday evening beginning at 9:00 p.m. Eastern. Visit www.taps.org or contact us at info@taps.org. Come visit and share with our special family.

We are here for you!



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OCTOBER 26TH, 2008

Call 800-959-TAPS or visit us at www.taps.org



Marine Corps Marathon

“
TAPS has been extremely beneficial to us since my husband was killed in Iraq. Running this marathon in his honor and in support of TAPS is an opportunity for me to contribute to the cause that has helped so many families like mine.”

”
Dawn Rowe, Widow of Captain Alan Rowe, USMC



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